

## **Screening Statement on the determination of the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and European Directive 2001/42/EC for the Headington Neighbourhood Plan**

**July 2018**

### **Introduction**

1. This screening report is used to determine whether or not the contents of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC (hereafter 'the Directive') and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (hereafter 'the Regulations'). These require an SEA to be undertaken on any land use plan or programme 'which sets the framework for future development or for future development consent of projects'.
2. However, there are exceptions to this requirement for plans 'which determine the use of a small area at a local level', or which only propose 'minor modifications to a plan', if it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects'.
3. The National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 167, advises that assessments should be proportionate, and should not repeat policy assessments that have already taken place.
4. To assess whether an SEA is required a screening process must be undertaken based on a standard set of criteria. This must be subject to consultation with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England. The results of the process must be documented in a Screening Statement, available to the public.
5. This report also contains a Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening as required under the Habitats Directive.

### **Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan**

6. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan contains policies to guide the development of the Wolvercote Area<sup>1</sup>. The policies cover five different areas:
  - Green Spaces and Biodiversity
  - Built Environment
  - Commerce
  - Community, Health and Transport
  - Heritage and Local Character
7. It is worth noting that it is only the planning policies that are the subject of this assessment

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<sup>1</sup> The Wolvercote Area Map is shown at Appendix 1

8. The plan does not allocate any sites for development.

### **The Screening Process**

9. The key to the screening decision is the determination of whether the Plan is likely to have any significant environmental effects on the environment, using the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the Regulations. These criteria are set out in the table at Appendix 3.
10. An extract from 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment' (set out at Appendix 2) provides a flow diagram to demonstrate the SEA screening process. This flow diagram sets out the process to be undertaken in order to ascertain whether or not an SEA is required for the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan.
11. Part of the screening process is a requirement to consider whether the Plan requires a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). An HRA Screening has been undertaken, and can be found at Appendix 4. An assessment of likely significance of effects on the environment has also been undertaken, which can be found at Appendix 5. These two assessments feed into Table 1 and the SEA Screening Assessment.

### **Statutory Consultees**

12. The SEA/ HRA Screening Opinion, was sent to the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England on 25 June 2018.
13. The Environment Agency responded that they were not going to provide detailed comments within Oxford City as they were prioritising those neighbourhood plans outside of areas where authorities have "up-to-date" local plans.
14. Historic England also provided comments on the Screening Opinion for the neighbourhood plan. Historic England considers that the Neighbourhood Area contains "a sensitive historic environment which may be affected by any development promoted or allowed for by the Neighbourhood Plan". While recognising that the neighbourhood plan does not contain site allocations, Historic England considered that a caveat be introduced to Policy BES1 "requiring development not to harm the significance, special interest, character or appearance of heritage assets".
15. Historic England considered that this caveat, in the absence of a specific policy to conserve and enhance heritage assets, would be sufficient to ensure that Policy BES1 would not lead to the unintentional harm of heritage assets with the Neighbourhood Area and would resolve the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment.
16. Historic England state that they "are content for now to agree with the Council's Screening Opinion that the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan need not be subject to a strategic environmental assessment." The response continues, however that Historic England "may wish to revise this opinion

depending on the wording of the policies in the next version of... the Neighbourhood Plan”.

17. At the time of writing Natural England had not responded to the Screening Consultation.

### **Conclusion**

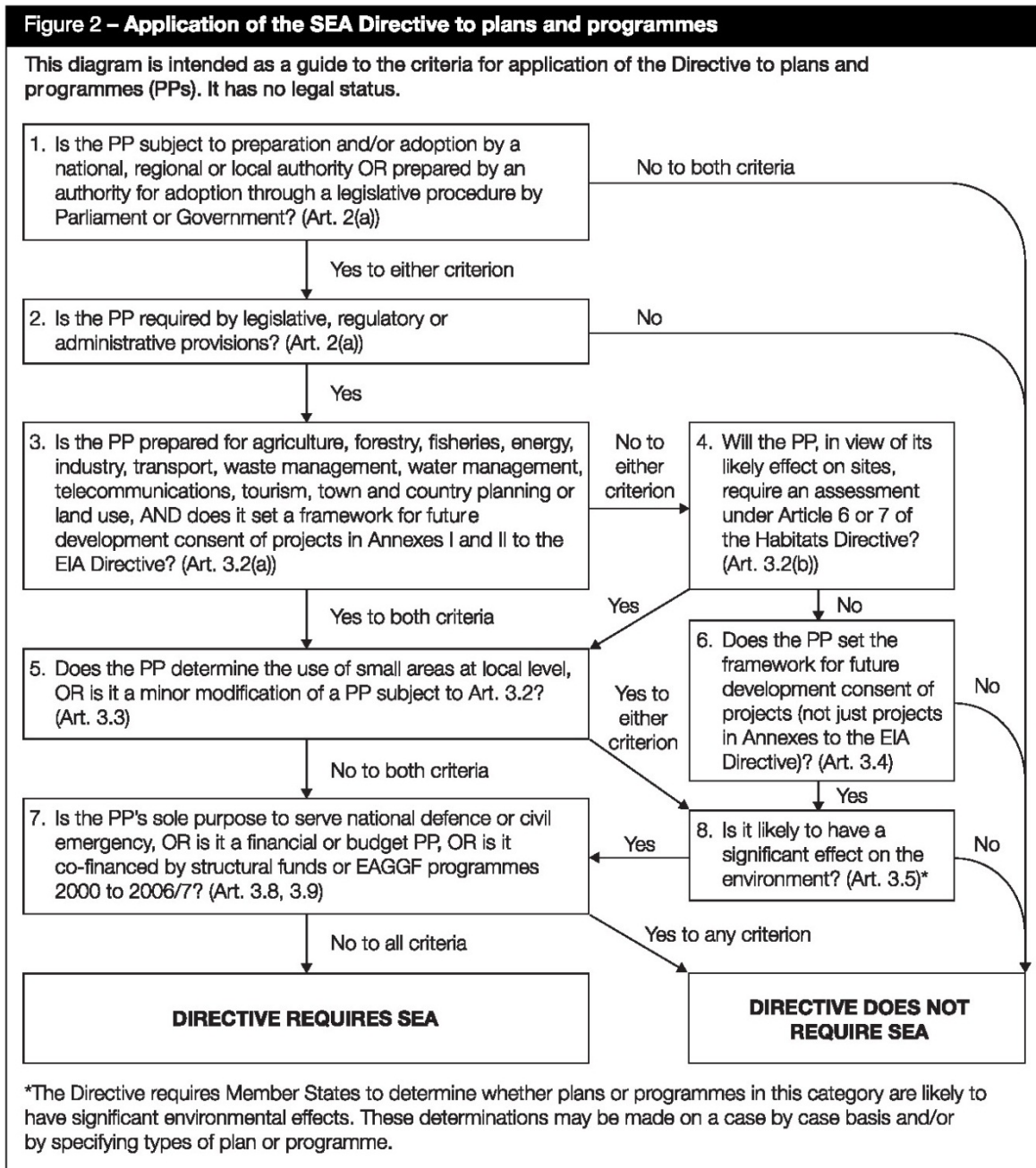
18. Oxford City Council considers that the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan will not be likely to have any significant impacts on the environment and as such does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as required by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
19. The Council notes Historic England’s comments in relation to conserving and enhancing the historic environment and suggests that the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum gives this due consideration going forward.

# Appendix 1: Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan Area



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**Appendix 2 – Extract from ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’, DCLG, 2005.**



**Appendix 3: Application of the SEA Directive as shown in Appendix 2.**

Stage	Yes/ No	Explanation
1. Is the Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	The preparation and adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan is allowed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Neighbourhood Plan will be prepared by the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (as the 'relevant body') and be "made" by Oxford City Council as the Local Authority. The preparation of Neighbourhood Plans is subject to the following regulations: The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and the Neighbourhood Planning (referendums) Regulations 2012.
2. Is the Neighbourhood Plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	No	Whilst Neighbourhood Planning is not a requirement, it is optional under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. It will, if "made", form part of the Development Plan for the City. It is therefore important that the screening process considers whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.
3. Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecoms, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II (see Appendix 5) of the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	Yes	The Neighbourhood Plan is prepared for town and country planning and land use. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan does not set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive.

4. Will the Neighbourhood Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art 3.2(b))	No	See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan at Appendix 4.  If No, go to Step 6 of the Flow Chart
5. Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art 3.2? (Art 3.3)	N/A	N/A
6. Does the Neighbourhood Plan set the future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Yes	The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan will be used to determine future planning applications.  If Yes, go to Step 8 of the Flow Chart
7. Is the Neighbourhood Plan's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds by EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)	N/A	N/A
8. Is it likely to have significant effects on the environment?	No	See Assessment of Significant Effects on the Environment Likely (Appendix 5)

## Appendix 4 – Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan

### Introduction

1. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum has undertaken this Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) with advice from Oxford City Council. This report discusses Stage 1 – Screening.
2. This Screening Assessment relates to a Neighbourhood Development Plan (Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan) that will be in general conformity with the higher level strategic plan (Oxford's Local Plan). This Screening Assessment uses the Oxford Core Strategy HRA as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan is likely to result in significant impacts on 'European' sites and therefore whether an 'Appropriate Assessment' is required.

### Requirements of the Habitats Directive

3. Appropriate Assessment of plans that could affect Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites (jointly called 'European sites') is required by Article 6(3) of the European Habitats Directive<sup>2</sup>, which states:

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

4. Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive discusses alternative solutions, the test of “imperative reasons of over-riding public interest” (IROPI) and compensatory measures.

*“If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of social and economic nature, the Member State shall take compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna

5. The Habitats Directive applies the precautionary principle to European sites. Plans and projects can only be permitted if it can be shown that they will have no significant adverse effect on the integrity of any European site, or if there are no alternatives to them and there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest as to why they should go ahead. In such cases, compensation will be necessary to ensure the overall integrity of the site network.
6. The Habitat Directive was implemented into UK legislation through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended<sup>3</sup>). This piece of legislation is generally known as the Habitats Regulations.

### **Methodology used for this assessment**

7. Habitat Regulations Assessment can involve up to a four stage process.
  1. **Screening:** Determining whether a plan 'alone, or in combination' is likely to have a significant effect on a European site
  2. **Appropriate Assessment:** Determining whether, in view of the site's conservation objectives, the plan 'alone or in combination' would have an adverse effect (or risk of this) on the integrity of the site. If not, the plan can proceed
  3. **Assessment of Alternative Solutions:** Where a plan is assessed as having an adverse effect (or risk of this) on the integrity of a site, there should be an examination of alternatives.
  4. **Assessment where no alternative solutions remain and where adverse impacts remain**
8. The HRA covers stage one of the process. This was carried out in April/ May 2018. Broadly, the HRA process involved:
  - Identification of European sites that could possibly be affected by the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan, qualifying features of those sites and, where available, key environmental conditions to support the sites' integrity. This process relied on information used in the Core Strategy HRA, which was updated through the Sites and Housing Plan HRA and most recently through the HRA for the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan;
  - Identification of possible impacts arising from the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan;
  - Identification of impacts and policies that could be screened out, and those that were likely to require more detailed appropriate assessment;
  - Consultation with Natural England to confirm that the proposed approach for the Habitat Regulations Assessment was acceptable, and what additional information (if any) was required to complete the analysis.
9. This report discusses Stage 1 (screening) only.

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<sup>3</sup> The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 as amended by The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) Regulations 2012.

## Screening

### European Sites

10. Table 1 lists all European sites that area within 20km of the boundary of Oxford City Council.

Name of site	Distance from boundary	Reason for designation <sup>4</sup>
Oxford Meadows SAC	Within the City Boundary, extending into administrative area for Cherwell District Council and into the administrative boundary of West Oxfordshire District Council.	<p><b>Annex I habitats that area primary reason for selection of this site</b> Oxford Meadows represents lowland meadows in the Thames Valley centre of distribution. The site includes vegetation communities that are perhaps unique in the world reflecting the influence of long-term grazing and hay-cutting on lowland meadows. The site has benefited from the survival of traditional management, which has been undertaken for several centuries, and so exhibits good conservation of structure and function.</p> <p><b>Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site</b> Oxford Meadows is selected because Port Meadow is the larger of only two known sites in the UK for creeping marshwort <i>Apium repens</i>.</p>
Cothill Fen SAC	Located 7km from the City boundary	<p><b>Annex I habitats that area primary reason for selection of this site</b> This lowland valley mire contains one of the largest surviving examples of alkaline fen vegetation in central England, a region where fen vegetation is rare. The M13 Schoenus nigricans – Juncus subnodulosus vegetation found here occurs under a wide range of hydrological conditions, with frequent bottle sedge <i>Carex rostrata</i>, grass-of-Parnassus <i>Parnassia palustris</i>, common butterwort <i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i> and marsh helleborine <i>Epipactis palustris</i>. The alkaline fen vegetation forms transitions to other vegetation types that are similar to M24 <i>Molinia caerulea</i> – <i>Cirsium dissectum</i> fen-meadow and S25 <i>Phragmites australis</i> – <i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i> tall-herb fen and wet alder <i>Alnus</i> spp. Wood</p>
Little Wittenham SAC	Located 19km from the City Boundary	<p><b>Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site</b> One of the best-studied great crested newt sites in the UK, Little Wittenham comprises two main ponds set in a predominantly woodland context (broad-leaved and conifer woodland is present). There are also areas of grassland, with sheep grazing and arable bordering the woodland to the south and west. The River Thames is just to the north of the site, and a hill fort to the south. Large numbers of great crested newts <i>Triturus cristatus</i> have been recorded in the two main ponds, and research has revealed that they range several hundred metres into the woodland blocks.</p>

<sup>4</sup> Source: [www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk)

## **Oxford Core Strategy**

11. An HRA was carried out for the Oxford Core Strategy. The Oxford Core Strategy sets out the strategic locations for housing and employment developments within Oxford, identifies a hierarchy of centres and sets a number of more general policies on climate change, housing, transport and employment. The Oxford Core Strategy also sets out the amount of housing required up to 2026.
12. The HRA for the Core Strategy examined whether the policies within the Core Strategy would adversely affect the integrity of any European Sites within 20km of the City. Of the three sites that were within 20km of the Oxford, two were screened out, and an Appropriate Assessment was undertaken on the Oxford Meadows SAC.
13. The HRA concluded that none of the policies in the Oxford 2026 Core Strategy were likely to have adverse effects on the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC with regard to the following environmental requirements of the site:
  - Maintenance of traditional hay cut and light aftermath grazing
  - Absence of direct fertilisation
  - Minimal air pollution
  - Absence of nutrient enrichment of waters; good water quality
  - Balanced hydrological regime
  - Recreational pressures

## **Content of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan**

14. Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan provides a series of policies to:
  - Green Spaces and Biodiversity
    - Protect and enhance green space and biodiversity for residents' well-being.
    - Maintain and enhance publicly accessible green space, including allotments and play areas
    - Ensure developments should always aim to increase biodiversity
  - Built Environment
    - Ensure that house building developments include affordable housing for purchase and rent.
    - Make sure that buildings are designed sustainably, land used efficiently, and pollution minimised.
  - Commerce
    - Ensure that growth in local businesses is matched with additional infrastructure that reduces dependence on car travel
    - Protect local businesses
    - Influence Northern Gateway development
  - Community, Health and Transport

- Ensure that growth in population is matched with provision of adequate schools, community and medical facilities for all age groups
- Improve transport links and promote safe access routes
- Heritage and Local Character
  - Protect and enhance the local character of Wolvercote -its building and streets - through the use of Character Assessments
  - Enhance the Wolvercote and Godstow Conservation Area.

### Other Plans and Projects

15. In compliance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the City Council must consider the implications of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan for relevant sites ‘in combination’ with other plans or projects that might have significant impacts for these sites. The HRA for the Core Strategy, and more recently the HRA for the Northern Gateway, considered many of these documents, but since those assessments were made, some projects have progressed. The following list updates those projects set out in the HRA for the Core Strategy and those in the HRA for the Northern Gateway.

Table 2: Other plans and programmes with potential ‘in-combination’ impacts

<b>Policy, Plan, Strategy/ Initiative</b>	<b>Proposals</b>	<b>Potential ‘in-combination’ impacts?</b>
Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy	Variety of sites proposed for minerals and waste throughout the County	The HRA concluded that a conclusion of no likely significant effects on the Oxford Meadows SAC could not be reached in respect of land in the Eynsham/ Cassington/ Yarton area with respect to hydrological impacts (groundwater flow to the SAC)
Oxford’s Local Plan (includes Core Strategy/ Barton AAP/ / Northern Gateway AAP/ West End AAP/ Sites and Housing Plan	8,000 new homes and between 11-13,000 new jobs by 2026	HRA ruled out impact on Oxford Meadows SAC subject to further work, which was carried out as part of the Northern Gateway AAP process.
Cherwell Local Plan 2031	21,734 new homes and an additional 56,000 sq m of employment space by 2031.	The HRA Screening report concluded that none of the policies will lead to likely significant effects on Oxford Meadows SAC. <sup>5</sup>
South Oxfordshire	5,000 new jobs and 11,487 homes by	Current evidence shows unlikely to have an impact on Oxford Meadows SAC. HRA

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/6347/hd-12-cdc-note-on-legal-issues---sustainability-assessment-and-habitats-update.pdf> 24/4/18

Core Strategy (Adopted)	2027. In process of reviewing Core Strategy to provide for additional homes over and above those allocated.	will need to be updated as the Core Strategy review comes forward.
Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031	20,560 new homes by 2031, and 23,000 new jobs	It is considered likely that planned growth across Oxfordshire will have an effect on the air quality within a small part of the Oxford Meadows SAC as it lies adjacent to the A34 and A40. The Council has engaged with the other Oxfordshire authorities through the Oxfordshire Growth Board and with Natural England in relation to this issue and preparing the Habitats Regulations Assessment. <sup>6</sup>
West Oxfordshire Local Plan	Plan submitted for examination. 10,500 homes to be delivered by 2031	Current evidence shows that the Local Plan is unlikely to have an adverse impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC in terms of recreational pressure and air quality
Chiltern Railways Evergreen 3 Rail project	Rail project	Scheme results in the permanent loss of 13m <sup>2</sup> from the margins of Oxford Meadows SAC. This loss is not predicted to affect the integrity of the SAC.  Air emissions may affect habitats including those within the Oxford Meadows. An approach involving the monitoring of vegetation has been agreed with Natural England, to identify any habitat changes, and to ensure that timely measures can be taken, if necessary to prevent adverse effects on the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC. <sup>7</sup>
Oxford Flood Risk Management Strategy	Flooding improvements across Oxford and surrounds.	This is no longer a standalone strategy being managed by the Environment Agency; it has been subsumed within relevant local authorities' plans.

### Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan

16. The planning policies in the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan have been assessed in Table 3. The table shows that there are no policies within the Neighbourhood Plan which are likely to have an adverse impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC.

<sup>6</sup>

<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/CSD04%20Statement%20of%20Compliance%20with%20the%20Duty%20to%20Cooperate.pdf> 24/4/18

<sup>7</sup> Chiltern Railways (Bicester to Oxford Improvements) Order Environmental Statement NTS January 2010

17. Table 3 shows that none of the policies within the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan are likely to have an adverse impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC.

18. Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan

A – Policies or proposals cannot have any negative impact

B – Effects will be addressed in assessments “down the line”, including project assessment under Regulation 48

C – Could have an effect, but would not be likely to have a significant (negative) effect (alone or in combination with other plans or projects)

D – Likely to have a significant effect alone and would require an Appropriate Assessment

E – Likely to have a significant effect in combination with other plans or projects and which require Appropriate Assessment of those combinations

F – Likely to have a significant effect, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, but which would not adversely affect the integrity of a European site

G – Likely to have a significant effect, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, and for which it cannot be ascertained that they would not adversely affect the integrity of a European site

Table 3 showing the likely key environmental considerations that are likely to give rise to significant effects as a result of the policies in the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Wolvercote NP</b>	<b>If policy has no effect, then reasons why</b>
Add Policy name and number here	Categorise the effects of the policy using the above key	Set out what policy is trying to achieve and why it is not likely to have an impact on the SAC
GBS1- Publicly Accessible Green Space	A	Policy seeks to conserve and enhance public access green spaces in the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan Area (WNPA)
GBS2 - Green Belt, Designated Land and Common Land	A	Policy seeks to restrict development on Common Land, and land designated as Green Belt or SSSI.
GBS3- Playing Fields and Play Areas	A	Policy seeks to protect areas of public amenity from development, and prescribes the provision for children's play areas on development of more than 10 homes.
GBS4- Allotments	A	Policy seeks to retain designated allotment land, and welcomes any increase in the number of allotments in the WNPA
GBS5- Biodiversity	A	Policy supports developments that conserve and enhance land which has a significant wildlife or ecological value, and that aim to enhance biodiversity. It seeks to promote the importance of wildlife corridors.
GBS6- Green Space in Developments	A	Policy seeks to increase and enhance accessible green space in development proposals within the WNPA.
BES1-	A	Policy challenges developments on greenfield sites when brownfield site is available.

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Wolvercote NP</b>	<b>If policy has no effect, then reasons why</b>
Brownfield Sites		
BES2– Air Pollution	A	Policy challenges residential development on sites where air pollution levels are injurious to health.
BES3– Noise Pollution	A	Policy seeks to minimise intrusive noise for new developments.
BES4- Building Demolition and conversion	A	Policy outlines preference for refurbishment and conversion of existing buildings over demolition and rebuilding.
BES5– Development Design Guidance	A	Policy seeks to limit new developments to those that respond to and enhance the existing built environment as set out in the Local Plan Sites and Housing Plan HP9.
BES6– Mix of Dwellings and less mainstream housing	A	Policy seeks to ensure that the local authority reviews its Balance of Dwellings Supplementary Planning Document every five years minimum.
BES7– Affordable and Key Worker Housing	A	Policy re-enforces Oxford’s Local Plan that stipulates provision of affordable and key worker housing in new developments.
BES8– Developer Contributions	A	Policy ensures that new development should be phased in tandem with the timely provision of infrastructure.
BES9– Drainage and	A	Policy ensures that new developments do not decrease rain water infiltration or increase the risk of flooding to existing properties. It requires that there is no new development on

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Wolvercote NP</b>	<b>If policy has no effect, then reasons why</b>
Flooding		sites in areas likely to be flooded.
COS1– Employment Use.	A	Policy seeks to ensure that permission for change of use will not be granted for proposals which reduce number of retail outlets in WNPA. Policy supports applications for additional small retail or service outlets in already developed areas to ensure sufficient services are available to local residents.
COS2– Northern Gateway	A	Policy seeks to minimise road traffic by limiting the size of retail outlets in the Northern Gateway development and avoiding destination shops.
CHS1– Community Connectivity	?	Policy supports development proposals that expand or improve community connectivity.
CHS2– Community and Medical Facilities	A	Policy seeks provision of improvements to community and medical (including dental) facilities for proposals for 100 or more dwellings.
CHS3– Electric Vehicle Charging Points	A	Policy seeks provision of adequate charging points for electric vehicles on community developments.
CHS4– Safe Access Routes	A	Policy requires that developers contribute to safe access routes between schools, community facilities and new homes.
CHS5– Parking	A	Policy requires that parking provision in new developments adhere to Oxford Local Plan policy, at a minimum.
CHS6– Travel	A	Policy requires that travel plans are provided to the local authority for new developments.

Policy	Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Wolvercote NP	If policy has no effect, then reasons why
Plans		
HES1– Character and Streetscape	A	Policy seeks to ensure that developers and planning officers refer to relevant Character Assessment in the WNPA.
HES2 – Development Design	A	Policy seeks to ensure that new developments take account of the established character of the area.
HES3 – Demolition.	A	Policy requires that proposals to demolish and replace a building must be justified with reference to local character.
HEC1– Tree Planting.	A	Policy seeks to plant and replace dying trees.
HEC2– Heritage Partners	A	Policy seeks to promote heritage of Wolvercote by working with local partners.

## Environmental Requirements for European Sites

### Oxford Meadows SAC

19. The citation for the Oxford Meadows SAC states that:

Oxford Meadows includes vegetation communities that are perhaps unique in reflecting the influence of long-term grazing and hay-cutting on lowland hay meadows. The site has benefited from the survival of traditional management, which has been undertaken for several centuries, and so exhibits good conservation structure and function. Port Meadow is the largest of only two known sites in the UK for creeping marshwort *Apium repens*.

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under article 4(4) of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*)

Qualifying species: The site is designated under article 4(4) of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Creeping marshwort *Apium Repens*

20. Natural England's report on the condition of Oxford Meadows notes that the most recent surveys took place in 2010 and 2011. These report that the Oxford Meadows SAC is in a favourable condition.

21. The following key environmental requirements to support the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC were agreed at a screening workshop for the South East Plan and are as follows:

1. Minimal air pollution;
2. Absence of nutrient enrichment of waters; good water quality;
3. Balanced hydrological regime – alteration to adjacent rivers may alter flooding regime and reduce botanical diversity;
4. Maintenance of traditional hay cut and light aftermath grazing;
5. Absence of direct fertilisation.

22. A further workshop on HRA for the Core Strategy raised the additional issue of ensuring that recreational pressures are maintained at a reasonable level.

### **Screening Conclusions**

23. It is worth noting that the HRA for the Oxford Core Strategy screened out the two other European sites within 20km of Oxford. These sites are Cothill Fen SAC and Little Wittenham SAC. The screening conclusions from the Core Strategy HRA have been summarised below for completeness

### **Cothill Fen SAC**

24. It is considered that the Oxford Core Strategy could not have an adverse impact on Cothill Fen SAC. Cothill Fen is an alkaline fen dependent on a high

water table and calcareous, base rich water supply. As Cothill Fen is in the catchment of the River Ock, which is a different river catchment, the Oxford Core Strategy could not have an adverse impact on this Designated Site. Cothill Fen SAC is in a relatively remote location and can only be accessed by private car, or by local residents travelling on foot. Recreational pressure is therefore likely to be slight as a result of the proposed new development in the Oxford Core Strategy. Development within Oxford is likely to feature new green spaces which will ease recreational pressure on the Cothill Fen.

### **Little Wittenham SAC**

25. Little Wittenham has been designated because it contains two ponds with large populations of great crested newts. These areas have restricted access which is designed to prevent conflicts between the visiting public, the newts and their habitat. As development in Oxford will not affect the habitat in the ponds or the newts foraging habitat around them, the Oxford Core Strategy could not have an adverse impact on this site. The site has therefore been excluded from further assessment.

### **Oxford Meadows SAC**

26. In the case of the HRA for the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan it has been possible to screen out all of the impacts on the Oxford Meadows SAC.

- Air Pollution;
- Water Quality;
- Balanced Hydrological Regime;
- Increased Recreational Pressure;
- Maintenance of traditional hay cut and light aftermath grazing\*
- Absence of direct fertilisation\*

\* These conservation objectives have been screened out as they are related to activities directly at the site which the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan will not affect

### **Air Pollution**

27. The HRA for the Core Strategy referred to EA Interim advice note 61/05 "Guidance for Undertaking Environmental Assessment of Air Quality for Sensitive Ecosystems in Internationally Designated Nature Conservation Sites and SSSIs", which states:

*"If there are no Designated Sites within 200m of an affected road, there is no need to proceed any further with [the] air quality assessment. If there is a Designated Site within 2km of a scheme but there is no significant change in emissions from roads within 200m of the site, then the scheme will not result in a significant change in air quality and the effects of change in air quality can be assumed to be negligible"*

28. The boundary of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan area includes part of the Oxford Meadows SAC, but as no development is included in the Plan,

there should not be any impact associated with the Plan on the air quality at the Oxford Meadows SAC.

29. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan does not include any additional development that was not assessed as part of the HRA for the Core Strategy.
30. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan includes part of the Oxford Meadows SAC within its boundary. The Plan's policies do not include any developments which will affect the air pollution conservation objective.

### **Balanced Hydrological Regime**

31. The HRA for the Core Strategy states that "Oxford Meadows SAC straddles the north western boundary of Oxford. Most of it is therefore upstream of the large urban areas of Oxford". The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan Area includes some of the Oxford Meadows SAC and includes land within 2km of the Oxford Meadows SAC. The HRA for the Core Strategy continues, "... a study of 'The Hydrology of the Oxford Meadows' states that '[t]he Second Terrace Gravels (Summertown Radley Terrace) on which much of Oxford is built appears to be a source of groundwater recharge (Eyles, 1986) with groundwater/ surface water flowing south and west across Port Meadow to the Seacourt Stream."
32. The boundary of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan area sits entirely within the bedrock unit Oxford Clay Formation and West Walton Formation Alluvium deposits of clay and silts are interspersed with patches of river sands and gravels deposited across the area containing fragments of limestone, flints and rounded quartzite pebbles.  
An interactive map available from the British Geological Survey website <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> provides further details of the geology.
33. The Plan policies do not include any developments, so is not likely to have an impact on this conservation objective

### **Recreational Pressure**

34. The Core Strategy HRA assessed the impacts of recreational pressure from 8,000 new homes on the Oxford Meadows SAC. The HRA for the Core Strategy stated that "[p]ublic consultation carried out by Scott Wilson as part of their "Oxford City Green Space Study" revealed that people are willing to walk approximately 1,900m to important green spaces such as Oxford Meadows SAC, which includes Port Meadow."
35. Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan Area lies adjacent to and includes part of the Oxford Meadows SAC. Other green spaces that exist within the Neighbourhood Plan Area include the Thames Path, Cutteslowe and Sunnymead Park, Wolvercote Lakes, Wolvercote Green, Goose Green, North Oxford Golf Club and Lower Wolvercote Play area.

36. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan promotes green spaces (see Table 3 above) and does not include any building development proposals. It is not likely to have an impact on this conservation objective.

### **Conclusion**

37. The Oxford Meadows SAC is currently judged by Natural England to be in favourable condition.
38. The policies in the Plan alone are not likely to have an impact on the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC. There are other development plans (former Mill Site, Wolvercote, the Northern Gateway AAP, and possibly the Cherwell Local Plan, which may have an impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC

**Appendix 5: Assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment**

<b>1. Characteristics of the plan, having regard to:</b>	
<p>(a) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.</p>	<p>The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, the Plan sits within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework, Oxford's Local Plan (including the saved policies within the Adopted Local Plan 2001-2016, the Core Strategy, Sites and Housing Plan and Area Action Plans). The projects for which the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan helps to set a framework are local in nature and have limited resource implications.</p>
<p>(b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans or programmes including those in a hierarchy.</p>	<p>The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan will be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework. The policies within the document will conform with the Council's strategic policies and complement Oxford's Local Plan. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to influence other plans or programmes within the Statutory Development Plan.</p>
<p>(c) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development</p>	<p>The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan contains policies relating to environmental considerations such as biodiversity, the historic environment, housing and sustainable transport. These policies will be in conformity with national and local policies as required by the basic conditions. The Neighbourhood Plan will have to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development to be approved at examination and "made" by the City Council. Development would also be subject to the policies in Oxford's Local Plan and therefore all environmental considerations would be covered by policy.</p>
<p>(d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme</p>	<p>Within the Plan area are the following:  Wolvercote with Godstow Conservation Area  Oxford Meadows SSSI  Wolvercote Green SSSI  Oxford Meadows SAC  19 Grade 11 Listed Buildings, a Grade C listed church and 2 scheduled monuments  Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common SAM</p> <p>As the Plan itself does not include developments, nothing in the Plan should affect any of the above environmental or historic protections.</p>

(e) The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection.	The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan is not directly relevant to any of these.
<b>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular to:</b>	
a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	There will not be any negative environmental effects on the environment as a result of the Plan.
b) The cumulative nature of the effects	As there will be no environmental effects of the Plan, there will be no cumulative effects on the environment
c) The transboundary nature of the effects	There will not be any effects from the Plan on neighbouring authorities.
d) The risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	There will not be any impacts of the Plan on human health.
e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	There will not be any environmental effects of the Plan.
f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use	The Plan contains no development allocations which will (i) affect the special natural characteristics (Oxford Meadows SAC) or the listed buildings, or the Scheduled Ancient Monument designation. (ii) exceed environmental quality standards or limit values, or (iii) involve intensive land use
g) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised	The Plan will not impact on any landscapes with a protected status.

national, Community or international protection status	
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