

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

# **Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Development Plan**

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## **Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report**

Final Report

November 2024



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 SEA Background

This screening report is designed to determine whether or not the contents of the draft Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

In general terms, the NDP seeks to guides the principles for the use of land for housing and business whilst safeguarding and improving valued features of the local environment. The vision statement of the Southborough and High Brooms NDP is as follows:

*In 2038 Southborough and High Brooms will be a thriving, vibrant place, where people choose to live, work and visit.*

*The two settlements will remain closely connected while recognising their distinctiveness both from each and from nearby places, such as Royal Tunbridge Wells.*

*Our High Street will have been regenerated to offer a range of recreational, retail and community facilities, as an appealing destination for those living here or visiting from the wider area. Within this, the Southborough Civic Centre and town square will provide a safe, inclusive spaces to host events, live music and other activities that bring together local culture and creativity.*

*New housing will be carefully planned and managed to meet local needs and it will be designed to be attractive and sustainable, reinforcing the character of the local area. Our residents will have opportunities to work locally should they wish.*

*We will celebrate our rich history, protecting and further promoting our heritage. Equally, our rural Green Belt setting, within the High Weald National Landscape, will continue to be highly valued and we will seek opportunities to enhance opportunities for accessing open space and enabling biodiversity. Treasured green spaces and views will be protected for our future generations.*

*We will strive to be a walkable, rideable and wheelable area, promoting safe, attractive and well-signposted routes to access local facilities, the wider countryside and nearby towns and villages.*

The legislative background set out below outlines the regulations that require the need for this screening exercise. Section 3 provides a screening assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the draft plan and the need for a full SEA.

## 1.2 Legislative Background

The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC and was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, or SEA Regulations.

This report focuses on screening for SEA and the criteria for establishing whether a full assessment is needed.

# 2 Assessment

## 2.1 Overview

The diagram below illustrates the process for screening a planning document to ascertain whether a full SEA is required.

The ODPM publication “A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive” (2005) sets out the approach to be taken in order to determine whether SEA is required.

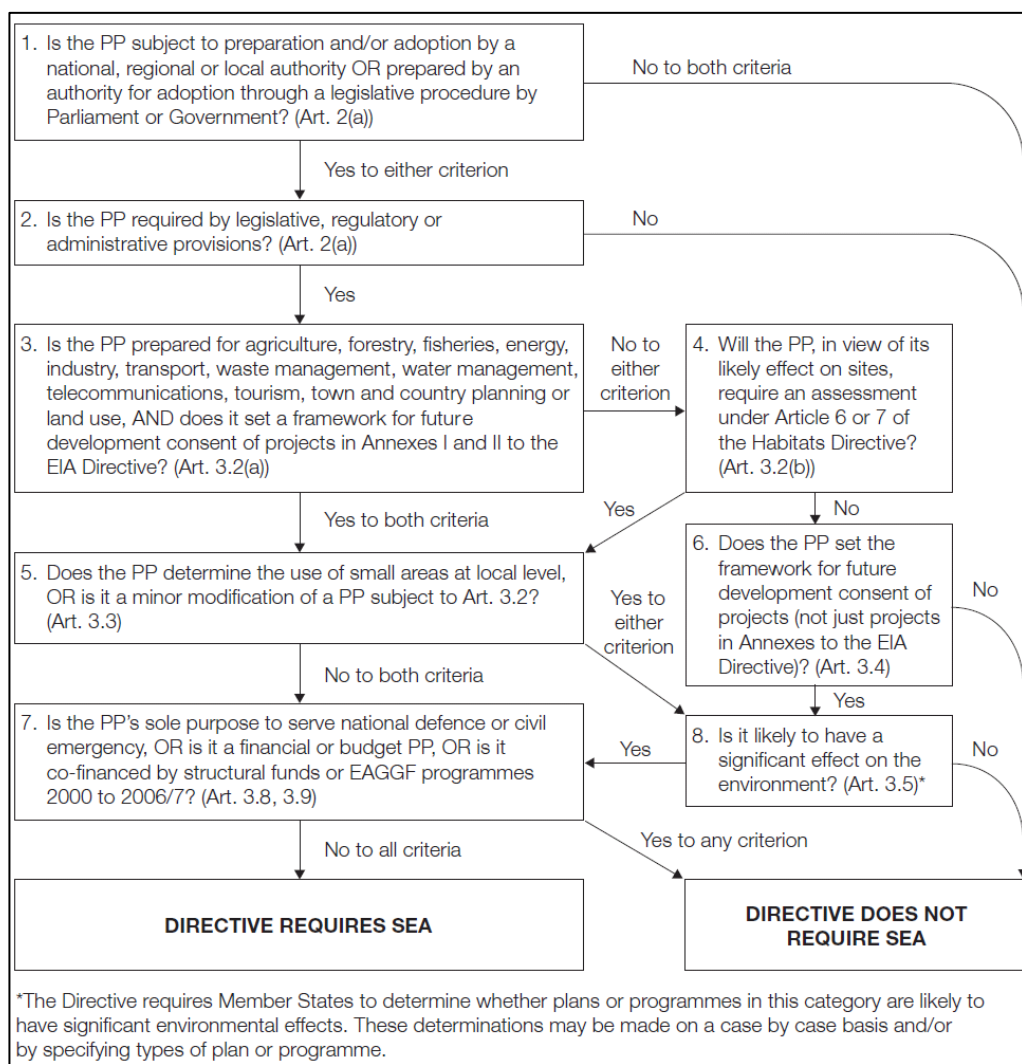


Figure 1. Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes (from “A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive”)

This assessment is therefore split into two parts. Part 1 runs the draft plan through the questions outlined in the diagram above and includes commentary on whether the need for SEA is triggered. Part 2 further assesses stage 8, on whether there is a likely significant impact. The screening opinion takes a 'precautionary approach' and when it is unclear as to how the Directive may be applied it is assumed that there are possible likely significant effects.

## 2.2 Part 1 - Application of the Directive to the draft NDP

Table 1. Establishing the need for SEA by following the flowchart in Figure 1.

| Stage  | Y/N | Justification  |
|--|-----|--|
| 1) Is the PP (plan or programme) subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))   | Y   | NDPs are prepared by parish councils under the provision of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism act 2011.<br><br><b>GO TO STAGE 2</b>  |
| 2) Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))   | Y   | It is not a requirement for a parish to produce an NDP. However, once "made" the plan forms part of the statutory Development Plan and will be used when making decision on planning applications.<br><br><b>GO TO STAGE 3</b>   |
| 3) Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a)) | Y   | The NDP is being prepared for town and country planning and land use.<br><br>The NDP supports allocations in the emerging Tunbridge Wells Local Plan and planning applications for small-scale housing development. It contains a general framework for all future development consent and thus projects which could be listed in Annex II of the EIA Directive.<br><br><b>GO TO STAGE 5</b> |

| Stage  | Y/N | Justification   |
|--|-----|---|
| 4) Will the PP, in view of its likely effects on sites require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2(b))   |     | <b>NOT APPLICABLE</b>   |
| 5) Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)  | Y   | The NDP does not allocate land for a specific purpose but does show preference for the type and form of development at local level.<br><br><b>GO TO STAGE 8</b> |
| 6) Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)   |     | <b>NOT APPLICABLE</b>   |
| 7) Is the PP's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9) |     | <b>NOT APPLICABLE</b>   |
| 8) Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)  | N   | <b>SEE TABLE 2</b>  |

## 2.3 Part 2 – Likely significant effects on the environment

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of Directive 2001/42/EC are set out below, together with a commentary on whether the draft NDP would trigger the need for a full assessment.

Table 2. Assessing Likely Significant Effects (LSE) for the characteristics of plans and programmes, with particular regard to the following criteria.

| SEA Directive Criteria  | LSE | SEA Directive Criteria  |
|---|-----|---|
| The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with | N   | The NDP does not allocate specific land for development but does direct |

| <b>SEA Directive Criteria</b>  | <b>LSE</b> | <b>SEA Directive Criteria</b>   |
|--|------------|---|
| regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources   |            | development to general locations such as within the limits to built development.  |
| The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy   | N          | If the NDP is not delivered, the Borough's emerging and existing Local Plans are not affected. The emerging Local Plan is subject to an SEA.  |
| The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development                            | N          | The NDP basic conditions statement includes reference to the consideration of sustainable development as the plan was being prepared.   |
| Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme   | N          | There are no specific environmental problems relevant to this NDP. Impacts upon environmental aspects such as flood risk, ecology and landscape, are considered and no negative outcomes are predicted. |
| The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection) | N          | The NDP will not affect implementation of European Community environmental legislation (or those now transcribed in UK law). The Water Framework Directive will need to be taken into account.          |

Table 3. Assessing Likely Significant Effects (LSE) for the characteristics of the effects and the area likely to be affected, with particular regard to the following criteria.

| <b>SEA Directive Criteria</b>   | <b>LSE</b> | <b>SEA Directive Criteria</b>  |
|---|------------|--|
| The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects | N          | The NDP does not allocate specific land for development but does direct development to general locations such as within or adjoining the limits to built development. Some effects such as pollution or flood risk are unknown because they are highly dependent on where development takes place. However, any effects are expected to be managed effectively by the development management process both within this plan and at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, and are thus considered unlikely to be significant. |
| The cumulative nature of the effects                                  | N          | Significant effects are considered unlikely and negative cumulative effects from the NDP are not predicted.  |
| The transboundary nature of the effects                               | N          | Southborough and High Brooms lies adjacent to the boundary with Tonbridge and Malling Borough.   |



| SEA Directive Criteria   | LSE | SEA Directive Criteria   |
|--|-----|--|
|  |     | However, no significant trans boundary effects from the NDP are expected.  |
| The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents).  | N   | The NDP does not create any significant risks to human health or the environment.  |
| The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).  | N   | The NDP covers the town of Southborough and High Brooms which contains the two primary settlements of Southborough and High Brooms. Significant effects are not predicted across or outside of this geographical area.   |
| The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,</li> <li>ii. exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,</li> <li>iii. intensive land-use</li> </ul> | N   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The High Weald National Landscape covers 64% of the neighbourhood area (the vast majority of the non-urbanised part), and there is a wealth of biodiversity and natural habitats in the non-urbanised areas, including significant areas of ancient woodland, all or parts of four local wildlife sites (Brokes Wood, Vauxhall Lane Woods, Southborough Common, and Bidborough Woods &amp; Pastures), Barnett's Wood local nature reserve. Southborough Pit SSSI is also located within the neighbourhood area. The neighbourhood area covers the Southborough Conservation Area, 46 listed buildings and 1 historic park and garden. Directing development to general locations, such as within the limits to built development (Policy SHB1: Location of development), is likely to prevent impact upon the wider landscape but could affect the Conservation Area or the setting of listed buildings. However, the NDP seeks to protect the historic environment through Policy SHB6: Conserving heritage assets. Protection of the natural and built environment is one of the main objectives of the NDP, and the NDP will uphold other policy at a borough and national level to ensure no significant environmental issues are created.</li> <li>ii. The NDP is not predicted to exceed standards or environmental limits.</li> <li>iii. The NDP seeks to make efficient use of land by directing development to land within the limits to built development thus more likely to be in-fill plots and previously developed land.</li> </ul> |
| The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national,   | N   | Whilst there are no areas within Tunbridge Wells borough that are EC or internationally protected, the Ashdown Forest SPA/SAC European designation is  |

| SEA Directive Criteria                               | LSE | SEA Directive Criteria   |
|--|-----|--|
| <p>Community or international protection status.</p> |     | <p>sited in an adjacent authority area (Wealden) which affects the south-west of the Borough. Proposals in this NDP are unlikely to impact upon this designated site as the neighbourhood area is outside of the 7km zone of influence (as determined by the Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Borough-Level DPD).</p> <p>At national level, the High Weald National Landscape washes over the non-urbanised parts of the neighbourhood area and protection of this unique landscape by various policies is recognised by the NDP. Of note is Objective 2 which seeks to protect and celebrate the National Landscape and this objective has been considered in the drafting of the policies.</p> <p>Locally, there are four local wildlife sites and a local nature reserve within the neighbourhood area. Objective 2 also seeks to protect these and is recognised through policies such as Policy SHB9: Landscape and Biodiversity, which seeks to support and, where possible, link habitats and wildlife corridors.</p> <p>Southborough Pit SSSI is located within the neighbourhood area. There is no specific protection for this in the draft policies, however, they do not conflict with the existing statutory protection and the designation is recognised and supported by the NDP group.</p> <p>There are no scheduled monuments within the neighbourhood area with the nearest located 1.5km away from the boundary.</p> <p>The NDP would support allocations within the Tunbridge Wells Borough emerging Local Plan (which is already subject to an SEA) and small scale housing only within the limits to built development so risks to SSSIs and scheduled monuments are deemed minimal.</p> <p>There are 46 listed buildings and a historic park and garden within the neighbourhood area. Policy SHB6: Conserving heritage assets has been drafted to</p> |

| SEA Directive Criteria                  | LSE | SEA Directive Criteria  |
|---|-----|---|
|   |     | <p>support these alongside a series of identified non-designated heritage assets.</p> <p>There is a corridor of flood zone 2 and 3 running through the northeastern section of the neighbourhood area. This is far outside the Southborough and High Brooms limits to built development. Therefore, development will not be supported near the areas of flood risk due to Policy SHB1: Location of development.</p> |
| <p><b>Part 2 Overall Conclusion</b></p> |     | <p><b>The Southborough and High Brooms NDP is unlikely to have a significant effect on the environment.</b></p>   |

## 2.4 Screening Outcome

As a result of the assessment in section 3, it is unlikely there will be any significant environmental effects arising from the draft NDP. As such, it does not require a full SEA to be undertaken. This conclusion has been sent to the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England for consideration. Their responses are included in Appendix A. It is noted the draft NDP is at an early stage of production and this conclusion is subject to the policies remaining as described.

# Appendix A

Responses from Statutory Environmental Bodies.

Date: 01 November 2024  
Our ref: 490052  
Your ref: Southborough & High Brooms Neighbourhood Plan



Mr Adam Reguera  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Hornbeam House  
Crewe Business Park  
Electra Way  
Crewe  
Cheshire  
CW1 6GJ

**BY EMAIL ONLY**

██████████ [@TunbridgeWells.gov.uk](mailto:██████████@TunbridgeWells.gov.uk)

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Mr Reguera

**Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Plan - SEA & HRA Screening Report Consultation**

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 7 October 2024.

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

**Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**

**It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely.**

The proposed neighbourhood plan is unlikely to significantly affect any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection area (SPA), Ramsar wetland or sites in the process of becoming SACs or SPAs ('candidate SACs', 'possible SACs', 'potential SPAs') or a Ramsar wetland. The plan area is unlikely to have a significant effect on a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Heritage Coast, and is unlikely to impact upon the purposes for which these areas are designated or defined.

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 is contained within the [Planning Practice Guidance](#). This identifies three triggers that may require the production of an SEA:

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

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's [standing advice](#) on protected species.

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be

sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission [standing advice](#).

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a SEA is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If a SEA is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

Please send any new consultations, or further information on this consultation to [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle  
Consultations Team



Historic England

By email only to: [REDACTED] [@TunbridgeWells.gov.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@TunbridgeWells.gov.uk)

Our ref: PL00797104

Your ref: Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Plan SEA

Main: 020 7973 3700

[e-seast@historicengland.org.uk](mailto:e-seast@historicengland.org.uk)

[REDACTED] [@historicengland.org.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@historicengland.org.uk)

Date: 01/11/2024

To whom it may concern

## Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening Opinion

Thank you for inviting Historic England to comment on this consultation. As the Government's adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, "Is it (the Neighbourhood Plan) likely to have a significant effect on the historic environment?". Our comments are based on the information supplied.

The information supplied indicates that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment we also note there are no site allocations for development.

On the basis of the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of 'SEA' Directive], Historic England concurs with the Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

The views of the other two statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for an SEA is made.

I should be pleased if you can send a copy of the determination as required by REG 11 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.



Historic England, 4th Floor, The Atrium, Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA

Telephone 020 7973 3700 [HistoricEngland.org.uk](http://HistoricEngland.org.uk)

Please note that Historic England operates an access to information policy.

Correspondence or information which you send us may therefore become publicly available.





Historic England

We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you with your correspondence. 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) where we consider that, despite the SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local 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), how the 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.

Please do contact me, via email if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely

**Louise Dandy**  
Historic Places Adviser



Historic England, 4th Floor, The Atrium, Cannon Bridge House, 25 Dowgate Hill, London EC4R 2YA

Telephone 020 7973 3700 [HistoricEngland.org.uk](http://HistoricEngland.org.uk)

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Good Afternoon Adam

You are correct in that we at the Environment Agency no longer respond to screening opinions and so have no comments to make.

We do have a standard advice note for Neighbourhood Plans which we would likely send out to future rounds of Neighbourhood Plan consultations which I have attached for information.

Kind regards  
Eleri

**Eleri Randall**

Planning Specialist - Kent and South London Sustainable Places

*Phonetic spelling of name: Eh-Leh-Ree Ran-Duhl*

**Environment Agency** | Orchard House, Endeavour Park, Addington, West Malling, Kent ME19 5SH.

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