



**Screening Statement on the determination of the need for a Strategic Environmental
Assessment / Habitat Regulations Assessment for the emerging Wellow
Neighbourhood Plan**

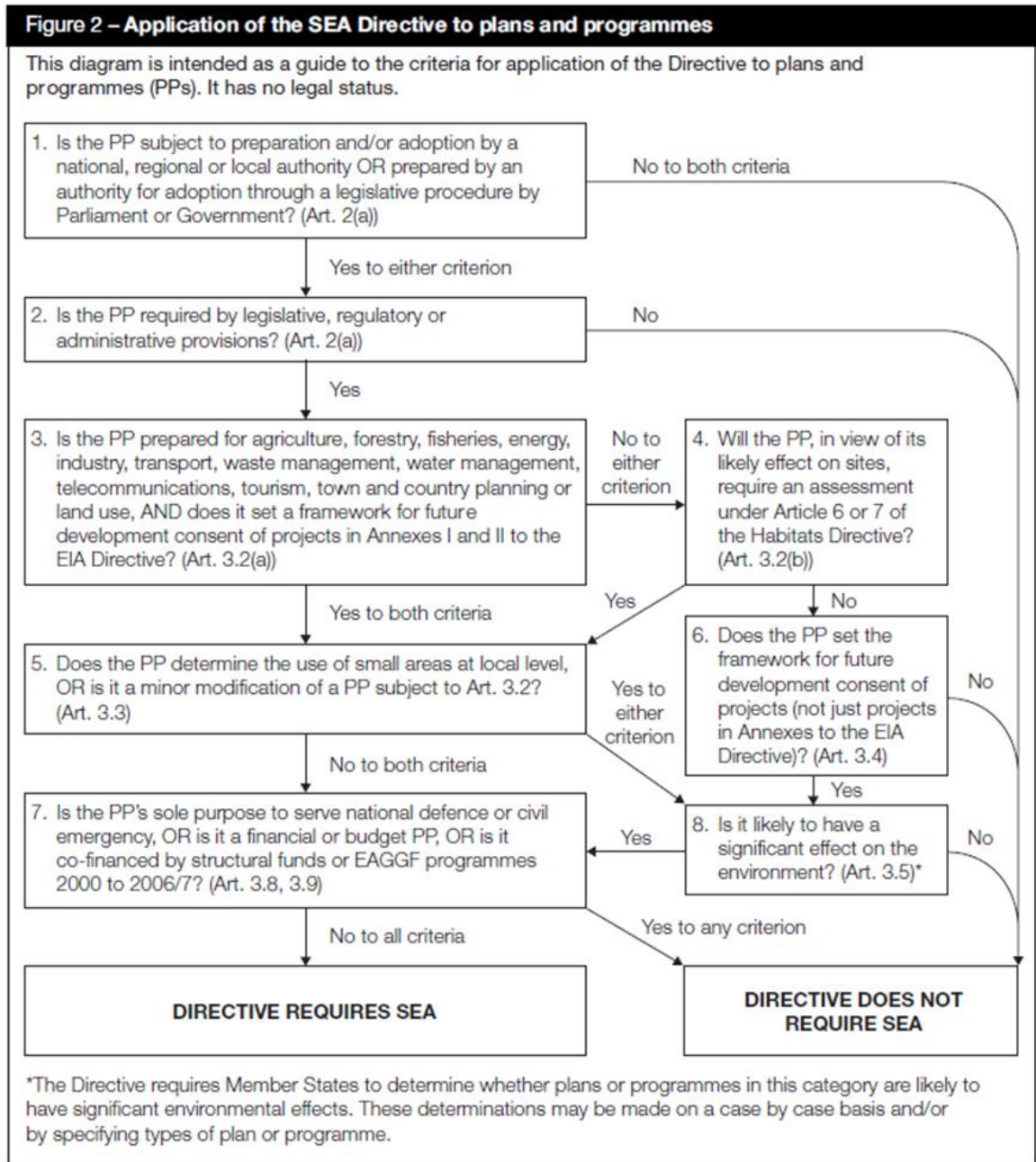
May 2022

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The whole of the parish of Wellow was formally designated as a ‘Neighbourhood Area’ under the relevant Neighbourhood Planning Regulations in 2016 by the New Forest National Park Authority and Test Valley Borough Council (as the parish includes land within both the Borough Council and National Park Authority planning administrative boundaries).
- 1.2 Wellow Parish Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the whole of the parish. Subject to approval at the Examination in Public and then local referendum, the Neighbourhood Plan will have formal status as part of the statutory ‘development plan’.
- 1.3 On 9 May 2022 Wellow Parish Council formally wrote to the New Forest National Park Authority (as the ‘responsible authority’ under the relevant Regulations) to request a formal screening opinion on the requirement for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/or a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. A similar request was also made to Test Valley Borough Council regarding the area of the designated Wellow Neighbourhood Area that falls within the Borough Council’s planning remit.
- 1.4 Wellow Parish Council’s letter of 9 May 2022 confirms that the neighbourhood plan is: (i) proposing to allocate sites for both open market and affordable housing; and (ii) is being prepared for an area with various environmental designations.
- 1.5 The National Park Authority’s screening opinion is formally requested in accordance with:
 - (i) European Directive 2001/42/EC (‘SEA Directive’) and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (‘SEA Regulations’) which require an SEA to be undertaken on any land use plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents. Regulation 9 of the Regulations states that the responsible authority must take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to Regulations and consult the consultation bodies in determining whether an SEA is required; and
 - (ii) European Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora (‘Habitats Directive’) and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (‘Habitat Regulations’), as amended.
- 1.6 This report sets out the National Park Authority’s formal screening opinion on whether the emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/or Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). In issuing this screening opinion the Authority has had regard to advice in the Government’s National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) resource. The NPPG guidance on ‘Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal’ confirms that whether a neighbourhood plan proposal requires a strategic environmental assessment will depend on what is proposed. An SEA may be required, for example, where: (i) a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development; (ii) the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan; or (iii) the neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the local plan or other strategic policies.

2. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Process

2.1 Set out below is an extract from ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’, DCLG (2005) which demonstrates the SEA screening process.



2.2 The key to the screening decision is the determination of whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects using the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the 2004 Regulations. These criteria are set out in the following tables, alongside an assessment against the emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan.

Table 1: Application of SEA Directive to the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan

Stage	Yes / No	Explanation
1. <i>Is the Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))</i>	Yes	The preparation and adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan is enabled by the Localism Act 2011. The Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by Wellow Parish Council and will be “made” by the Authority as the local authority for the part of the Neighbourhood Area that falls within the National Park. The preparation of the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan is subject to the following regulations (as amended): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012; ▪ Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012; ▪ Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.
2. <i>Is the Neighbourhood Plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))</i>	Yes	Although the production of a Neighbourhood Plan is optional under the Localism Act 2011, once commenced its preparation is covered by relevant legislation and requirements. Once adopted the Plan will form part of the statutory ‘development plan’ for the National Park-part of Wellow parish. It is important that the screening process considers whether it is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.
3. <i>Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II (see Appendix 2) to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))</i>	Yes	The Wellow Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared for the purposes of town & country / land use planning and will set out a framework for future development consents as part of the statutory development plan covering Wellow. At this stage the scale of housing development proposed is likely to be limited, but this will only be determined as the emerging Neighbourhood Plan goes through its preparation process. It is recognised that development sites are likely to be small and due regard will be given to national and local policy relating to the National Park, as confirmed by the Parish Council. In conclusion, the Neighbourhood Plan is setting a framework for future development. At this stage in the Plan-preparation process the final scale of development has yet to be determined, although it is noted that the scale currently envisaged is limited. These matters will become clearer as work on the Plan progresses.
4. <i>Will the Neighbourhood Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))</i>	Yes	Given the range of protected habitats within and adjacent to the Neighbourhood Plan Area (including the New Forest and Solent internationally designations), at this stage it is concluded that the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan could potentially have uncertain or significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. The Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Opinion that follows in Section 3 provides more detail on this and concludes that an HRA will be required.
5. <i>Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)</i>	No	The Wellow Neighbourhood Plan will determine the use of sites at a wider than small area / local level. The parish of Wellow extends to nearly 16 square kilometres (roughly a sixth of which lie within the National Park) - with a population of circa 3,300 people - and the Neighbourhood Plan is proposing to allocate sites for development.

<p>6. Does the Neighbourhood Plan set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Once adopted, the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan will include policies to provide a framework to guide future development within the Parish. The Plan will form part of the statutory ‘development plan’ for the parish and in accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act will be the starting point for planning decisions on development proposals.</p>
<p>7. Is the Neighbourhood Plan’s sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Given the statutory nature of the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan; the range of environmental designations within and adjacent to the Wellow Neighbourhood Area; and the fact that the Plan is proposing to allocate sites for development (albeit the final scale and locations have yet to be determined); it is concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) due to the potential for significant effects upon the environment.</p>

2.3 The Government’s National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) resource recognises that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) may be required where a Neighbourhood Plan allocates sites for development and/or the Neighbourhood Area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan. The National Park Authority has concluded that this is the case with the emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan. Although the Parish Council has confirmed that at this stage the scale of development likely to be allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan is limited (circa 20 dwellings), this will only be confirmed as work on the Plan progresses. It is also the case that development immediately adjacent to the protected New Forest National Park could have environmental impacts on it as therefore an assessment is justified. The following table assesses the likely significance of effects on the environment in accordance with the criteria established in Regulation 9 and [Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations](#).

Table 2 - Assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment (SEA) – based on Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

1. Characteristics of the plan, having regard to:	
<i>(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;</i>	The Wellow Neighbourhood Plan would, once adopted, form part of the statutory ‘development plan’ for the parish and provide the planning framework for consenting development proposals within the National Park-part of the parish. Under Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act it would therefore form part of the legal planning framework for the consideration and consenting of future development projects within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the strategic policies of the New Forest National Park Local Plan (2019).
<i>(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans & programmes including those in a hierarchy;</i>	The Wellow Neighbourhood Plan will be in conformity with two statutory National Park purposes (as originally established in the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949) and the relevant sections of the Government’s National Planning Policy Framework. The policies within the Neighbourhood Plan will also be in general conformity with the strategic planning policies contained within the adopted New Forest National Park Local Plan 2016 – 2036.
<i>(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;</i>	<p>Wellow Parish Council has confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan will include policies which seek to protect valuable cultural, environmental, economic and community resources, whilst facilitating sustainable growth and commensurate provision of infrastructure to serve any new development</p> <p>The Wellow Neighbourhood Area is located close to a range of environmental designations that will be key considerations in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan. The NPPF places the presumption in favour of sustainable development at the heart of national planning system (paragraph 11) and also includes a range of environmental policies that the Neighbourhood Plan is required to be in general conformity with. The SEA aims to ensure environmental factors are fully considered when planning for sustainable development.</p>
<i>(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and</i>	<p>The Wellow Neighbourhood Area is situated close to a range of environmental designations. In terms of habitat designations, these include the following either within the Neighbourhood Area, or in close proximity to it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The New Forest SAC - New Forest SPA - The New Forest Ramsar

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar - Solent Maritime SAC - Solent & Southampton Water SPA - National SSSI designations (including the New Forest SSSI, the Landford Bog SSSI, Landford Heath SSSI, Whiteparish Common SSSI, River Test SSSI and the Lower Test SSSI). <p>Parts of the Wellow Neighbourhood Area are also affected by flooding (fluvial and surface water), particularly in the River Blackwater valley. The emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan will therefore need to consider flood risk in the preparation of policy and any site allocations. Evidence from the Environment Agency and the New Forest Strategic Flood Risk Assessment that informed the National Park Authority’s adopted Local Plan (2019) can inform this process.</p> <p>On this basis it is concluded that the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan has the potential to have significant effects on the environment, which should be assessed in reviewing potential development sites.</p>
<p><i>(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).</i></p>	<p>The emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan includes several policies linked to the environment. For example, the current composite draft Plan includes policies on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for appropriate renewable energy and sustainable construction. - A ‘River Blackwater policy’ to protect the water quality in the river and associated tributaries. - Measures to promote biodiversity and linked between the New Forest and surrounding local designations. - The potential designation of ‘local green spaces’ through the Neighbourhood Plan making process.
<p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</p>	
<p><i>(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;</i></p>	<p>The emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan will set the framework for development in the parish, which will be implemented ‘in perpetuity’ (i.e. long term). The New Forest National Park Local Plan Review Sustainability Appraisal & SEA Scoping Report (2016) and the Sustainability Appraisal for the New Forest National Park Submission draft Local Plan (2018) set out the key sustainability issues and how these may be affected by Local Plan policies. These reports will be a useful source of information for the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. Copies of these documents can be shared with the Parish Council. In addition, the New Forest ‘State of the Park Report’ (2019) provides baseline information and trends on biodiversity, landscape character, tranquillity and environmental quality, all of which provide useful information for the SEA process.</p>

The New Forest National Park Local Plan Review Habitats Regulations Assessment work (undertaken by LUC) identified the following potential effects from development either within the National Park, or in combination with development proposed in surrounding areas that would need to be considered:

Direct loss or physical damage due to construction:

The Wellow Neighbourhood Area includes part of the internationally designated New Forest Ramsar, SPA and SAC sites (covering Wellow and Canada Commons). The HRA work for the National Park Local Plan identified the potential effects of direct loss of or physical damage to designated habitats or habitats on which designated species rely or direct mortality of designated species. In addition, the HRA work identified the potential for development to result in loss of habitat which lies outside European site boundaries but which is used by the qualifying bird populations of the New Forest SPA and Solent designations. Should HRA Screening be unable to rule out likely significant effects then more detailed Appropriate Assessment will be required to determine whether loss of the supporting habitat present at the development site would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the New Forest SPA; or Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site.

Disturbance and other urban edge effects from construction or occupation of buildings: It is not possible to rule out the potential for urban edge effects such as pet predation from new residential development within 400 metres of New Forest SPA; or from effects such as noise pollution or light pollution from all types of built development. The Wellow Neighbourhood Area includes part of the New Forest SPA and additional areas of land within the parish are located within 400 metres of the SPA. Potential disturbance and urban edge effects therefore cannot be screened out.

Recreational pressure: The Local Plan HRA work concluded in relation to recreational impacts that, prior to mitigation, likely significant effects in-combination could not be ruled out for any residential development or visitor accommodation within New Forest National Park on the New Forest SAC and SPA. The Wellow Neighbourhood Area includes areas of land within the National Park and therefore affected by this issue. The National Park Authority adopted an updated Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD in 2020 which provides details on how the recreational impacts of new development within the National Park can be mitigated. In addition, development within the defined 13.8km 'zone of influence' of the New Forest's designated sites may also increase recreational pressures and therefore mitigation is required for new housing and other forms of overnight accommodation within the zone (which covers the whole of the parish of Wellow).

In addition, a very small area in the east of the designated Wellow Neighbourhood Area falls within the defined 5.6km 'zone of influence' relating to recreational pressures on the Solent's designated sites. The Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy sets out a package of mitigation measures for development within this zone and this matter should be considered as part of the Neighbourhood Plan-making process. Test Valley Borough Council is best placed to advise on this, as the area of the parish within the 5.6km Solent 'zone of influence' is not the part of the parish within the National Park for planning purposes.

	<p><u>Changes in water quality:</u> The Authority’s Local Plan HRA work identified the European sites vulnerable to a deterioration in water quality as the following that are relevant to the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan - the New Forest SAC & Ramsar site; Solent & Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC; Solent Maritime SAC; Solent & Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site. The most relevant of these for the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan work is the Solent designations and the impacts arising from increased levels of nitrates. Although new development only makes a small contribution to the issue, Natural England’s updated methodology and budget calculator (March 2022) re-affirms that new development in the Solent catchment must be ‘nitrate-neutral’ to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations and recent legal case law.</p>
<p>(b) <i>the cumulative nature of the effects;</i></p>	<p>To be determined as more detailed is available. The HRA work undertaken for the New Forest National Park Local Plan Review 2016 – 2036 highlighted the cumulative, in-combination impacts of development around the New Forest’s Natura 2000 sites as potentially significant. These impacts included increased recreational pressures on the New Forest designations and (more recently) impacts on water quality on the Solent designations arising from increased levels of phosphates.</p>
<p>(c) <i>the transboundary nature of the effects;</i></p>	<p>The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary impacts (i.e. other Member States).</p>
<p>(d) <i>the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);</i></p>	<p>There are no significant risks to human health or the environment.</p>
<p>(e) <i>the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);</i></p>	<p>The full Neighbourhood Plan Area covers an area of nearly 16 square kilometres and a population of approximately 3,300 people. Given the environmental sensitivities of the area – and in particular the need to address the impacts of development on water quality and increased recreational pressures – effects are likely. There are established mitigation schemes in place to address these matters.</p>
<p>(f) <i>the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</i> <i>(i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;</i> <i>(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;</i> <i>or</i> <i>(iii) intensive land-use; and</i></p>	<p>There are a number of nationally and internationally protected nature conservation sites within and immediately adjacent to the Wellow Neighbourhood Area. These sites are vulnerable to a variety of impacts, as set out in the assessment against criteria 2(a) above. The Wellow Neighbourhood Area also contains a range of built environment assets (designated and non-designated), including a number of listed buildings. National (NPPF and NPPG) and local planning policies (the respective National Park Authority and Borough Council Local Plans) includes policies seeking to protect these assets.</p> <p>The designated Wellow Neighbourhood Area includes land within the New Forest National Park. The first statutory Park purpose is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park.</p>

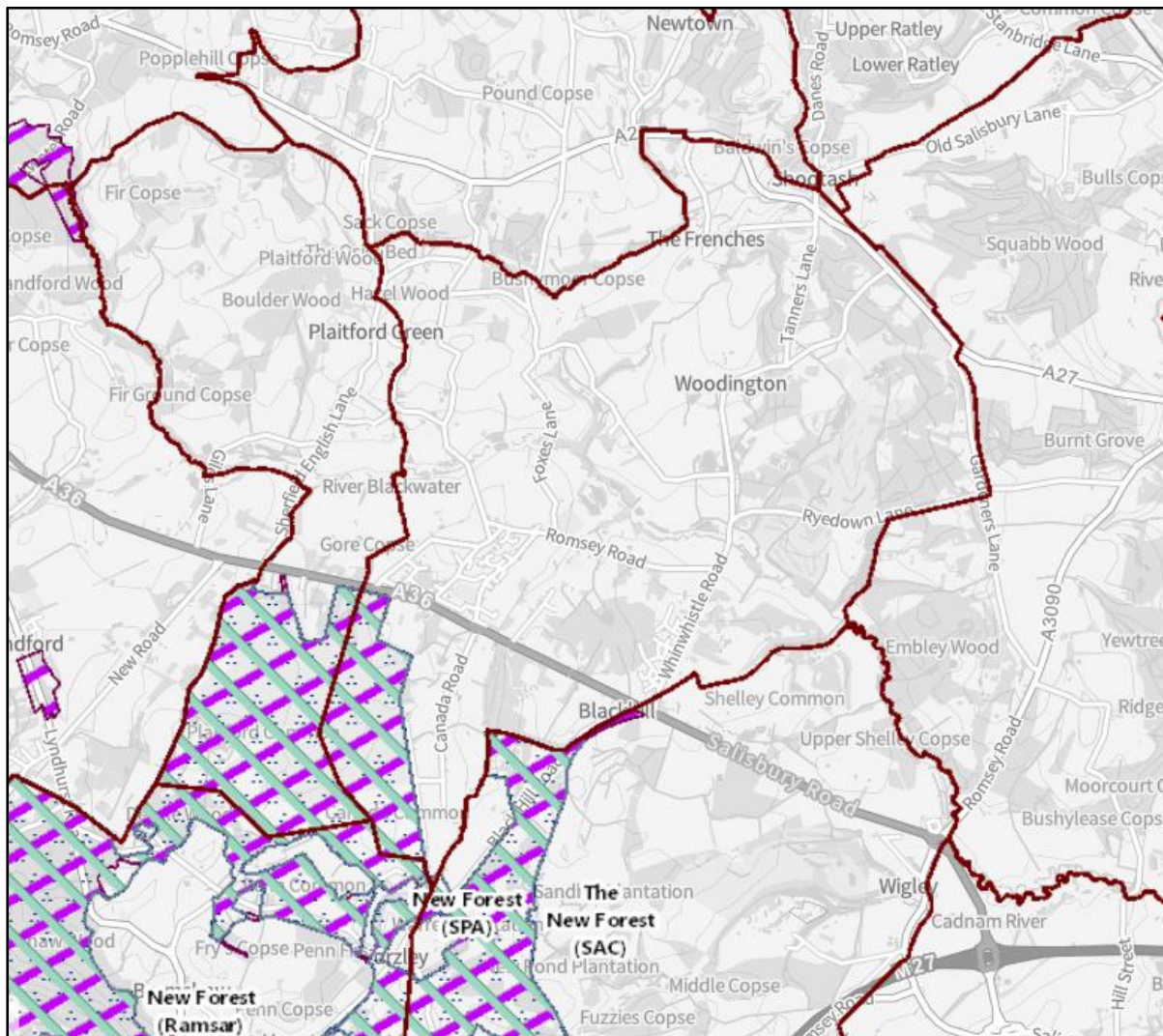
<p>(g) <i>the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</i></p>	<p>National Parks – including the New Forest - have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty (paragraph 176 of the NPPF) and great weight should also be given to the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage within the National Park. Section 62(2) of the Environment Act 1995 requires relevant authorities to have regard to the two statutory Park purposes in making decision that could affect National Parks. This applies to the preparation of plans and projects outside National Parks, but which could impact on them, including Neighbourhood Plans.</p>
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2.4 As it has been concluded that there is potential for likely significant environmental effects, an environmental report should be prepared in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3) of regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. It is advised that the following matters should be focused on in the assessment in relation to impacts on the New Forest National Park.

- Impacts on natural environment designations – comprising international (e.g. SAC, SPA, Ramsar), national (e.g. SSSI) and county/local (e.g. SINCs). This issue will also be addressed through the HRA process for international nature conservation designations (see next section).
- Impacts on built environment designations – including designated heritage assets (e.g. listed buildings); and non-designated heritage assets. These heritage assets should be identified through the SEA process and consideration given to impact on them (and their settings) from the policies in the emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan.
- Potential landscape impacts on the New Forest National Park. National policy also highlights the importance of considering development within the settings of National Parks. This reflects the legal duty placed on ‘relevant bodies’ by Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995 to have regard to the two statutory National Park purposes when undertaking activities which could impact on them. This can include development outside National Parks.

3. The Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening Process

3.1 Wellow Parish Council has also sought a formal screening opinion from the National Park Authority on the need for a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. The Authority is the ‘competent authority’ under the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010, and therefore needs to ensure the emerging Neighbourhood Plan has been assessed through the Habitats Regulations process where necessary. This process looks at the potential for significant impacts on nature conservation sites that are of international importance, also referred to as Natura 2000 sites. The Wellow Neighbourhood Area includes, or is adjacent to, a number of internationally important habitats – including the New Forest SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites; and the Solent designations. The map below illustrates these designations in various hatchings in relation to the Wellow parish boundary (brown line), with the Solent designations just off the map to the south east.



3.2 This screening assessment has regard to the work on the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the New Forest National Park Local Plan Review (2016 – 2036), as well as considering information that has become available since the Authority’s Local Plan was adopted in 2019. Test Valley Borough Council will be providing a separate HRA screening opinion to the Parish Council relating to the area of the parish that lies within the Borough Council’s planning remit. It is also recognised that the Neighbourhood Plan will be in general conformity with the

higher-level development plans prepared by the National Park Authority and Test Valley Borough Council, which have themselves been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessments.

- 3.3 From this process the Authority has determined whether the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan is likely to result in significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites either alone or in combination with other plans and policies and, therefore, whether an ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is required.

Legislative Background

- 3.4 Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive provides that:

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [European] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”

Assessment

- 3.5 A Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) was undertaken for the New Forest National Park Local Plan Review (2016-2036). This assessment was undertaken in consultation with Natural England and other bodies. The HRA work on the National Park Local Plan concluded that significant impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites within and adjacent to the National Park could not be ruled out. This conclusion recognised the in-combination effects caused by the development plans prepared for areas surrounding the National Park. The main areas where potential impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites in the New Forest are highlighted the response to point 2(a) in Table 2 and summarised below.

Direct loss or physical damage due to construction:

The Wellow Neighbourhood Area includes part of the internationally designated New Forest Ramsar, SPA and SAC sites (covering Wellow and Canada Commons). The HRA work for the National Park Local Plan identified the potential effects of direct loss of or physical damage to designated habitats or habitats on which designated species rely or direct mortality of designated species. In addition, the HRA work identified the potential for development to result in loss of habitat which lies outside European site boundaries but which is used by the qualifying bird populations of the New Forest SPA and Solent designations. Should HRA Screening be unable to rule out likely significant effects then more detailed Appropriate Assessment will be required to determine whether loss of the supporting habitat present at the development site would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the New Forest SPA; or Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site.

Disturbance and other urban edge effects from construction or occupation of buildings:

It is not possible to rule out the potential for urban edge effects such as pet predation from new residential development within 400 metres of New Forest SPA; or from effects such as noise pollution or light pollution from all types of built development. The Wellow Neighbourhood Area includes part of the New Forest SPA and additional areas of land within the parish are located within 400 metres of the SPA. Potential disturbance and urban edge effects therefore cannot be screened out.

Recreational pressure:

The Local Plan HRA work concluded in relation to recreational impacts that, prior to mitigation, likely significant effects in-combination could not be ruled out for any residential development or visitor accommodation within New Forest National Park on the New Forest SAC and SPA. The Wellow Neighbourhood Area includes areas of land within the National Park and therefore affected by this issue. The National Park Authority adopted an updated Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD in 2020 which provides details on how the recreational impacts of new development within the National Park can be mitigated.

In addition, development within the defined 13.8km 'zone of influence' of the New Forest's designated sites may also increase recreational pressures and therefore mitigation is required for new housing and other forms of overnight accommodation within the zone (which covers the whole of the parish of Wellow). Research reports published in 2020 and 2021 from the consultants Footprint Ecology (see [Research into recreational use of the New Forest's protected habitats - New Forest National Park Authority \(newforestnpa.gov.uk\)](https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/research-into-recreational-use-of-the-new-forest-protected-habitats)) identified a 13.8km 'zone of influence' from the New Forest's designated sites within which the majority of recreational visits originated from. This work has been supported by Natural England and the zone covers the whole of the parish of Wellow. New development will therefore be required to address recreational impacts on the New Forest designations.

In addition, a very small area in the east of the designated Wellow Neighbourhood Area falls within the defined 5.6km 'zone of influence' relating to recreational pressures on the Solent's designated sites. The Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy sets out a package of mitigation measures for development within this zone and this matter should be considered as part of the Neighbourhood Plan-making process. Test Valley Borough Council is best placed to advise on this, as the area of the parish within the 5.6km Solent 'zone of influence' is not the part of the parish within the National Park for planning purposes.

Changes in water quality:

The Authority's Local Plan HRA work identified the European sites vulnerable to a deterioration in water quality as the following specific to the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan - the New Forest SAC & Ramsar site; Solent & Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC; Solent Maritime SAC; Solent & Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site. The most relevant of these for the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan work is the Solent designations and the impacts arising from increased levels of nitrates. Although new development only makes a small contribution to the issue, Natural England's updated methodology and budget calculator (March 2022) re-affirms that new development in the Solent catchment must be 'nitrate-neutral' to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations and recent legal case law.

- 3.6 **It is concluded that the emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan does require a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).** This is based on the range of designated habitats within and adjacent to the Wellow Neighbourhood Area and the recognition in published HRA work of their sensitivities to the impacts of development. The HRA work for the New Forest National Park Local Plan for example, identified the potential impacts of recreational pressure on the integrity of the New Forest's Natura 2000 sites from any development within the National Park. This has been supplemented by the reports published in 2020 and 2021 following research by the specialist consultants Footprint Ecology into the 'zone of influence' for recreational visits to the New Forest's internationally designated sites. Natural England has also re-affirmed the need for new development within the Solent catchment to be 'nitrate neutral' and updated guidance on this matter was published in March 2022.

4 Statutory Consultees

- 4.1 The National Park Authority's initial SEA and HRA Screening Opinion will be sent to Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England - as statutory consultation bodies under Regulation 9 of the SEA Regulations. The statutory consultees will be given 4 weeks to respond in accordance with national policy. The draft screening opinion will also be shared with Test Valley Borough Council, who will be responding to a similar screening request from Wellow Parish Council relating to the area of the parish that lies within the Borough Council's planning remit. Once responses have been received from the statutory consultees the Authority's SEA and HRA screening opinions will be finalised and formally sent to Wellow Parish Council.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The screening process undertaken by the National Park Authority concludes that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) are required for the emerging Wellow Neighbourhood Plan. This conclusion is consistent with the requirements placed on other statutory development plans that have been prepared by the local planning authorities for the area which have gone through the SEA and HRA process.
- 5.2 The Authority's conclusion is based on the fact that the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan will, once adopted, be a statutory planning document that will set the framework for future development in an area with a range of environmental designations. The Neighbourhood Plan is proposing to allocate sites for development and include further policies that support sustainable development.
- 5.3 Table 2 of this report sets out an assessment as to whether the Wellow Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment. This assessment is based on the requirements of Regulation 9 and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations and recognises the statutory nature of the Neighbourhood Plan; its likely scope; and the value and vulnerability of the area (including national and internationally protected landscapes and habitats).
- 5.4 The scoping work undertaken on the HRA of the Authority's own Local Plan (2016-2036) recognises that even with the relatively low level of development proposed within the National Park, potential in-combination impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites within and adjacent to the New Forest cannot be ruled out. It is therefore consistent to conclude that a separate, statutory plan being prepared to provide a framework for future development proposals is required to go through the same process. The SEA and HRA scoping work has identified the following environmental effects as key:
- The potential for direct loss of, or physical damage, to designated habitats or habitats on which designated species rely or direct mortality of designated species. In addition, the potential for development to result in loss of habitat which lies outside European site boundaries but which is used by the qualifying bird populations requires consideration.
 - Disturbance and other urban edge effects from new residential development within 400 metres of New Forest SPA.
 - Recreational pressures arising from new development on the international nature conservation sites including the New Forest SAC & SPA – this applies across the whole of the parish of Wellow; and potential recreational impacts on the Solent designations should development come forward within the 5.6km zone of influence.

- Changes in water quality arising from new development within the Solent catchment.
- Potential impacts on built heritage assets, both directly and indirectly (through impacts on their settings).
- Potential impacts on the landscape of the New Forest National Park, including its setting.

Policy Team
New Forest National Park Authority
19 May 2022