

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan

**Environmental Report to accompany the submission version of the
Neighbourhood Plan**

February 2025

Quality information

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Non-Technical Summary (NTS)

Introduction

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan (hereafter referred to as “the WNP”). The WNP is being prepared by Wickhambrook Parish Council in the context of the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan (WSLP). Once ‘made’, the WNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications alongside the WSLP.

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects. SEA of the WNP is a legal requirement.¹

It is a requirement that SEA is undertaken in line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which transposed into national law EU Directive 2001/42/EC on SEA. 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*”.² The report must then be considered, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.

This report is the Environmental Report for the WNP. It is published alongside the ‘submission’ version of the Plan, under Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).

Structure of the Environmental Report/ NTS

The Environmental Report can address regulatory requirements by answering the following three questions³:

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?

As such and following an introductory section (Chapters 1 – 3 of the Environmental Report detailing what the WNP seeks to achieve and the scope of the SEA), the Environmental Report (and this NTS) is structured according to questions 1-3 above.

¹ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: a) an environmental report; or b) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a ‘screening’ process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (‘the SEA Regulations’).

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

³ See Appendix A for a detailed explanation of how the report structure is designed to meet regulatory requirements.

What is the WNP seeking to achieve?

The WNP has created the following vision, which sets out the over-arching approach as to how Wickhambrook will respond to the pressures for change in the period to 2040:

“In 2040 Wickhambrook will remain a village that has retained its distinct structure of a number of small settlements within a high-quality rural landscape, where limited sustainable growth has taken place that meets the needs of the Parish and where essential infrastructure and services are retained and improved.”

A total of 15 objectives over 7 topic areas have been identified to support the delivery of the vision which are detailed in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Report.

What is the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is summarised in a list of themes and objectives, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological ‘framework’ for assessment. The summary SEA framework is presented below.

SEA theme	SEA objective
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity
Climate change and flood risk	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area and increase resilience to the potential effects of climate change.
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Land, soil, and water resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and active travel opportunities and reduce the need to travel.

Plan-making / SEA up to this point (Part 1 of the Environmental Report)

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

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

Specifically, Part 1 of the report:

- Explains the process of establishing reasonable alternatives
- Presents the outcomes of assessing reasonable alternatives
- Explains reasons for establishing the preferred option, in light of the assessment.

Establishing reasonable alternatives

The Environmental Report explains how reasonable alternatives were established after the process of considering the strategic policy context ('top down' factors) and the site options in contention for allocation ('bottom-up' factors).

In terms of options for WNP, 5 short-listed sites provide the main options for future growth, with an obvious preferred site being progressed through the WSLP – a smaller version of site WS195(A) 'Land South of Bunters Road' referred to in the submitted WSLP as 'Land West of Bunters Road'. This smaller version of site WS195(A) is also the current preferred site for allocation in the WNP in support of the WSLP, delivering around 40 new homes.

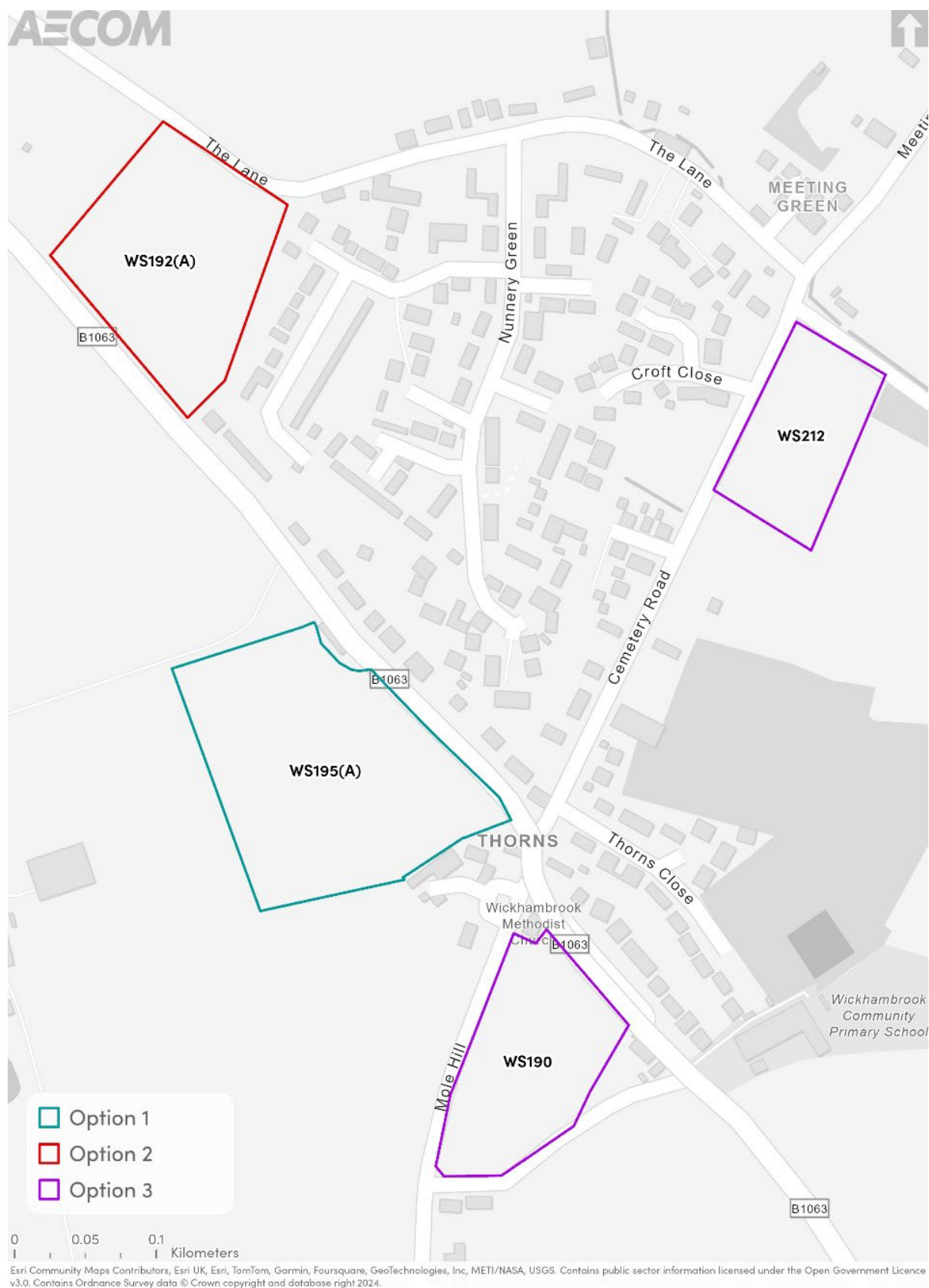
Given there is no local or political will to greatly exceed the indicative housing need for around 40 new homes, it is assumed that the smaller version of the short-listed site WS191(A) – site WS192(A) 'Land North of Bunters Road' would be a more reasonable option to progress for the purposes of exploring alternatives (with the potential to deliver up to 63 new dwellings).

An additional option to meet the need for around 40 new homes could also reasonably be formed of the two remaining smaller sites – sites WS190 'Land South of Bunters Road' and WS212 'Land at Cemetery Hill', which combined could deliver up to 49 new homes.

The following three options are therefore progressed for the purposes of SEA:

- **Option 1:** The current WSLP preferred site, a smaller version of site WS195(A) 'Land South of Bunters Road' for 40 new dwellings – herein referred to as 'Land West of Bunters Road'.
- **Option 2:** Site WS192(A) 'Land North of Bunters Road' for 63 dwellings.
- **Option 3:** Site WS190 'Land South of Bunters Road' and site WS212 'Land at Cemetery Hill' delivering 49 homes combined (29 and 20 new homes respectively).

These options are depicted in **Figure NTS.1** overleaf.

Figure NTS.1: Wickhambrook NP SEA alternative options

Assessment of reasonable alternatives

For each of the options, the assessment examines likely significant effects on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability themes and objectives identified through scoping (see **Table 3.1** in the main body of the report) as a methodological framework. Where appropriate neutral effects, or uncertainty will also be noted. Red indicates significant negative effects, whilst green indicates significant positive effects. Grey marks uncertainty.

Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, where there is a need to rely on assumptions to reach a conclusion on a significant effect, this is made explicit in the appraisal text.

Efforts are also made to comment on the relative merits of the alternatives in more general terms and to indicate **a rank of preference**. This is helpful, as it enables a distinction to be made between the alternatives even where it is not possible to distinguish between them in terms of 'significant effects'. Numbers are used to highlight the option or options that are preferred from an SEA perspective with 1 performing the best. An 'equals' sign ("=") indicates options are ranked on par with each other and occurs when no significant/ meaningful differences can be drawn between options.

The following conclusions are reached:

SEA theme	Findings	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	=	=	=
Climate change and flood risk	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	1	3	2
Community wellbeing	Significant effect?	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	Yes - positive
	Rank	1	3	2
Historic environment	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	2	1	3
Land, soil, and water resources	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	2	1	3
Landscape	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	1	2	3
Transportation and movement	Significant effect?	No	No	No

SEA theme	Findings	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
	Rank	1	3	2

Identifying the preferred approach

The preferred approach is **Option 1** – the allocation of the ‘Land West of Bunters Road’ site. The group have provided the following statement in relation to this:

“Given that the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan identified the site west of Bunters Road (Option 1) for development, the draft Neighbourhood Plan has adopted the same strategy for the location of development in the neighbourhood area in order to meet the Local Plan housing requirement. To do otherwise would have resulted in the amount of future housing growth being doubled through the allocation of additional sites. The selection of the site in the Draft Local Plan was made through assessing potential sites and suitability through the West Suffolk Strategic Land Availability Assessment.”

SEA findings at this stage (Part 2 of the Environmental Report)

Part 2 of the Environmental Report assesses the submission version of the plan as a whole under the SEA themes established through scoping and considers cumulative effects. The overall conclusions and recommendations (as presented in Chapter 10) are presented below.

Significant positive effects are considered likely for the community wellbeing SEA theme, due to the fact that the plan addresses the housing need within the area, improves accessibility, and enhances community facilities and green spaces. Further, the location of development, close to existing services and facilities, makes the site allocation beneficial for the wellbeing of the community.

Minor positive effects are concluded for the biodiversity and geodiversity SEA topic. This is because the policy framework seeks to safeguard and enhance local biodiversity, as well as delivering a 10% net gain, amongst a number of other things.

Neutral effects are considered likely for the historic environment SEA theme, as well as the climate change and flood risk SEA topic. With regard to historic environment, it is concluded that the policy framework ensures that new development in the area respects and integrates with the historic environment. For climate change and flood risk, the policy framework focuses on reduction of flood risk and promotion of sustainable development. These policies ensure that new developments incorporate flood mitigation measures and energy-efficient building techniques, contributing to climate resilience.

Minor negative effects are expected for land, soil and water resources and transportation. This is because development in the neighbourhood area is likely to lead to the loss of productive agricultural land, and the area is very constrained with regards to water. Also, for the transportation SEA theme, despite efforts to promote active travel and improve traffic safety, the neighbourhood area is poorly served by public transport, leading to a reliance on private vehicles. The policy framework supports active transport, but minor negative effects are still expected due to likely car dependency.

With regard to the landscape SEA theme, **minor negative effects** are also concluded as most likely given the greenfield development proposed (whilst noting a lack of brownfield alternatives). It is considered that the spatial strategy and policy framework seek to ensure that new developments respect and enhance the local landscape. Further, the policy framework helps to mitigate/ reduce any likely negative impacts, maintaining and enhancing the village's character and distinctiveness.

As the WNP avoids any significant negative effects, no specific recommendations are made at this stage.

Next steps (Part 3 of the Environmental Report)

The WNP and SEA Environmental Report will be submitted to West Suffolk Council for further consultation (Regulation 16) and 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 local planning policy.

If the Independent Examination is favourable, the Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a referendum, organised by West Suffolk 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 West Suffolk.

It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by West Suffolk 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 West Suffolk Council.

Though significant positive effects are predicted in relation to Community Wellbeing, it is considered that the existing monitoring framework within the AMR includes sufficient indicators to monitor such effects.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan (hereafter referred to as “the WNP”).
- 1.2 The WNP is being prepared by the Parish Council in the context of the adopted planning framework of the former St Edmundsbury Borough Council, and the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan (WSLP). Once ‘made’, the WNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications alongside the Local Plan.

SEA explained

- 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 potential negative effects and maximising potential positive effects.⁴
- 1.4 The WNP has been screened for SEA by West Suffolk Council (July 2024), stating:

“In respect of strategic environmental assessment, the SEA Directive requires that if an eligible plan or programme requires an appropriate assessment under the Habitats Directive, then that plan or programme will also require an SEA.”⁵
- 1.5 In light of the above, SEA is required to assess the potential for significant environmental effects.
- 1.6 It is a requirement that SEA is undertaken in line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which transposed into national law EU Directive 2001/42/EC on SEA. 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*”.⁶ The report must then be considered, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.7 More specifically, the report can address regulatory requirements by answering the following three questions⁷:
 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?

⁴ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an Environmental Report, or B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a ‘screening’ process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (‘the SEA Regulations’).

⁵ Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Opinion, West Suffolk Council (2024) available to access via [this link](#)

⁶ Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

⁷ See Appendix A for a detailed explanation of how the report structure is designed to meet regulatory requirements.

- i.e., in relation to the draft plan.

3. What happens next?

- 1.8 As such and following an introductory section (**Chapters 1-3**), this report is structured according to questions 1-3 above.

This Environmental Report

- 1.9 This report is the Environmental Report for the WNP. It is published alongside the 'submission' version of the Plan, under Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).

2. What is the WNP seeking to achieve?

Introduction

2.1 This section considers the strategic planning policy context provided by the adopted planning framework of the former St Edmundsbury Borough Council, and the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan (WSLP), before then presenting the vision and objectives of the WNP. **Figure 2.1** below presents the neighbourhood area.



Figure 2.1 The WNP neighbourhood area

Strategic planning policy context

- 2.1 The adopted planning framework of the former St Edmundsbury Borough Council consists of the Core Strategy (adopted in 2010), the Rural Vision 2031 (adopted 2014), and the Joint Development Management Policies Document (adopted 2015). In April 2019, the Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council were dissolved and replaced with the new West Suffolk Council, who began work on the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan (WSLP). The emerging WSLP was submitted to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination on the 24th of May 2024 and is expected to be adopted in Spring 2025. Given the advanced stage of the WSLP at examination and the more up to date corresponding plan period, the WSLP provides the main strategic context for the WNP.
- 2.2 The WSLP identifies Wickhambrook as a 'Local Service Centre' in recognition of its local services and facilities. It allocates a single 2.85ha site 'Policy AP53 Land West of Bunters Road' in Wickhambrook to deliver around 40 homes with the opportunity for community facilities or retail and/ or local employment to meet local needs.

WNP vision and objectives

- 2.3 The WNP has created the following vision, which sets out the over-arching approach as to how Wickhambrook will respond to the pressures for change in the period to 2040:

"In 2040 Wickhambrook will remain a village that has retained its distinct structure of a number of small settlements within a high-quality rural landscape, where limited sustainable growth has taken place that meets the needs of the Parish and where essential infrastructure and services are retained and improved."
- 2.4 A total of 15 objectives over 7 topic areas have been identified to support the delivery of the vision, these are:

Development location

1. New development should minimise the loss of the best quality agricultural land and its impact on the natural and historic environment as well as being well related to the existing services and facilities in the village centre.

Housing

2. New housing development will reflect Wickhambrook's status as a Local Service Centre within the 'Settlement Hierarchy' of West Suffolk and provide a range of types, sizes, prices and tenures that meets the needs of all age groups and incomes.
3. New housing should be located where it is safely accessible by foot to the village's services and facilities.
4. Homes should incorporate measures to ensure they are accessible for all needs, incorporate energy saving features and make use of sustainable approaches to building.

Employment and Local Economy

5. A range of employment opportunities in the Parish will be retained and supported where there will not be a detrimental impact on the environment, services and infrastructure.

Natural Environment

6. The rural character of the Parish will be protected and, where possible, enhanced.
7. Natural habitats will be protected and enhanced.

Built Environment and Design

8. Wickhambrook's built heritage assets will be protected.
9. High-quality and eco-friendly development will reinforce the local character of the village.
10. New development will not have a detrimental impact on the quality of life of existing residents.

Services and Facilities

11. The level of services and facilities will be protected and improved.
12. The range of existing community facilities and services will be improved.

Highways and Travel

13. The capacity and safety of the road network to cope with new development will be ensured.
14. The improvement of bus services to nearby towns will be encouraged.
15. The Public Rights of Way network will be protected, maintained and improved.

3. What is the scope of the SEA?

Summary of SEA Scoping

- 3.1 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”.
- 3.2 In England, the consultation bodies are Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Historic England⁸. These authorities were consulted on the scope of the SEA in November 2024.
- 3.3 The purpose of scoping was to outline the ‘scope’ of the SEA through setting out the following information:
- A context review of the key environmental and sustainability objectives of national, regional, and local plans and strategies relevant to the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan.
 - Baseline data against which the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan can be assessed.
 - The key sustainability issues for the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan; and
 - An ‘SEA framework’ of objectives against which the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan can be assessed.
- 3.4 The summary SEA framework of themes and objectives can be found in **Table 3.1** below. Further information on the scope of the WNP, alongside the full SEA framework as consulted on, is presented in **Appendix B**.
- 3.5 The comments provided on the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan SEA Scoping Report, and how they have been addressed, can be read in **Table 3.2** overleaf.

Table 3.1: Summary SEA framework

SEA theme	SEA objective
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity
Climate change and flood risk	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area and increase resilience to the potential effects of climate change.
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.

⁸ These consultation bodies were selected “by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effect of implementing plans and programmes” (SEA Directive, Article 6(3)).

SEA theme	SEA objective
Land, soil, and water resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and active travel opportunities and reduce the need to travel.

Table 3.2: Scoping consultation responses

Scoping response	Response in relation to the SEA
Historic England	
<p>Thank you for your email requesting a scoping opinion for the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan SEA.</p> <p>We would refer you to the advice in Historic England Advice Note 8: Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment, which can be found here: https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/sustainability-appraisal-and-strategic-environmental-assessment-advice-note-8/ . This advice sets out the historic environment factors which need to be considered during the Strategic Environmental Assessment or Sustainability Appraisal process, and our recommendations for information you should include.</p> <p>We would also refer you to Historic England Advice Note 3: Site Allocations and Local Plans. This advice note sets out what we consider to be a robust process for assessing the potential impact of site allocations on any relevant heritage assets. In particular we would highlight the Site Selection Methodology set out on Page 5. This is similar to the methodology used to assess potential impacts on the setting of heritage assets (Good Practice Advice 3) but is focused specifically on the site allocation process and is therefore a more appropriate methodology to employ in this context.</p> <p>We would expect a proportionate assessment based on this methodology to be undertaken for</p>	<p>Many thanks for response, the documents shared have been used through the SEA process.</p>

Scoping response

Response in relation to the SEA

any site allocation where there was a potential impact, either positive or negative, on a heritage asset, and the SEA consequently to advise on how any harm should be minimised or mitigated.

Advice Note 3 can be found here:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/historic-environment-and-site-allocations-in-local-plans/> .

We welcome that the historic environment has been scoped in for this assessment and includes consideration of the conservation area as well as non-designated heritage assets. We recommend that third question is amended to include 'and enhance'...the conservation area'.

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local planning authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its assessment. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), which should be consulted as part of the SEA process. In addition, they will be able to advise how any site allocation, policy or proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.

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

Natural England

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping request: Natural England has no specific comments to make on the scope of this neighbourhood plan's SEA.

Many thanks for response, no action required.

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

4. Introduction (to Part 1)

Overview

- 4.1 The aim of this part of the report is to explain work undertaken to develop and assess reasonable alternatives. Whilst work on the WNP has been underway for some time, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work undertaken to date, but rather to discuss the evolution of the WNP in association with the SEA process. More specifically, this part of the report presents information on the consideration given to reasonable alternative approaches to a particular issue that is of central importance to the plan, namely the broad location of future development in the neighbourhood area.
- 4.2 This part of the report is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 5** – explains the process of establishing reasonable alternatives
 - **Chapter 6** – presents the outcomes of assessing reasonable alternatives
 - **Chapter 7** – explains reasons for establishing the preferred option, in light of the assessment.

Why focus on development location?

- 4.3 The decision was taken to develop and assess reasonable alternatives in relation to the matter of allocating land for housing, given the following considerations:
- The WNP objectives, particularly development location and housing objectives to provide sufficient and appropriate high-quality housing to meet local needs whilst minimising the impact of development on soil resources and the built and natural environment.
 - Housing growth is known to be a matter of key interest amongst residents and other stakeholders; and
 - The delivery of new homes is most likely to have a significant effect compared to the other proposals within the WNP. National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that SEA should focus on matters likely to give rise to significant effects.

5. Establishing alternatives

Introduction

- 5.1 The aim here is to explain a process that led to the establishment of reasonable alternatives, and thereby present “an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with”.

Strategic parameters

- 5.2 As discussed in Chapter 2 the WNP is being prepared in the context of the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan (WSLP). Whilst the WSLP does not identify a specific housing requirement for Wickhambrook, it does allocate a single site to deliver 40 new homes (as well as community infrastructure and retail and/ or employment uses). This figure is therefore considered indicative of the required / acceptable level of housing development to meet the housing needs of Wickhambrook residents/ the district in the period up to 2040.

Site options

- 5.3 A long list of sites within the Wickhambrook neighbourhood area have been identified and explored through the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) that supports the WSLP. A total of three versions of the SHELAA have been published between 2020 and 2024 (and submitted for examination) which combined have investigated a total of 14 sites (with some of these sites undergoing boundary amendments through the process). Across all three versions, a total of 6 of the 14 sites were deferred from the outset, deemed unsuitable for development primarily due to their distance away from the settlement boundary. The deferred sites include WS512, WS513, WS514, WS515, WS516, and WS518, most of which could also not be confirmed as available for development in 2024.
- 5.4 2 of the 14 sites have gained planning permission since 2020. Site WS193 gained planning permission for 23 new dwellings and was confirmed in 2024 to be already built out. Site WS1074 gained planning permission for 1 new dwelling, and whilst a larger development option for 23 dwellings was explored this was ruled out as unsuitable primarily as such a development would constitute back land development that is disconnected from the settlement area.
- 5.5 1 of the 14 sites was also submitted and considered for potential further employment development rather than as a housing option – site WS1075. This site was subsequently also ruled out as unsuitable due to the large-scale employment development being at odds with the position of the settlement in the settlement hierarchy.
- 5.6 Given the above factors, the long list of 14 sites is subsequently reduced to a shortlist of 5 sites that are potentially in contention for allocation, each with the potential to deliver future growth in the plan area. Each of these 5 sites were first identified in the 2020 version of the SHELAA and are considered in turn.

- WS190: Land South of Bunters Road. This site is 1.60 hectares with a capacity for 48 new homes at a density of 30 dwellings per hectare.
- WS191: North and West of Boyden End (also known as North of Nunnery Green). This site is 9.10 hectares with a capacity for 273 new homes at a density of 30 dwellings per hectare.
- WS192: Land North of Bunters Road. This site is 1.30 hectares with a capacity for 39 new homes at a density of 30 dwellings per hectare.
- WS195: Land to the East of Gaines Hall. This site is 15.00 hectares with a capacity for 450 new homes at a density of 30 dwellings per hectare.
- WS212: Land at Cemetery Hill. This site is 1.08 hectares with a capacity for 32 new homes at a density of 30 dwellings per hectare.

5.7 In the 2021 update to the SHELAA, sites WS191 and WS192 were resubmitted as a single combined option with an extended boundary, referred to as WS191(A) – Land North of Bunters Road. Site WS192 was also resubmitted as a single site option with an amended (extended) boundary to that submitted in 2020 – subsequently referred to as WS192(A) – Land North of Bunters Road. In addition, Site WS195 was also resubmitted with an amended (extended) boundary – subsequently referred to as WS195(A) – Land South of Bunters Road.

5.8 The 2021 update to the SHELAA also revised the capacity calculations for resubmitted sites, recognising a need to set aside 40% of the area of the sites for infrastructure development, including access and landscaping. Applying this calculation across all the shortlisted sites with an expected density of 30 dwellings per hectare the list is amended as follows:

- WS190 (Land South of Bunters Road) = 29 new dwellings
- WS191(A) (Land North of Bunters Road) = 111 new dwellings
- WS192(A) (Land North of Bunters Road) = 63 new dwellings
- WS195(A) (Land South of Bunters Road) = 331 new dwellings
- WS212 (Land at Cemetery Hill) = 20 new dwellings

5.9 The 2024 SHELAA main report and site proformas subsequently omitted Sites WS190, WS191(A), WS192(A), and WS212 with detailed reasoning that supports a smaller version of site WS195(A) as the preferred allocation site, being deemed more suitable/ sustainable than the alternatives presented.

Alternative spatial options

5.10 In terms of options for WNP, the 5 short-listed sites above provide the main options for future growth, with an obvious preferred site being progressed through the WSLP – a smaller version of site WS195(A) 'Land South of Bunters Road' referred to in the submitted WSLP as 'Land West of Bunters Road'. This smaller version of site WS195(A) is also the current preferred site for allocation in the WNP in support of the WSLP, delivering around 40 new homes.

5.11 Given there is no local or political will to greatly exceed the indicative housing need for around 40 new homes, it is assumed that the smaller version of site WS191(A) – site WS192(A) 'Land North of Bunters Road' would be a more

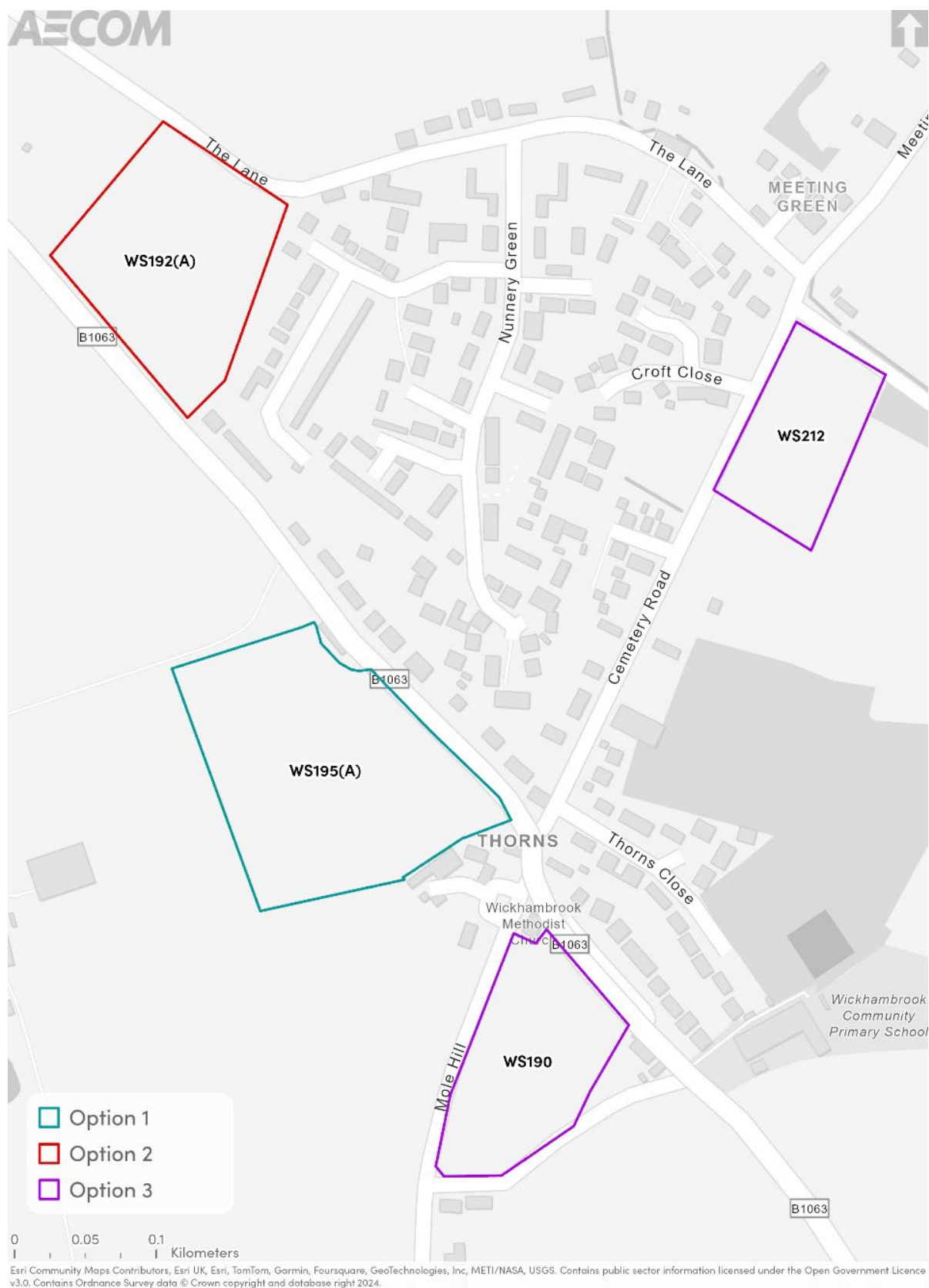
reasonable option to progress for the purposes of exploring alternatives (with the potential to deliver up to 63 new dwellings).

5.12 An additional option to meet the need for around 40 new homes could also reasonably be formed of the two remaining smaller sites – sites WS190 ‘Land South of Bunters Road’ and WS212 ‘Land at Cemetery Hill’, which combined could deliver up to 49 new homes.

5.13 The following three options are therefore progressed for the purposes of SEA:

- **Option 1:** The current WSLP preferred site, a smaller version of site WS195(A) ‘Land South of Bunters Road’ for 40 new dwellings – herein referred to as ‘Land West of Bunters Road’.
- **Option 2:** Site WS192(A) ‘Land North of Bunters Road’ for 63 dwellings.
- **Option 3:** Site WS190 ‘Land South of Bunters Road’ and site WS212 ‘Land at Cemetery Hill’ delivering 49 homes combined (29 and 20 new homes respectively).

5.14 These options are depicted in **Figure 5-1** overleaf.

Figure 5-1: Wickhambrook NP SEA alternative options

6. Assessing reasonable alternatives

Introduction

6.1 This chapter provides the detailed findings of the assessment of the three alternative spatial options established in the previous chapter. The options are as follows:

- **Option 1:** 'Land West of Bunters Road' for 40 new dwellings
- **Option 2:** 'Land North of Bunters Road' for 63 dwellings
- **Option 3:** 'Land South of Bunters Road' and 'Land at Cemetery Hill' for 49 homes combined (29 and 20 respectively).

Methodology

- 6.2 For each of the options, the assessment examines **likely significant effects** on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability themes and objectives identified through scoping (see Table 3.1) as a methodological framework. Where appropriate neutral effects, or uncertainty will also be noted. Red indicates significant negative effects, whilst green indicates significant positive effects. Grey marks uncertainty.
- 6.3 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, where there is a need to rely on assumptions to reach a conclusion on a significant effect, this is made explicit in the appraisal text.
- 6.4 Efforts are also made to comment on the relative merits of the alternatives in more general terms and to indicate **a rank of preference**. This is helpful, as it enables a distinction to be made between the alternatives even where it is not possible to distinguish between them in terms of 'significant effects'. Numbers are used to highlight the option or options that are preferred from an SEA perspective with 1 performing the best. An 'equals' sign ("=") indicates options are ranked on par with each other and occurs when no significant/ meaningful differences can be drawn between options.
- 6.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted considering the criteria presented within Regulations.⁹ So, for example, account is taken of the duration, frequency, and reversibility of effects.

Assessment findings

SEA theme	Findings	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	=	=	=
Climate change and flood risk	Significant effect?	No	No	No

⁹ Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 20004.

SEA theme	Findings	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
	Rank	1	3	2
Community wellbeing	Significant effect?	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	Yes - positive
	Rank	1	3	2
Historic environment	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	2	1	3
Land, soil, and water resources	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	2	1	3
Landscape	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	1	2	3
Transportation and movement	Significant effect?	No	No	No
	Rank	1	3	2

Biodiversity and geodiversity

6.6 The Wickhambrook neighbourhood area does not have any biodiversity designations within its boundaries, and limited designations within proximity. There are no international or national biodiversity constraints on any of the sites, nor local constraints. Therefore, it is considered that none of the options will have a significant effect on biodiversity and geodiversity, and the options are considered to rank on par with each other.

Climate change and flood risk

6.7 As discussed under the transportation topic (below), any additional development within the neighbourhood area is likely to increase pressure on localized congestion and road capacity in Wickhambrook, particularly along the B1063 (Bunters Road) and Cemetery Road. New housing of any scale will lead to more vehicles on the local road network, thereby contributing to greenhouse gas emissions within the area. Greater growth levels are likely to amplify this impact, with Option 2 performing the least favourably in this regard. However, it is worth noting that the differences between Option 2, and Option 1 and Option 3 are relatively minor.

6.8 That said, higher growth levels also enhance the potential for delivering sustainable infrastructure alongside new developments. This could include features such as EV charging points to help reduce tailpipe emissions and small-scale renewable energy projects to power new housing. It is important to note, however, that the proposed growth does not reach a strategic scale, which might otherwise justify higher development levels to leverage significant opportunities for low-carbon and renewable solutions. Regardless of the option

chosen, minimizing per capita emissions will remain crucial, including through efforts to reduce domestic energy consumption and promote renewable resource adoption.

- 6.9 From the perspective of climate change adaptation, none of the options face significant constraints related to flood risk. While there are no constraints from fluvial flooding, Option 2 includes a minor surface water flood risk (1 in 1000 years) in the northern part of the site, and WS212 (Option 3) has a higher surface water flood risk (1 in 30 years) adjacent to its northern boundary. This could be mitigated by application of sustainable drainage systems.
- 6.10 Overall, Option 1 is considered to be the best performing, as it directs a lower level of growth to a site that is not constrained by flood risk. This is then followed by Option 3, which is less constrained, and a slightly lower level of development than Option 2, which is considered to rank the least favourably. None of the options are considered likely to lead to significant effects on climate change or flood risk.

Community wellbeing

- 6.11 While there is no specific housing requirement for Wickhambrook, Option 1 includes an allocation for 40 dwellings and up to 450 square metres of Commercial, Business, and Service uses, or Local Community uses. This option is particularly beneficial as it would provide both infrastructure and community facilities alongside housing. Additionally, 40% of the 40 dwellings would be designated as affordable housing, contributing to the significant community need for affordable housing in the area.
- 6.12 On the other hand, WS192(A), which forms Option 2, is the largest site proposed among the options. Larger-scale development, such as that in Option 2, offers greater potential for development contributions, which could result in positive outcomes like on-site amenities or improvements to existing facilities, such as open spaces or community buildings. Comparatively, Option 3, which combines the two smallest sites, is considered to perform the least favourably in this respect.
- 6.13 Access to services and facilities is an important contributor to the quality of life of residents, however in this case, it is not considered that there are significant differences between any of the three options.
- 6.14 Both Option 1 and Option 3 are situated within 400 metres of green infrastructure or open spaces, which support recreational activities. As a result, these options are likely to enhance physical and mental health and well-being by improving access to natural environments. Furthermore, WS195(A) (Option 1) and WS190 (Option 3) are both located within 100 metres of Wickhambrook Community Primary School, making them more favourable compared to Option 2, which is situated further afield.
- 6.15 In light of the above, significant positive effects are considered likely for all options regarding community wellbeing, delivering housing in relatively sustainable locations to meet (and exceed) residual local housing needs. Option 1 is best performing, as it delivers a moderate level of growth and is well located to access to health and education facilities, as well as having the potential to deliver on-site amenities/ improvements to. Following this, Option 3

is considered to be the next best performing option, due to both sites being well located with regard to green infrastructure/green space, and educational facilities.

Historic environment

- 6.16 When considering designated heritage assets within the neighbourhood area, constraints are limited. Site WS195(A) (Option 1) is located directly opposite Grade II listed building Gaines Cottage on the northeastern boundary across Bunters Road. The sites that make up Option 3 are both constrained, with Site WS190 located adjacent to Grade II listed building Cutt Bush on the southwestern boundary of the site, and site WS212 located directly adjacent to Grade II listed Wickhambrook War Memorial to the southeast of the site. However, it is anticipated that sensitive development design and layout could reduce the potential for adverse effects.
- 6.17 Whilst there are other constraints in the NP area, such as Wickhambrook Conservation Area, these are not located within proximity of the considered sites for development and therefore are highly unlikely to be impacted by these options.
- 6.18 None of the sites are particularly constrained with regard to historic environment and no significant effects are considered likely. However overall, Option 2 is ranked most favourably of the three options with regard to historic environment. This is due to there being no listed buildings within proximity of the site, with Option 3 considered the least favourable due to both sites making up the option being located in proximity to a Grade II listed building each.

Land, soil, and water resources

- 6.19 With regards to agricultural land classification (ALC), there is no Post-1988 data, therefore provisional data is relied upon. According to provisional ALC data, it is likely that all sites are underlain by Grade 2 agricultural land. Further, all of the sites are greenfield in nature, the loss of which cannot be mitigated for. Option 3, split across two sites, and overall making up the largest hectareage, is therefore considered to be least favourable in this regard, due to the largest loss of greenfield land.
- 6.20 In light of the above it is difficult to differentiate between the options in terms of their impact on the loss of productive agricultural land, as all options will result in the loss of 'best and most versatile' (BMV) agricultural land. Nevertheless, it is fair to assume that as the level of growth increases, so does the potential loss of BMV land. Options are therefore ranked in terms of size, with Option 3 worst performing overall.
- 6.21 Taking the above into consideration, all options will lead to the loss of greenfield, high quality agricultural land, and are therefore all considered to lead to minor adverse effects on land, soil and water quality objectives. Given the scale of development proposed under any option, significant effects are likely to be avoided. However, the Options are ranked by their level of land take, although it is recognised that a level of uncertainty exists relating to the grading of agricultural land overall.

Landscape

- 6.22 With regards to the options impact upon landscape, Wickhambrook is not particularly constrained in this theme. However, according to the West Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment, the neighbourhood area sits within Landscape Character Area (LCA) C2: Glem and Wickhambrook Farmlands. This LCA is made up of undulating ancient farmland, with rolling valley farmlands. Features of the area include open, expansive landscapes with large skies, and notable perceptions of remoteness. With regards to this, all sites are greenfield and therefore would impact upon the rural feel of the area by removing agricultural land from the surrounding area of the existing settlement. Option 3 poses the largest loss of greenfield land, however across two smaller sites which could disperse impacts on the landscape from development more than developing the single site, overall smaller hectareage of Options 1 and 2.
- 6.23 All the proposed sites are outside of the settlement boundary, as defined by the Local Plan. However, they are all located adjacent to existing development, which helps to limit intrusion into the open countryside. All three options lie adjacent to the settlement boundary, allowing for better integration with the existing built form. While their proximity to existing development reduces the potential for landscape disruption, being outside the boundary may result in a more fragmented development pattern, with a potentially greater visual impact on the surrounding rural character.
- 6.24 Overall, whilst Wickhambrook is not particularly constrained in terms of landscape, the potential impacts of development on the area's rural character and land must be considered. All the options are outside of the defined settlement boundary, and would result in the loss of greenfield land, affecting the area's expansive and remote qualities as described in the West Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment. Option 1 is considered the least impactful and therefore the most favourable, as it involves a single site adjacent to the settlement boundary, which allows for better integration with the existing built environment and minimizes fragmentation. Option 2 also sits adjacent to the settlement boundary but involves a slightly larger site, which could have a greater localized impact on the landscape. Option 3 would distribute development across two smaller sites, and is therefore considered to be least favourable, as it could increase the potential for fragmentation and visual disruption to the surrounding countryside. In the absence of designated landscapes however, no significant effects are considered likely.

Transportation and movement

- 6.25 All four sites have existing vehicle, pedestrian, and cycle access. However, in terms of active travel, the neighbourhood area has limited opportunities to engage with sustainable transportation, given the distance from rail stations and the limited bus service provision. As such, it is likely development through the WNP will contribute additional private vehicles to the local road network to allow for journeys within and outside of the neighbourhood area. Therefore, it is likely that larger scale growth will have a larger implication on traffic and congestion, so Option 2 is considered less favourable than Option 1 and 3 in this respect.

- 6.26 All sites are located accessibly to the village centre, within walking distance, and none of the sites have Public Rights of Way (PRoW) adjacent to their boundaries or within their areas. Therefore, the sites are considered to rank equally with regard to these elements.
- 6.27 Overall, while all four sites benefit from existing vehicle, pedestrian, and cycle access and are within walking distance of the village centre, the neighbourhood area's limited sustainable transportation options mean that development will likely increase reliance on private vehicles. This could contribute to additional traffic and congestion within and beyond the area, particularly with larger-scale growth. Option 1 is considered the most favourable in this regard, as it is located closest to village amenities and is therefore most likely to encourage walking and cycling rather than additional vehicular traffic. Option 3, despite being outside the settlement boundary, is comparable to Option 1 in scale and is similarly less likely to exacerbate congestion significantly. Option 2, being the largest proposed development, is the least favourable due to its potential to contribute more heavily to increased vehicle usage and associated traffic issues. In conclusion, while all options rank equally regarding their accessibility to the town centre and lack of impact on Public Rights of Way, Option 1 performs most favourably due to its enhanced walking and cycle access to village amenities, followed closely by Option 3, with Option 2 being the least favourable. Given the scale of development under any option, significant effects are considered likely to be avoided.

7. Identifying the preferred approach

- 7.1 The preferred approach is **Option 1** – the allocation of the ‘Land West of Bunters Road’ site. The group have provided the following statement in relation to this:

“Given that the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan identified the site west of Bunters Road (Option 1) for development, the draft Neighbourhood Plan has adopted the same strategy for the location of development in the neighbourhood area in order to meet the Local Plan housing requirement. To do otherwise would have resulted in the amount of future housing growth being doubled through the allocation of additional sites. The selection of the site in the Draft Local Plan was made through assessing potential sites and suitability through the West Suffolk Strategic Land Availability Assessment.”

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

8. Introduction (to Part 2)

Overview

8.1 The aim of this part of the report is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the current ‘submission’ version of the WNP. This part of the report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 9** presents an appraisal of the plan under the SEA themes established through scoping and considers potential cumulative effects
- **Chapter 10** presents the overall conclusions and recommendations

WNP policies

8.2 The draft WNP puts forward 17 policies to guide development in the neighbourhood area. These are set out in **Table 8.1** below.

Table 8.1 WNP policies

Policy reference	Policy title
WHB1	Spatial Strategy
WHB2	Land west of Bunter’s Road
WHB3	Housing Design
WHB4	Low Energy and Energy Efficient Housing
WHB5	Employment Sites
WHB6	New Businesses and Employment
WHB7	Protecting Wickhambrook’s Landscape Character
WHB8	Biodiversity and Habitats
WHB9	Local Green Spaces
WHB10	Buildings and Structures of Local Significance
WHB11	Development Design Considerations
WHB12	Sustainable Construction Practices
WHB13	Flooding and Sustainable Drainage
WHB14	Dark Skies
WHB15	Community Facilities
WHB16	Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities
WHB17	Public Rights of Way

Methodology

8.3 The assessment identifies and evaluates ‘likely significant effects’ on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability objectives identified through scoping (see **Table 3.1**) as a methodological framework.

8.4 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the strategic nature of the policies under consideration and understanding of the baseline (now and in the future under a ‘no plan’ scenario) that is inevitably limited. Given uncertainties there is a need to make

assumptions, e.g., in relation to plan implementation and aspects of the baseline that might be impacted. Assumptions are made cautiously and explained within the text (with the aim of striking a balance between comprehensiveness and conciseness). In many instances, given reasonable assumptions, it is not possible to predict 'significant effects', but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) of the draft plan in more general terms.

- 8.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. So, for example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of effects as far as possible. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e., the potential for the Neighbourhood Plan to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes, and projects. Policies are considered as a whole when determining significance, but there is no need to systematically appraise policies individually. These effect 'characteristics' are described within the assessment as appropriate.

9. Appraisal of the WNP

Plan contents, aims and objectives

- 9.1 The Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan covers the period from 2023 to 2040 and covers the civil parish of Wickhambrook in West Suffolk.
- 9.2 The Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan splits policies up into 7 themes. The first is 'Development Location', which seeks to ensure that new development minimises the loss of productive agricultural quality land and reduces impacts on the natural and historic environment within the neighbourhood area. Policy WHB1 is key to this, as it seeks to focus growth within the designed Housing Settlement Boundary as far as possible. Policy WHB2 is also crucial to this.
- 9.3 It is important to note that the allocated site, Land west of Bunter's Road, is likely to occur with or without the neighbourhood plan, as it is a development site that is being progressed through the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan. The main intentions of the neighbourhood plan are to support this development opportunity with local planning guidance – providing a concept diagram and the Wickhambrook Site Masterplan. The site is anticipated to deliver up to 40 dwellings (including affordable housing) and up to 450m² of land for commercial, business and service use or local community use. The 'Housing' and 'Employment and Local Economy' themes provide further detail in relation to these aims.
- 9.4 Under the 'Natural Environment' theme, the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan seeks to supplement higher level policy protections for biodiversity, by protecting local landscape character and important habitats and local green spaces and also seeks to ensure biodiversity improvements.
- 9.5 Under the 'Built Environment and Design' theme, the policies are seeking to ensure existing and new development is sustainable and viable going into the future, by seeking to guide designs and implement sustainable construction practices. The theme also seeks to safeguard dark skies in the neighbourhood area, which is a key component of its character.
- 9.6 Through the 'Services and Facilities' and 'Highways and Travel' themes, the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan seeks to maintain community wellbeing. This will be achieved through safeguarding community facilities and open spaces and maintaining and improving accessibility in the neighbourhood area.

Biodiversity and geodiversity

- 9.7 There are no internationally or nationally designated sites for biodiversity in the neighbourhood area, however the Breckland Special Protection Area (SPA) is located approximately 7.3km north of the neighbourhood area, and the Breckland Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which shares part of the SPA designated area, is located approximately 13km north of the neighbourhood area. It is also noted that the Devils Dyke SAC is approximately 13km to the north-west of the neighbourhood area, and the Chippenham Fens Ramsar is approximately 14km to the north-west. The nearest designated site – Cavendish Woods SSSI – is 2.9 kilometres south-east from the boundary of the neighbourhood area. The neighbourhood area, and specifically the

development allocated in Policy WHB2 (Land West of Bunters Road) is located within the zone of influence for the woodlark/nightjar Breckland SPA habitat and Breckland SAC. However, the associated Habitats Regulations Assessment has concluded that none of the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan policies are likely to lead to significant effects upon the designated sites. Whilst Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) for this SSSI, and others within the vicinity of the neighbourhood area, intersect the neighbourhood area, these only impact residential/ rural residential development of 50 units or more, which exceeds the 40 homes that the WNP seeks to deliver over the plan period.

- 9.8 In terms of BAP Priority Habitats, the neighbourhood area consists of good quality semi-improved grassland, ancient woodland (ancient and semi-natural as well as replanted), deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, and wood pasture and parkland. However, the allocated site in Policy WHB2 is not within proximity of these areas.
- 9.9 Although there are no specifically designated priority habitats immediately near the allocated site, the parish's network of hedgerows, trees, and watercourses plays a vital role in supporting local wildlife. Policy WHB8 (Biodiversity and Habitats) encourages restoring fragmented wildlife networks through measures such as planting native trees and hedgerows, creating new natural habitats, and installing swift boxes, bat boxes, and hedgehog-friendly fencing. Developments will need to demonstrate how these features are integrated into the site design, ensuring no substantial harm to existing biodiversity.
- 9.10 Further, Policy WHB9 (Local Green Spaces (LGS)) designates 12 LGS in the plan, that contribute significantly to local biodiversity. These spaces are protected from development unless it aligns with national Green Belt policy. Among these spaces, areas such as the open spaces at Attleton Green and Genesis Green play a role in supporting local ecosystems. Development proposals in or near these spaces will be expected to demonstrate how they contribute to the biodiversity value of the Local Green Spaces, in line with Policy WHB8.
- 9.11 Other relevant policies include WHB12 (Sustainable Construction Practices), WHB13 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage), and WHB14 (Dark Skies) which are considered likely to indirectly benefit biodiversity.
- 9.12 Overall, the WNP is considered most likely to lead to **minor positive effects** for biodiversity. The policy framework aims to safeguard priority species, biodiversity and habitats, improve the biodiversity value of Local Green Spaces (LGSs), and ensure at least a 10% biodiversity net gain in development proposals, among other measures. Additionally, the development that is allocated is unlikely to have any adverse impact on nearby designated habitats.

Climate change and flood risk

- 9.13 In relation to climate change and flood risk, the WNP includes a number of policies aimed at reducing vulnerability to flooding, promoting sustainable development, and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Policy WHB13 establishes that all new development must be located outside areas at risk of flooding, in line with the Environment Agency's flood maps. In addition, proposals within areas identified as potentially at risk from flooding will be

required to demonstrate that appropriate flood risk assessments have been carried out and that suitable flood mitigation measures, such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), are incorporated into the design.

- 9.14 Policy WHB13 also stipulates that development must include measures to manage surface water runoff, ensuring that it does not increase flood risk elsewhere; whilst also seeking the provision of water harvesting and recycling in new developments. This may include the use of permeable paving, green roofs, and water attenuation features that help slow the flow of water. Such measures are key to both mitigating climate change impacts and reducing the risk of local flooding, especially given the increasing intensity of rainfall events predicted as a result of climate change. The policy also promotes the use of SuDS as a means of managing both flood risk and climate change. This policy highlights the importance of working with natural systems to reduce the risk of flooding, while also helping to address the wider environmental impacts of climate change, such as water shortages and rising temperatures. By implementing SuDS, developments can improve water quality, increase biodiversity, and contribute to the resilience of the local area against climate change.
- 9.15 Climate change mitigation is also addressed through Policy WHB12 (Sustainable Construction Practices), which encourages the use of energy-efficient building techniques and the integration of renewable energy solutions such as solar panels, heat pumps, and energy-efficient insulation. This policy aims to reduce the carbon footprint of new development, ensuring that the built environment contributes to national efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In line with this, developers are also encouraged to utilize sustainable technologies and design features that promote energy conservation.
- 9.16 Overall, the policies within the WNP are designed to address both the challenges of climate change and the risks associated with flooding. With a strong emphasis on sustainable development, energy efficiency, and flood mitigation, the plan ensures that new developments contribute to a more resilient community, while protecting the natural environment and reducing carbon emissions. On this basis, and alongside the avoidance of significant effects with regard to flood risk, no significant deviations from the baseline are expected, and therefore broadly **neutral effects** are concluded for the climate change and flood risk SEA theme.

Community wellbeing

- 9.17 The neighbourhood area is within the St Edmundsbury 010C Lower Super Output Area (LSOA), which is amongst the 30% least deprived neighbourhoods with regard to overall deprivation. However, it is within the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods for barriers to housing and services, and the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods for living environment. This shows that the accessibility of housing and services is poor in the neighbourhood area when compared to England.
- 9.18 Land at Bunter's Road performs well by delivering 40 dwellings, in line with the emerging Local Plan and identified housing need. Further, 40% of these will be affordable housing, also in line with the emerging Local Plan. By promoting

growth in the neighbourhood area, the spatial strategy should help improve the local environment, however the extent of this will depend on the community infrastructure delivered alongside development, therefore it is significant that the site will also deliver up to 450 square metres of employment space, which will support the local economy, as well as supporting sustainable access to local services and facilities. Moreover, the site is located in an accessible area, which will allow for active transport into the village of Wickhambrook, as well as to Local Green Spaces (LGS). This is enhanced by Policy WHB2, which ensures that the site allocation will include measures to improve traffic safety and connectivity, including a safe crossing point across Bunter's Road.

- 9.19 Further, WHB3 (Housing Design) sets out that new development will need to be designed to be adaptable so as to meet the needs of the ageing population, without restricting the needs of younger families. This ensures that new dwellings are accessible to all groups of people.
- 9.20 More broadly, Policy WHB15 (Community Facilities) supports the development and improvement of community facilities, ensuring they are accessible and contribute to the quality of life in Wickhambrook, so long as they are accessible on foot, and within or in close proximity to the Housing Settlement Boundary. Policy WHB16 (Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities) also supports community wellbeing by promoting the provision and enhancement of recreational spaces, contributing to the health and wellbeing of the community. Further, Policy WHB9 designating Local Green Spaces (LGS) directly contributes to the quality of life in Wickhambrook. These areas offer aesthetic value, improve air quality, and provide habitats for wildlife, all of which enhance the living environment for residents.
- 9.21 Overall, **significant positive effects** are anticipated with respect to the community wellbeing SEA topic. By addressing housing needs, improving accessibility, and retaining community facilities and green spaces, the plan promotes a high-quality of life and supports a sustainable, inclusive community.

Historic environment

- 9.22 Wickhambrook has a rich historic environment, which is recognised through 60 listed buildings (including two Grade I – Gifford's Hall, and Church of All Saints), and two Grade II*. Moreover, a scheduled monument, and the Wickhambrook Conservation Area, which partially covers the settlement of Wickhambrook. This is in addition to 112 heritage assets listed on the Suffolk Heritage Explorer.
- 9.23 With relation to the site allocation policy (Policy WHB2), the site allocated for development is located in proximity of a listed building, on the opposite side of Bunter's Road. In response to this, the policy sets out that development proposals for the site must be supported by a Heritage Impact Assessment, as well as a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. In addition, WHB10 (Buildings and Structures of Local Significance) of the WNP seeks to ensure that development proposals respect the integrity and appearance of historically and locally significant buildings. Further, WHB11 (Development Design Considerations) ensures that new development respects the local architectural and historic distinctiveness of the neighbourhood area, through promotion of design that harmonises with the historic environment.

- 9.24 More broadly, Policy WHB7 (Protecting Wickhambrook's Landscape Character), whilst focused on landscape, also contributes to the historic environment by ensuring that development proposals consider and conserve the essential landscape, heritage and rural character of the parish.
- 9.25 Overall, the policy framework performs well and is considered likely to ensure that new development is in keeping with the character of Wickhambrook. Therefore, that whilst this will ultimately depend on the design and layout of the development, it is anticipated that there will be **broadly neutral effects** from the WNP on the historic environment.

Land, soil, and water resources

- 9.26 The neighbourhood area has a high likelihood of being underlain by Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. In this respect, development in the neighbourhood area is likely to lead to the loss of a large area of productive agricultural land.
- 9.27 In terms of water resources, the entirety of the neighbourhood area overlaps with nitrate vulnerability zones (NVZs) – the Lower Stour NVZ for surface water (identification code S424), the Sandlings and Chelmsford NVZ for groundwater (identification code G78), and the Ely Ouse and Cut-off Channel NVZ for surface water (identification code S390). The neighbourhood area is also in a drinking water safeguard zone for surface water – SWSGZ1024. Moreover, there is a mineral consultation area around the settlement of Wickhambrook, and therefore consultation with Suffolk County Council will be required with relation to the development through the site allocation, though the minerals authority have not identified any concerns to date. In relation to this, Policy WHB13 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage) focuses on managing flood risks and promoting sustainable drainage systems to protect water quality.
- 9.28 Overall, no significant effects are anticipated with respect to the land, soil and water resources SEA topic. Whilst the allocated site will lead to the loss of greenfield land, it is recognised that this is largely unavoidable given the limited availability of brownfield land. However, due to the fact that the neighbourhood area is highly constrained with regard to land and water on the area, it is anticipated that there will be **minor negative effects**.

Landscape

- 9.29 Land west of Bunter's Road (Policy WHB2) is adjacent to existing development on two sides, extending the settlement boundary, and is greenfield land. However, the policy ensures that any potential negative impacts on the landscape are identified and addressed through a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Moreover, the policy requires that development should follow the masterplan which includes structural landscaping.
- 9.30 Further, Policy WHB1 aims to protect the countryside from inappropriate development, ensuring that development will be primarily focused within the Housing Settlement Boundary, and that development will not negatively impact the landscape. Importance is also placed on the protection of the countryside from inappropriate development, with any proposals outside of the Settlement

Boundary being required to be accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

- 9.31 This is also supported by Policy WHB7 (Protecting Wickhambrook's Landscape Character), which emphasizes the importance of maintaining and enhancing the landscape character of Wickhambrook, requiring development proposals to integrate with existing landscape features. Moreover, Policy WHB11 (Development Design Considerations) ensures that new developments respect and enhance the local landscape and built environment, maintaining the village's character and distinctiveness through the reflection of local characteristics and circumstances.
- 9.32 Other relevant policies include WHB8 (Biodiversity and Habitats), which states that development should be landscape-led, and WHB10 (Buildings and Structures of Local Significance) which ensures that the character and distinctiveness of the various greens, hamlets and neighbourhoods are to be protected. Further, WHB14 (Dark Skies) ensures development proposals should consider the dark sky environment of the parish, which will reduce the potential for adverse effects on the landscape. Finally, WHB9 (Local Green Spaces) will enhance the landscape by designating and protecting 12 LGS within the neighbourhood area.
- 9.33 Overall, **minor negative effects** are anticipated with respect to the landscape SEA topic. The spatial strategy avoids significant impacts arising by locating development within the Housing Settlement Boundary. Whilst the site allocation will lead to the loss of greenfield land, it is recognised that this is largely unavoidable given the limited availability of brownfield land. Further, the site allocation policy takes into consideration the impact on landscape, and the policy framework strengthens the site allocation policy and spatial strategy by mitigating the likely adverse impacts of development and protecting and enhancing the local landscape and villagescape.

Transportation and movement

- 9.34 The neighbourhood area is relatively poorly served by public transport, with the closest train stations being located ~11km away, one in Bury St Edmunds, and one in Newmarket, and only three bus services through the area. These are unreliable and poorly serve Wickhambrook, with limited journeys to Bury St Edmunds, and to Haverhill. As such, there is a heavy reliance on private vehicles to travel within and beyond the neighbourhood area.
- 9.35 Land at Bunter's Road supports active travel as it is in proximity to Wickhambrook village, where local services and facilities are located. Further, it will provide employment opportunities on-site. It is also in walking distance of the bus stop in the village, supporting the use of public transport. However, it is recognised that the bus services are poor, and therefore it is recognised that any development in the neighbourhood area is likely to lead to a degree of car dependency. Further, Policy WHB2 encourages active transport, as it ensures that development proposals incorporate measures for traffic safety and speeds along Bunter's Road, as well as a safe crossing point to the village.
- 9.36 More broadly, Policy WHB17 (Public Rights of Way) supports the enhancement of public rights of way, improving accessibility and connectivity within the

village. Also, Policy WHB3 (Housing Design) ensures that covered cycle parking is provided for in new developments, which is reaffirmed in Policy WHB11 (Development Design Considerations). WHB11 also ensures that vehicle parking is provided in any new developments.

- 9.37 Overall, with or without the WNP, growth in the neighbourhood area causing increases in vehicle use on local roads are an inevitable evolution of the baseline. Whilst there are considerations for Bunter's Road with regard to traffic safety and road speeds, as well as policy framework promoting active transport, **minor negative effects** are still expected, as residents are likely to still rely on private vehicles.

Cumulative effects

- 9.38 No significant cumulative effects are predicted at this stage, reflecting that the Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan has a focus on guiding the development design of the allocated site.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- 10.1 **Significant positive effects** are considered likely for the community wellbeing SEA theme, due to the fact that the plan addresses the housing need within the area, improves accessibility, and enhances community facilities and green spaces. Further, the location of development, close to existing services and facilities, makes the site allocation beneficial for the wellbeing of the community.
- 10.2 **Minor positive effects** are concluded for the biodiversity and geodiversity SEA topic. This is because the policy framework seeks to safeguard and enhance local biodiversity, as well as delivering a 10% net gain, amongst a number of other things.
- 10.3 **Neutral effects** are considered likely for the historic environment SEA theme, as well as the climate change and flood risk SEA topic. With regard to historic environment, it is concluded that the policy framework ensures that new development in the area respects and integrates with the historic environment. For climate change and flood risk, the policy framework focuses on reduction of flood risk and promotion of sustainable development. These policies ensure that new developments incorporate flood mitigation measures and energy-efficient building techniques, contributing to climate resilience.
- 10.4 **Minor negative effects** are expected for land, soil and water resources and transportation. This is because development in the neighbourhood area is likely to lead to the loss of productive agricultural land, and the area is very constrained with regards to water. Also, for the transportation SEA theme, despite efforts to promote active travel and improve traffic safety, the neighbourhood area is poorly served by public transport, leading to a reliance on private vehicles. The policy framework supports active transport, but minor negative effects are still expected due to likely car dependency.
- 10.5 With regard to the landscape SEA theme, **minor negative effects** are also concluded as most likely given the greenfield development proposed (whilst noting a lack of brownfield alternatives). It is considered that the spatial strategy and policy framework seek to ensure that new developments respect and enhance the local landscape. Further, the policy framework helps to mitigate/ reduce any likely negative impacts, maintaining and enhancing the village's character and distinctiveness.

Recommendations

- 10.6 As the WNP avoids any significant negative effects, no specific recommendations are made at this stage.

Part 3: What are the next steps?

11. Next steps and monitoring

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

Next steps

11.2 The WNP and SEA Environmental Report will be submitted to West Suffolk Council for further consultation (Regulation 16) and Independent Examination.

11.3 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 local planning policy.

11.4 If the Independent Examination is favourable, the Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a referendum, organised by West Suffolk 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 West Suffolk.

Monitoring

11.5 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.

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

11.7 Though significant positive effects are predicted in relation to Community Wellbeing, it is considered that the existing monitoring framework within the AMR includes sufficient indicators to monitor such effects.

Appendix A - Regulatory requirements

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

Table AA.1: Questions answered by the SEA Environmental Report, in accordance with an interpretation of regulatory requirements

Report section	Questions answered	Regulatory requirement met
Introduction	What is the plan seeking to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.
	What is the scope of the SEA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance. Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected. Key environmental problems/ issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e., provide a 'framework' for) assessment.
Part 1	What has plan-making/ SEA involved up to this point?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (and thus an explanation of the 'reasonableness' of the approach). The likely significant effects associated with alternatives. Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of the alternatives assessment/ a description of how environmental

Report section	Questions answered	Regulatory requirement met
		objectives and considerations are reflected in the Plan.
Part 2	What are the SEA findings at this current stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The likely significant effects associated with the Plan. • The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce, and offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the Plan.
Part 3	What happens next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the monitoring measures envisaged.

Table AA.2: Questions answered by the SEA Environmental Report, in accordance with regulatory requirements

Schedule 2	Interpretation of Schedule 2		
The report must include...	The report must include...		
1. 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>	i.e. answer – <i>What's the scope of the SA?</i>
2. the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'context'?</i>	
3. the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'baseline'?</i>	
4. 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'		
5. 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		
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;	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What are the key issues & objectives?</i>	
7. 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		
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	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]	
9. 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 regulatory requirements are or will be met.

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how the requirement is met
Schedule 2 requirements:	
1. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.	Chapter 2 (‘What’s the plan seeking to achieve’) presents this information. The relationship with other plans and programmes is also set out in the Scoping Report, 2024.
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 were considered in detail at the scoping stage, which included consultation on a Scoping Report published in 2024. The outcome of scoping was an ‘SEA Framework’, and this is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What’s the scope of the SA’). More detailed messages from the Scoping Report - i.e., messages established through context and baseline review - are presented within Appendix B.
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, 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.	
5. The environmental protection objectives established at international, national, or community level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.	The Scoping Report (2024) presents a detailed context review and explains how key messages from the context review (and baseline review) were then refined to establish an ‘SEA framework’. The key issues from scoping are presented in Appendix B. The context review informed the development of the SA framework and topics, presented in Chapter 3, which provide a methodological ‘framework’ for appraisal. With regards to explaining “how... considerations have been taken into account” - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapter 5 explains how reasonable alternatives were established in-light of available evidence.

Regulatory requirement

Discussion of how the requirement is met

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 sets out the detailed appraisal of alternative options.
- Chapter 7 explains the Council's 'reasons for supporting the preferred approach', i.e., explains how/ why the preferred approach is justified in-light of alternatives appraisal (and other factors).
- Chapter 9 sets out the findings of the appraisal of the draft plan and Chapter 10 provides a summary of the findings and any recommendations.

- Chapter 5 explains how reasonable alternatives were established in-light of available evidence.
- Chapter 6 sets out the detailed appraisal of alternative options.
- Chapter 9 sets out the findings of the appraisal of the draft plan and Chapter 10 provides a summary of the findings and any recommendations.

As explained within the various methodology sections, as part of appraisal work, consideration has been given to the SEA scope, and the need to consider the potential for various effect characteristics/ dimensions.

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.

Where necessary, mitigation measures are identified within the alternatives appraisal (in Chapter 6) and appraisal of the Draft Plan (Chapters 9 and 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.

Chapter 5 deals with 'Reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with', in that there is an explanation of the reasons for focusing on particular issues/ options.

Also, Chapter 7 explains the Council's 'reasons for selecting the preferred option' (in light of alternatives appraisal).

Methodology is discussed at various places, ahead of presenting appraisal findings, and limitations/ assumptions are also discussed as part of appraisal narratives.

9. A description of the measures envisaged concerning

At this stage no additional monitoring measures are identified as being necessary over and above

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how the requirement is met
monitoring in accordance with Article 10.	those already being considered by the Local Planning Authority.
10. A Non-Technical Summary of the information provided under the above headings.	A Non-Technical Summary (NTS) is provided at the start of the report.
The SEA 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 SA Report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1 and 6.2).	At the current time, this Environmental Report is being published alongside the submission version of the NP for public consultation.
The SEA Report must be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the Plan. The SA 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.	The Council will take into account this Environmental Report when preparing the submission version of the Plan for publication.

Appendix B - Scoping information

Linked to **Chapter 3** of the Environmental Report, this appendix presents the key issues/ messages established through scoping under the 7 SEA themes, as well as the detailed SEA framework.

Biodiversity and geodiversity

Whilst the Wickhambrook neighbourhood area does not have any biodiversity designations within its boundaries, and limited designations within proximity, it does sit within a very biodiverse wider landscape. Given this, the WNP has the potential to impact upon the wider biodiversity and geodiversity of West Suffolk. A separate Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) will assess the likely significant effects of the WNP on internationally designated biodiversity sites.

Climate change and flood risk

Whilst fluvial flood risk is limited to the watercourse of the River Glem, surface water flood risk is prevalent in the neighbourhood area – likely linked to the drainage pattern of the watercourse. On this basis, new development through the WNP could exacerbate flood risk in the neighbourhood area. As such, the WNP should seek opportunities to improve drainage through targeted application of new sustainable drainage systems.

The industrial sector is the largest contributing sector of CO₂ emissions in West Suffolk; the second largest is the transport sector, and the third largest is the domestic sector. Whilst the WNP has limited potential to reduce emissions linked to the industrial sector in the neighbourhood area, it could seek to address transportation emissions locally. This could be achieved through strengthening active travel routes and opportunities to increase self-containment, thus reducing the need to use private vehicles to access key services and facilities. Domestic emissions could also be addressed through the WNP by reducing emissions linked to households – for example, by including design principles that bolster energy efficiency.

Community wellbeing

The neighbourhood area experiences deprivation linked to barriers to housing and services and the living environment. Bringing forward new houses will likely contribute to reducing deprivation linked to housing; however, 40 new dwellings could also put additional pressure on local services and facilities within Wickhambrook which should be assessed in plan development.

It is recognised that the WNP provides the opportunity to bring forward new community infrastructure through development benefits, which would help to support the existing community and new residents that move into the neighbourhood area.

Census data suggests there is an ageing population within Wickhambrook. As such, it will be important for the WNP to consider how it can best support older people through new development. For example, this could include new community infrastructure provision to meet the health and wellbeing needs of an older generation, and specialist housing.

Historic environment

The Wickhambrook Conservation Area was designated in 1975; however, there is not an associated appraisal or management plan. These plans detail the various aspects of interest within the conservation area, and how it will be managed in relation to everyday living and future development. As such, the lack of appraisal or management plan for the Wickhambrook Conservation Area presents a gap in the baseline and the WNP provides an opportunity to bolster evidence relating to the significance of the conservation area.

There are a number of designated heritage features in the neighbourhood area that contribute to the historic character of Wickhambrook – including both designated and non-designated assets. As such, the neighbourhood area is considered to have a sensitive historic environment which could be impacted upon by development. Given this, any development that is proposed in close proximity to important heritage features will need to consider the potential impact on the significance of the asset and its wider setting.

Land, soil, and water resources

Development through the WNP could require consultation with Suffolk County Council, given the overlap between the settlement and a mineral safeguarding area.

Allocating land for development could influence changes to land and soil resources, reflecting the high potential of the underlying soil to be of high quality for agricultural activity. Given this, it will be important for development to come forward within or adjacent to settlement boundaries to reduce the loss of soils.

Given the numerous water designations that intersect with the neighbourhood boundary, it will be important for development to ensure that water quality and quantity are maintained. The WNP could assist with this by implementing mitigation measures to ensure water pollution does not occur throughout the development phases.

Landscape

There are a number of TPOs within the Wickhambrook neighbourhood area, which are likely important features of a number of locally important views. New development should avoid visual impacts to and from these TPOs where possible to maintain the character and quality of built-up areas in the neighbourhood area, especially within the areas of Genesis Green, Shop Hill, and Wickham Street.

It will be important for the WNP to protect the character, qualities and features of the local landscape, especially the important features that contribute to the LCA C2 – Glem and Wickhambrook Farmlands. Respecting the different key characteristics and objectives for the local and national landscapes will not only protect and enhance the landscape quality, but will likely bring benefits to other SEA themes, including biodiversity and climate change.

Transportation and movement

The neighbourhood area has limited opportunities to engage with sustainable transportation, given the distance from rail stations and the limited bus service provision. As such, it is likely development through the WNP will contribute

additional private vehicles to the local road network to allow for journeys within and outside of the neighbourhood area. The WNP can help to mitigate this increase by encouraging development to come forward within proximity to active travel opportunities, including pavement and the PRow network, to encourage an uptake in walking and cycling for access to nearby services and facilities.

SEA framework

SEA theme	SEA objective	Supporting assessment questions
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance internationally and nationally designated sites, including supporting the maintenance and / or improvement of their condition, and support habitats and species that are important to the integrity of these sites? (Informed by the HRA) • Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats as well as priority habitats and species? • Achieve biodiversity and environmental net gains and support the delivery of ecosystem services and multifunctional green infrastructure networks? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the area to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks? • Support access to, interpretation of, and understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity?
Climate change and flood risk	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area and increase resilience to the potential effects of climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid vulnerable development in areas of elevated flood risk? • Reduce the number of journeys made and reduce the need to travel? • Promote the use of more sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling, public transport, and electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure? • Increase the number of new developments meeting or exceeding sustainable design criteria? • Generate energy from low or zero carbon sources, or reduce energy

SEA theme	SEA objective	Supporting assessment questions
		<p>consumption from non-renewable resources?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve and extend green infrastructure networks in the neighbourhood area? • Sustainably manage water runoff, and reduce runoff where possible? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the area to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks?
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing? • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes? • Meet the needs of all sectors of the community? • Provide flexible and adaptable homes that meet people's needs, particularly the needs of an ageing population? • Improve the availability and accessibility of key local facilities, including health infrastructure? • Encourage and promote social cohesion and active involvement of local people in community activities? • Facilitate green infrastructure enhancements, including improved access to open space? • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of existing residents?
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest, both designated and non-designated, and their settings? • Protect the integrity of the historic setting of key monuments of cultural heritage interest? • Protect and enhance the heritage importance of the Wickhambrook Conservation Area? • Support the undertaking of early archaeological investigations and,

SEA theme	SEA objective	Supporting assessment questions
		<p>where appropriate, recommend mitigation strategies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic evolution and character of the neighbourhood area?
Land, soil, and water resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of previously developed land wherever possible? • Identify and avoid or minimise the development of BMV agricultural land? • Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste? • Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water quality? • Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development? • Protect waterbodies from pollution?
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and/ or enhance local landscape character and quality of place? • Conserve and enhance local identity, diversity, and settlement character? • Identify and protect locally important viewpoints which contribute to character and a sense of place? • Retain and enhance landscape features that contribute to the neighbourhood area's rural setting, including trees and hedgerows?
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and active travel opportunities and reduce the need to travel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the objectives within the West Suffolk Local Transport Plan to encourage the use of more sustainable transport modes? • Encourage a shift to more sustainable forms of travel and enable sustainable transport infrastructure enhancements? • Improve local connectivity and pedestrian and cyclist movement? • Facilitate working from home to reduce the use of private vehicles to

SEA theme	SEA objective	Supporting assessment questions
		<p>access workplaces outside of the neighbourhood area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce the impact of the transport sector on climate change?• Improve road safety and reduce pollution from vehicles?

