

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan

SEA and HRA Screening Document

December 2018



LEPUS CONSULTING
LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY, PLANNING & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan

SEA and HRA Screening Document

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Acronyms

AQMA	Air Quality Management Area
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
IRZ	Impact Risk Zone
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
NCA	National Character Area
NDP	Neighbourhood Development Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
PP	Policy or Programme
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SLA	Special Landscape Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SuDS	Sustainable Urban Drainage System

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1 Introduction

1.1 This report

- 1.1.1 This screening report has been prepared to determine whether the Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011 – 2031 (NDP) should be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive) and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations).
- 1.1.2 This report screens the August 2018 Pre-Submission Consultation Version 3.0 of the Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan.

1.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 1.2.1 The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC. This was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations). Detailed guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’ (ODPM, 2005) and Paragraph 009 of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) ‘Neighbourhood Planning’ section.
- 1.2.2 Under the requirements of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004), certain types of plans that set the framework for the consent of future development projects must be subject to an environmental assessment.

1.3 The Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan

- 1.3.1 The creation of neighbourhood development plans started with the Government's Localism Act 2011. The Act set out a series of measures to shift power away from central government and towards local people. One of the Localism Act's key components is the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP); a new tier in planning policy which enables local people to shape the development of the community in which they live.
- 1.3.2 On 06 January 2013, Stratford-on-Avon District Council approved Alcester Town Council as an appropriate 'qualifying body' to submit a NDP. Stratford-on-Avon District Council also approved the NDP boundary, which is in accordance with the boundary of the Parish (see **Figure 1.1**).
- 1.3.3 The NDP offers a picture of the Parish and a vision for the 14 year period between 2017 and 2031. The NDP's core aim is to ensure that all development is sustainable and accords with the preferences of the local community.
- 1.3.4 The Alcester NDP has been developed on behalf of Alcester Town Council by residential volunteers within the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. Evidence gathering and analysis between 2015 and 2017, including public meetings, consultation workshops and planning assessments, have led to the creation of policies and the existing documentation.
- 1.3.5 The Plan must also have appropriate regard to existing policy, including:
- The National Planning Policy Framework and related Planning Practice Guidance advice; and
 - Historic environment policies for the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy as the Neighbourhood Area contains numerous features of cultural heritage importance.

1.3.6 The plan area includes the administrative areas of the Town Council including the town of Alcester, Oversley Green, Kings Coughton and Alcester Heath. The plan area does not include the Parish of Kinwarton to the east, although it does include a proportion of the housing and employment sites associated with the town. Hereafter this area is referred to as the 'Neighbourhood Area' and is shown in **Figure 1.1**. The Built-up Area boundary within the Neighbourhood Area is shown in **Figure 1.2** below.

1.3.7 A summary of the NDP's policies are listed in **Appendix A**. These are associated with the NDP's five strategic objectives as follows:

- Housing and Built Environment;
- Economy;
- Transport and Infrastructure;
- Community, Leisure and Well-being; and
- Natural Environment.

Consultation

1.3.8 The NDP is subject to public consultation, which provides an opportunity for the public and local organisations to comment on the NDP. After consultation, responses are taken into account and used to prepare a 'submission draft' of the NDP.

1.3.9 The submission version of the NDP is then subject to inspection by the Independent Examiner. If the Independent Examiner approves the NDP it will then be subject to a local referendum. If 50% or more of people voting in the referendum support the NDP, then the NDP will be adopted, will gain statutory status and will become integral to the Stratford-on-Avon District Council Local Plan.

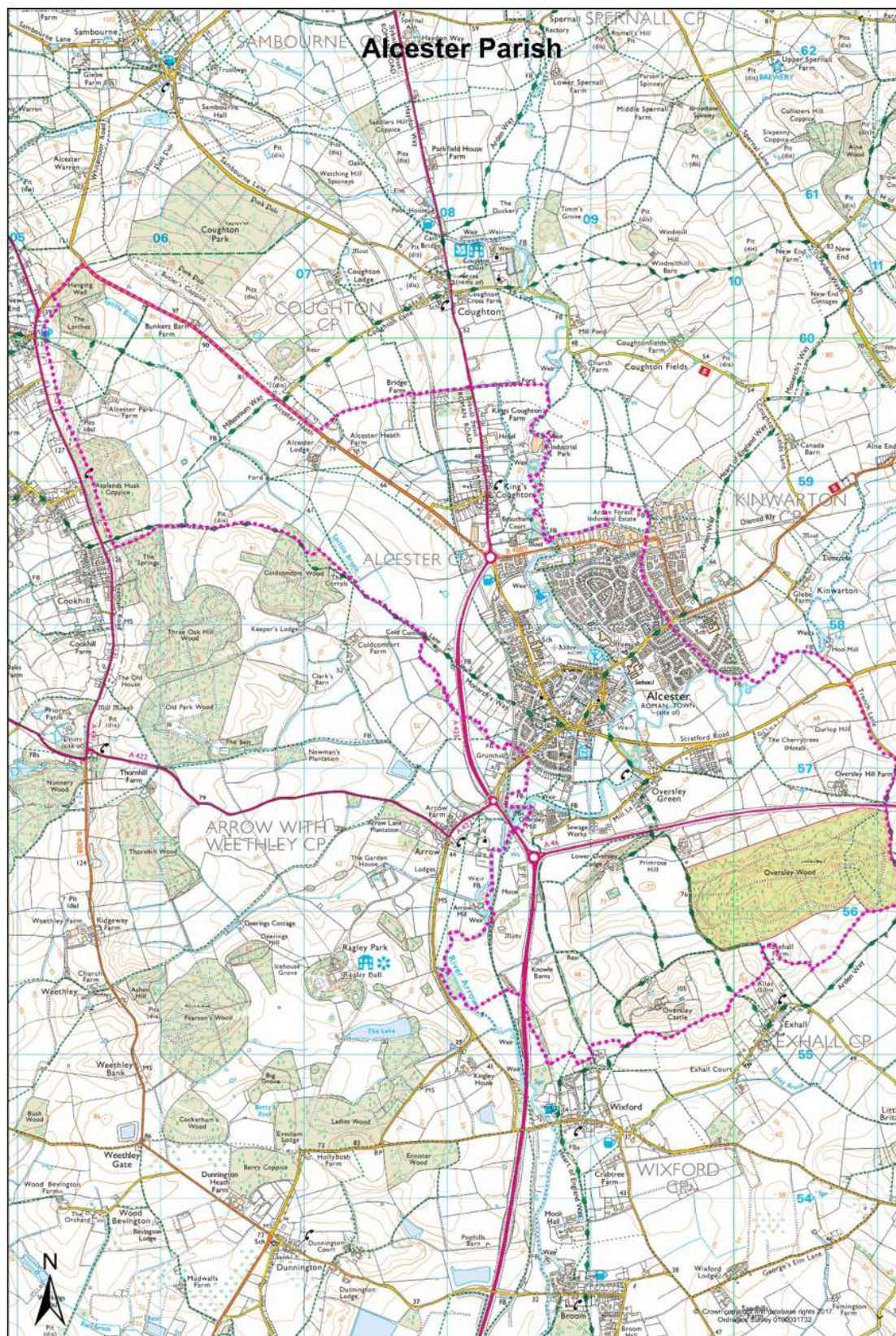


Figure 1.1: Alcester Neighbourhood Area (source: NDP)

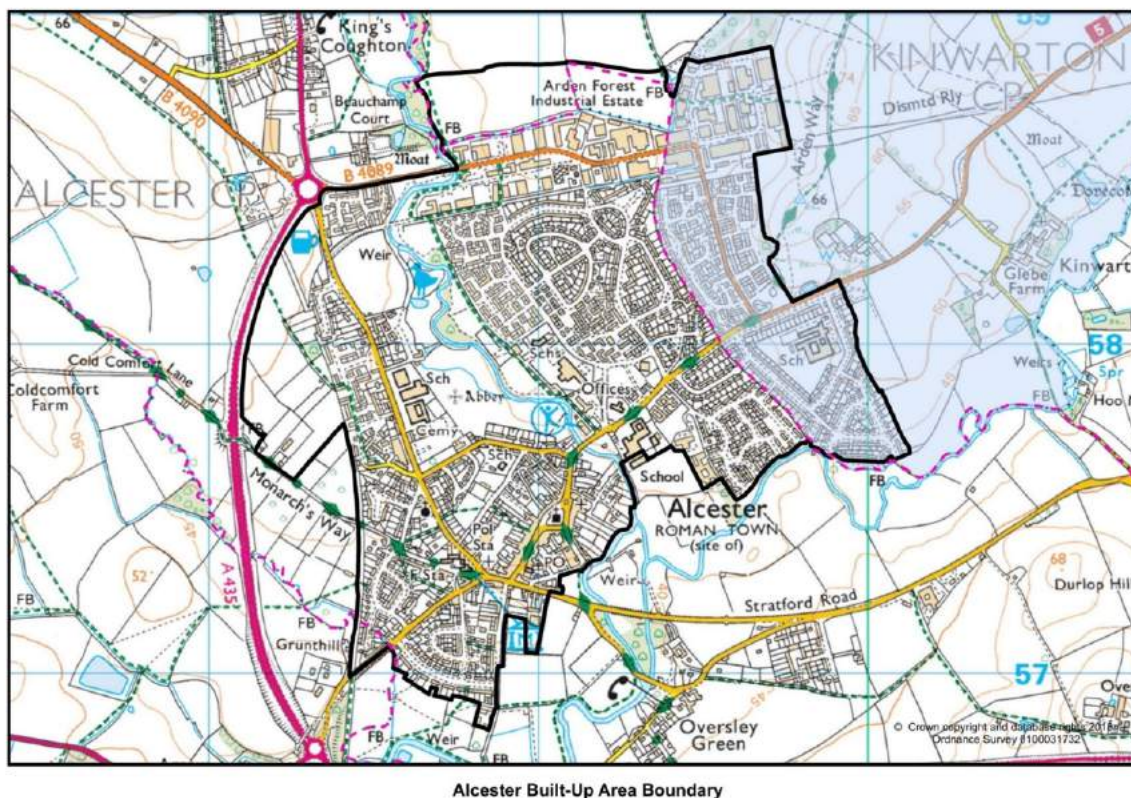


Figure 1.2: Built-up Area Boundary (source: NDP)

1.4 The Parish of Alcester

1.4.1 The town of Alcester is located in the Stratford-on-Avon District of Warwickshire, approximately 8 miles south of Redditch and approximately 8 miles west of Stratford-upon-Avon. The Parish includes the town of Alcester, Oversley Green, Kings Coughton and Alcester Heath. It is situated at the confluence of the River Arrow and the River Alne (**Figure 1.3**).

1.4.2 The Parish has a population of 6,273 and comprises of 2,916 dwellings. The long and rich history of the town of Alcester has led to its central core comprising a Conservation Area containing numerous Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments (SM) (**Figure 1.4**). The Built-up Area of the town is surrounded by Green Belt and the Arden Special Landscape Area (SLA), as set out in Policy CS.12 of the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy 2011 to 2031.

- 1.4.3 The Parish benefits from many open green spaces with a variety of wildlife and habitats and several recreational areas. Oversley Wood, an area of Ancient Woodland designated under the NPPF, is located in the south east of the Neighbourhood Area. Further areas of Ancient Woodland are located within and adjacent to the boundary as illustrated in **Figure 1.3**.
- 1.4.4 The majority of industry in the Parish is based on the well-established Arden Forest Industrial Estate which overlaps with neighbouring parishes of Kinwarton and Coughton and the high-technology innovation centre/business incubation units at Minerva Hill. The town has a diverse economy with a wide range of jobs. The 2011 National Census notes that 42% of its employed residents work within the town, with Stratford and Redditch providing other employment.
- 1.4.5 The town of Alcester provides a range of services including three secondary schools, two primary schools, a library, healthcare facilities, a fire station and a leisure centre (Greig Lifestyles). In addition it has an extensive network of footpaths and cycle ways which link up with national cycle and walking routes.

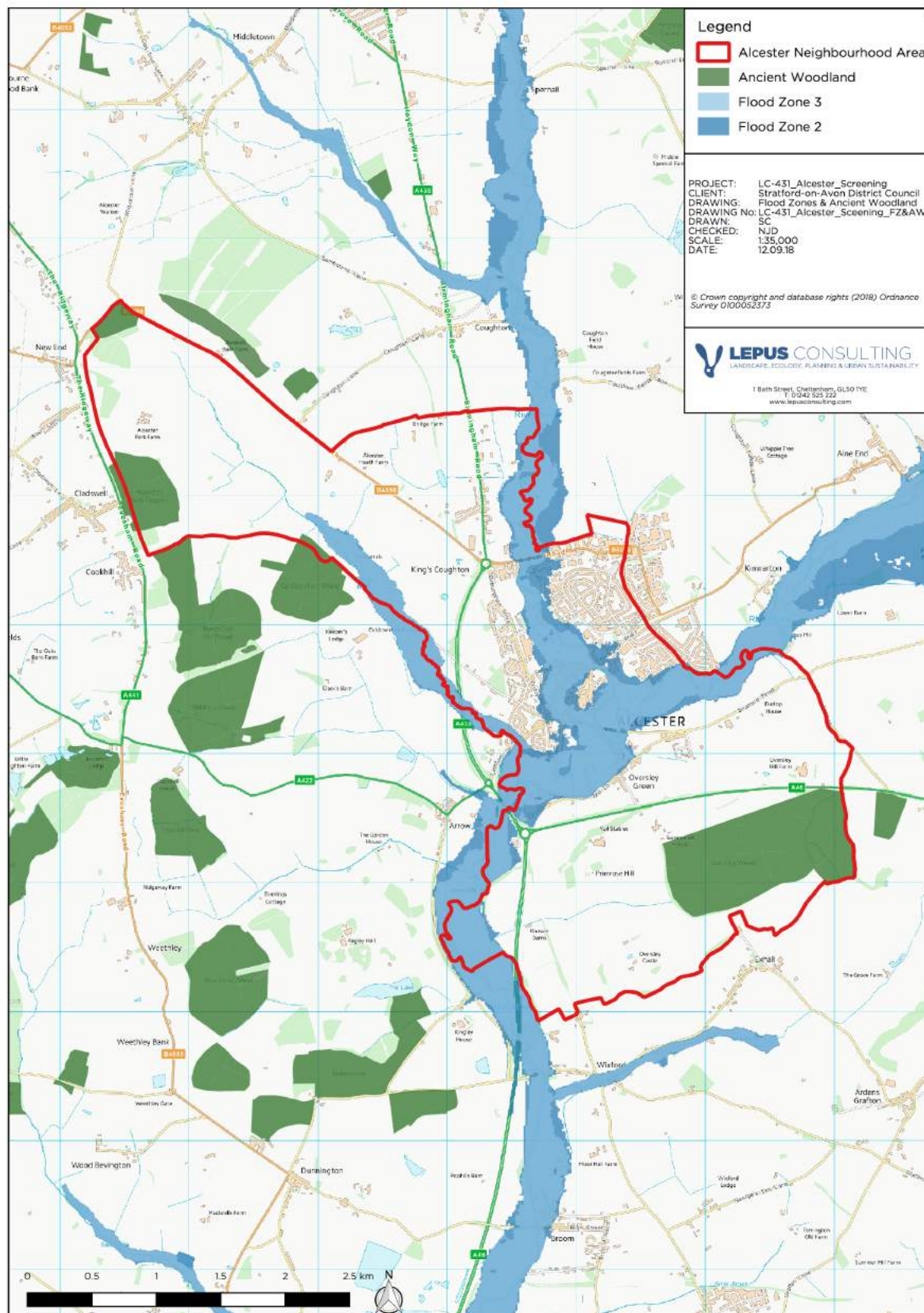
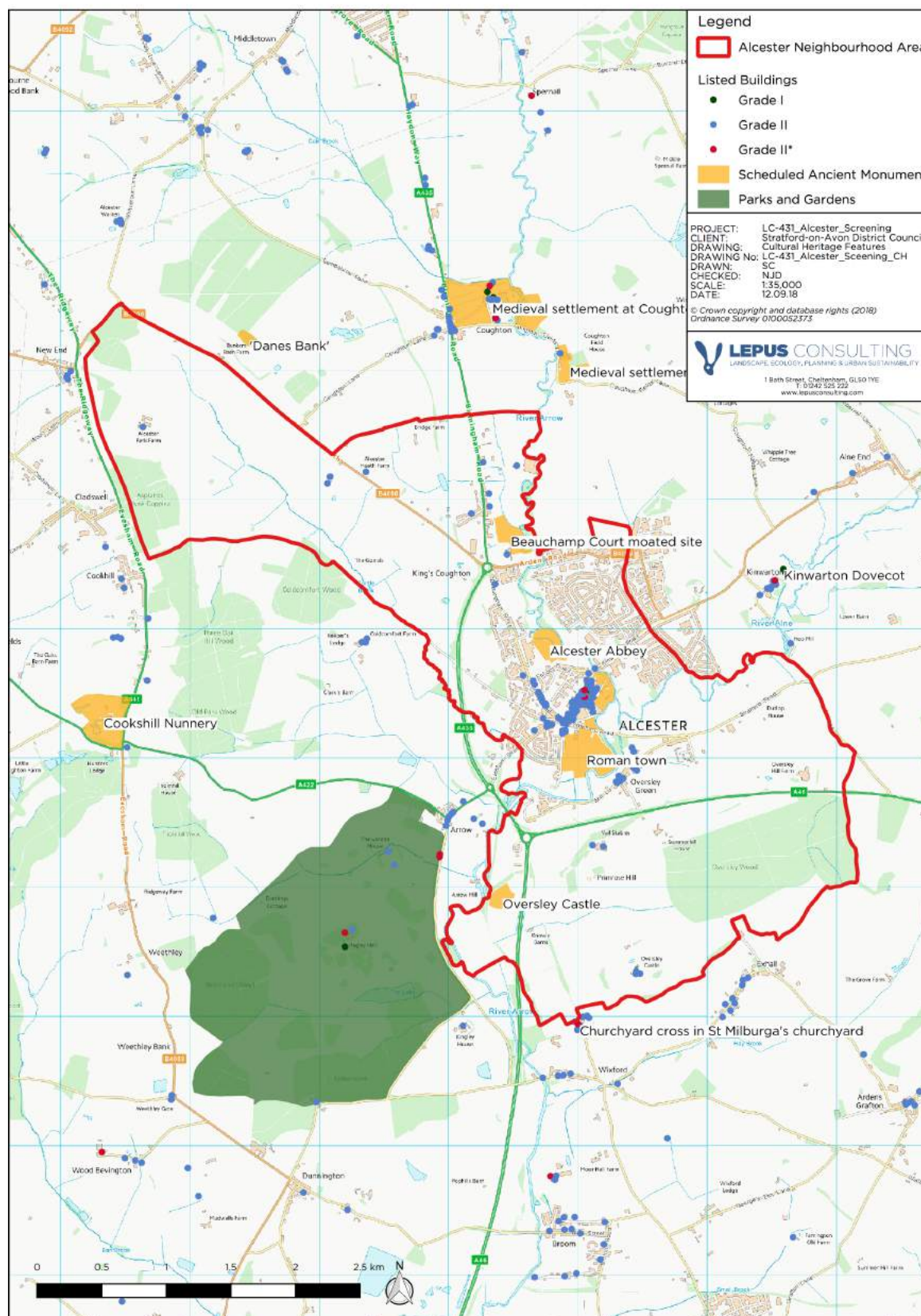


Figure 1.3: Ancient Woodland and Flood Zones in and around the Alcester Neighbourhood Area Boundary



1.5 Relationship with the Core Strategy

1.5.1 The NDP is a land-use plan, prepared for town and country planning purposes. It sets out a framework for future development consents within the Alcester Parish. As noted above once adopted, the NDP will form part of the framework for planning in Stratford-on-Avon district, along with the Core Strategy and other development plan documents and supplementary planning documents.

1.5.2 The NDP sets out a series of policies that, once made, will be used to guide development and help to determine future planning applications. This important legal position means that it has to regard national planning policy and to be in 'general conformity' with the strategic planning policies set out in the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy 2011-2031.

1.5.3 NDPs are smaller in geographic scale than Core Strategies and Local Plans, and serve to add further detailed policies and proposals to these documents. The Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan and the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy will form part of the development plan for the area once the NDP is 'made'.

1.6 Assumptions

1.6.1 For the purposes of this screening assessment a number of assumptions have been made as follows.

1.6.2 The NDP identifies two strategic housing allocations at Allimore Lane and an employment expansion site at Arden Forest Industrial Estate. At the time of writing each of these sites had received outline planning permission. As such, these sites lie outside the NDP forward planning process. These sites were included in the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy and based on this information they have not been considered further throughout this report.

1.6.3 The NDP refers loosely to some small parcels of land on either side of Allimore Lane which it considers might be suitable for future housing development. These sites have not been allocated in the NDP and have therefore not been considered further throughout this report.

- 1.6.4 The NDP identifies a number of projects which it notes are not part of the plan. These projects have therefore not been considered further within this report.
- 1.6.5 Should the NDP be further developed in the future a re-screening of any amendments would need to be undertaken for the purposes of the SEA and HRA screening processes.

2 The Screening Process

2.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment screening

2.1.1 SEA seeks to ensure that environmental considerations are part of the process of preparing certain plans and programmes. The objective of the Directive 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 the Directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

2.1.2 The process for determining whether or not an SEA is required is called screening. In order to screen, it is necessary to determine if a plan will have significant environmental effects using the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive and Schedule I of the SEA Regulations. A determination cannot be made until the three statutory consultation bodies have been consulted: the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England.

2.1.3 Within 28 days of its determination, the local planning authority, by virtue of its legal responsibility for NDPs, must publish a statement, setting out its decision. If they determine that an SEA is not required, the statement must include the reasons for this.

2.2 The screening process

2.2.1 The Localism Act requires NDPs to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted development plan for the local area. In this instance, the NDP must be in general conformity with the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy 2011-2031.

2.2.2 Paragraph 009 of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) 'Neighbourhood Planning' section states:

'Where a neighbourhood plan is brought forward before an up-to-date Local Plan is in place the qualifying body and the local planning authority should discuss and aim to agree the relationship between policies in:

- *the emerging neighbourhood plan*
- *the emerging Local Plan*
- *the adopted development plan*

with appropriate regard to national policy and guidance’.

2.2.3 **Figure 2.1** presents a diagram prepared by the ODPM (2005). This shows the application of the SEA process to plans and programmes. The sequential approach in the flow diagram can be used to screen the Alcester NDP.

2.2.4 **Table 2.1** uses the questions presented in **Figure 2.1** to establish whether there is a need for SEA for the Alcester NDP.

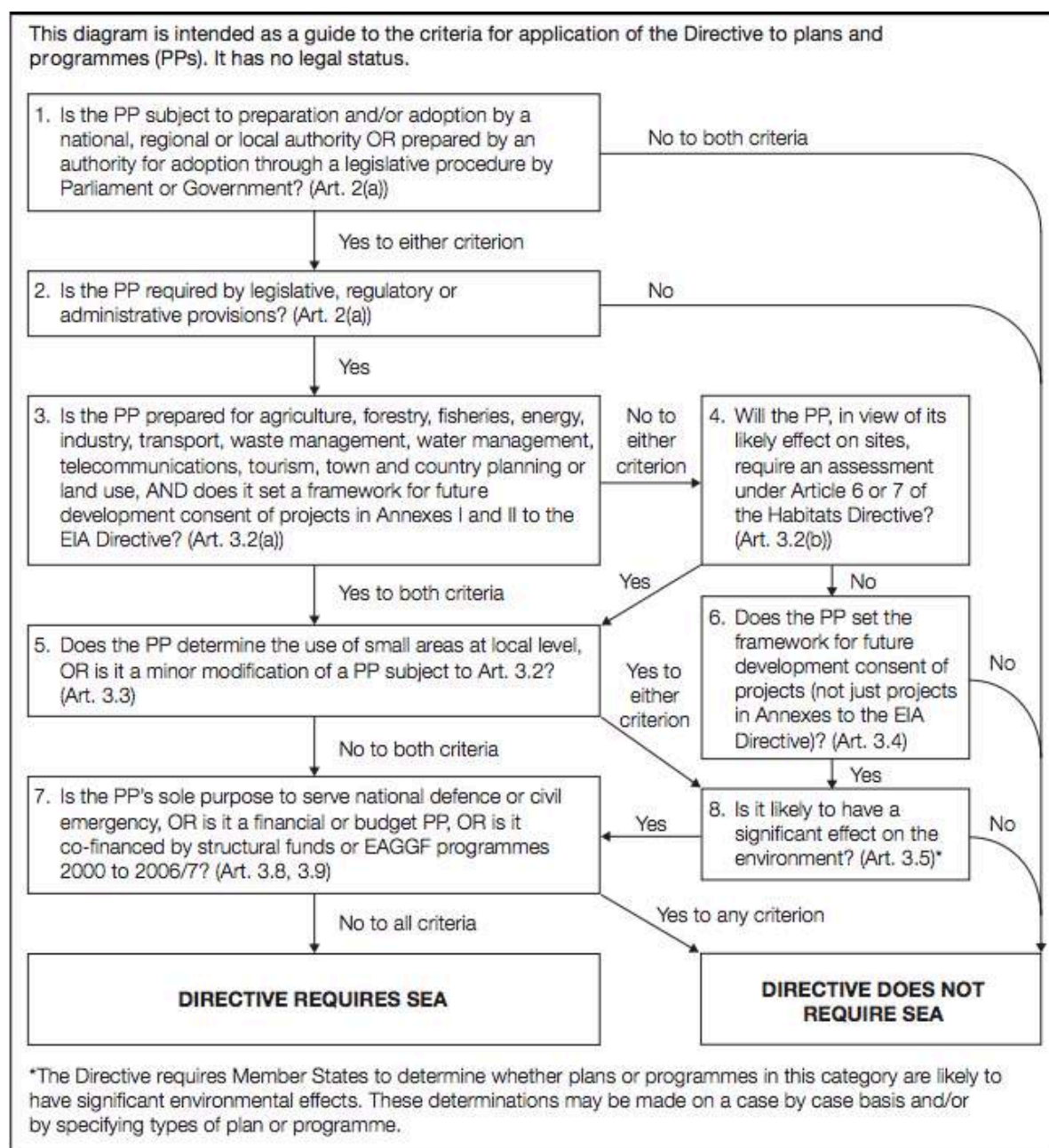


Figure 2.1: Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes¹.

¹ODPM (2005) A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive

Table 2.1: Establishing whether there is a need for SEA

Stage	Y/N	Reason
Is the PP (plan or programme) subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	The plan constitutes an NDP, which will be subject to independent examination and brought into legal force if it receives 50% or more affirmative votes at referendum. The NDP would form part of the statutory development plan for Stratford-on-Avon.
Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	No	Communities and neighbourhoods have a right to produce an NDP, however it is not required by legislative, regulatory or administrative bodies. If the NDP is adopted it would become part of the statutory development plan, meaning it should continue to be screened under the SEA Directive.
Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	No	The NDP is a land-use plan and sets the framework for future development consents within the Alcester Neighbourhood Area. However, the NDP is unlikely to set a framework for consent of projects in Annex 1 of the EIA Directive.
Will the PP, 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 Chapter 3
Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Yes	The NDP does set the framework for future development consent of projects.
Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	No	See Section 2.5 – 2.12 and Chapter 4
Is the PP's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGD programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)	No	Not applicable.

2.3 Relevance to the SEA Directive

- 2.3.1 Question 8 within the ODPM guidance (see **Figure 2.1**) refers to whether the NDP would have a significant effect on the environment. The criteria from Annex II of the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004) can be used to consider the relevance of the plan to the SEA Directive. **Sections 2.5 - 2.12** consider the likely environmental effects of the plan.

Table 2.2: Alcester NDP and the SEA Directive

Criteria (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule I of Regulations)	Response
The characteristics of plans and programmes	
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	The NDP is prepared for town and country planning and will form a part of the development management framework for Alcester Parish.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	The NDP must be in general conformity with the strategic planning policies set out in the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	The NDP contains policies to protect the natural environment, such as the Natural Environment Strategic Objectives (NE1-6). There are also objectives to promote heritage and archaeological assets (HBE12), local green spaces (NE3), and general environmental sustainability.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	No environmental issues were identified relevant to the plan.
(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 NDP is a land use plan and sets the framework for future development consents within the Alcester NDP area. It also sets out policies which planning applications within the NDP area will need to adhere to.
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected	
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	The NDP is not expected to result in any significant environmental effects.

(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	The NDP is not considered to have any cumulative effects and is not thought to contribute to cumulative impacts in combination with the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects	The NDP is not expected to give rise to any significant transboundary environmental effects.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	There are no anticipated risks of the NDP on human health.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The NDP is unlikely to result in any significant or adverse environmental effects. It is likely that some policies will help preserve and enhance environmental features within the Neighbourhood Area.
(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 (iii) intensive land-use	It is considered to be unlikely that the NDP would adversely impact the special natural characteristics or cultural heritage features within the Neighbourhood Area. The NDP would not be expected to cause exceedances of environmental standards or lead to intensive land use.
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	The NDP is unlikely to result in any adverse impacts on protected landscapes.

2.4 Determination of likely significant effects

2.4.1 It is not the purpose of a screening report to appraise policies, the Environmental Report element of the SEA process would deliver this function. Screening is undertaken at the beginning of the plan making process so that the SEA can influence from the start rather than from a perspective of retro-fitting or halfway through a process.

2.4.2 A summary of baseline conditions and an assessment of the potential effects of the NDP against each of the topics set out in Annex I (f) of the SEA Directive is presented in the following sections. The NDP policies are set out in **Appendix A**.

2.5 Biodiversity, flora and fauna

- 2.5.1 There are no European protected sites (Ramsar, Special Protection Areas (SPA) or Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)) located within the Neighbourhood Area. The nearest Natura 2000 sites are Bredon Hill SAC, located approximately 17.5km south west and Lyppard Grange Ponds SAC which is located approximately 18km west.
- 2.5.2 The closest nationally designated sites include Aston Grove and Withycombe Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Rough Hill and Wirehill Woods SSSI and Bannam's Wood SSSI which are located approximately 2.5km east, 3.2km north and 4.9km north respectively from the Neighbourhood Area. Due to the distance of these sites from the plan boundary and the nature of the policies proposed in the NDP, under the Strategic Objective – Natural Environment, it is unlikely that there will be any adverse impact on these SSSIs.
- 2.5.3 A number of Ancient Woodlands are located within and immediately adjacent to the plan boundary as illustrated in **Figure 1.3**. Those within the boundary include Oversley Wood to the south, Cold Comfort Wood and Asplands Husks Copice to the west and Hanging Well to the north. It is unlikely that the NDP will adversely impact these stands of Ancient Woodland due to their location in relation to the Built-up Area boundary (see **Figure 1.2**) and the policies set out under the Natural Environment Strategic Objective which aim to protect local green space.
- 2.5.4 The Warwickshire Wildlife Trust has designated Alcester as a 'Living Landscape' due to its mosaic of open green spaces and river corridors. The River Arrow Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is located within the plan area, covers 2.96 hectares and is managed by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Policy NE.4 aims to safeguard existing rivers, streams and ponds within and adjacent to development sites in order to restrict adverse effects. It is likely that the NDP will positively impact this locally designated site.

2.5.5 Priority Habitats² in the Neighbourhood Area comprise floodplain grazing marsh, good quality semi-improved grassland, deciduous woodland, traditional orchard and woodland pasture and parkland. Priority Species identified, include brown hairstreak butterfly (*Thecla betulae*), curlew (*Numenius*) and lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*). In addition bat (unknown species) and great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) records have been submitted for the area³. The Natural Environment Strategic Objective proposes numerous policies which aim to minimise impacts upon and provide net gains for wildlife and habitats found within Alcester Neighbourhood Area. These policies include NE.1 which seeks to protect mature healthy trees and hedges, Policy NE.2 which aims to enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains and Policy NE.3 which aims to protect local green spaces including the River Arrow Nature Resesrve, Oversley Wood, cemeteries, green spaces, parks, play areas and allotments. These policies are likely to result in positive impacts for biodiversity, flora and fauna.

2.5.6 Overall, it is anticipated the NDP will help protect and enhance biodiversity, flora and fauna in the Neighbourhood Area. A significant adverse impact is not considered likely.

2.6 Population and human health

2.6.1 Within the Parish there are a range of facilities that the community has access to including two GP surgeries based at the Alcester Primary Care Centre, two pharmacies, a library and a range of organisation and groups running regular activities throughout the year. There is also a Youth Club that regularly meets. In addition there are meeting facilities at Jubilee Centre, Church House, the Town Hall, library and also the Roman Museum. Greig Lifestyles provides the town's leisure facility with a sports hall, courts and gym.

2.6.2 There are variety of shops and local services within the town itself. In addition there is a supermarket, several public houses and cafes. To the north-east of the town centre there is a small group of shops called Hopkins Precinct which serves residents living in the local area.

² Priority Habitats and Species are specified in England by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

³ Magic www.magic.defra.gov.uk. Sourced 11.09.18.

- 2.6.3 The Town has four allotment sites, outdoor children's play equipment provided at the town's parks and a multi-use games area, skate park and adult exercise equipment located at the Jubilee Centre.
- 2.6.4 As noted in **Section 2.5** above there are a many green spaces in the plan boundary including the river corridor which provide a valuable community resource. **Figure 2.2** illustrates the location of Local Green Spaces within the Parish.
- 2.6.5 There are three secondary schools (including Alcester Grammar School), two primary schools and four preschools within Alcester.
- 2.6.6 Although there is a good provision of community facilities in the Parish the NDP notes that the quality and range of community facilities could be improved and protected. In addition it is noted that the town's facilities support people from smaller villages within the surrounding local area. This combined with recent development in Kinwarton Parish to the north of the town, and development proposed for Alcester within the Core Strategy, are likely to increase pressure on the town's resources and facilities. Although Alcester supports a range of shops its catchment is relatively small with people travelling to the larger centres of Stratford-upon-Avon, Redditch and Evesham to access services.
- 2.6.7 As such Policy CLW.1 encourages the improvement of current community facilities and resists the loss of existing facilities. Other policies set out under the Community, Leisure and Well-being Strategic Objective which aim to promote community well-being include the following:
- CLW.2 – Enhancing access and utilization of open green spaces;
 - CLW.3 – Health provision;
 - CLW.4 – Allotment and growing spaces; and
 - CLW.5 – Reducing levels of air, noise, water and light pollution.
- 2.6.8 In terms of educational facilities Policies EC.6 and EC.7 aims to support the provision of education, childcare facilities and further education training within the Built-up Area Boundary. This is likely to positively impact the future education provision in the Parish.

- 2.6.9 The Housing and Built Environment Strategic Objective, Objective A, aims to ensure that a range of housing is provided within the Built-up Area for the whole community to meet local housing needs which meets social requirements, supports infrastructure and facilities and protects and enhances the character of the town and surrounding. **Figure 1.2** illustrates the extent of the Built-up Area boundary for the NDP. Policy HBE.1 notes that new housing development (either by means of infill or new build, converting, extending, and or redeveloping) will be supported providing other policies in the NDP are satisfied.
- 2.6.10 Policy HBE.5 seeks to protect occupant health and the wider environment which would result in positive impacts for the local community.
- 2.6.11 In terms of employment provision, alongside the town centre, employment is also supported at Arden Forest Industrial Estate (which overlaps with the neighbouring parishes of Kinwarton and Coughton) and the Minerva Mill Business Centre (a high-technology innovation centre / business incubation units).
- 2.6.12 The Economy Strategic Objective aims to promote and protect economic activity and job opportunities within the Parish to maintain viability. In addition the Sub-Objective C (Promoting Tourism) will support developments which boost local tourism providing further benefits for the local economy.
- 2.6.13 Overall, it is anticipated that the policies set out in the NDP will provide benefits to people in the Neighbourhood Area and improve their health. A significant adverse impact is not considered likely.

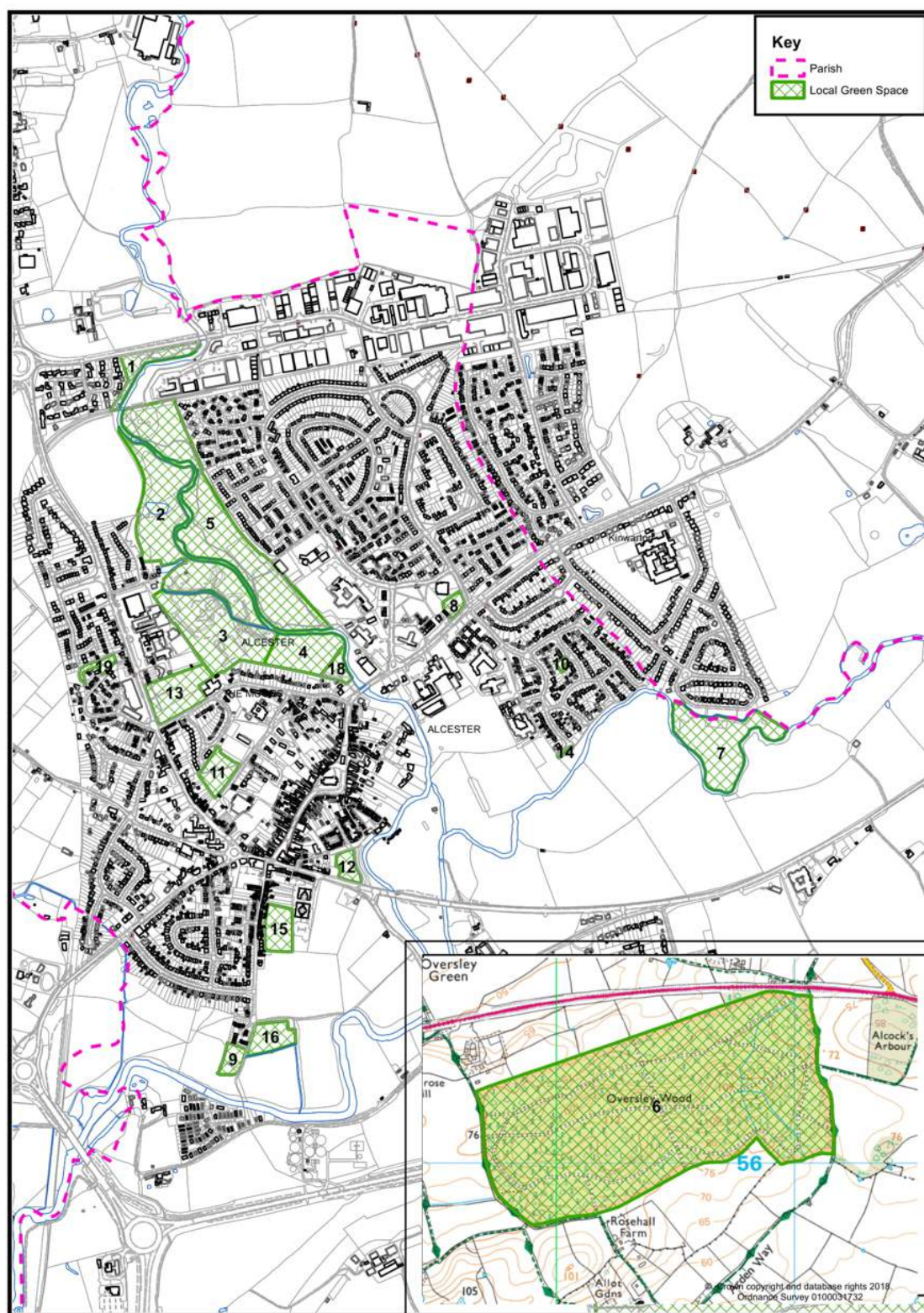


Figure 2.2: Designated Local Green Spaces in Alcester Neighbourhood Area Boundary (source: NDP)

2.7 Transport and accessibility

- 2.7.1 Whilst not an Annex 1(f) topic in itself, transport and accessibility interacts with a number of the topics such as population and human health, material assets and climatic factors.
- 2.7.2 It is approximately 1000m from the edge of the Built-up Area Boundary to the centre of Alcester town. This equates to a walking time of approximately 12 minutes. Although it varies on the person and the destination, it is likely that people will make 50+% of trips on foot at this distance⁴. It is likely that development at the edges of the Built-up Area Boundary would not be within walking distance to the central village services for all residents.
- 2.7.3 The A46 and A435 major trunk roads run close to the Built-up Area boundary. The NDP recognises the need to ensure that new housing is appropriately located in order to avoid the exposure of residents to high levels of air or noise pollution associated with these sources. The Transport and Infrastructure Strategic Objective sets out policies (Policy TI.1) which aim to reduce reliance on the car, improving movement around the Parish and thereby improving the overall quality of the local environment.
- 2.7.4 Another key issue associated with travel in Alcester is concerned with the effects of vehicular traffic. These issues include visual intrusion, congestion of on street parking and safety in terms of walking and cycling. Policy TI.1 seeks to ensure that new development includes connections and improvements to existing walking and cycling networks, aims to encourage a modal shift to public transport and provides bike storage.
- 2.7.5 Alcester town centre provides a range of services and facilities however the nearest larger shopping centre is approximately 8 miles to the east in Stratford-upon-Avon. There are a number of bus stops within Alcester itself with an hourly bus route serving Stratford-upon-Avon and Redditch with other services connecting to Evesham and Worcester.

⁴ Barton, H; Grant, M and Guise, R (2010). Shaping Neighbourhoods: For Local Health and Global Sustainability. Second Edition. Routledge.

- 2.7.6 There are four train stations within 10 miles of Alcester including; Wootton Wawen (6 miles), Wilmcote (7 miles), Stratford upon Avon (8 miles) and Redditch (9 miles), the latter three also being linked to Alcester via a bus service.
- 2.7.7 Approximately 38% of households in the Parish have two or more cars. This combined with visiting tourists and the towns draw as a small service centre has resulted in congestion and on-street parking becoming an issue, in particular within Alcester itself. Traffic volume is increased in particularly during the school run period. Congestion in the town is expected to be having adverse impacts on human health due to air pollution, whilst increasing the local area's contribution towards the causes of climate change. On street parking visually detracts from cultural heritage assets such as Listed Buildings.
- 2.7.8 Policy TI.1 notes that new development should ensure linkages with and provision for pedestrian, cycling and bus routes to encourage a modal shift from car use. It also encourages the use of screening, landscaping and planting of routes to ensure no visual impacts. Finally Policy HBE.7 promotes the use of electric car charging points within new dwellings to encourage the uptake of low emission vehicles.
- 2.7.9 In conclusion the NDP would be unlikely to have negative impacts on transport and accessibility.

2.8 Soil, water and air

- 2.8.1 The Parish covers predominantly Agricultural Land Class (ALC) Grade 3 (good to moderate quality) agricultural land, but also areas of Grade 4 (poor quality) agricultural land. Policy HBE.1, HBE.2, HBE.4, EC.1, EC.3, and EC.5 promote development within the town centre and built-up area boundary (**Figure 2.2**) which is anticipated to help minimise soil resource loss. Any development on ALC Grade 3 land would be an adverse impact on the local extent of versatile soils.
- 2.8.2 There are no local Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) located within the Parish. However, as noted above in **Section 2.7** there are 2 major trunk roads running close to the Built-up Area boundary – the A46 and A435. Noise pollution and air quality associated with these routes and impacts on existing and proposed receptors will be managed through adoption of The Transport and Infrastructure Strategic Objective and Policy TI.1 specifically.

- 2.8.3 Alcester is situated at the confluence of the River Arrow and smaller River Alne. The Spittle Brook also runs through the western area of the Neighbourhood Area. According to the Environment Agency's flood mapping, areas along these watercourses and within the Built-up Area itself are prone to surface water flooding. In addition areas along all three watercourses are at risk of fluvial flooding being within Zone 3 and Zone 2 flood risk areas.
- 2.8.4 Policy NE.6 aims to ensure new development will not increase the flood risk to current residents and states that site-specific flood risk assessments should be prepared and the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) be incorporated into any new development to control on-site run-off. The policy confirms that any proposals that do not address issues with fluvial or surface water flooding will not be supported.
- 2.8.5 It is considered unlikely that there will be any significant adverse impacts on soil, air or water resources of the Neighbourhood Area as a result of the NDP. This is because policies seek to safeguard and enhance this environment promoting measures to mitigate impacts where necessary.

2.9 Climatic factors

- 2.9.1 Policy HBE.8 aims to support renewable technologies in new developments such as biomass, ground source heating, air source heating, hydroelectric, wind and thermal capture.
- 2.9.2 Policy CLW.2 looks at the protection and enhancement of local green spaces, which may result in benefits that can help climate change adaptation, such as carbon dioxide uptake and storage.
- 2.9.3 Alcester offers a number of sustainable transport options (bus service, walking and cycling provisions), although access to these service could be improved as reliance on the car is still high. Policy TI.1 seeks to ensure that connections with these sustainable alternatives are available to encourage a modal shift. It is anticipated that this will contribute towards ensuring there is not an increase in greenhouse gas emissions.
- 2.9.4 The NDP does not include any site allocations. This in combination with the above policy provisions mean that significant adverse impacts on climate change are unlikely.

2.10 Material assets

- 2.10.1 The material assets topic considers social, physical and environmental infrastructure. This sub-section should be read alongside 'Population and human health', which details some health and social infrastructure implications of the NDP; 'Climatic factors', which considers transport infrastructure in terms of sustainable transport; 'Soil, water and air', which considers water infrastructure and agricultural land classification; and the 'Biodiversity, flora and fauna' sub-section, which considers environmental infrastructure.
- 2.10.2 Strategic Objective 'Transport and Infrastructure' and specially Objective B aims to ensure that businesses, residents and visitors can benefit from the most up to date technologies in terms of telecommunications and high speed broadband. This will provide benefits to residents choosing to work from home as well as local businesses. These policies would also help reduce the number of residents outward-commuting and therefore reduce the quantity of private car journeys.
- 2.10.3 It is considered unlikely that the NDP will have significant adverse impacts on material assets within the Neighbourhood Area.

2.11 Cultural heritage (including architectural and archaeological features)

- 2.11.1 The central core of Alcester comprises a Conservation Area containing numerous listed buildings. In addition a number of Scheduled Monuments lie within the Parish including Alcester Roman Town, Alcester Abbey, Beauchamp Court Moated Site and Oversley Castle.
- 2.11.2 Policy HBE.12 states that "*any development within or adjacent to the Conservation Area and/or affecting a heritage asset or within the setting of a heritage asset will only be supported if it conserves or enhances the Conservation Area or heritage asset*".
- 2.11.3 Areas within the central core of Alcester are located within a Conservation Area and an area of high archaeological sensitivity. Policy HBE.12 will therefore help to ensure these assets are conserved for future benefit. In addition Policies HBE.9 and HBE.10 aim to ensure that all design is in keeping with the character of the town and will preserve the town's heritage assets.

2.11.4 In line with the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy (Policy C.8), *“where proposals will affect a heritage asset, applicants will be required to undertake and provide an assessment of the significance of the asset using a proportionate level of detail relating to the likely impact the proposal will have on the asset’s historic interest”*.

2.11.5 The NDP does not include any allocations. Taking into consideration this and those policies noted above it is concluded that the NDP will not have a significant adverse impact on features of cultural heritage importance.

2.12 Landscape

2.12.1 The Neighbourhood Area is not located within or adjacent to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is located within the Arden National Character Areas (NCA). Arden is characterised by farmland and former wood-pasture lying to the south and east of the Birmingham, including part of the West Midlands conurbation.

2.12.2 Alcester town is surrounded by a Special Landscape Area (SLA) as identified in the Stratford-on-Avon Special Landscape Study (2012) and as set out in the Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy. These are defined as areas with special District level importance in terms of their landscape value. In 2008 a Conservation Area Character Appraisal was undertaken for Alcester which identified a number of ‘important views’. These are detailed in the NDP. The Built-up Area is also surrounded by Green Belt designation.

2.12.3 Policy NE.5 aims to conserve valued landscapes and important views from any significant adverse impact resulting from any new development. In addition and as noted above, Policies HBE.9, HBE.10 and HBE.11 all aim to ensure that the design of development is in keeping with the character of the town.

2.12.4 The NDP is not proposing any development through specific site allocations. Taking this into consideration alongside those policies noted above it is concluded that the NDP will not have a significant adverse impact on landscape.

3 HRA Screening Process

3.1 Habitats Regulations Assessment screening

3.1.1 HRA screening is a requirement of Regulation 102 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010⁵.

3.1.2 HRA considers the potential adverse impacts of plans and projects on designated Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), classified Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and listed Ramsar sites. This is in accordance with the Habitats Directive⁶ and the Birds Directive⁷. SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

3.1.3 Should a development, plan or project be considered likely to have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 site, the HRA proceeds to an Appropriate Assessment. If likely significant effects cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated to the extent that the conservation status of the EU site will not be undermined, the HRA proceeds to Imperative Reasons of Overriding Interest (IROPI).

3.2 Determination of likely significant effects

3.2.1 The nearest Natura 2000 sites to Alcester Parish are Bredon Hill SAC, located approximately 17.5km south west and Lyppard Grange Ponds SAC which is located approximately 18km west. Due to this distance and the nature of the policies contained within the NDP there is unlikely to be any impact on the SAC. Based on the available information, a significant impact of the NDP on any Natura 2000 site can therefore be objectively ruled out at this stage.

⁵ Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/490/regulation/102/made>

⁶ EU Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

⁷ EU Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of wild birds

4 Conclusions

4.1 SEA Screening outcome

4.1.1 This screening report has explored the potential effects of the proposed Alcester NDP with a view to determining whether an environmental assessment is required under the SEA Directive.

4.1.2 In accordance with topics cited in Annex 1(f) of the SEA directive, significant effects on the environment are considered to be unlikely to occur as a result of the NDP.

4.1.3 It is recommended that the Alcester NDP should not be screened into the SEA process.

4.2 HRA Screening outcome

4.2.1 This screening report has explored the potential effects of the proposed Alcester NDP with a view to determining whether a habitats regulations assessment is required.

4.2.2 It is recommended that the Alcester NDP should not be screened into the HRA process.

4.3 Consultation

4.3.1 This report has been subject to consultations with Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England. Their comments are presented in **Appendix B**.

Appendix A: Alcester NDP Policies

Strategic Objective		Policy Code	Policy Name
Housing and Built Environment	Objective A – Provision of a range of housing types to meet community needs, whilst protecting the town’s character.	HBE.1	Residential Development within the Built-up Area Boundary
		HBE.2	Local Needs Housing
		HBE.3	Housing Mix
		HBE.4	Bungalows
		HBE.5	Healthy Living
		HBE.6	Specialist Provision
		HBE.7	Electric Car Charging Points
		HBE.8	Renewable Energy
	Objective B – To safeguard the quality of the built environment and heritage assets.	HBE.9	Development Design
		HBE.10	Responding to Local Character
		HBE.11	Space Between Buildings, Signage, Lighting, Street Furniture.
		HBE.12	Heritage Assets
Economy	Objective A – Promoting and protecting economic activity and job opportunities	EC.1	Development within the Town Centre
		EC.2	Supporting Employment on Brownfield Sites
		EC.3	Supporting Business Start Up
		EC.4	Employment Land Change of Use
		EC.5	Support for Commercial Development
	Objective B – Supporting Education	EC.6	Education and Childcare Provision
		EC.7	Further Education Support
	Objective C – Promoting Tourism	EC.10	Support for New or Improved Tourist Attractions and Accommodation
Transport and Infrastructure	Objective A – Accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and disabled persons	TI.1	New Development and Connectivity
	Objective B – Access to the latest communication technologies	TI.2	Telecommunications
		TI.3	High Speed Broadband
Community, Leisure and Well-being	Objective A – Promoting and enhancing community and leisure facilities	CLW.1	Community and Leisure Facilities Development

Strategic Objective		Policy Code	Policy Name
	Objective B – Maximising use of our green spaces	CLW.2	Enhancing Access and Utilisation of Open Green Spaces
	Objective C – Promoting and active and healthy community	CLW.3	Health Provision
		CLW.4	Allotments and Growing Spaces
		CLW.5	Reducing Levels of Air, Noise, Water and Light Pollution
Natural Environment	Objective A – Protecting the green landscape, green spaces, rivers and biodiversity	NE.1	Trees, Hedges and Landscaping
		NE.2	Biodiversity
		NE.3	Local Green Spaces
		NE.4	Safeguarding Rivers and Ponds
		NE.5	Protecting Valued Landscapes and Views
	Objective B – Improve and maintain flood resilience	NE.6	Mitigating and Preventing Increased Flood Risk

Appendix B: Consultation Responses

Date: 24 October 2018
Our ref: 262063
Your ref: Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan



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BY EMAIL ONLY

Samantha.Cheater@Lepusconsulting.com

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Ms Cheater

Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan - Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 1st October 2018 which was received by Natural England on the same date.

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

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment

It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests are concerned (including but not limited to statutory designated sites, landscapes and protected species, geology and soils) are concerned, that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan.

Neighbourhood Plan

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans in light of the SEA Directive is contained within the [National Planning Practice Guidance](#). The guidance highlights three triggers that may require the production of an SEA, for instance where:

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

We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.

We are not aware of significant populations of protected species which are likely to be affected by the policies / proposals within the plan. It remains the case, however, that the responsible authority should provide information supporting this screening decision, sufficient to assess whether protected species are likely to be affected.

Notwithstanding this advice, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all potential environmental assets. As a result the responsible authority should raise environmental issues that we have not identified on local or national biodiversity action plan species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites or local landscape character, with its own ecological and/or landscape advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local landscape and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by this plan, before determining whether an SA/SEA is necessary.

Please note that Natural England reserves the right to provide further comments on the environmental assessment of the plan beyond this SEA/SA screening stage, should the responsible authority seek our views on the scoping or environmental report stages. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make.

For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Victoria Kirkham
Consultations Team



Historic England

WEST MIDLANDS OFFICE

Ms Samantha Cheater

Direct Dial: 0121 625 6887

Lepus Consulting Ltd

1 Bath Street

Our ref: PL00483522

Cheltenham

GL50 1YE

22 October 2018

Dear Ms Cheater

ALCESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SEA SCREENING

Thank you for your consultation and the invitation to comment on the SEA Screening Document for the above Neighbourhood Plan.

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

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, please note that Historic England has published guidance on Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Historic Environment that is relevant to both local and neighbourhood planning and available at: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/sustainability-appraisal-and-strategic-environmental-assessment-advice-note-8/>

I trust the above comments will be of help in taking forward the Neighbourhood Plan.

Yours sincerely,



THE AXIS 10 HOLLIDAY STREET BIRMINGHAM B1 1TF

Telephone 0121 625 6870
HistoricEngland.org.uk





Historic England

WEST MIDLANDS OFFICE

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Historic England is subject to both the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and Environmental Information Regulations (2004). Any Information held by the organisation can be requested for release under this legislation.

Ms Samantha Cheater
Lepus Consulting
1 Bath Street
CHELTENHAM
Gloucestershire
GL50 1YE

Our ref: KP/2018/100027/01-L01
Your ref: LC431
Date: 21 November 2018

Dear Ms Cheater

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND HABITATS REGULATIONS
ASSESSMENT OF THE ALCESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN
ALCESTER PARISH COUNCIL**

Thank you for consulting the Environment Agency in relation to the above screening document.

I have reviewed the SEA / HRA Screening Document, looking in detail at the following paragraphs:

2.5 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

I concur with the identification of protected sites, and agree with the findings of the report that development within the Neighbourhood Plan boundary and emerging policies are unlikely to have an adverse effect on local SSSIs.

Furthermore Policies NE2 and NE3 of the emerging plan support biodiversity gains, and safeguard land for flood risk management functions, and we welcome proposals to use CIL funding to enhance the green space designations.

2.8 Soil, Air and Water

This chapter acknowledges that there is flood risk within the Neighbourhood Plan Area and correctly identifies the Rivers that run through the community. The Screening opinion directs to policy NE.6 of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan which has detailed measures to assess and support the Environment Agency's position in relation to flood risk management for new development.

Furthermore Policy NE4 – Safeguarding Rivers and Ponds also seeks to ensure that proposals that could adversely affect rivers streams and ponds will be resisted.

Environment Agency
9, Sentinel House Wellington Crescent, Fradley Park, Lichfield, WS13 8RR.
Customer services line: 03708 506 506
www.gov.uk/environment-agency

Cont/d..

Conclusion

I have reviewed the relevant Environment Policies within emerging Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan and the adopted Stratford on Avon District Council Core Strategy (2011 -2031) and agree that they are in general conformity with each other.

Therefore I agree with the conclusions within the report that the emerging Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have a significant effect on the environment and therefore agree that neither a SEA or Habitats Regulation Assessment is required.

Further Information

The Environment Agency is currently in the early stages of preparing a flood risk management strategy to improve and enhance assets within Alcester to reduce flood risk to the community.

We would like to begin early engagement with the Parish Council to discuss the scope of the project and to seek their ideas so that we can work in partnership to ensure that they support the aspirations of the emerging local plan.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Becky Clarke

Planning Specialist – Sustainable Places
Direct e-mail becky.clarke@environment-agency.gov.uk

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Ecological Services

Green Infrastructure

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Sustainability Appraisal



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