

1. Introduction

This report sets out a draft Screening Determination for the Preston Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan and has been prepared by North Hertfordshire District Council. The purpose of the screening is to assess if the Neighbourhood Plan will require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). More detail is given in the following sections on SEA (section 2) and Neighbourhood Plans (section 3), and Preston Neighbourhood Plan specifically (section 4).

The assessment of the Preston Neighbourhood Plan and the draft Determination is included in sections 5, 6 and 7.

2. Strategic Environmental Assessment context

European Union Directive 2001/42/EC requires an SEA to be undertaken for certain types of plans or programmes that could have significant environmental effects. The Directive has been transposed into law for England and Wales in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations). The purpose of Strategic Environmental Assessment is to promote sustainable development through assessing the extent to which the plan will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives.

Under Regulation 9 of the Regulations, the responsible body (local parish or town council or neighbourhood forum) is required to determine whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant environmental effects, and therefore whether an SEA is required. This process is called screening, and is undertaken using a specified set of criteria (set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations). The Regulations require that the results of this process are set out in an SEA Screening Determination (this document), which must be publicly available. This document should be submitted with the Neighbourhood Plan proposal and made available to the independent examiner.

Before the responsible body makes a formal determination, there is a requirement to consult three statutory consultation bodies designated in the regulations (Historic England, the Environment Agency & Natural England) on whether an environmental assessment is required. This draft document has been produced to facilitate that consultation.

3. Neighbourhood Plans and Strategic Environmental Assessment

Planning Practice Guidance states that *"to decide whether a draft Neighbourhood Plan might have significant environmental effects, it must be assessed (screened) at an early stage of the plan's preparation according to the requirements set out in regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004"*¹.

The Guidance also suggests that *"The local planning authority, as part of its duty to advise or assist, should consider putting in place processes to determine whether the proposed Neighbourhood Plan will require a strategic environmental assessment."*² In this case North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) is providing assistance by undertaking the screening determination.

¹ Paragraph: 028 Reference ID: 11-028-20150209

² *ibid*

The Guidance notes particular circumstances which may require a SEA³:

“ A strategic environmental assessment may be required, for example, where:

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

The Determination has taken account of the Guidance in reaching its conclusions, and it notes that the particular circumstances described above are encompassed by the criteria outlined in Schedule 1 of the Regulations.

4. Preston Neighbourhood Plan

The parish of Preston is located in the North Hertfordshire District of Hertfordshire. It is 4 miles south of Hitchin at the north east end of the Chiltern Hills and 38 miles north of Central London. The parish covers the village and surrounding countryside. At the 2011 census the population of the parish of Preston was 420 and there were 158 dwellings in the parish.

There are 63 listed buildings and structures within the Parish on 41 sites. Thirty three of these are situated in the designated Conservation Area. Two buildings, Princess Helena College, in the Conservation area, and Tudor House are Grade II*, with the remaining 61 being Grade II.

The Neighbourhood Plan has been produced by the Qualifying Body, Preston Parish Council (PPC), and covers the period 2011 to 2031. In June 2016 the PPC established the Preston Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group which has included Parish Council members and community volunteers. The Neighbourhood Plan area was designated in June 2016 and is shown in the map below.

The Plan is the result of consultation within the community through questionnaires and consultation events. It has also involved liaison with NHDC and the wider community, either through direct communication or through the Preston Neighbourhood Plan dedicated web site.

The Plan does not include proposals for housing or other development. Its overall approach is to support appropriate development which protects the character of the village and the environment. The Plan's objectives are shown below.

Living in Preston (Quality of Life)

Objective Q1: To encourage the provision of opportunities for social interaction through cultural, leisure, sport and commercial activities for all members of the community.

Objective Q2: To promote a community quality of life including clean air and water, enjoyment of open spaces, conservation of wildlife and natural resources, security from crime and protection from toxic substances.

Objective Q3: To prioritise local distinctiveness in every element of change and growth.

Amenities and Facilities

Objective A1: To support all existing amenities, facilities and services available in the parish and new ventures where appropriate for the benefit of the community.

Objective A2: To support existing businesses and promote businesses and employment opportunities on a scale compatible with Preston parish's rural character.

Housing and Development

Objective H1: To ensure that any development is sensitively planned and phased over the period of the Plan, protecting and enriching the landscape and built setting.

Objective H2: To ensure the integration of new residents into the village, new developments should link into or enhance paths and rights of way.

Objective H3: To ensure that any development delivers a range of housing to buy or to rent to meet local needs including affordable housing.

Objective H4: To support developments which have a low carbon footprint and are eco-friendly.

Objective H5: To encourage the provision of suitable storage areas for refuse, bicycles and mobility scooters.

Objective H6: To ensure that each property has the benefit of a garden.

Objective H7: To seek to ensure that the impact of new development on sewage, surface water drainage and water pressure is assessed and that infrastructure, services and utilities to existing houses are improved or at least not exacerbated.

Objective H8: To seek to ensure that individual extensions are of an appropriate scale for the site and maintain or enhance village amenities.

Objective H9: To seek to ensure any new housing scheme or infill development is of an appropriate scale and maintains or enhances the character of the village.

Objective H10: To seek to ensure that all development meets the requirements of the relevant Housing and Development Policies contained within this Plan in order to reduce the impact of building construction for local residents, surrounding properties and the narrow lanes within the village.

Environment and Heritage

Objective E1: To protect and enhance the rural environment of the parish, and its varied landscapes.

Objective E2: To maintain and protect good access to the countryside by means of footpaths and bridleways.

Objective E3: To protect 'greenspace' e.g The Green and all verges, within and around the village, so as to maintain and enhance the appearance of this rural settlement.

Objective E4: To recognise all merits of the built environment across the parish, and to seek to protect this architectural heritage, especially that of the many Listed Buildings.

Objective E5: To take special care of the Conservation Area, and to raise awareness of the relevant legislation.

Objective E6: To ensure new developments do not create flood risk and problems with the sewerage system and surface water drainage, while at the same time ensuring that any existing problems are not exacerbated.

Objective E7: To support the conservation of flora and fauna and to maintain and enhance the different habitats and their distinctive and varied species.

Transport and Communication

Objective T1: To support and encourage sustainable transport, including walking and cycling.

Objective T2: To support and encourage safe use of roads, paths and bridleways for all users: walkers, joggers, cyclists and horse riders, as well as being safe for motorised vehicles.

Objective T3: To support the development of efficient and effective broadband speed and mobile coverage throughout the parish, while maintaining a good landline service, meeting the domestic, social and business needs of the community.

Objective T4: To support the maintenance of the rural character of the lanes in the parish.

Objective T5: To support on-going improvements to transport, to utility infrastructure and to digital coverage consistent with other objectives.

5. Screening assessment

As noted above, the Regulations specify a set of criteria which must be used to assess whether any plan covered by the Regulation is likely to have a significant environmental effect and therefore require a SEA. The table below considers each of these criteria in turn.

Table 1: Assessment of likelihood of significant effects on the environment

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects	Likely to have significant effects?	Justification for assessment
1 (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	No	The framework for development in Preston is currently set by the saved policies of the existing North Hertfordshire Local Plan and the NPPF. A new Local Plan is currently being developed, with adoption timetabled for March 2018. The Preston Neighbourhood Plan does not include site allocations or provide for any other projects which are likely to have significant effects.
1 (b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans or programmes including those in a hierarchy.	No	A Neighbourhood Plan is at the bottom of the planning hierarchy and must be in general conformity with the strategic

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		policies of the Local Plan
1 (c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	No	The Neighbourhood Plan focuses on protecting the quality of the neighbourhood and its environment, particularly in the case of any development which arises out of the existing planning framework or the emerging new Local Plan. The emerging Local Plan has been subject to sustainability appraisal at all stages, and the outcomes of those assessments have been considered with regard to this Neighbourhood Plan. It is considered that the Neighbourhood Plan's likely impact will be to have a positive effect on the environment by providing an additional layer of policy protection.
1(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan	No	None have been identified.
1 (e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)	No	The Plan will be in conformity with the saved Local Plan Policies, the NPPF and the emerging Local Plan which have taken account of existing legislation for environmental protection. As noted above it is likely to have a positive effect by improving environmental protection policies.
2 (a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (b) the cumulative nature of the effects	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (c) the trans-boundary nature of the effects	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	No	No significant effects have been identified
2 (e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	No	No significant effects have been identified

<p>2 (f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <p>(i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage</p> <p>(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards</p> <p>(iii) intensive land-use</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The neighbourhood area does contain sensitive features, as noted above, but there are no proposals in the Plan which are likely to have significant environmental effects on these features. In fact key Plan policies are designed to protect these features.</p> <p>The following specific policies protect sensitive features:</p> <p>QL1: Social Interaction QL2: Community Quality of Life QL3: Local Distinctiveness HD5: Sustainability and Energy Efficiency HD8: Drainage Provisions HD9: Residential Extensions HD10: New Housing Development HD11: Construction Management EH2: Open and Green Spaces EH5: Tranquillity and Dark Skies EH6: Protecting and Enhancing the Local Environment EH7: Conservation Areas and Heritage EH8: Views and Vistas EH9 Flood Risk and Drainage EH10: Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment EH11: Wildlife Sites EH12: Biodiversity TC1: Safe and Sustainable Transport</p> <p>Policies in Appendix to Neighbourhood Plan HERC1,HERC2,HERC3,HERC4 HERC5,HERC6,HERC7,HERC8,HERC9 HERC10</p>
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<p>2 (g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>As noted above Preston is located on the edge of the Chilterns AONB. Any effects are likely to be positive. The views of the AONB from the village will be protected by Policy EH8 Views and Vistas.</p> <p>In addition, Preston has:</p> <p>SSSI: Wain Wood Ancient Woodland Inventory Sites:13 Medieval Monastic Site: 1 Historic Landscape Park and Garden: 1 Areas of Archaeological Significance: 4 Area of Landscape Conservation: 1 Local Wildlife sites: 9</p> <p>The above sites are protected by policies:</p> <p>EH1: Village Boundary EH3: Open and Green Spaces EH6: Protecting and Enhancing the Local Environment EH7: Conservation Areas and Heritage EH10: Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment EH11: Wildlife Sites EH12: Biodiversity</p> <p>In appendix: HERC1,HERC2,HERC3,HERC4 HERC5,HERC6,HERC7,HERC8,HERC9 HERC10</p> <p>As also discussed above, any other effects are also likely to be positive. The Habitats Regulation Assessment screening report produced by NHDC in February 2013 concluded that in combination, there is not likely to be any significant combined impact on European sites from any plans or projects developed for the District.</p>
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6. Consultation responses

7. Screening determination

In summary, it is concluded that the Preston Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have significant environmental effects and therefore a SEA is not required. The principal reasons for this conclusion are:

No sites are allocated for development in the Plan.

The Plan focuses on protecting the quality of the parish and its environment, particularly in the case of any development which arises out of the existing District planning framework or the emerging Local Plan. It is considered that the Neighbourhood Plan's likely impact will be to have a positive effect on the environment by providing an additional layer of protection.

The neighbourhood area does contain sensitive features, particularly heritage features as noted above but there are no proposals in the Plan which are likely to have significant environmental effects on these features. In fact as already noted, key plan policies are designed to protect these features.