

# Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Westbury Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report

Westbury Parish Council

June 2023

## Quality information

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# Non-Technical Summary

## Introduction

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

The WNP is being prepared by Westbury Parish Council, under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the local development framework for Buckinghamshire Council (previously Aylesbury Vale District Council). Once 'made' the WNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, alongside the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP).

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. Central to the SEA process is publication of an Environmental Report alongside the draft plan that presents certain required information. The aim is to inform the consultation and, in turn, plan finalisation.

Preparing the Environmental Report essentially involves answering 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

## This Environmental Report

This is the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the Environmental Report for the WNP, in which the three questions are answered in turn. Firstly, there is a need to set the scene further by answering the question: What's the scope of the SEA?

## What is the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is reflected in a list of topics and objectives, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological 'framework' for assessment.

The following topics form the core of the framework:

- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Community wellbeing
- Historic environment
- Landscape
- Land, soil and water resources
- Transportation

## 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 plan, and then publishing assessment findings in the Environmental Report.

As such, Part 1 of this report explains how work was undertaken to develop and assess reasonable alternatives.

### Strategic context

Firstly, there is a need to reiterate the context provided by the AVLP. The key message is that the VALP identifies Westbury as a 'smaller village' in the settlement hierarchy, and does not set a housing target for smaller villages. Nonetheless, the AVLP is supportive of allocation of land for housing through the WNP.

Westbury village has grown organically in the past 25 years with brownfield residential developments adding 66 new homes. This growth represents a circa 40% increase in the number of homes in Westbury.

### Local context

In light of the above, the Steering Group and Parish Council sought to further engage with the local community on the issue. A key question being whether the community would benefit from planning for a higher number of homes based on local circumstances (i.e. considering the need for affordable housing and additional community facilities).

Led by the outcome of the community consultation, the Steering Group and Parish Council have taken the decision to pursue incremental growth within the neighbourhood area. This means that the WNP will propose that the village grows as it has done in the past, with a small number of small sites around the village. This approach considers the emerging Buckinghamshire Local Plan, and anticipates a forthcoming housing requirement for 'small villages' in the period to 2040 (assuming Westbury will remain a small village in the emerging Bucks Local Plan).

Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan will not seek to make any housing site allocations. However through using a settlement boundary, will recognise the potential value that small scale, infill housing development may have in enabling access to homes in the Parish suited to younger people.

### The reasonable alternatives

On the basis of the above discussion it is clear that there is a need to explore potential alternative options for establishing a settlement boundary for Westbury village.

Supporting evidence has been prepared by the Steering Group and Parish Council, setting out the rationale for drawing a settlement boundary. It is recognised that an element of new housing growth in the parish will come forward during the Neighbourhood Plan period, including through windfall development.

The following three broad options have therefore been identified relating to proposal of a settlement boundary.

Options reflect particular issues identified through community engagement. Specifically, the transition between types of openness such as moving from garden to countryside has been difficult for the Steering Group and Parish Council to define.

- **Option 1:** Do not define a settlement boundary
- **Option 2:** Define a tight settlement boundary around the built development edge (Figure 5.1 in the main report)
- **Option 3:** Define a less restrictive settlement boundary that includes all residential gardens (see Figure 5.2 in the main report)

Option 1 takes an unrestricted approach to development within the built up area. Under this Option, without a defined settlement boundary, development (small scale market and affordable housing) could be delivered outside of the parish's built up area; assuming it is in line with the VALP policy framework.

Option 2 would support a continuing level of new infill, brownfield land development and affordable housing led 'exception' sites to come forward in the village.

Option 3 takes a less restrictive approach, including all residential gardens within the proposed settlement boundaries. Notably large gardens to the east of the village are considered to relate more to the built-up area than the wider open countryside beyond.

## Assessing the reasonable alternatives

Table 4.2 in the main body of the Environmental Report presents the findings of the appraisal of Option 1 and Option 2 outlined above. The following summary conclusions have been made:

Option 2 is best performing in relation to the majority of SEA themes, given it restricts development within the settlement boundary and is therefore least likely to lead to adverse effects on environmental constraints present (such as historic assets, valued landscapes, biodiversity assets, and high quality agricultural land). However, Option 3 performs best in relation to the Community Wellbeing SEA theme, as it is most likely to enable a sustainable level of growth in the village, while also supporting increased access to village services and community facilities, active travel uptake, and delivering increased community cohesion.

Option 3 also performs well in relation to the majority of themes, as this option also supports the protection and enhancement of the local environmental resource, by restricting growth outside of a less restrictive settlement boundary. In terms of transport, both Options 2 and 3 perform well, facilitating active travel uptake and providing good access to the village's amenities.

Option 1 performs least positively against all SEA themes as development could come forward in a less coordinated way which does not support the sustainable growth of the village; and has the greatest potential to adversely impact upon the parish's valued environmental resource. Assessment findings at this stage

## Developing the preferred approach

The Parish Council's reasons for developed the preferred approach in light of the alternatives assessment are identified below:

“The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee has selected Option 3, which takes a less restrictive approach to the proposed settlement boundaries. This is the preferred choice for several reasons. Firstly, it recognises the unique characteristics of the village and acknowledges that large gardens to the east of the village follows the natural border created by the stream and creates potential for some residential growth that is more closely connected to the built-up area than the surrounding open countryside. By incorporating these gardens within the settlement boundaries, the option ensures that future development aligns with the existing fabric of the village and maintains its distinct identity.

Additionally, Option 3 considers the valuable input from the community. The overwhelming support for this option, as evidenced in both the community engagement survey and the informal consultation process, demonstrates that it aligns with the aspirations and desires of the local residents. By prioritising the community's preferences, the option promotes a sense of ownership and involvement in the decision-making process.

Moreover, Option 3 offers a balanced approach to development. While it allows for the inclusion of some residential gardens, it still maintains certain restrictions and guidelines outlined in the VALP policy framework. This ensures that any development, particularly small-scale market and affordable housing, is carried out in a controlled manner that respects the overall policy objectives and maintains the sustainability of the village.

Overall, selecting Option 3 provides a comprehensive solution that integrates the community's input, preserves the village's character, and ensures responsible development. It strikes a balance between growth and preservation, fostering a thriving community while maintaining the village's unique identity.”

## What are the SEA findings at this stage?

Part 2 of the Environmental Report presents an assessment of the Pre-submission version of the draft WNP. Assessment findings are presented as a series of narratives under the ‘SEA framework’ theme headings. The following conclusions are reached:

Overall, the draft Plan appraisal has served to highlight the potential for positive effects of varying significance, with broadly neutral effects overall.

The draft WNP, supported by the Westbury Design Codes & Guidance, is considered to lead to **significant positive effects** in relation to the community and wellbeing SEA theme. While the draft WNP does not seek to allocate sites for housing, significant positive effects are predicted in terms of supporting a balanced community, meeting local needs, and improving the overall quality of life of residents.

**Minor positive effects** are predicted for the WNP in relation to biodiversity. Building upon higher level planning policy, the WNP seeks to establish provisions which will support and enhance habitats, species, and ecological networks in and around the neighbourhood area.

**Minor positive effects** are predicted on landscape and historic environment given the focus of development within the settlement boundary, and through incorporating high-quality and sensitive design through new development proposals. Furthermore,

the draft WNP presents opportunities in terms of enhancement of assets and the wider public realm, including through the delivery of a Green Infrastructure Network.

**Neutral effects** are concluded in relation to climate change; predominantly reflecting the contribution set out to nature recovery, embedded carbon reduction and energy requirements for new development, and the absence of site allocations. There is the **potential for minor long term positive effects**, but these are uncertain at this stage and dependent on the implementation of proposed measures.

**Neutral effects** are concluded in relation to transportation as the draft WNP supports connectivity and encourage active travel uptake, however continued car reliance and limited public transport offer is predicted.

**Neutral effects** are also concluded in relation to the landscape and historic environment SEA themes. While it is recognised that the policy framework performs well in terms of protecting and enhancing the important local heritage and landscape resource, neutral effects overall reflect the sensitivity of the neighbourhood area in relation to these themes.

Broadly **neutral effects** are concluded in relation to land, soil and water resources, with no significant deviation from the baseline anticipated.

## Recommendations

At this stage, no negative effects are considered likely that would require more stringent mitigation. On this basis no recommendations are identified. Despite this, it is recognised that the views of statutory consultees are being sought at consultation and will be considered in the next iteration of plan-making and SEA.

## Next steps

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

## Plan finalisation

Following Regulation 14 consultation and consideration of responses, the draft WNP 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 Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.

Assuming the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the Neighbourhood Plan 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 draft WNP will become part of the Development Plan for Buckinghamshire Council, 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 draft WNP 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 draft WNP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Buckinghamshire Council.

# Introduction

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Westbury Neighbourhood Plan (WNP).
- 1.2 The WNP is being prepared under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of Buckinghamshire Council's local development framework. Once 'made' the draft WNP will form part of the Development Plan for Buckinghamshire.
- 1.3 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.<sup>1</sup>

## SEA explained

- 1.4 It is a requirement that the SEA process is undertaken in-line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 1.5 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". The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.6 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?

## This Environmental Report

- 1.7 This report is the Environmental Report for the WNP. It is published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the Plan, under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).
- 1.8 This report answers questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn, to provide the required information. Each question is answered within a discrete 'part' of the report.
- 1.9 Before answering Q1, two further introductory sections are presented.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 WNPR was subject to screening in 2022, on the basis of which it was determined that there is a requirement for SEA (i.e. the plan was 'screened-in').

## 2. The scope of the WNP

### Introduction

- 2.1 This section considers the context provided by Buckinghamshire Council's local development framework, before setting out the WNP vision and objectives.
- 2.2 The neighbourhood area is shown in Figure 2.1 below, covering the parish of Westbury.

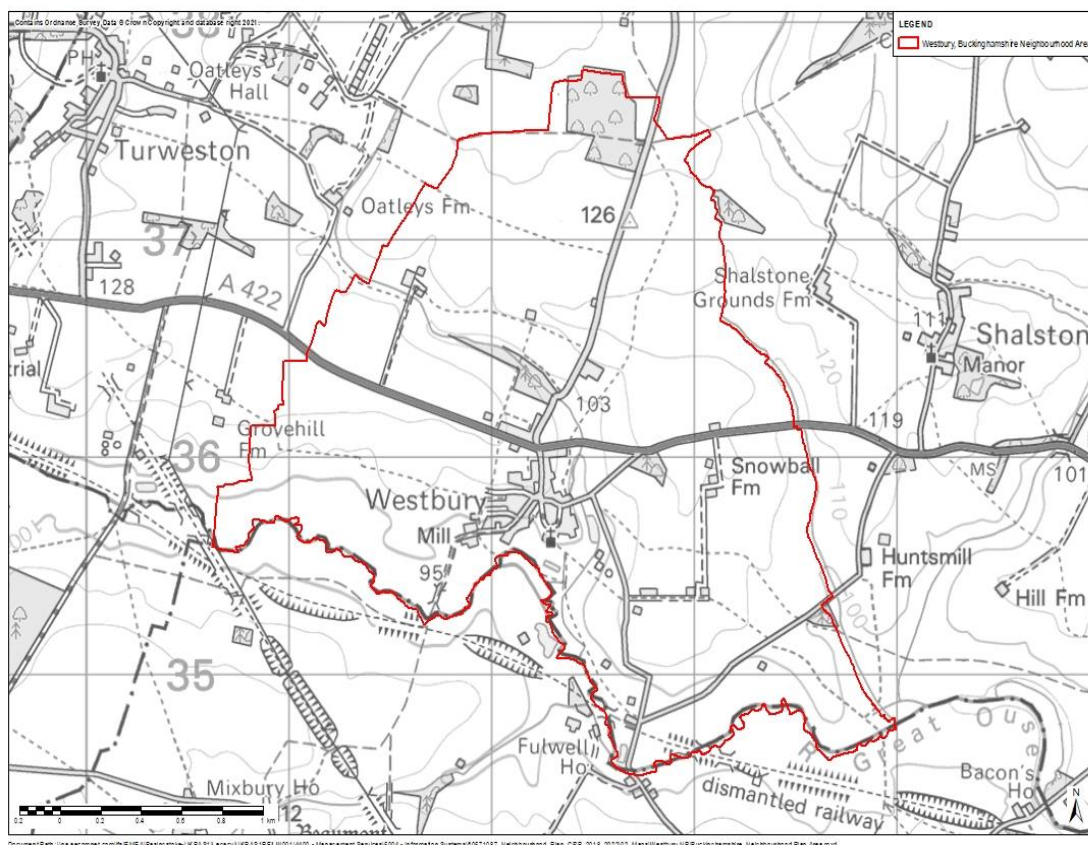


Figure 2.1 Westbury neighbourhood area

### Planning policy context

- 2.3 Falling formerly under the remit of Aylesbury Vale District Council, the adopted planning framework for Westbury consists of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) 2013-2033. With the creation of Buckinghamshire Unitary Authority in 2020, work is now progressing on the Buckingham Local Plan, which must be in place for the whole council area by April 2025. This work is at an early stage, with Buckinghamshire Council currently (April – June 2023) consulting on the draft Vision and Objectives for the Local Plan.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.4 The VALP identifies Westbury as a 'smaller village' in the settlement hierarchy, which is the second to smallest classification, above 'other settlements'. The VALP does not set a housing target for smaller villages.

<sup>2</sup> <https://yourvoicebucks.citizenspace.com/planning/vision-and-objectives/>

- 2.5 While there is currently no strict requirement for the WNP to provide for any new homes, it is considered that housing is expected to come forward through neighbourhood plans; or through the development management process considered against relevant policies in the WNP.

## **WNP vision and objectives**

- 2.6 The following Vision for the draft WNP has been identified:

*“To recognise Westbury’s rural village environment by ensuring that its key special features are protected and only appropriate development occurs within the area.”*

- 2.7 This vision is supported by four key objectives:

- *“To facilitate incremental growth through small scale ‘windfall’ sites;*
- *Securing a more appropriate mix of housing in new developments which recognises the need for a balanced community;*
- *Design coding to manage the quality of infill and other schemes and prioritising the mix of any future housing schemes to deliver smaller homes; and*
- *To protect community facilities and services that are essential to community life.”*

## 3. What is the scope of the SEA?

- 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 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. As such, these authorities were consulted in March 2023. Appendix II presents further information.

### The SEA framework

- 3.3 Table 3.1 overleaf presents a list of topics and objectives that together form the back-bone of the SEA scope. Together they comprise a ‘framework’ under which to undertake assessment.

*Table 3.1: The SEA framework*

SEA Topic	SEA objective
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Maintain and enhance the extent and quality of biodiversity and geodiversity habitats and networks within and surrounding the Plan area.
Climate change (including flood risk)	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities in the Plan area.
	Support the resilience of the Plan area to the potential effects of climate change, including flood risk.
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the Plan area is aligned with the needs of all residents and in suitably connected places, supported by the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure to enable 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, including green infrastructure corridors.
Land, soil, and water resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land
	Protect and enhance water quality, and use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

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

## 4. Introduction (to Part 1)

- 4.1 The aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work to date. Rather, the aim is to explain work undertaken to develop and appraise reasonable alternatives.
- 4.2 More specifically, this part of the report presents information on the consideration given to reasonable alternative approaches to addressing a particular issue that is of central importance to the plan, namely the delivery of new homes within the neighbourhood area.

### Who's responsibility?

- 4.3 It is important to be clear that:
- **Defining scenarios** - is ultimately the responsibility of the plan-maker, although the SEA consultant (AECOM) is well placed to advise.
  - **Assessing scenarios** - is the responsibility of the SEA consultant.
  - **Selecting a preferred scenario** - is the responsibility of the plan-maker.

### Structure of this part of the report

- 4.4 This part of the report is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 5** - explains the process of defining reasonable alternative options;
  - **Chapter 6** - presents the outcomes of assessing reasonable alternatives;
  - **Chapter 7** - explains reasons for selecting the preferred option.



## 5. Defining reasonable alternatives

### Introduction

- 5.1 The aim here is to discuss the key steps taken to inform the establishment of reasonable alternatives. Ultimately, the aim is to present “an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with”, in accordance with the SEA Regulations.

### Strategic context

- 5.2 Firstly, there is a need to reiterate the context provided by the AVLP, as already discussed above (Section 2.3). The key message is that the VALP identifies Westbury as a ‘smaller village’ in the settlement hierarchy, and does not set a housing target for smaller villages. Nonetheless, the AVLP is supportive of allocation of land for housing through the WNP.
- 5.3 Westbury village has grown organically in the past 25 years with brownfield residential developments adding 66 new homes. This growth represents a circa 40% increase in the number of homes in Westbury.

### Local context

- 5.4 In light of the above, the Steering Group and Parish Council sought to further engage with the local community on the issue. A key question being whether the community would benefit from planning for a higher number of homes based on local circumstances (i.e. considering the need for affordable housing and additional community facilities).
- 5.5 Led by the outcome of the community consultation, the Steering Group and Parish Council have taken the decision to pursue incremental growth within the neighbourhood area. This means that the WNP will propose that the village grows as it has done in the past, with a small number of small sites around the village. This approach considers the emerging Buckinghamshire Local Plan, and anticipates a forthcoming housing requirement for ‘small villages’ in the period to 2040 (assuming Westbury will remain a small village in the emerging Bucks Local Plan).
- 5.6 Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan will not seek to make any housing site allocations. However through using a settlement boundary, will recognise the potential value that small scale, infill housing development may have in enabling access to homes in the Parish suited to younger people.

### The reasonable alternatives

- 5.7 On the basis of the above discussion it is clear that there is a need to explore potential alternative options for establishing a settlement boundary for Westbury village.
- 5.8 Supporting evidence has been prepared by the Steering Group and Parish Council, setting out the rationale for drawing a settlement boundary. It is recognised that an element of new housing growth in the parish will come forward during the Neighbourhood Plan period, including through windfall development.

- 5.9 The following three broad options have therefore been identified relating to proposal of a settlement boundary.
- 5.10 Options reflect particular issues identified through community engagement. Specifically, the transition between types of openness such as moving from garden to countryside has been difficult for the Steering Group and Parish Council to define.
- **Option 1:** Do not define a settlement boundary
  - **Option 2:** Define a tight settlement boundary around the built development edge (Figure 5.1 overleaf)
  - **Option 3:** Define a less restrictive settlement boundary that includes all residential gardens (see Figure 5.2 overleaf)
- 5.11 Option 1 takes an unrestricted approach to development within the built up area. Under this Option, without a defined settlement boundary, development (small scale market and affordable housing) could be delivered outside of the parish's built up area; assuming it is in line with the VALP policy framework.
- 5.12 Option 2 would support a continuing level of new infill, brownfield land development and affordable housing led 'exception' sites to come forward in the village.
- 5.13 Option 3 takes a less restrictive approach, including all residential gardens within the proposed settlement boundaries. Notably large gardens to the east of the village are considered to relate more to the built-up area than the wider open countryside beyond.

Figure 5.1 Option 2: Define a tight settlement boundary

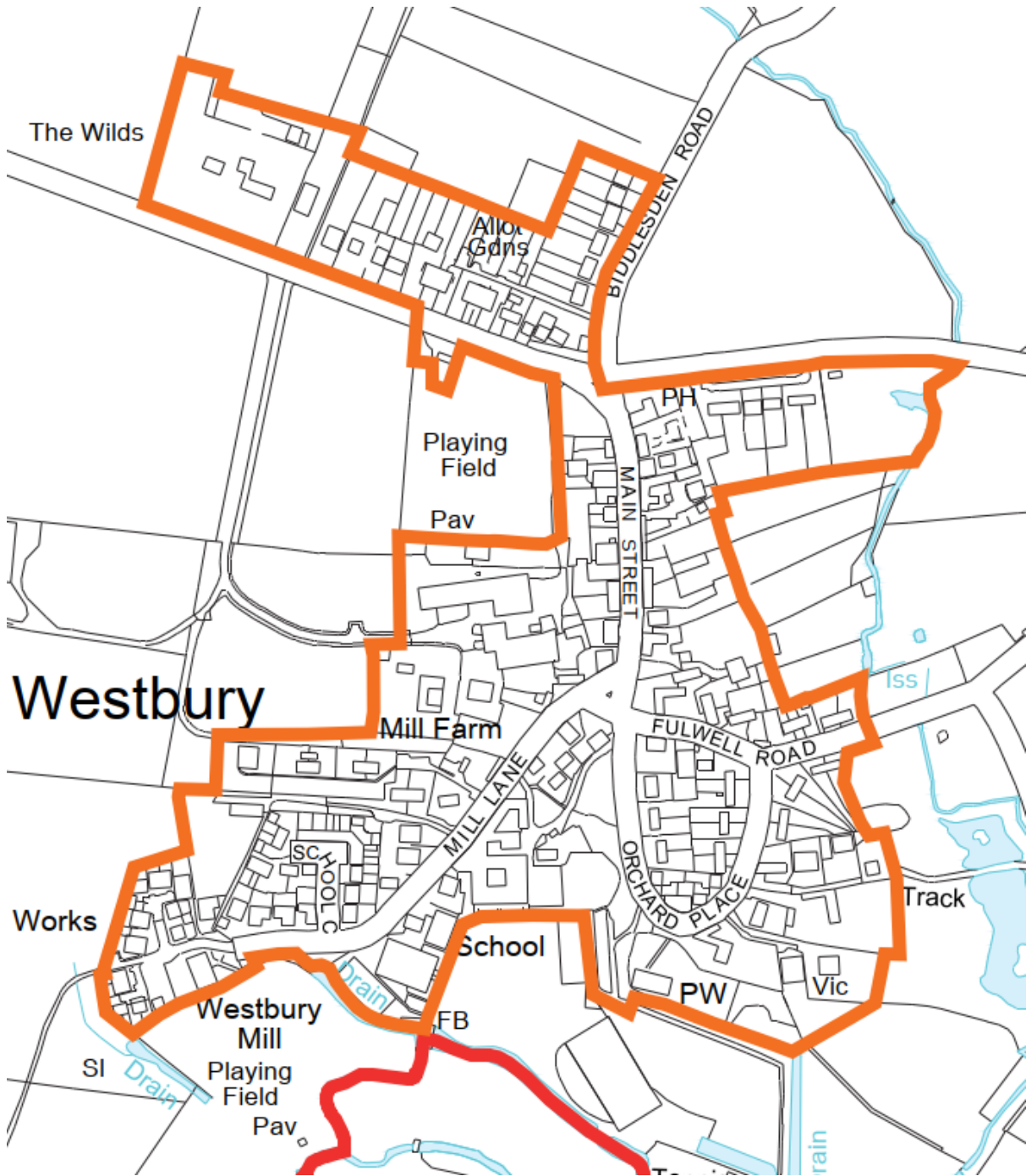
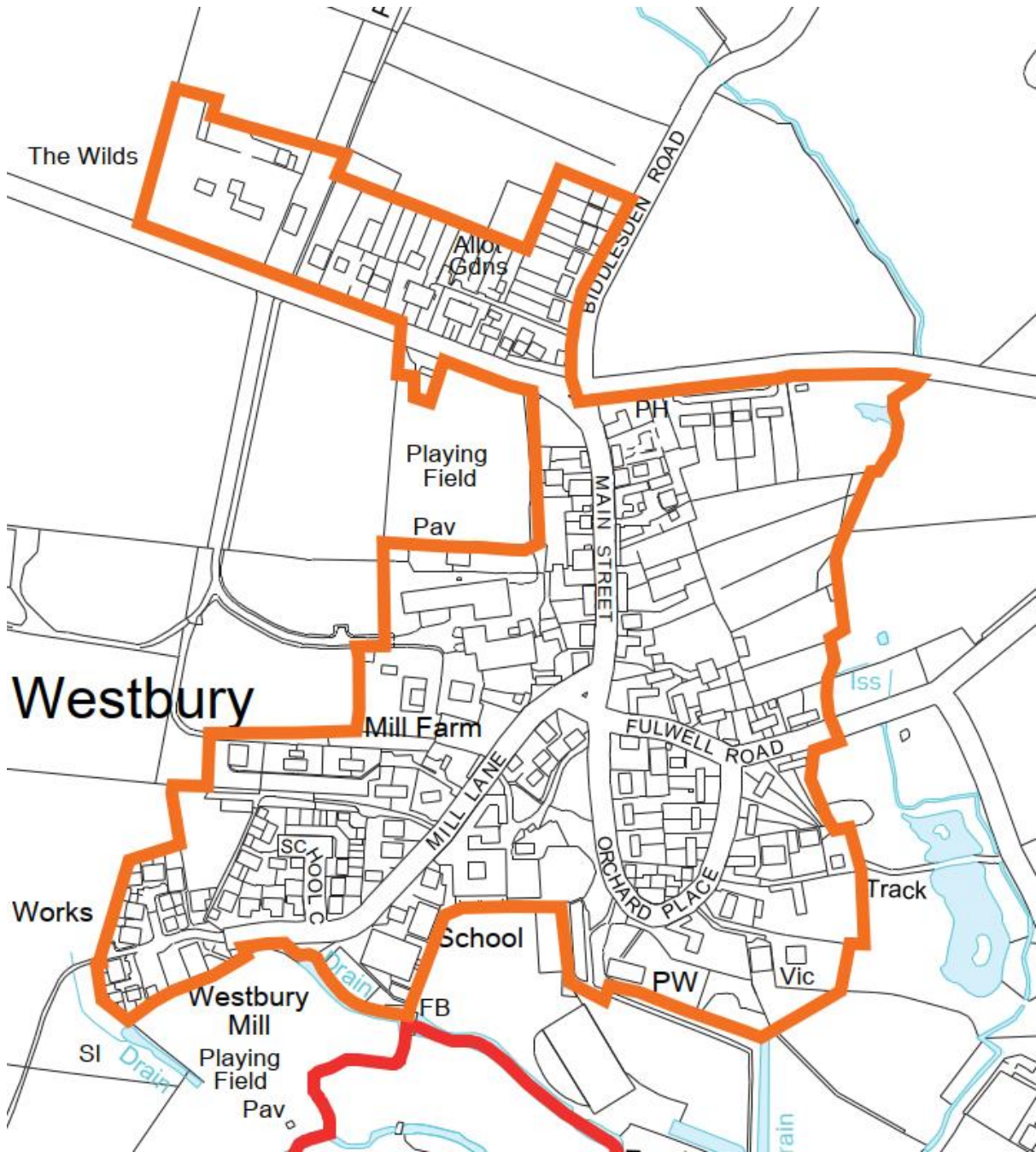


Figure 5.2 Option 3: Define a less restrictive settlement boundary



## Assessing the reasonable alternatives

5.14 Table 6.1 overleaf presents the findings of the appraisal of options outlined above. To support the assessment findings, the options have been ranked in terms of their sustainability performance against the relevant topic. It is anticipated that this will provide the reader with a likely indication of the comparative sustainability performance of the three options in relation to each topic considered.

**Option 1:** Do not define a settlement boundary

**Option 2:** Define a tight settlement boundary around the built development edge

**Option 3:** Define a less restrictive settlement boundary that includes all residential gardens

SEA topic	Discussion of potential effects and relative merits of options	Rank of preference		
		Opt 1	Opt 2	Opt 3
<b>Biodiversity</b>	<p>The neighbourhood area is unconstrained in relation to internationally designated biodiversity sites, however there is an area of nationally important Ancient Woodland to the east of the parish.</p> <p>In terms of locally important features, the neighbourhood area is interspersed with a range of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats, with woodland and pasture areas surrounding the settlement area, particularly to the south and north adjacent to the proposed settlement boundary (Option 2 and 3). Network Enhancement and Expansion Zones also extend across the neighbourhood area.</p> <p>It is considered that Option 2 is best performing as it restricts development to the built up village core, where biodiversity constraints are largely absent. A more relaxed settlement boundary (Option 3) would allow development closer to the Ancient Woodland present to the east of the parish, with the settlement boundary approx. 200m from the nationally important habitat. Option 1 is worst performing as it does not define a boundary and therefore development is not restricted to the village core, with the potential to adversely impact upon the local biodiversity resource identified above.</p> <p>However, it is recognised that the significance of effects in relation to biodiversity is dependent on the design and layout of new development and the integration of infrastructure, which supports ecological resilience and connectivity in the area. As such, if all development seeks to integrate these elements, then all options could theoretically perform equally in terms of impact on biodiversity. The significance of the effects from each option on features and areas of biodiversity interest therefore largely depends on the detailed location, scale and nature of development and the incorporation of biodiversity enhancement measures.</p> <p>Nonetheless, for the purposes of ranking the options, Option 2 is considered best performing as it ensures growth is directed away from designated biodiversity assets. Furthermore, growth within a defined settlement boundary (Option 2 and 3) provides an opportunity to deliver biodiversity gains; enhancing green spaces and connecting residents with nature.</p>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>



**Option 1:** Do not define a settlement boundary

**Option 2:** Define a tight settlement boundary around the built development edge

**Option 3:** Define a less restrictive settlement boundary that includes all residential gardens

SEA topic	Discussion of potential effects and relative merits of options	Rank of preference		
		Opt 1	Opt 2	Opt 3
<b>Climate change (inc. flood risk)</b>	<p>In relation to climate change mitigation, through focusing development within settlement boundaries, Options 2 and 3 have some potential to limit the need to travel to access local services and facilities. This also has the potential to encourage the use of non-motorised transport modes such as walking and cycling for these purposes. This may do more than Option 1 (which could facilitate a more dispersed approach to development) for limiting greenhouse gas emissions from transport.</p> <p>It is however noted that Option 3 could lead to the loss of a public footpath present to the east of the village, located within the proposed settlement boundary. This would reduce opportunities for active travel uptake for local journeys.</p> <p>In terms of other types of emissions from new development areas, this depends on the design, materials use and energy efficiency of new buildings.</p> <p>In terms of flood risk, Option 2 is best performing as it restricts development to lower flood risk areas in the built up village core. The settlement boundary proposed through Option 3 extends to flood risk areas to the east. Option 1 is the worst performing option as development could be directed towards areas of the parish at higher risk of flooding, including south of the main settlement. However it is considered that the provisions of the NPPF and national policy will help guide development away from flood risk areas and ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented.</p> <p>In terms of the wider elements relating to climate change adaptation, this also depends on the provision of appropriate infrastructure alongside new development areas, such as green infrastructure provision and appropriate design and layout. All options perform equally in this respect at this stage.</p>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

**Option 1:** Do not define a settlement boundary

**Option 2:** Define a tight settlement boundary around the built development edge

**Option 3:** Define a less restrictive settlement boundary that includes all residential gardens

SEA topic	Discussion of potential effects and relative merits of options	Rank of preference		
		Opt 1	Opt 2	Opt 3
<b>Community wellbeing</b>	<p>Option 1 arguably has the potential to deliver the greatest level of new homes as it does not restrict the location of development. However, this Option would limit the potential to strategically plan for future growth of the village. While in line with the VALP policy framework, applications could come forward outside of the main settlement, providing it is within the 'existing development footprint' (VALP Policy D4 (Housing Development at Smaller Villages), which extends to the southern border of the parish boundary. This could lead to developments coming forward in a less-coordinated way, with fewer potential benefits in terms of supporting sustainable growth of the community.</p> <p>Conversely, Option 2 is the most restrictive in terms of new development, limiting new homes to the small number of available land parcels in the built up area. However this would prioritise the redevelopment of brownfield land where possible, which would support regeneration within the village core.</p> <p>Proposing a settlement boundary that includes residential gardens (Option 3) allows for the delivery of an increased level of new homes around the existing built footprint of the village. This would likely lead to the sustainable growth of the village, supporting increased access to village services and community facilities, active travel uptake, and overall increased community cohesion.</p> <p>However, it is noted that Option 3 could lead to the loss of a public footpath present to the east of the village, located within the proposed settlement boundary.</p>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>



**Option 1:** Do not define a settlement boundary

**Option 2:** Define a tight settlement boundary around the built development edge

**Option 3:** Define a less restrictive settlement boundary that includes all residential gardens

SEA topic	Discussion of potential effects and relative merits of options	Rank of preference		
		Opt 1	Opt 2	Opt 3
<b>Historic environment</b>	<p>Option 2 is best performing as restricting development within the existing built up area will most likely protect and enhance the local heritage resource, with the potential to lead to positive effects where development includes the regeneration of derelict brownfield land. Limiting development to within the built settlement edge will best protect the setting of the conservation area, as well as Grade II Listed Buildings present, delivering new homes that are in keeping with their built surroundings. Small-scale, high quality and sensitive infill development has the potential to rejuvenate features and areas of historic environment interest and sensitivity.</p> <p>It should however be noted though that any development to the fabric and setting of the historic environment. For example, a tight settlement boundary could lead to densification in the settlement core, which could adversely impact upon the intrinsic qualities and setting of assets present.</p> <p>Option 3 does not perform as well as Option 2 as the development of residential gardens to the east (within the proposed settlement boundary) could impact the setting of the conservation area and Listed Buildings along Main Street.</p> <p>By not defining a settlement boundary, Option 1 is likely to perform least positively in relation to the historic environment, with the greatest potential to impact the setting of historic assets throughout the neighbourhood area. While it is recognised development would need to be within the 'existing development footprint' (VALP Policy D4 (Housing Development at Smaller Villages), this is not further defined, and therefore development could come forward in a constrained location. This could include designated historic assets discussed above, non-designated assets and archaeological features, or historic landscape setting outside surrounding the village. However, conversely, any</p> <p>All options carry a level of uncertain at this stage as the exact location of any future development is currently unknown.</p>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

**Option 1:** Do not define a settlement boundary

**Option 2:** Define a tight settlement boundary around the built development edge

**Option 3:** Define a less restrictive settlement boundary that includes all residential gardens

SEA topic	Discussion of potential effects and relative merits of options	Rank of preference		
		Opt 1	Opt 2	Opt 3
Landscape	<p>Through restricting development to locations within a tightly drawn settlement boundary, Option 2 is best performing in terms of protecting the character of the settlement, whilst preventing unnecessary building into the countryside. This will promote settlement distinctiveness and contribute to the sense of place within the parish.</p> <p>Option 3 performs less positively as the settlement boundary proposed includes some greenfield land to the east, which could extend the settlement to an extent, and adversely impact upon the local landscape character. This could potentially set precedent for further expansion of the settlement to the east, however it is recognised that any future growth would need to align with VALP Policy 4.</p> <p>By not defining a settlement boundary, Option 1 is likely to be worst performing in relation to the landscape, with the potential to impact the rural landscape character and setting of the parish. While it is recognised development would need to be within the 'existing development footprint' (VALP Policy D4 (Housing Development at Smaller Villages), this is not further defined. As such, development could come forward on greenfield areas within the development footprint, or where it impacts upon village views outwards to the surrounding countryside.</p> <p>All options carry a level of uncertain at this stage as the exact location of any future development is currently unknown.</p>	3	1	2

**Option 1:** Do not define a settlement boundary

**Option 2:** Define a tight settlement boundary around the built development edge

**Option 3:** Define a less restrictive settlement boundary that includes all residential gardens

SEA topic	Discussion of potential effects and relative merits of options	Rank of preference		
		Opt 1	Opt 2	Opt 3
<b>Land, soil and water resources</b>	<p>Option 2 is best performing as it promotes the use of brownfield land in the village core. Option 1 also performs positively in this respect as development would need to be within the 'existing development footprint' (VALP Policy D4 (Housing Development at Smaller Villages)). However this is not further defined through the VALP, and therefore could include some greenfield areas, although it is considered that this is unlikely to be high quality agricultural land.</p> <p>Option 3 through a less restrictive approach supports the development of some greenfield land to the east of the settlement, however being residential gardens this is unlikely to be high quality productive agricultural land.</p> <p>In terms of water quality, it is difficult to reach a conclusion regarding the potential for development at any given location to result in negative effects without an understanding of the design measures that will be put in place. For example, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) are an effective means of minimising surface water runoff and hence pollution. All options therefore perform equally in this respect, at this stage.</p>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>Option 2 is best performing as would focus new development within the settlement core where there is greatest access to services, community facilities and public/ active travel opportunities (footpath/ cycle routes). This would reduce reliance on the private vehicle for local day-to-day journeys.</p> <p>Similarly, Option 3 would support the uptake of active travel for short journeys, with good access to the village's amenities. However it is noted that Option 3 could lead to the loss of a public footpath present to the east of the village, located within the proposed settlement boundary. This could reduce opportunities for active travel uptake, although it is noted that this PRoW is not the main long distance footpath (Westbury Circular Ride) that extends through the village.</p> <p>Option 1 could lead to development coming forward in a less-coordinated way, that does not utilise active travel opportunities or links to the settlement core. This option therefore may deliver fewer potential benefits in terms of supporting active travel uptake and increased connectivity, with possible increases in reliance on the private vehicle and localised congestion.</p>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

## Summary findings

- 5.15 The assessment of reasonable alternatives carried out in Table 6.1 above concludes that Option 2 is best performing in relation to the majority of SEA themes. This is given it restricts development within the settlement boundary and is therefore least likely to lead to adverse effects on environmental constraints present (such as historic assets, valued landscapes, biodiversity assets, and high quality agricultural land). However, Option 3 performs best in relation to the Community Wellbeing SEA theme, as it is most likely to enable a sustainable level of growth in the village, while also supporting increased access to village services and community facilities, active travel uptake, and delivering increased community cohesion.
- 5.16 Option 3 also performs well in relation to the majority of themes, as this option also supports the protection and enhancement of the local environmental resource, by restricting growth outside of a less restrictive settlement boundary. In terms of transport, both Options 2 and 3 perform well, facilitating active travel uptake and providing good access to the village's amenities.
- 5.17 Option 1 performs least positively against all SEA themes as development could come forward in a less coordinated way which does not support the sustainable growth of the village; and has the greatest potential to adversely impact upon the parish's valued environmental resource.

## 6. Establishing the preferred approach

### 6.1 The Parish Council's reasons for developed the preferred approach in light of the alternatives assessment are identified below:

“The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee has selected Option 3, which takes a less restrictive approach to the proposed settlement boundaries. This is the preferred choice for several reasons. Firstly, it recognises the unique characteristics of the village and acknowledges that large gardens to the east of the village follows the natural border created by the stream and creates potential for some residential growth that is more closely connected to the built-up area than the surrounding open countryside. By incorporating these gardens within the settlement boundaries, the option ensures that future development aligns with the existing fabric of the village and maintains its distinct identity.

Additionally, Option 3 considers the valuable input from the community. The overwhelming support for this option, as evidenced in both the community engagement survey and the informal consultation process, demonstrates that it aligns with the aspirations and desires of the local residents. By prioritising the community's preferences, the option promotes a sense of ownership and involvement in the decision-making process.

Moreover, Option 3 offers a balanced approach to development. While it allows for the inclusion of some residential gardens, it still maintains certain restrictions and guidelines outlined in the VALP policy framework. This ensures that any development, particularly small-scale market and affordable housing, is carried out in a controlled manner that respects the overall policy objectives and maintains the sustainability of the village.

Overall, selecting Option 3 provides a comprehensive solution that integrates the community's input, preserves the village's character, and ensures responsible development. It strikes a balance between growth and preservation, fostering a thriving community while maintaining the village's unique identity.”

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

## 7. Introduction (to Part 2)

- 7.1 The aim of this section is to present an assessment of the current ‘pre-submission’ version of the draft WNP.
- 7.2 The WNPR puts forward 10 policies to guide development in the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 7.3 These policies are set out in Table 8.1 below.

*Table 0.1 Draft WNP policies*

<b>Policy no.</b>	<b>Title</b>
W1	Settlement Boundary
W2	Housing Mix
W3	Design Code
W4	Passivhaus
W5	Local Heritage Assets
W6	Important Views
W7	Local Green Space
W8	Green Infrastructure
W9	Sustainable Travel
W10	Community Facilities

## Methodology

- 7.4 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. The SEA framework comprises the following seven topics -
- Biodiversity
  - Climate change
  - Community wellbeing
  - Historic environment
  - Landscape
  - Land, soil and water resources
  - Transport
- 7.5 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.

- 7.6 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 and reversibility of effects as far as possible. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e. the potential for the WNP to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes and projects.



## 8. Appraisal of the draft WNP

### Introduction

The assessment is presented below under seven topic headings, reflecting the established assessment framework (see Section 3). A final section (Chapter 10) then presents overall conclusions and recommendations.

### Biodiversity

- 8.1 The neighbourhood area is not constrained by internationally designated biodiversity sites, however does contain nationally designated Ancient Woodland (Doctor's Spinney), located east of the main village settlement. In terms of locally important biodiversity features, within the parish there are also a number of priority habitats. These include grazing marsh, semi-improved grassland, deciduous woodland and wood pasture and parkland.
- 8.2 The draft WNP sets out provisions which will 1) help limit potential effects from new development on features and areas of biodiversity interest and 2) support the resilience of ecological networks; recognising that land outside of the built centre can provide key Green Infrastructure and habitat value. Policy W8 (Green Infrastructure) is notably in this respect, designating a 'Westbury Green Infrastructure network', for the purpose of promoting nature recovery and delivering a net gain to biodiversity. This is required to be in line with national provisions, which is expected to be a minimum of 10% as identified in the Environment Act 2021.
- 8.3 In accordance with Policy W8, proposals that will harm the functionality or connectivity of the network will not be supported. Ecological networks within the neighbourhood area are further protected through Policy W7 (Local Green Space) and W1 (Settlement Boundary). Safeguarding Westbury's open/ green spaces from development will strengthen locally important areas of priority habitats, maintaining the availability of connectivity corridors and stepping stones between them. Furthermore, the scale of development proposals likely to come forward through the Neighbourhood Plan (i.e. small infill development and affordable housing-led exception sites) is unlikely to negatively impact upon the local biodiversity resource, particularly the Ancient Woodland present to the east of the parish.
- 8.4 Finally, it is noted that Policy W3 (Design Codes) requires that all proposals have full regard to the Westbury Design Guidelines and Codes Report. Codes and guidelines set out contribute positively towards protecting and enhancing habitats, species, and ecological networks in the Neighbourhood Plan area. Code SU.04 for example focuses on the use of sustainable features within new and existing dwellings; and states that "wherever possible, biodiversity should be supported by the inclusion of features such as hedgehog corridors, bird/bat boxes, or bee bricks."
- 8.5 Overall, it is considered that the draft WNP appropriately considers the ecological sensitivities present, and through not allocating sites for development, avoids the potential for any significant effects on the baseline. The policy framework, and its appendices, build upon higher level planning policy to establish provisions which will support and enhance habitats, species,

and ecological networks in and around the neighbourhood area. **Minor positive effects** are therefore anticipated.

## Climate change

- 8.6 In terms of mitigating climate change, Policy W4 (Passivhaus) highlights that development proposals should be suitably designed to reduce carbon emissions and energy demand in response to climate change. Wherever feasible, all buildings should be certified to a Passivhaus or equivalent standard. Policy W4 also states that new development schemes should be supported by an Energy Statement to demonstrate how opportunities to reduce the energy use intensity (EUI) of buildings over the plan period have been maximised in accordance with the energy hierarchy.
- 8.7 For major development, in line with Policy W4, planning applications are required to be accompanied by a Whole Life-Cycle Carbon Emission Assessment, using a recognised methodology. Finally all planning applications for new and refurbished buildings are expected to demonstrate that they have been tested to ensure the buildings will perform as predicted.
- 8.8 The combination of requirements set through Policy W4 (as identified above) is intended to deliver a step change in the energy performance of all new and extended buildings in the town and, in doing so, encourage and incentivise the use of the Passivhaus or equivalent standard of building design. This is anticipated to support positive effects on the baseline, supporting opportunities to contribute towards meeting climate change targets for 2050.
- 8.9 It is recognised that road transport is proportionally a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the area. This is discussed under the 'Transportation' SEA topic below.
- 8.10 Policy W8 (Green Infrastructure) designates Westbury Green Infrastructure network for the purpose of promoting nature recovery and helping mitigate climate change. The network comprises land with known biodiversity value, priority habitats, woodlands, significant hedgerows, and lines of tree, including newly planted hedgerows and trees as part of the HS2 project mitigation measures extending into the Parish. Enhancements to the Green Infrastructure network will promote climate change mitigation through supporting carbon sequestration and promoting sustainable modes of transport; and climate change adaptation through helping to limit the effects of extreme weather events and regulating surface water run-off. Positive effects in this respect exist throughout the draft WNP policy framework, for example through provisions set out within Policy W1 (Settlement Boundary), W3 (Design Code), and W7 (Local Green Space).
- 8.11 In relation to flood risk in the neighbourhood area, the addressing of issues linked to fluvial, groundwater and surface water flooding are likely to be supported by the provisions of the NPPF. Likewise, the flood risk, SuDS and surface water flooding policies proposed through the VALP will further help limit adverse effects in this regard. It is noted that the Design Codes and guidelines set out (Appendix B of the draft WNP) encourage the use of sustainable features such as SuDS and rainwater harvesting facilities.

8.12 In conclusion, whilst the above approaches will contribute positively towards addressing climate change, these are not seen to be significant in the context of the SEA process. As such, the draft WNP is predicted to have a **neutral effect** on climate change. There is the potential for some minor long term positive effects but these are uncertain at this stage and dependent on the implementation of proposed measures.

## Community wellbeing

8.13 In terms of housing need, the VALP (2021) identifies Westbury as a 'smaller village' in the settlement hierarchy of the District (S3 Settlement hierarchy and cohesive development) and as a result, makes no formal site allocations but allows 'windfall' applications. It is anticipated that the emerging Buckinghamshire Local Plan will treat small villages like Westbury in a similar manner to the VALP.

8.14 The VALP does not itself adopt settlement boundaries on its Policies Maps but Policy D4 'Housing development at smaller villages' defines the 'existing development footprint' as the 'continuous built form of the village'. The WNP seeks to build upon this policy and provide a further degree of clarity by defining the settlement boundary on the Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map.

8.15 Through this approach, the draft WNP enables the delivery of sustainable development that is sensitive to the environmental constraints present, and that is intended to meet specific local housing requirements and wider community objectives. For example, the provisions of Policy W1 (Settlement Boundary) affirm that Proposals for development outside of the settlement boundary will only be supported if they accord with development plan policies managing development in the countryside. The Neighbourhood Plan is therefore supportive of infill development within settlement boundaries.

8.16 Where proposals for residential development do come forward within the settlement boundary, they will be expected to provide a mix of dwelling types and sizes to address the nature of local needs and contribute to the objective of creating a mixed and balanced community (Policy W2). To achieve this objective, in line with Policy W2, new residential development should seek to include in their housing mix, a majority of 2 and 3 bed dwellings. This is supported by Policy W3 (Design code), which seeks to ensure high standard and quality of infill and other schemes, and prioritise the mix of any future housing schemes to deliver smaller homes to meet local needs.

8.17 It is considered that changing the balance of housing mix towards more and smaller, two-to-three-bedroom houses would allow more younger families to join the community, leading to positive effects in terms of supporting a thriving, vibrant village.

8.18 The benefits to community wellbeing and mental health resulting from close contact with the natural environment are well-documented, and there is a strong drive to maintain and improve access to open, green spaces through the draft WNP. Policy W8 (Green Infrastructure) states that development proposals located within or adjoining to the network are required to have full regard to maintaining and improving the functionality of the network, including delivering a net gain to biodiversity, in the design of their layouts and landscaping schemes. The connectivity of the network is further ensured through Policy W7

(Local Green Space) which seeks to maintain and improve access to locally valued green spaces, and protect their integrity, special character and significance.

- 8.19 Accessible, connected neighbourhoods are further supported by Policy W9 (Sustainable Travel), which identifies the existing Active Travel Network. The network of walking and cycling routes extend through the main village settlement and to its boundaries, providing access to the countryside and neighbouring settlements. Protecting and enhancing this Network will likely lead to long-term positive effects, encouraging modal shift and supporting healthy lifestyles.
- 8.20 The population of the village has seen a 7% increase from 447 in 2011 to 481 in 2021<sup>3</sup>, and the largest age groups are 50-59 and 40-49, representing 18% and 16% of the population respectively. Maintaining and enhancing the diversity of local community infrastructure is therefore essential for the vitality of the village, encouraging growth and meeting the needs of residents. Policy W10 (Community Facilities) identifies several assets which are especially important to community life, including the Village Hall and Shop, Playing Field, Village Club, and St Augustine's Church. The policy confirms that development will be supported which includes provision to partially change or extend a facility, provided they are consistent with the relevant policies of the development plan. This will help secure the longer-term viability of services and community facilities, to meet current and future community needs.
- 8.21 Overall, it is considered that the draft WNP seeks to provide a robust development management policy framework for this topic, supported by the Westbury Design Codes and Guidance (Appendix B). While the draft WNP does not seek to allocate sites for housing, **significant positive effects** are predicted in terms of supporting a balanced community, and improving the overall quality of life of residents.

## Historic environment

- 8.22 Westbury has a rich history and is home to numerous heritage assets. Notably, the Westbury Conservation Area extends throughout the centre of the village, and contains several surviving important historic buildings and structures (including a Grade II\* Listed Building and nine Grade II Listed Buildings).
- 8.23 The proposed spatial strategy within the draft WNP seeks to deliver development through residential infill development within the settlement boundary (as outlined through Policy W1). This is likely to provide opportunities for new development to positively contribute to the fabric and setting of heritage assets through incorporating high-quality design which reflects the historic character and special qualities of these settlements. This is reinforced through Policy W3 (Design Code), which has a focus on protecting the historic environment of the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 8.24 In line with Policy W3 (Design code) development proposals will be supported provided they have full regard to the essential design guidelines and codes, where relevant to the character area typologies within which they are located. These are shown on the draft WNP Policies Maps, and reflect distinctive

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<sup>3</sup> Census 2011 and 2021

features of Westbury that shapes its character, particularly the distinct characteristics of the Westbury Conservation Area. This will likely lead to positive effects on the historic environment, adding additional local emphasis to the design quality principles of VALP Policies BE1 and BE2. Furthermore, it is recognised that the Conservation Area Appraisal (1989) has informed the Westbury Design Codes and Guidance.

- 8.25 Policy W5 (Local Heritage Assets) recognises the importance of a number of buildings and structures which are regarded as ('non-designated') heritage assets in the parish that, whilst not statutorily listed, have some local heritage value for the purposes of applying the provisions of the NPPF and VALP Policy BE1. The protection of these assets through Policy W5 is anticipated to lead to positive effects, protecting historic buildings and architecture that make a contribution to Westbury's character and sense of place.
- 8.26 Grade II\* Listed St Augustine's Church is provided additional protection through Policy W10 (Community Facilities). This policy restricts change of use or replacement, recognising the value of the asset as a community resource.
- 8.27 Overall, it is considered that the policy framework set out in the draft WNP provides a robust framework for the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. **Minor positive effects** are concluded, given the focus of development within the settlement boundary, and through incorporating high-quality and sensitive design through new development proposals. Furthermore, the draft WNP presents opportunities in terms of enhancement of assets and the wider public realm, including through the delivery of a Green Infrastructure Network.

## Landscape

- 8.28 The built footprint of Westbury is concentrated in a relatively small part of the Parish. Outside of the built footprint the remainder of the Parish area is rural in nature and contains various campsites, farms, and industrial units.
- 8.29 Policy W3 (Design code) seeks to ensure that any new development demonstrates a connection with local character, requiring that they have "full regard to the essential design guidelines and code, where relevant to the character area typologies within which they are located". Notably Code RC.03 relates to the scale of development, requiring that "New development must be of an appropriate scale to the village."
- 8.30 More broadly, the general design guidelines include "Relate well to local topography and landscape features, including prominent ridge lines and long-distance views." This reinforces provisions set out in Policy W6 (Important Views), which sets out a level of protection for a series of views from public vantage points in the Parish. In line with Policy W6, development which would obstruct such a view or which would lead to a detrimental impact on the view should not be permitted.
- 8.31 Policy W7 (Local Green Space) designates a series of Local Green Spaces in the Parish, while Policy W8 (Green Infrastructure) identifies a Green Infrastructure Network; both strengthening the Parish's distinctiveness and rural nature outside of its built core. It is considered that the policies discussed



above, will lead to positive effects in terms of preserving the rural character of the village and the surrounding landscape.

- 8.32 Along with policies which support the protection of green spaces, the provisions of Policy W1 (Settlement Boundary) seek to prevent sprawl into the countryside by focusing development within existing built-up areas. This will support a limitation of effects on the open countryside and safeguard these areas from inappropriate scales of development.
- 8.33 Overall, it is considered that the policy framework set out in the draft WNP provides a robust framework for the protection and enhancement of the landscape. **Minor positive effects** are concluded, given the focus of development within the settlement boundary, and through incorporating high-quality and sensitive design through new development proposals. Furthermore, the draft WNP presents opportunities in terms of enhancement of assets and the wider public realm, including through the delivery of a Green Infrastructure Network.

## Land, soil and water resources

- 8.34 In terms of the location of the best and most versatile agricultural land, a detailed classification has not been undertaken within the Neighbourhood Plan area. As such, there is a need to rely on the nationally available 'Provisional Agricultural Land Quality' national dataset. The provisional Agricultural Land Quality dataset shows that the parish is predominately covered by Grade 3 agricultural land, however, the data does not differentiate as to whether this is Grade 3a (e.g. the best and most versatile) or lower quality 3b land.
- 8.35 A significant amount of Grade 3 (3a and 3b) agricultural land within the parish has been lost to ongoing HS2 activities. It will therefore be important to protect the remaining higher quality agricultural land from future development, and promote the use of previously developed land where possible. In this regard, Policy W1 (Settlement Boundary) affirms that new developments will be focused within the built up area, with growth outside of this area strictly controlled in accordance with VALP policy.
- 8.36 Policy W1 (Settlement Boundary) and Policy W2 (Housing Mix) support the provision of a high proportion of small dwellings (i.e. greater than 50% of the total of schemes of five or more dwellings), which will further ensure an efficient use of scarce land in the built-up areas of the villages.
- 8.37 Along with policies in the Neighbourhood Plan which seek to protect open spaces and green infrastructure between settlements (Policy W7 and Policy W8), Policy W1 will promote the efficient use of land within Westbury and safeguard areas of agricultural land within the parish. Positive effects are also predicted in this respect through Policy W3 (Design Code), with Design Codes CO.01 – CO.04 supporting, and positively managing, infill development within settlement boundary.
- 8.38 Policy W8 (Green Infrastructure) promotes “a net gain to biodiversity”, through the creation of new habitats and the enhancement/ expansion of the existing network. Enriched habitats and species and facilitating improvements to green infrastructure provision in the area will support the quality of land and water

resources. This will promote the ability of natural processes to support soil and water quality.

- 8.39 This is further supported through Policy W3 (Design Code), where general design guidelines include “provide adequate open space for the development in terms of both quantity and quality”. Design Codes further promote development which encourages healthy and sustainable design, and water and energy efficiency, which in turn will stimulate resilience to climate change. This is reinforced through Policy W4 (Passivhaus), and will help limit resource use.
- 8.40 There are Minerals Safeguarding Areas (MSAs) in and adjacent to the parish (see draft WNP Plan F). The supporting text of the draft WNP recognises that the Buckinghamshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2016 – 2036) forms part of the development plan that applies in the Parish, and that comments on the draft WNP are being sought from the minerals authority. It is considered that focusing development within the settlement boundary (Policy W1) will ensure adverse effects on the local mineral resource are avoided.
- 8.41 **Neutral effects** are concluded overall. It is considered that the draft WNP suitably supports higher level policy provisions in terms of providing appropriate protection and enhancement to land, soil, and water resources.

## Transportation

- 8.42 It is recognised that public transport infrastructure in Westbury is limited, with infrequent bus services and no immediate access to a rail station. It is noted that the parish is located within a HS2 safeguarding area, however, as the nearest stations will be in London and Birmingham, it is unlikely the HS2 project will increase sustainable transport usage in the neighbourhood area. Policy W9 (Sustainable Travel) therefore seeks to protect and enhance Westbury’s Active Travel Network, which will likely encourage walking and cycling in the parish, and reduce the current reliance on the private vehicle.
- 8.43 The nearest large settlement to Westbury is Buckingham, approximately 5 miles away, accessed via the A422, which is the main road that runs through Westbury from east to west. Development has more recently taken place along the A442 Buckingham to Brackley Road, which has led to increased traffic and road safety concerns. Policy W1 (Settlement Boundary) seeks to address these issues by focusing new residential development within the defined settlement boundary. This will ensure that new developments are situated in the most sustainable locations in terms of the relative distance to the local centre. This in turn will likely support the creation of an inclusive community and encouraging alternative options of transportation for undertaking day-to-day activities.
- 8.44 As set out in the Westbury Design Code & Guidance, further pressure on parking facilities is a issue for Westbury, particularly in relation to on-street parking. Policy W3 (Design Code) ensures that new development consider the Westbury Design Codes & Guidance document, which sets detailed requirements in terms of ensuring any new development include off-street parking that is appropriately designed. This will lead to positive effects in terms of avoiding parking overspill issues and addressing visitor parking needs.

8.45 Overall, the draft WNP policy framework supports connectivity within and surrounding the parish, and seeks to encourage active travel uptake where possible. With public transport in the parish limited, and car reliance likely to be continued (albeit perhaps lessened in light of measures proposed), **neutral effects** are concluded.



## 9. Conclusions and recommendations

### Conclusions at this stage

- 9.1 Overall, the draft Plan appraisal has served to highlight the potential for positive effects of varying significance, with broadly neutral effects overall.
- 9.2 The draft WNP, supported by the Westbury Design Codes & Guidance, is considered to lead to **significant positive effects** in relation to the community and wellbeing SEA theme. While the draft WNP does not seek to allocate sites for housing, significant positive effects are predicted in terms of supporting a balanced community, meeting local needs, and improving the overall quality of life of residents.
- 9.3 **Minor positive effects** are predicted for the WNP in relation to biodiversity. Building upon higher level planning policy, the WNP seeks to establish provisions which will support and enhance habitats, species, and ecological networks in and around the neighbourhood area.
- 9.4 **Minor positive effects** are predicted on landscape and historic environment given the focus of development within the settlement boundary, and through incorporating high-quality and sensitive design through new development proposals. Furthermore, the draft WNP presents opportunities in terms of enhancement of assets and the wider public realm, including through the delivery of a Green Infrastructure Network.
- 9.5 **Neutral effects** are concluded in relation to climate change; predominantly reflecting the contribution set out to nature recovery, embedded carbon reduction and energy requirements for new development, and the absence of site allocations. There is the **potential for minor long term positive effects**, but these are uncertain at this stage and dependent on the implementation of proposed measures.
- 9.6 **Neutral effects** are concluded in relation to transportation as the draft WNP supports connectivity and encourage active travel uptake, however continued car reliance and limited public transport offer is predicted.
- 9.7 **Neutral effects** are also concluded in relation to the landscape and historic environment SEA themes. While it is recognised that the policy framework performs well in terms of protecting and enhancing the important local heritage and landscape resource, neutral effects overall reflect the sensitivity of the neighbourhood area in relation to these themes.
- 9.8 Broadly **neutral effects** are concluded in relation to land, soil and water resources, with no significant deviation from the baseline anticipated.

### Conclusions

- 9.9 At this stage, no negative effects are considered likely that could require more stringent mitigation. On this basis no recommendations are identified. Despite this, it is recognised that the views of statutory consultees are being sought at consultation and will be considered in the next iteration of plan-making and SEA.

## **Part 3: What are the next steps?**

## 10. Next steps and monitoring

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

### Plan finalisation

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

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

10.4 Assuming that the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the Neighbourhood Plan 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 WNP will become part of the Development Plan for Buckinghamshire Council, covering the defined neighbourhood area.

### Monitoring

10.5 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.

10.6 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 WNP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Buckinghamshire Council.

# Appendices

# Appendix A Regulatory requirements

As discussed in **Chapter 1** above, 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** overleaf 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*

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... <sup>4</sup>
What is the plan seeking to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan.</li> </ul>
What is the sustainability 'context'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.</li> <li>The relevant environmental protection objectives established at international or national level.</li> <li>Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.</li> </ul>
What's the scope of the SEA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan.</li> <li>The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.</li> <li>Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.</li> </ul>
What is the sustainability 'baseline'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan.</li> <li>The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.</li> <li>Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.</li> </ul>
What are the key issues and objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key problems/issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e., provide a 'framework' for) assessment.</li> </ul>
What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with.</li> <li>The likely significant effects associated with alternatives.</li> <li>Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives appraisal/a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the current version of the plan.</li> </ul>
What are the assessment findings at this stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The likely significant effects associated with the Regulation 14 version of the plan.</li> <li>The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the Regulation 14 version of the plan.</li> </ul>
What happens next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The next steps for the plan making /SEA process.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> NB this column does not quote directly from Schedule II of the Regulations. Rather, it reflects a degree of interpretation.

**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 The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level	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 aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan'	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 environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	
(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;	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 &amp; objectives?</i>
(g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan;	Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of appraisal	
(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	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]
(i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring.	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 will be met.**

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
<b>Schedule 2 of the regulations lists the information to be provided within the SA Report</b>	
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?'). More detailed messages, established through a context and baseline review are also presented in Appendix B of this Environmental Report.
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 considered during its preparation;	The SEA framework is presented within Chapter 3 ('What is the scope of the SEA'). Also, Appendix B presents key messages from the context review. With regards to explaining "how...considerations have been taken into account", Chapter 7 explains the Parish Council'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 particular 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.
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10.A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings	The NTS is provided at the beginning of this Environmental Report.
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**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 'pre-submission' version of the Westbury Neighbourhood Plan, with a view to informing Regulation 14 consultation.
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**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.	This report, and consultation responses received through the consultation (informed by this report) will inform plan finalisation.
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# Appendix B Scoping information

## Introduction

This appendix presents additional information on the SEA scope, namely key issues under each of the SEA framework headings. As set out in the Scoping Report, these key issues were identified following a review of the context and baseline.

Additionally, this appendix presents a summary of responses received as part of the scoping consultation, followed by the SEA Framework.

## Key issues

### Air quality

- Within the neighbourhood area there is an absence of any significant air quality issues (i.e., AQMAs) and there are no exceeded or expected exceedances of national air quality objectives. Therefore, the air quality topic has been scoped out for the purposes of the SEA process.

### Biodiversity

- Growth in the WNP area should seek to avoid the loss or fragmentation of Priority Habitat. The WNP provides an opportunity to develop a spatial strategy that minimises impacts on the local habitat network and delivers development gains in respect of biodiversity net gain, habitat expansion, and new green infrastructure.

### Climate change (including flood risk)

- The WNP neighbourhood area, including the main settlement, is partially affected by areas at high risk of fluvial flooding (Flood Zone 3) and areas at varying risk of surface water flooding. These areas broadly follow the watercourses present. Development should ensure appropriate mitigation (e.g., sustainable drainage systems) and seek opportunities to improve drainage and reduce flood risk where they exist.
- The transport sector continues to be a key challenge in terms of reducing emissions. The WNP provides opportunities to guide development towards the most accessible available locations in the neighbourhood area and require local infrastructure (including walking and cycling) improvements where appropriate.
- The WNP should seek to maximise opportunities for local renewable energy and electric vehicle infrastructure development, as well as new green infrastructure and improved ecological links, to support climate resilience.

### Community wellbeing

- The WNP provides the opportunity for enhanced policy provisions which seek to deliver the right mix of housing types, tenures and sizes according to local needs, in suitably connected places; and reduce deprivation in this respect.

- The neighbourhood area is limited in terms of community infrastructure, services and facilities – the WNP provides an opportunity to encourage the delivery of new provision in the area.
- The WNP provides the opportunities to plan for development which accommodates for changing working patterns and lifestyles, and places greater emphasis on high levels of accessibility.

## Historic environment

- With a variety of designated assets and archaeological finds in the neighbourhood area, it will be important to ensure that future development avoids / minimises impacts upon the historic environment and maximises opportunities to improve the public realm and green infrastructure to the indirect benefit of heritage settings.
- With the Conservation Area Appraisal undertaken in 2008, the WNP provides an opportunity to bolster evidence in relation to the significance of the Westbury Conservation Area, its key features and values derived locally, and implement local controls where appropriate.

## Landscape

- Given its proximity to several bigger settlements, Westbury is positioned to allow residents access to larger towns as well as supporting access to the rural countryside surrounding the village. The Parish's unique character in this respect will be important to retain alongside future development. It will also be important to take into consideration the key characteristics and features supporting local landscape designations present, and enhance these where possible to increase access to and understanding of the natural environment.
- The WNP area is set in an area of rising topography. As such, views to the east, south and west of the neighbourhood area could be adversely impacted by new development depending on its location, detailed design and layout. Impact on views to the West of the village would likely negatively impact the spectacular sunsets that are enjoyed across the village - and in particular from the Playing Fields & Village Hall. It is however recognised that the Policy directions of the WNP can seek to ensure any adverse effects in this respect are avoided/ mitigated where possible.

## Land, soil and water resources

- Given its proximity to several bigger settlements, Westbury is positioned to allow residents access to larger towns as well as supporting access to the rural countryside surrounding the village. The Parish's unique character in this respect will be important to retain alongside future development. It will also be important to take into consideration the key characteristics and features supporting local landscape designations present, and enhance these where possible to increase access to and understanding of the natural environment.
- The WNP area is set in an area of rising topography. As such, views to the east, south and west of the neighbourhood area could be adversely impacted by new development depending on its location, detailed design and layout. Impact on views to the West of the village would likely negatively impact the spectacular sunsets that are enjoyed across the village - and in particular from the Playing

Fields & Village Hall. It is however recognised that the Policy directions of the WNP can seek to ensure any adverse effects in this respect are avoided/ mitigated where possible.

- The growth strategy for the WNP should seek to minimise impacts on the wider landscape, including through avoidance / protection of key landscape features, such as valued trees and hedgerows.

## Transportation

- There is no rail station within the WNP area, and the bus services are limited. In the absence of sustainable transport interventions, growth in the WNP area is likely to cause an increase in private vehicles on the local road network. It will therefore be important to locate any additional growth in areas which maximise pedestrian and cycle route connections within the settlement and beyond.
- Following the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a shift towards increased working from home. Opportunities to capitalise on this should be maximised to reduce the need to travel for work.

## Scoping consultation responses

The draft SEA scoping report was shared with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England for formal consultation earlier in 2023. The responses received and how they have been addressed are presented overleaf.

*Table All. 1: SEA scoping consultation responses*

<b>Consultee</b>	<b>Consultation response summary</b>	<b>AECOM response</b>
<b>Natural England</b>	Natural England has no specific comments to make on this neighbourhood plan SEA scoping.	Noted.
<b>Historic England</b>	<p>In terms of the historic environment, we consider that the report has identified the plans and programmes which are of most relevance to the development of the plan, that it has established an appropriate baseline against which to assess the plan's proposals and that it has put forward a suitable set of objectives and indicators. Overall, we believe that it provides an appropriate framework for assessing significant effects which this plan might have upon the historic environment.</p> <p>Historic England strongly advises that conservation and archaeological advisers are closely involved throughout the preparation of the SEA of this plan. Historic England has produced guidance for all involved in undertaking SEA/SA exercises which gives advice on issues relating to the historic environment. This can be found here.</p>	Noted.
<b>Environment Agency</b>	No response received.	

