



Bromsgrove
District Council

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Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulation Assessment Screening Determination

Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan

September 2015

Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan

SEA & HRA Screening Determination

1. Introduction

This report sets out the screening assessment for the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan and has been prepared by Bromsgrove District Council. The purpose of the screening is to assess if the Neighbourhood Plan will require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and /or a Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA). Section 10 shows the report conclusions for the screening assessment.

2. Introduction to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulation Assessment

Introduction to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required under European legislation for all plans which may have a significant effect on the environment. This particularly relates to plans that designate sites for development. When a neighbourhood plan becomes “made” (adopted) it will have legal status as a statutory development plan document. As the Neighbourhood Plan will become a statutory development plan document, there is a legal requirement to assess the policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan against the requirements of European Union Directive 2001/42/EC; also known as the “Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive”. The objective for SEA is: *“to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this Directive, and environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.”* (SEA Directive, Article 1).

The SEA Directive was incorporated into national law through The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SI 2004 No 1633) (the SEA Regulations). Detailed guidance on these regulations can be found in the Government publication ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’ (ODPM 2005). While this guidance pre-dates Neighbourhood Plans, it remains a relevant and useful document and provides the definitive government guidance.

Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA)

The Habitats Regulation (2010) requires an assessment of land use planning proposals associated with neighbourhood plans. The assessment process examines the likely significant effects of the different spatial options on the integrity of the European wildlife sites of nature conservation importance within, close to or connected to the plan area. European wildlife sites are areas of international nature conservation importance that are protected for the benefit of the habitats and species they support. This assessment is known as a Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA). For the purposes of the HRA, international designated wildlife sites are Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), and Ramsar wetland sites.

3. Neighbourhood Plans and SEA & HRA

Regulation 15 of the 2012 Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations sets out the information that must accompany a Neighbourhood Plan when submitted to the local planning authority. In February 2015 amendments to the Neighbourhood Plan Regulations came into force; this is known as the Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015. Regulation 2(4) of these amendments adds additions to the list of documents that a qualifying body must submit to a local planning authority with a Neighbourhood Plan. The additional document which must be submitted is either an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, or a statement of reasons why an environment assessment is not required. The amendment to the Regulations is to ensure that the public can make informed representations and that independent examiners have sufficient information before them to determine whether a neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects.

The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) states that one of the basic conditions that will be tested at examination stage is to see if the Neighbourhood Plan is compatible with the European Union obligations (including under the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive).

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes it clear that *“A sustainability appraisal which meets the requirements of the European Directive on strategic environmental assessment should be an integral part of the plan preparation process, and should consider all the likely significant effects on the environment, economic and social factors.”* (NPPF para 165). The NPPF goes on to say that *“Local Plans may require a variety of other environmental assessments, including under the Habitats Regulations where there is a likely significant effect on a European wildlife site.”* (NPPF para 166).

However, as a Neighbourhood Plan is not a ‘Local Plan’, it may not need an environment assessment of the type normally required when preparing Local Plans. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will only be required for a Neighbourhood Plan if it is likely to cause significant environment effects. Neighbourhood Plans that are located near to a European wildlife site may also trigger the Habitats Directive depending on how complex the proposed policies are. The Duty to Cooperate requires the Local Planning Authority (alongside Natural England, Environment Agency, and English Heritage to advise and assist on SEA and HRA requirements. This involves the Local Planning Authority undertaking a screening assessment of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan proposals at an early stage to ascertain whether they will trigger any EU directives or Habitat directives and thus to avoid the community and local authority undertaking unnecessary work.

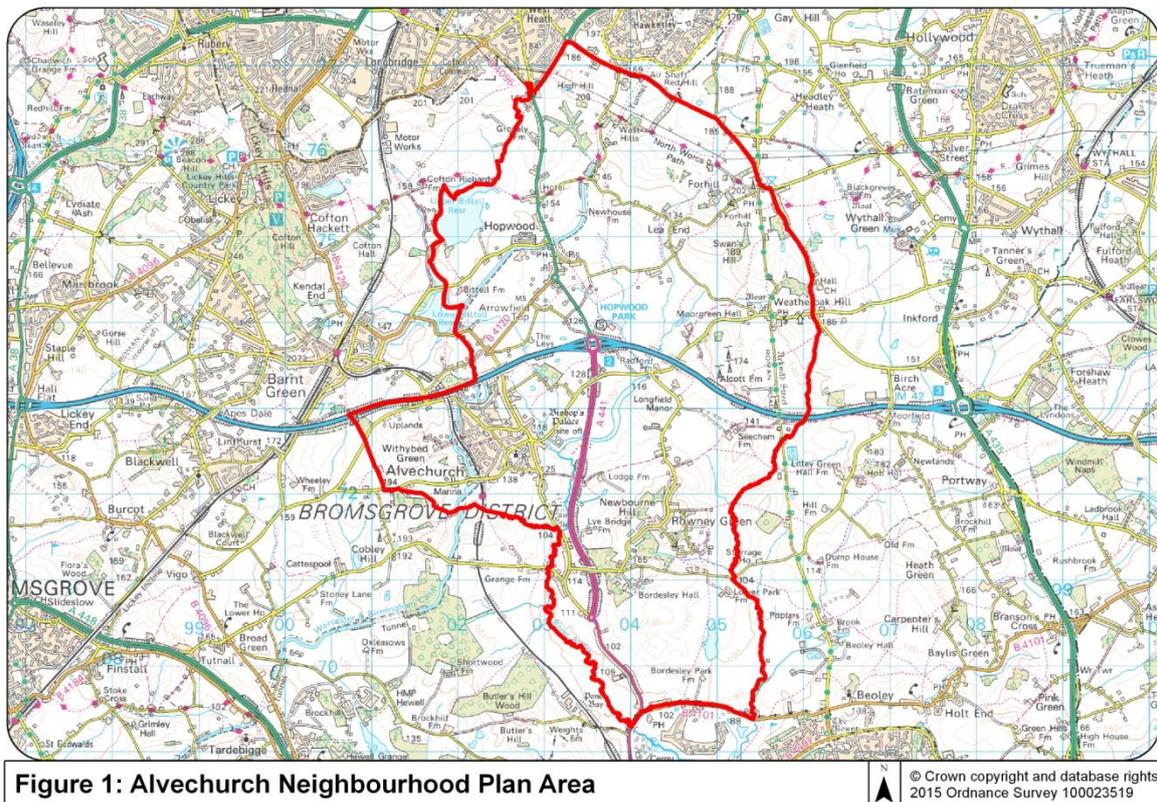
If an SEA or HRA is found to be required, the gathering of evidence for its preparation can be integrated into the process of producing the Neighbourhood Plan. If the outcome concludes that an SEA or HRA is not necessary, a statement will be prepared that sets out how environmental issues have been taken into account and considered during the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. This statement will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority with the proposed Neighbourhood Plan following the pre-submission consultation.

4. The Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Work on the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan commenced in 2011 as the Parish Council wanted the people of the parish to have a say in all aspects of the future of the area, but importantly it wanted local people to decide where new housing (if needed) should go and what it should look like.

Alvechurch Parish is located in Bromsgrove District within Worcestershire. The parish borders both the city of Birmingham and the new town of Redditch. The majority of the parish area is designated as Green Belt, with the exception of Alvechurch village which has a tightly drawn village envelope around the built development of the village. All the other smaller settlements within the parish, such as Hopwood and Rowney Green are washed over by Green Belt. The parish has many assets including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Wildlife Sites, areas of high Landscape Character, Scheduled Monument and a Conservation Area centered on the heart of the village.

Figure 1: Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan Area



5. Previous Consultation with Statutory Bodies

During the early stages of the preparation of the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan advice was sought from the three statutory consultees on whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was required. The three statutory consultees were consulted in February 2013. The consultation included a map of the Parish, a draft schedule of the Neighbourhood Plan objectives (at January 2013) and an outline sustainability issues SWOT analysis.

The consultation responses are attached in full at Appendix B. A summary of the responses is detailed in table 1 below. In February 2013 when this consultation was undertaken, the emerging proposals for the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan included plans to allocate sites for housing. The statutory consultees responded by advising an SEA would be necessary. However, since this time the draft plan preparation has progressed and the priorities have changed; there is no longer a desire to include site allocations in the neighbourhood plan. As the priorities have changed it is necessary to re-screen the neighbourhood plan to check if an SEA is still necessary. The last screening assessment did not include a screening for the HRA, so this has been added to this latest screening assessment.

Table 1: Consultee Responses for Screening Assessment undertaken in February 2013

Consultation Body	Consultee Response	Council's Action
Natural England Response received 27 February 2013	<p>Considers that SEA would be required given that the plan's objectives relate to the location of housing associated infrastructure.</p> <p>Also suggest that SA would be needed because of the changes the plan may make to the environment, society or local economy.</p>	Comments noted.
English Heritage Response received 18 March 2013	<p>Draft objectives refer to the Plan identifying areas of search for new housing and potentially business development. Unclear at present how much these proposals would affect the historic environment and heritage assets of the Council.</p> <p>Noted that the draft objectives do not include any provisions for conservation or enhancement of the historic environment or heritage assets.</p> <p>Therefore insufficient information at present to determine the likely impact of the plan and any significant effects on cultural heritage.</p> <p>Recommend that a concise Screening Report is prepared to help inform the decision on SEA.</p> <p>Notes that the views of other statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before an overall decision on the need for SEA is made.</p>	Comments noted. This revised screening assessment will hopefully address these issues raised.
Environment Agency Response received 3 April 2013	<p><u>Flood Risk</u></p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan area is part of the River Arrow catchment and as such all water flows through to Redditch which has</p>	Detailed comments noted and will be taken forward when drafting the plan and in the production of the SA

	<p>known flooding issues. The Neighbourhood Plan may wish to promote/focus on reducing any known flooding hotspots. Recommend that flooding is highlighted as an issue to the local community. North Worcestershire Water Management Team (as lead Local Flood Authority) should be consulted with.</p> <p><u>Water Quality / Ecology</u> Neighbourhood Plan should look to conserve biodiversity assets and promote the enhancement of biodiversity in accordance with the BAP. The Upper River Arrow catchment has several important conservation sites including the Bittel Reservoir complex (SSSI) and Hopwood Dingle (SSSI). River Arrow catchment has been classed as moderate ecological status under the WFD.</p> <p>As part of the plan we would wish to see the river habitat corridor maintained and improved.</p> <p>The north of the plan area is considered particularly sensitive as there are numerous sites of significant ecological importance and it is used for water abstraction purposes.</p> <p><u>Groundwater Vulnerability / Contaminated Land</u> The Parish is located on Mercia Mudstone which is classed as low sensitivity Secondary B Aquifer and not particularly vulnerable. There are groundwater Source Protection Zones in Hopwood for public water abstraction which would restrict certain activities.</p> <p>There are also a number of historic waste pits within the plan area.</p> <p><u>Sustainable Development</u> Advise consideration of water efficiency techniques within the design of dwellings and commercial/employment buildings.</p> <p><u>Summary</u> Do not consider that there would be</p>	documentation.
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	significant environmental effects as a result of the plan. Reference should be made to BDC’s Water Cycle Study work which may need to be updated to inform the plan.	
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6. Applying the SEA & HRA Screening to the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan

The SEA screening is a two stage process consisting of:

Stage 1 – this stage considers the Neighbourhood Plan against the SEA assessment criteria set out in the national guidance “A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive”, (Figure 2, ODPM, 2005). If it is determined at this stage that there is potential for the Neighbourhood Plan to have a significant effect on the environment then stage 2 should be carried out.

Stage 2 – this stage involves testing the relevant Neighbourhood Plan against the criteria set out in SEA Directive Article 3(5) Annex II, to determine the likely significance of environmental effects.

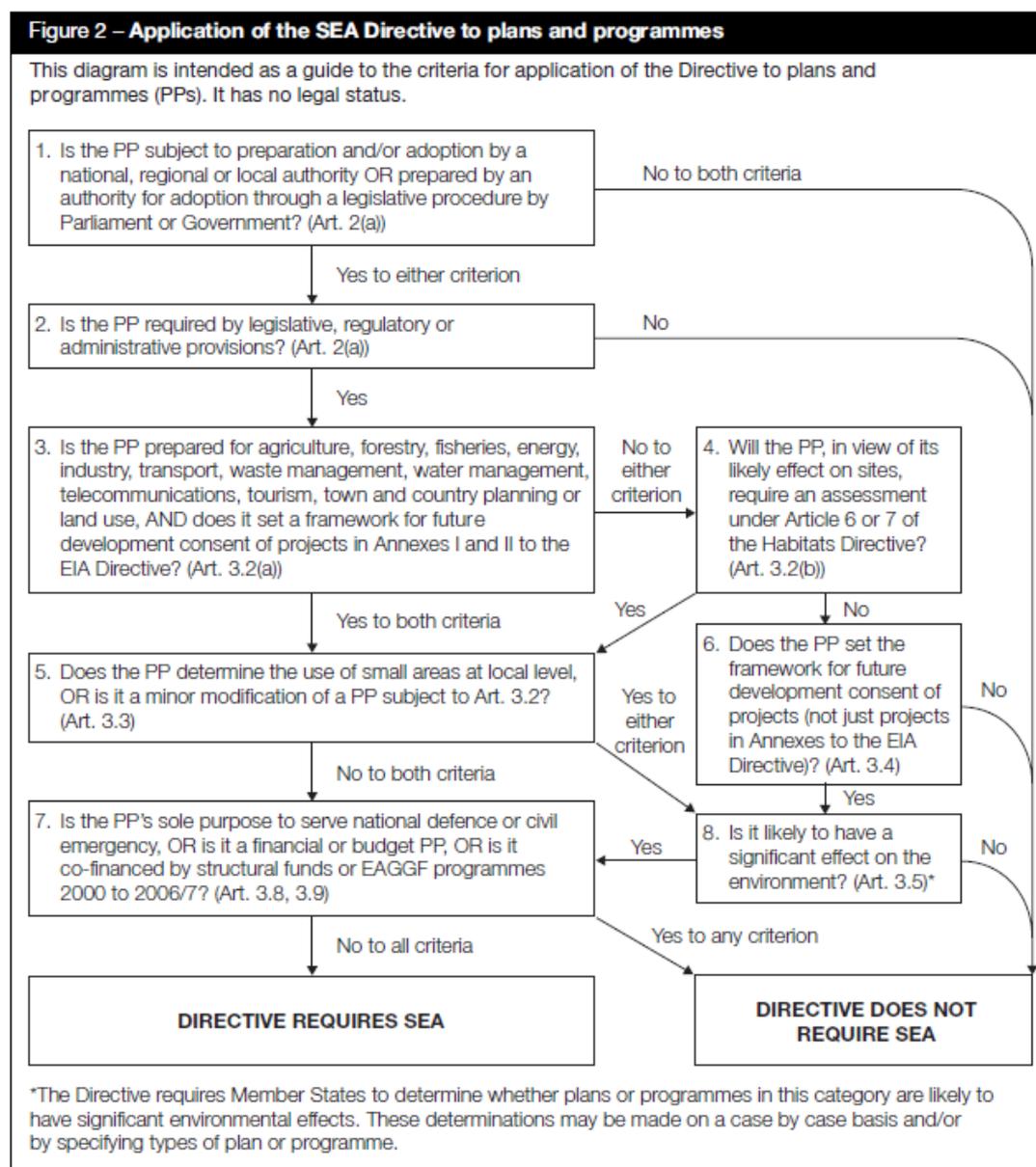
The HRA screening approach involves consideration of the internationally designated wildlife sites within a reasonable distance of the Neighbourhood Plan Area and the potential impact of the proposals within the plan on these designated sites. For the purpose of the HRA, international designated wildlife sites are Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar wetland sites.

The next three sections set out stages 1 and 2 of the SEA screening and the HRA screening assessment.

7. SEA Screening Stage 1: Application of SEA Directive to the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan

To establish if a Neighbourhood Plan needs to be accompanied by a full SEA, stage 1 of the screening assessment is required to assess the plan against a series of criteria set out in the SEA Directive. Figure 2 is taken from the ODPM guidance on SEAs. The diagram shows the screening process and how a plan would be assessed against the SEA Directive criteria.

Figure 2: Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes



Source: A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, Figure 2, ODPM 2005

An assessment of the characteristics of the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan against these criteria is set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2: SEA Screening Stage 1 – Application of the SEA Directive to the Neighbourhood Plan

SEA Assessment Criteria	Neighbourhood Plan Outcome (Y/N)	Commentary
1) Is a Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and / or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority through a legislative	Y	The Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by a qualifying body (Alvechurch Parish Council) under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The Local Planning Authority (Bromsgrove District Council) has a statutory obligation to

procedure by Parliament or Government? (Article 2(a))		“make” a Neighbourhood Plan once it has successfully gone through the relevant statutory preparation stages, culminating in a local community referendum. At this stage, the Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the statutory development plan for the local authority area. To this extent, the Neighbourhood Planning process is directed through a legislative procedure which is set out in the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (and Amendments 2015) and the Localism Act 2011.
2) Is the Neighbourhood Plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Article 2(a))	N	The preparation of Neighbourhood Plans is optional and is a decision to be made by the Parish/Town Council or Neighbourhood Forum. However, if the decision is taken to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, the qualifying body is required to follow the set of regulatory and administrative procedures as set out in the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (and Amendments 2015) and the Localism Act 2011.
3) Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Article 3.2(a))	Y	A Neighbourhood Plan must relate to town and country, spatial and/or land use planning. Once made, it will form part of the statutory framework (“development plan”) for the determination of planning applications. Neighbourhood Plans therefore set specific frameworks for future development consents.
4) Will the Neighbourhood Plan, in view of its likely effects on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Article 3.2(b))	N	A Neighbourhood Plan could potentially have impacts on sites covered by the Habitats Regulations. A Habitat Regulations Assessment screening of Neighbourhood Plans is required to assess if the plan proposals will impact negatively on internationally designated wildlife sites. A HRA screening assessment of the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan has been undertaken and is concluded in section 9 and 10 of this report.
5) Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local OR is it a minor modification of an existing plan/programme subject to Article 3.2? (Article 3.3)	Y	A Neighbourhood Plan can set out detailed, localised policies to reflect local aspirations, concerns or issues. The Neighbourhood Plan can also determine the use of sites in its neighbourhood plan area by

		making site specific land use allocations. The Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will not be allocating any sites within its area.
6) Is the Neighbourhood Plan likely to have a significant effect on the environment?	N	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan could potentially have an effect on the environment. However, whether this is significant depends on the proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan. This requires individual assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan.</p> <p>The relevant criteria for determining whether Neighbourhood Plans are likely to have a significant environmental effect are set out in Article 3(5) Annex II of the SEA Directive.</p> <p>Stage 2 of this screening assessment determines whether or not the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will lead to any significant effects on the environment and, therefore, whether the Neighbourhood Plan will need to be accompanied by a full SEA.</p>

SEA Screening Stage 1: Conclusions

The conclusion of the assessment in Table 2 is that depending on the content of the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan, an SEA may be required. For this reason an analysis of the proposed Neighbourhood Plan was required to determine the likely significant effects on the environment. Therefore, it was necessary to complete stage 2 of the SEA screening assessment.

8. SEA Screening Stage 2: SEA Directive Article 3(5) Annex II – Application of Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects of a Neighbourhood Plan

Table 3 below sets out the assessment against the Strategic Environmental Assessment criteria for the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan. This is to determine whether the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan will have a significant effect on the environment. This criteria against which the screening is carried out are taken directly from Annex II of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC (also known as the SEA Directive), as required by Article 3(4).

Table 3: SEA Screening Stage 2 – Assessment of likelihood of significant effects on the environment

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects (Schedule 1 of SEA Regulations)	Is the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan likely to have a significant environmental effect?	Justification for Screening Assessment
1) The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular to:		
a) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and	No	The Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will only be setting the framework for projects in a local context. There is a statutory requirement for the

<p>other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.</p>		<p>Neighbourhood Plan's policies to be within the context of strategic policies in the adopted development plan. It therefore cannot provide for development that significantly exceeds, at a strategic level, the intentions of the adopted Local Plan. Rather, it will make policies and proposals that will be applicable to the designated neighbourhood plan area. The proposed neighbourhood plan will not include site allocations.</p>
<p>b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will be in conformity with the Development Plan for Bromsgrove District, which consists of the Bromsgrove Local Plan (adopted 2004) and the emerging Bromsgrove District Plan (currently at examination). The Neighbourhood Plan will also be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework and the planning guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Guidance. The conformity of the Neighbourhood Plan with these strategic district plans and national policies is one of the basic conditions and will be checked at examination stage by an Independent Examiner.</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>Potentially</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan will need to be in conformity with the emerging Bromsgrove District Plan which advocates sustainable development and has been subject to full SEA and Sustainability Appraisals. It is also one of the Basic Conditions of producing a Neighbourhood Plan that it should contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. (Note: Bromsgrove District Plan is currently at examination stage).</p> <p>The proposed Neighbourhood Plan will make reference to the Green Belt review that the Local Authority will be undertaking in the future. A policy is proposed for future growth in the neighbourhood plan area to address the possible release of land from the Green Belt following the completion of the Green Belt review.</p>
<p>d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.</p>	<p>Potentially</p>	<p>At this stage it is considered that the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will not introduce any environmental problems, rather it will seek to encourage sensitive development in relation to the environment.</p>
<p>e) The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will not impact on the implementation of European Community legislation on the environment.</p>

<p>European Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).</p>		<p>Strategies relating to waste disposal or water protection are mostly dealt with by Worcestershire County Council. Bromsgrove District Council itself has a number of strategies in place, relating to waste collection and environmental protection. Community consultations as part of the plan process may identify specific local environmental concerns or issues, but these are generally not issues which could be addressed through a Neighbourhood Plan.</p>
<p>2) Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</p>		
<p>a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>It is considered that the overall impact of the Neighbourhood Plan will be positive by maximising the positive environmental effects of development and minimising or avoiding negative impacts.</p>
<p>b) The cumulative nature of the effects</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>It is considered that the effect of this Neighbourhood Plan will be largely beneficial therefore any cumulative impacts will also be beneficial.</p>
<p>c) The transboundary nature of the effects</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The effects of the proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan are limited to the area within the Neighbourhood Plan boundary and are unlikely to have a significant impact on neighbouring areas outside of the boundary (see figure 1 for neighbourhood plan area).</p>
<p>d) The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>No significant risks to human health or the environment are envisaged through the application of this Neighbourhood Plan.</p>
<p>e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan is applicable only to developments within the neighbourhood plan area (Alvechurch Parish area). Therefore, the potential for environmental effects are likely to be minimal and limited to the neighbourhood plan area.</p>
<p>f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; b. Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or c. Intensive land-use. 	<p>Potentially</p>	<p>The Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan is applicable to developments within Alvechurch Parish, which includes a Conservation Area and listed buildings. Policy impacts on heritage have been assessed through the Sustainability Appraisal of the emerging Bromsgrove District Plan.</p>
<p>g) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national,</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The overall impact of the Neighbourhood Plan will be positive by maximising the positive environmental effects of development and</p>

community or international protection status.		<p>minimising or avoiding negative impacts. Bromsgrove has a number of sites of importance for nature conservation but these are protected by separate policies in the emerging Bromsgrove District Plan.</p> <p>If a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) is deemed necessary then a full SEA would be required. The results of the HRA screening assessment is shown in sections 9 and 10 of this report.</p>
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SEA Screening Stage 2: Conclusions

On the basis of the SEA Screening Assessment set out in Tables 2 and 3, the conclusion is that the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will not have significant environmental effects in relation to any of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations, and therefore does not need to be subject to an SEA. The main reasons for this conclusion are:

- There are no plans for the proposed Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan to allocate sites for development;
- The Neighbourhood Plan itself is unlikely to have environmental effects; rather it is the specific developments that come forward as part of planning applications within the neighbourhood area that may result in environmental effects;
- The neighbourhood plan will seek to avoid or minimise negative environmental effects by providing guidance for applicants when making proposals for development within the neighbourhood plan area. This will help to reduce the number of negative environmental effects occurring within the neighbourhood plan area.

9. HRA Screening

In addition to the screening of the Neighbourhood Plan in relation to SEA, there is a requirement to assess if the proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan could have an adverse impact on internationally designated wildlife sites. This Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) is required by the European Habitats Directive.

The HRA involves an assessment of any plan or project to establish if it has potential implications for European wildlife sites. The HRA will consider if the proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan have the potential to harm the habitats or species for which European wildlife sites are designated. European wildlife sites are:

- Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

In addition to SPA and SAC sites Ramsar sites are designated under the Ramsar Convention (Iran 1971 as amended by the Paris Protocol 1992). Although they are not covered by the Habitats Regulations, as a matter of Government Policy, Ramsar sites should be treated in the same way as

European wildlife sites. European wildlife sites and Ramsar sites are collectively known as internationally designated wildlife sites.

The legislation sets out a process to assess the potential implications of a plan on internationally designated sites. The first stage of this process is a “screening” exercise where the details of nearby internationally designated sites within a reasonable distance from the Neighbourhood Plan area are assessed to see if there is any potential for the Neighbourhood Plan proposals to have an impact on the site. For the purposes of this HRA screening assessment a “reasonable distance” will be taken to be sites within 15km of the designated Neighbourhood Plan Area.

For the HRA “screening” assessment the Neighbourhood Plan area was checked to see if any Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation sites, or Ramsar sites were located within its area. The assessment also checked to see if any of these internationally important sites were located within a 15km radius and a 20km radius from the Neighbourhood Plan area.

10. SEA & HRA Screening Conclusion

SEA Assessment

On the basis of the SEA Screening assessment set out in stages 1 and 2 above, it is concluded that the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will not have significant effects in relation to any of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations, and therefore does not need to be subject to an SEA report.

Habitat Regulations Assessment

There are no internationally designated wildlife sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area or within 15km of it. However, the results show that there is one Special Area of Conservation (SAC) located within 20km of the neighbourhood plan area. This site is Fens Pools, a 20.2ha SAC site located near to Pensnett in the Dudley Borough.

HRAs published to date have typically considered European sites with a 10-15km radius around the plan area. Using this approach of a 15km radius, it is concluded that the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of internationally designated sites either on its own or in combination with other plans and therefore does not require a Habitat Regulation Assessment to be undertaken.

11. Next Stages

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The next stage will be to submit this Screening Report of the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan to the Statutory Consultees (Natural England, Environment Agency, and English Heritage). The Statutory Consultees will be asked to consider the Screening Report and confirm if they consider an SEA is necessary or not. The consultation period will last for six weeks.

If the Statutory Consultees advise that an SEA is necessary then a Sustainability Appraisal will be carried out on the Neighbourhood Plan. The Sustainability Appraisal will integrate the requirements of the SEA Regulations. This will ensure that the potential environmental effects (the focus of the

SEA) are given full consideration alongside social and environmental issues. The Sustainability Appraisal will sit alongside the draft Neighbourhood Plan when it goes out to formal consultation. It will also be submitted to the Local Planning Authority when the proposed Neighbourhood Plan is submitted.

If it is concluded that the emerging Neighbourhood Plan will not require a full SEA, then it will be necessary to publish the Statutory Consultee responses together with this screening assessment on the Bromsgrove District Council website and the Alvechurch Parish Council website. In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2015) Amendments, a statement of reasons why an environmental assessment is not required will need to be published and submitted to the Local Planning Authority with the proposed Neighbourhood Plan.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

The next stage will also request Natural England to consider the screening assessment of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and to advise if a HRA is necessary or not. If Natural England advises that a HRA is necessary then a HRA will be prepared and will sit alongside the draft Neighbourhood Plan when it goes out to formal consultation. It will also be submitted to the Local Planning Authority with the proposed Neighbourhood Plan.

12. Further Information

The Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has prepared a statement to Bromsgrove District Council setting out why they consider an SEA should not be required. Appendix A shows a copy of this statement and has been submitted with this screening assessment to the three statutory consultees.

Further details on the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan can be found on the Bromsgrove District Council website at:

<http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/policy-and-strategy/planning-policies/neighbourhood-plans/alvechurch-neighbourhood-plan.aspx>

Appendix A: Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Statement

ALVECHURCH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STATEMENT TO BDC OF WHY THE STEERING GROUP CONSIDERS A SEA SHOULD NOT BE REQUIRED

The characteristics of the APNP and the likelihood for causing significant effects on the environment have been assessed and the SG considered that:

- The scale and location of housing development has not been proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan, but when this happens following a Green belt review this will replicate those that have already been set out and subject to the SA of the existing 2004-2011 BDC Local plan and that of the emerging Local Plan (Bromsgrove District Council Local Plan 2011-2030).

- Given this, and the scope of other environmental matters/ policies within the neighbourhood plan (also subject to consideration in the Local Plan and emerging Local Plan), it is considered unlikely that there will be any significant environmental effects arising from the Neighbourhood Plan that have not been given detailed consideration in the Sustainability Appraisals of the current and emerging Bromsgrove District Local Plan.

- The plan sets a framework for the consideration of a range of matters at the local level that due to their size, nature and location will not give rise to significant environmental effects.

- It is considered unlikely that housing allocations / considerations set out within the Neighbourhood Plan will have such an influence on other plans and programmes so as to prejudice their sustainability or cause significant environmental effects. Particularly as significant strategic allocations will have already been assessed through the Sustainability of the Draft Local Plan (2004-2011) and the emerging Local Plan submission version(2011-2030) under examination at the moment.

- The Neighbourhood Plan ensures that any matters pertaining to the natural and historic environment are carefully managed /considered in future decisions.

- Whilst identifying perceived local problems (such as the likely increase in through traffic), it is not considered that these matters will cause any significant harm to the environment.

- The SG consider that the scale of development proposed and issues to be addressed by the plan will have any cross boundary environmental effects of a significant nature.

- The Neighbourhood Plan will purely help inform / shape planning decisions to ensure that there are no significant effects (individually or cumulatively) on the recognised special characteristics of the conservation area and its buildings of historic value.

- There are 2 sites such as SSSI'S in the Parish, which are protected by the Local Plan and its environmental assessments.

To conclude: it is the opinion of the SG that the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan should not require a full SEA.

August 2015

Appendix B: Responses received from Statutory Consultees (Spring 2013)

Natural England

Date: 27 February 2013
Our ref: 78236
Your ref: Alvechurch NP

Tim Collard
Planning Officer
Bromsgrove District Council

BY EMAIL ONLY



Customer Services
Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 8DJ

T 0300 080 5900

Dear Mr Collard

Planning Consultation:

Thank you for your consultation on the above document which was received by Natural England on 12 February 2013

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.

Natural England considers that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) would be required for the Neighbourhood Plan given that the plan's objectives include the location of housing and associated infrastructure which would impact on the environment including the protected nature conservation sites (Local Wildlife Sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest SSSI) which fall within the parish boundaries.

We would also suggest that there would be a need for a Sustainability Appraisal because of the changes that the plan may make to the environment, society and the local economy. However we understand that the need for a Sustainability Appraisal appears to be something that is recommended as good practice but not necessarily a legal requirement.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact Roslyn Deeming on 0300 060 1524. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

Yours sincerely

Roslyn Deeming
Land Use Adviser



ENGLISH HERITAGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Mr T Collard
Strategic Planning
Bromsgrove District Council
The Council House
Burcot Lane
Bromsgrove
Worcestershire
B60 1AA

Our ref: HD/P NHP
Your ref:
Telephone 0121 625 6851
Fax 0121 625 6820

18 March 2013

Dear Mr Collard

re: **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCREENING REQUEST-
ALVECHURCH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Thank you for your email of 12 February and the accompanying information on the emerging Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan. For the purposes of such consultations, English Heritage confines its advice to the question, "Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?" in respect of our area of concern, cultural heritage. Our comments are based on the information supplied with the screening request.

The accompanying information with the consultation included a map of the Parish, a draft schedule of objectives (as at January 2013) and an outline sustainability issues SWOT analysis.

The draft objectives indicate that the Plan will identify areas of search for new housing, direct development to existing 'ADRs' and release greenbelt land for future development. The draft objectives also indicate the creation of a business development plan for Alvechurch village centre with options for pedestrianisation and highway changes and encouragement for farm diversification. It is unclear, however, based on the information provided how such proposals may affect the historic environment and heritage assets of the Parish, as for example the Alvechurch conservation area and the extensive scheduled monument at the Bishop's Palace immediately to the east of the town.

Moreover, the draft objectives do not include any provisions for the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment and the area's heritage assets. In this context, **therefore, English Heritage considers that there is insufficient information at this stage to determine the likely impact of the Plan and any significant effects on cultural heritage.**



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

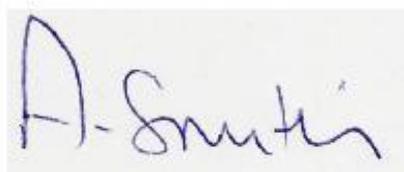
I recommend that a concise Screening Report is prepared to help inform the consultation process and the decision as to the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). A possible approach is that used by Madeley Parish Council, Telford and Wrekin Council. The consultation Screening Report outlined the emerging objectives for the Plan and the emerging development strategy. It also provided a short assessment against each of the criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive. These provide the framework for helping to determine whether there are likely to be significant effects resulting from the implementation of the Plan.

The views of the other statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for a SEA is made. If a decision is made to undertake a SEA, I would be happy to forward further advice on this. English Heritage is about to publish updated guidance on Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Historic Environment which is relevant to both local and neighbourhood planning.

With regard to general information on the preparation of neighbourhood plans, outlined in an Annex to this response is an extract of general advice English Heritage typically provides when consultation on area designations. In particular, it includes a series of signposts to further information including the relevant pages on our main website.

Please let me know if you require any further information or wish to discuss our comments in further detail at this stage.

Yours sincerely



Amanda Smith
Planner (West Midlands)
E-mail: amanda.smith@english-heritage.org.uk



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ANNEX: Neighbourhood Area Designation

Extract of general advice from English Heritage in response to Neighbourhood Area Consultations:

"We would like to take the opportunity of the consultation to outline the range of support English Heritage is able to offer in relation to Neighbourhood Plans. It would be helpful if this response can be copied to the Parish Council for their information.

Research has clearly demonstrated that local people value their heritage¹ and Neighbourhood Plans are a positive way to help communities care for and enjoy the historic environment.

English Heritage is expecting that as Neighbourhood Planning Forums come to you to seek advice on preparing Neighbourhood Plans they will value guidance on how best to understand what heritage they have, as well as assistance on preparing appropriate policies to secure the conservation and enhancement of this local heritage resource.

Information held by the Council and used in the preparation of your Local Plan is often the starting point for Neighbourhood Plans. Other useful information may be available from the Historic Environment Record Centre or local environmental and amenity groups. English Heritage also publishes a wide range of relevant guidance. Links to these can be found in the appendix to this letter.

Plan preparation also offers the opportunity to harness a community's interest in the historic environment by getting them to help add to the evidence base, perhaps by creating and or reviewing a local heritage list, inputting to the preparation of conservation area appraisals and undertaking or further deepening historic characterisation studies.

English Heritage has a statutory role in the development plan process and there is a duty on either you as the Local Planning Authority or the Neighbourhood Planning Forum to consult English Heritage on any Neighbourhood Plan where our interests are considered to be affected as well as a duty to consult us on all Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders.

English Heritage will target its limited resources efficiently. We will directly advise on proposals with the potential for major change to significant, nationally important heritage assets and their settings. Our local offices may also advise communities where they wish to engage directly with us, subject to local priorities and capacity.

English Heritage fully recognises that the neighbourhood planning process is a locally-led initiative and communities will shape their own neighbourhood plan as informed by the issues and opportunities they are most concerned about and relevant to the local area. As a national organisation we are able to draw upon our experiences of neighbourhood planning across the country and information on our website might be of initial assistance <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/get-involved/improving-your-neighbourhood/>. It is envisaged that the website will be progressively updated to share good practice in the management of the historic environment through neighbourhood planning.¹

¹ English Heritage, *Heritage Counts*, 2008



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Appendix

The National Heritage List for England: a full list with descriptions of England's listed buildings: <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk>

Heritage Gateway: includes local records of historic buildings and features www.heritagegateway.org.uk

English Heritage's Advice by topic: you can search for advice on a range of issues relating to the historic environment in the Advice section of our website

Heritage Counts: facts and figures on the historic environment <http://hc.english-heritage.org.uk>

HELM (Historic Environment Local Management) provides accessible information, training and guidance to decision makers whose actions affect the historic environment. www.helm.org.uk or www.helm.org.uk/communityplanning

Heritage at Risk programme provides a picture of the health of England's built heritage alongside advice on how best to save those sites most at risk of being lost forever. <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk>

Placecheck provides a method of taking the first steps in deciding how to improve an area. <http://www.placecheck.info/>

The Building in Context Toolkit grew out of the publication 'Building in Context' published by EH and CABE in 2001. The purpose of the publication is to stimulate a high standard of design when development takes place in historically sensitive contexts. The founding principle is that all successful design solutions depend on allowing time for a thorough site analysis and character appraisal of context. <http://building-in-context.org/toolkit.html>

Knowing Your Place deals with the incorporation of local heritage within plans that rural communities are producing. <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/knowing-your-place/>

Planning for the Environment at the Neighbourhood Level produced jointly by English Heritage, Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission gives ideas on how to improve the local environment and sources of information. <http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/PDF/GEHO0212BWAZ-E-E.pdf>

Good Practice Guide for Local Heritage Listing produced by English Heritage uses good practice to support the creation and management of local heritage lists. <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/listing/local/local-designations/local-list/>

Understanding Place series describes current approaches to and applications of historic characterisation in planning together with a series of case studies <http://www.helm.org.uk/server/show/nav.19604>



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Mr. Tim Collard
Bromsgrove District Council
Planning Policy
Burcot Lane
Bromsgrove
B60 1AA

Our ref: SV/2010/103997/OR-
06/IS1-L01
Your ref: 6/23.30
Date: 3 April 2013

Dear Mr. Collard

SEA/SA Requirement for Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for referring the above consultation, seeking our views on whether an SEA/SA is required for the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood plan. The consultation documents include the emerging objectives and strategic options of the plan along with a map outlining the designated neighbourhood area. We have reviewed the documents and have the following comments to assist:

Flood Risk

The plan area is part of the River Arrow catchment and as such all water flows through the parish to Redditch which has known flooding issues. The fluvial floodplain extents are shown on our Flood Zone Map, copy enclosed. The River Arrow is classified 'Main River' from its location to the east of Alvechurch downstream.

Any new development should be sited outside of Flood Zone 3 and 2, within Flood Zone 1 ('low probability') and should not increase flooding issues downstream in Redditch, in line with national planning guidance. As part of this surface water drainage proposals should be designed with sufficient attenuation, through sustainable drainage (SuDS) techniques, to maintain the existing pre-development greenfield runoff rate or betterment for brownfield sites. Overall, opportunities for flood risk betterment should be sought in line with the policy aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and its Technical Guidance.

In order to preserve water quality in all watercourses and to ensure that flooding problems are not created or exacerbated in any way, new drainage systems should implement SuDS techniques and be designed and installed in accordance with industry standard Ciria C697. When new development is planned it should not be sited over or close to existing culverted watercourses and the plan provides an opportunity to identify watercourse improvements, including the removal of culverts where practicable, in line with the NPPF and objectives of the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

The Neighbourhood Plan may, in certain cases, wish to promote/focus on reducing any known flooding hotspots. We would recommend that flooding is highlighted as an issue

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when the local community is engaged. All sources of flooding should be considered in producing the plan. We would recommend that you consult with the North Worcestershire Water Management Team, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, for further information on any local flooding issues and in considering all sources of flooding.

Water Quality/Ecology

Every public authority has the duty to conserve biodiversity as specified under the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006. The Neighbourhood Plan should therefore look to conserve local biodiversity assets and promote the enhancement of biodiversity in accordance with priorities specified in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).

The plan should look to identify important and designated sites for nature conservation ensuring these features are maintained and/or enhanced. Where a development has the potential to affect nationally designated sites or species Natural England should be contacted. We would expect Natural England to have been consulted on this SEA/SA screening opinion.

The Upper River Arrow catchment has several important conservation sites with the Bittell Reservoir complex forming a significant part of these sites, designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Hopwood Dingle SSSI is also located within the plan area, which is a National Trust site north-east of Bittell Reservoir.

The River Arrow in this catchment has been classed as moderate ecological status under the WFD. The main issues in this part of the catchment are:

- Nutrient enrichment from phosphate
- Excess sediment/silt
- Failing invertebrates
- Sewage pollution from septic tanks

Run-off from the adjacent land and brownfield development in the Barnt Green and Longbridge area has historically caused problems to the catchment. Phosphate levels have been an issue at Bittell Reservoir since the 1990's and the site is currently failing its SSSI status due to poor water quality and aquatic macrophytes. Bittell Reservoir is a significant source of the River Arrow and therefore any problems at this site can quickly spread further downstream. Development should consider WFD status to ensure no deterioration and to assist in achieving 'good status' by 2027 in surface waters, groundwater and protected areas, in line with the objectives of the WFD.

As part of the plan we would wish to see the river habitat corridor maintained and improved with the aim of restoring natural features alongside and within the watercourse. Where practicable, this could incorporate the removal of barriers to fish passage. River shading should be taken into consideration through tree planting along watercourses, thus helping to control water temperature as a climate change adaptation strategy. Woodland grant schemes are available. Again, the use of SuDS techniques such as the creation of retention ponds, vegetated swales, wetlands and reed beds where appropriate, will not only provide for drainage and flood storage but can create biodiversity and water quality benefits, in addition to enhancing the aesthetics and therefore improving well-being.

The north of the plan area is considered particularly sensitive, as there are numerous sites of significant ecological importance and it is used for water abstraction purposes (see groundwater vulnerability section below). Any development would need to take

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these issues into account to ensure that the plan does not put the area at risk or negatively impact its WFD status. Any work close to the Bittell reservoir complex should provide an appropriate level of surface water treatment through SuDS. Additionally, some of the area is not on a foul sewer network and sewage pollutions from septic tanks are common, particularly in the Hopwood area. Investment in first time sewerage should be discussed as an option early on with Severn Trent Water Ltd. Should non-mains drainage be required, proposals should be sustainable and appropriate in protecting the water environment.

In general, the plan should incorporate a holistic view at a local landscape level to improve, enhance and create habitat sites to make "more, bigger, better and joined" landscapes for wildlife as specified in 'Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Networks by John Lawton. Planning at this level can help to create a more resilient ecological network for the future and to prevent fragmentation of important wildlife sites and their corridors.

There is an opportunity to encourage environmentally and wildlife friendly farming practices through environmental stewardships, incorporating buffer zones, fencing to prevent livestock poaching and creating silt traps near watercourses. This will help to prevent run-off and sediments degrading the watercourses.

The plan could encourage the local community to create 'friends of' groups, to work in partnerships with the local Wildlife Trust to manage and enhance important urban green spaces as their own. These groups can apply for various community funding opportunities to enhance and improve their local green space, benefiting people and wildlife.

Groundwater Vulnerability/Contaminated Land

The area of Alvechurch Parish is predominantly green belt land and located on Mercia Mudstone, which is classed as a low sensitivity Secondary B Aquifer and not particularly vulnerable. Further west towards Bromsgrove the geology changes into Sherwood Sandstone strata, which is a Principal Aquifer and much more valuable in terms of groundwater resource. As a result, Severn Trent Water Ltd. has got public water abstractions in the area further to the west (e.g. Brockhill pumping station in Tutnall, some 3km to the south-west of Alvechurch and some boreholes at Burcott too, at some 4km westerly). Within the plan area there are groundwater Source Protection Zones (SPZs) in Hopwood for public water abstraction, categorised as Zones 1, 2 and 3, which would restrict certain activities, particularly when it comes to the Inner SPZ (1). Further guidance on activities within SPZ1 (and topics including: brownfield regeneration, cemeteries, sewage works, groundwater flooding, sustainable drainage, waste storage, fuel storage, groundwater resources, agricultural disposals, ground source heat pumps etc.) is set out in our Groundwater Protection: Principles and Practice document (GP3), available via: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/library/publications/144346.aspx>

It is essential that these principles are adhered to where relevant when it comes to detailed proposals being produced.

Also, there is useful guidance for the redevelopment of land in the form of the procedures set out in the NPPF and in CLR11 – Model Procedures for the Management of Contamination. This would include assessing the suitability of sites for redevelopment based on their environmental setting, as well as previous site history and potential for contamination to be present and the best ways to mitigate any risks to Controlled Waters shown i.e. there are a number of historic waste pits located within the plan area.

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Sustainable Development

We acknowledge the emerging objectives refer to sustainable development. Your Council's Outline Water Cycle Study (WCS) by MWH Ltd and emerging Local Plan picks up local water resource issues and the need for water efficiency as part of sustainable development. We would advise consideration of water efficiency techniques within the design of dwellings, with reference to the Code for Sustainable Homes water efficiency levels (such as level 3/4 for water of 105 litres per person per day). As part of sustainable development, we would also expect water efficiency techniques to be incorporated within the design of the commercial/employment buildings e.g. to BREEAM (BRE Environmental Assessment Method) very good standard or above, or alternatively the 'Good Practice' level of the AECB (Association for Environment Conscious Building) for non-residential development, which relates to water efficiency only.

Summary

In considering the emerging objectives and strategic options for the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan and the environmental context for the plan area, we do not consider that there would be 'significant environmental effects' as a result of the plan. The plan will need to comply with existing legislation and national policies and have regard to your Council's emerging Local Plan, which is still in draft. Notwithstanding this, the above environmental issues should be taken into consideration, along with opportunities to deliver environmental improvements through the objectives and policies of the plan.

The plan should be informed by a robust and credible evidence base to ensure that its policies and broad site allocations are justified and effective. Reference should be made to your Council's WCS work by Royal Haskoning and MWH Ltd, which may need to be updated to inform the plan.

I trust the above comments are of use at this time.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Rachel Whiteman
Senior Planning Officer

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End

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