



# **Neighbourhood Planning Screening Report – Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan**

**Final version - following consideration  
by consultation bodies**

Strategic Environmental Impact  
Assessment

and

Habitats Regulations Assessment

**Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council**

**September 2014**

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## 1. Non-technical Summary

- 1.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required under European legislation for all plans which may have a significant effect on the environment.
- 1.2 The purpose of SEA is to provide a high level of protection for the environment and to integrate considerations of the environment into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 1.3 The SEA process sets out criteria for assessing the significance of the impact of a plan on the environment. For example, if a plan proposes a housing development it may have an impact on the wildlife of the area or have an impact on landscape. If a significant effect is possible, the assessment requires the consideration of alternative options and for the evaluation of the potential effects on the environment.
- 1.4 To ascertain if SEA is required, a “screening” exercise is undertaken which looks at the proposals and policies in a Neighbourhood Plan to see if a significant effect on the environment is likely. The criteria for making the screening assessment are set out in the relevant legislation.
- 1.5 A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is a process which looks at the potential impact of proposals within a plan on what are termed ‘European sites’. In relation to the Basingstoke and Deane area the relevant European sites are a number of Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) outside of, but within 10km of the borough.
- 1.6 The initial stage of the HRA process involves consideration of the reasons for designation and the conservation objectives of each European site within a reasonable distance of the Neighbourhood Plan area. The next stage is to consider the potential impact of the proposals within the plan on any European sites which could be affected.
- 1.7 **This report details the assessment of the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan against the need for an SEA and/or HRA to be produced to accompany the Neighbourhood Plan. It concludes that an SEA/Environmental Report is considered to be required to accompany the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan but that it would not need to be subject to HRA.**
- 1.8 The preliminary version of this report was sent to the three statutory consultees, known as the consultation bodies, namely the Environment Agency, English Heritage and Natural England to elicit their views on its

contents. The consultation bodies concurred with the conclusion set out in paragraph 1.7 above. The results of this consultation are included in Appendix 4 and a formal screening opinion has been issued to Whitchurch Town Council indicating the outcomes of the screening stage.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan must comply with EU obligations. An important element of this requirement is that the borough council needs to determine whether the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan should be subject to a Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEA) and/or Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). This is an important legal requirement and a screening process in relation to this legislation should form an integral part of the neighbourhood planning process as early as possible. The main consideration will be whether the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects (in relation to SEA) or a significant effect on a European site (i.e. a site protected by the Habitats Directive).

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 2.2 The need for environmental assessment of Neighbourhood Plans stems from EU Directive 2001/42/EC – known as the SEA Directive. The SEA Directive applies to a wide range of public plans and programmes (e.g. on land use, transport, energy, waste, agriculture, etc. and includes those at the ‘local level’). The SEA Directive 2001 has been transposed into English law via The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (EAPP).
- 2.3 As per the information set out in the National Planning Practice Guide, it will be necessary for the borough council to screen the proposed Neighbourhood Plan in order to determine whether the plans/programmes are likely to have significant environmental effects<sup>1</sup>. The screening procedure is based on criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the EAPP Regulations 2004. This report assesses the Neighbourhood Plan against those criteria, and on that basis sets out whether an SEA (in the form of an Environmental Report) is required. Figure 2.1 below sets out the basic framework for establishing whether an SEA will be required.

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<sup>1</sup> The national practice guide states the following:

#### **Does a neighbourhood plan require a strategic environmental assessment?**

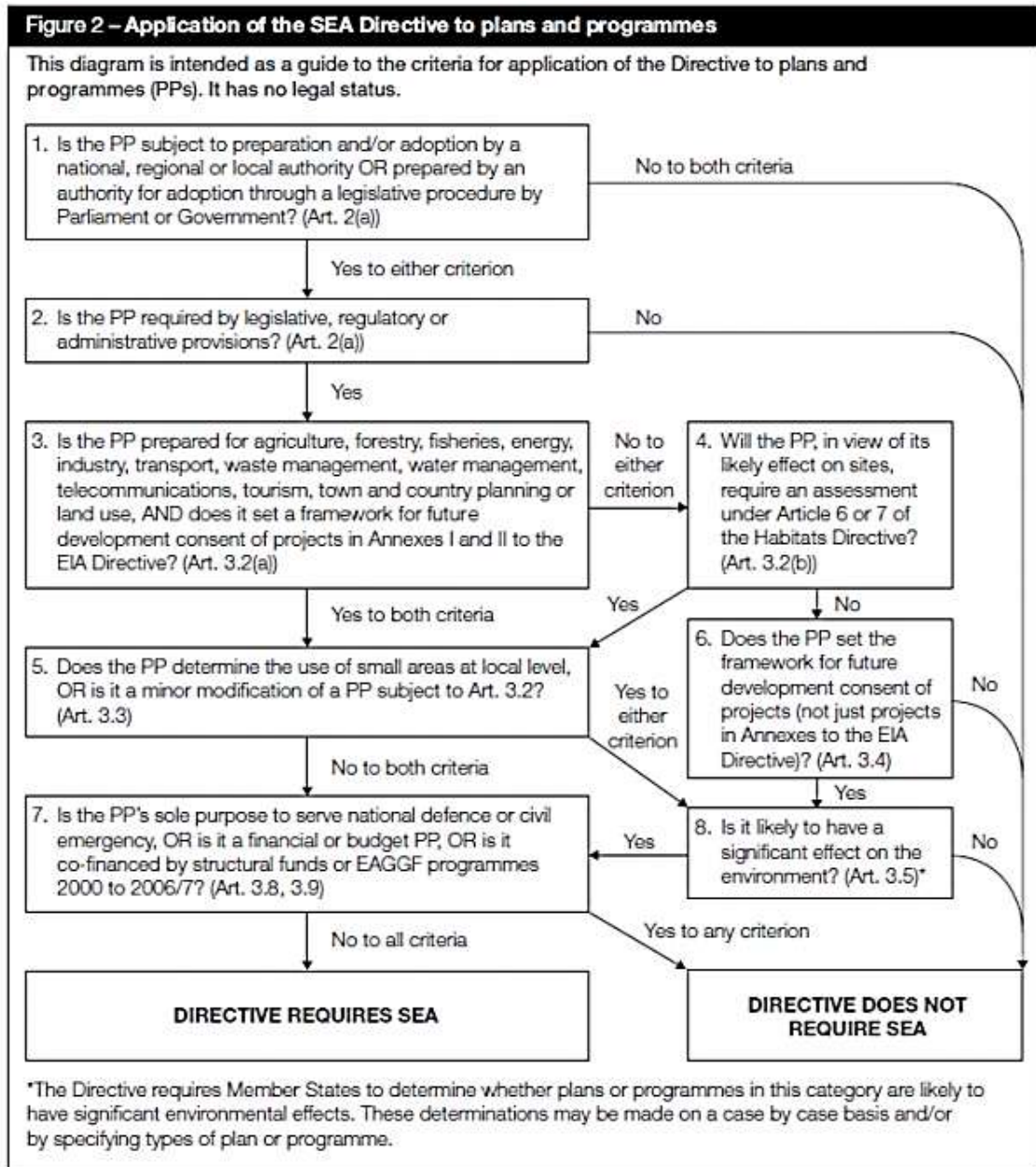
In some limited circumstances, where a [neighbourhood plan](#) could have significant environmental effects, it may fall within the scope of the [Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004](#) and so require a strategic environmental assessment. One of the basic conditions that will be tested by the [independent examiner](#) is whether the making of the neighbourhood plan is compatible with European obligations.

Whether a neighbourhood plan requires a strategic environmental assessment, and (if so) the level of detail needed, will depend on what is proposed in the draft neighbourhood plan. A strategic environmental assessment may be required, for example, 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](#).

<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal/does-a-neighbourhood-plan-require-a-sustainability-appraisal/>

Figure 2.1 – Diagram indicating whether an SEA is required for a plan or project



## Habitats Regulations

- 2.4 In addition to the screening of Neighbourhood Plans in relation to SEA, there is a need to assess the likelihood of proposals or policies within a Neighbourhood Plan having an adverse impact on European sites<sup>2</sup>. This Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is required by the

<sup>2</sup> In relation to the Basingstoke and Deane area, relevant European sites consist of areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA).

Habitats Directive as transposed into English law via The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

- 2.5 A Habitats Regulations Assessment may be required depending on the contents of the Neighbourhood Plan and the potential impact of the plan on European sites. A case by case assessment of Neighbourhood Plans will need to be undertaken to see if a full HRA is required.
- 2.6 The approach to assessing the potential impact of a Neighbourhood Plan on a European site, and the need for an HRA, include consideration of the reasons for designation and conservation objectives for each site within a reasonable distance from the Neighbourhood Plan area (which was set at 10km in the borough council's Habitats Regulations Screening Assessment supporting the emerging Local Plan). Where relevant the key environmental conditions that support the site are assessed below against the proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Consultation bodies**

- 2.7 Once the initial assessments of the requirement for both SEA and HRA had been undertaken, the Environment Agency, Natural England and English Heritage were consulted on the preliminary conclusions. This report incorporates the consultation responses provided by these consultation bodies, which have informed the finalised conclusions.

### 3. Generic Screening Assessment of Neighbourhood Plans

- 3.1 In the first instance, in order to establish if a Neighbourhood Plan potentially needs to be accompanied by a full SEA, a generic assessment of Neighbourhood Plans has been undertaken with the results of this assessment being set out below in Figure 3.1. The Assessment criteria set out in Figure 3.1 is derived from the government guidance produced to accompany the EAPP Regulations 2004: A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.2 The assessment below illustrates that Neighbourhood Plans can be subject to the SEA Directive, and concludes that the need for an SEA in respect of any particular Neighbourhood Plan will ultimately come down to whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. Therefore, Neighbourhood Plans will need to be screened on a case by case basis.

Figure 3.1 - Generic screening assessment of Neighbourhood Plans

Assessment criteria	y/n	Assessment
1. Is the Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))	yes	Neighbourhood Plans are prepared by parish or town councils (as the “qualifying body”) under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. Once the Plan has been prepared, and subject to examination and referendum, it will be “made” by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council as the Local Planning Authority
2. Is the Neighbourhood Plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	It is not a requirement for a parish to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. However, a Neighbourhood Plan, once “made” does form part of the statutory Development Plan and will be used when making decisions on planning applications.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf)

<p>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 Environmental Impact Assessment Directive? (Art 3.2(a))</p>	<p>yes</p>	<p>Neighbourhood plans will cover town and country planning/land use, and may also cover other issues in the list set out. In addition, it will also set part of the framework for possible future consents covered by Annex II of the EIA Directive. Development under Annex I however, would be excluded development.</p>
<p>4. 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))</p>	<p>?</p>	<p>Given that there are no sites designated under the Habitats Directive in the borough, the only impact on such sites could be on those outside the borough, and any effect on those sites is unlikely given the separation distances involved. However, a case by case assessment should still be carried out and included within the screening report.</p>
<p>5. Does the Neighbourhood Plan Determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)</p>	<p>yes</p>	<p>A Neighbourhood Plan can determine the use of small areas at the local level.</p>
<p>6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)</p>	<p>yes</p>	<p>A Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the development plan and therefore will be used in the decision making process in relation to planning applications. The policies in a Neighbourhood Plan therefore set the framework for future development proposals.</p>
<p>7. Is the Neighbourhood Plan sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF(European Agricultural Guarantee Fund) programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>A Neighbourhood Plan does not deal with any of these categories of plan.</p>
<p>8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)</p>	<p>?</p>	<p>The impact of a Neighbourhood Plan on the environment will depend on the proposals and policies included. For this</p>

**reason a case by case assessment of each Neighbourhood Plan will be required.**

- 3.3 Given that Neighbourhood Plans may be subject to the requirement for an SEA where they are likely to have a significant effect on the environment, the next step is to establish how to determine whether such effects are likely when assessing each plan on a case by case basis. The criteria for making that assessment are set out in Schedule 1 of the EAPP Regulations 2004. Please see figure 3.2 below for a full list of the relevant criteria.
- 3.4 The list set out below forms the basis for the full assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan in question, which is set out in section 5 below.

Figure 3.2 - Criteria for determining likely significance of effects on the environment (as per section 9 of the EAPP Regulations 2004, this list is taken from Schedule 1 of the EAPP Regulations 2004).

**Schedule 1 - criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment**

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 other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;
  - (b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;
  - (c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;
  - (d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and
  - (e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to –
  - (a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;
  - (b) the cumulative nature of the effects;

- (c) the trans-boundary nature of the effects;
- (d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents);
- (e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
- (f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to –
  - (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;
  - (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or
  - (iii) intensive land-use; and
- (g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

## 4. Description of the Neighbourhood Plan and area

- 4.1 Turning firstly to the neighbourhood area, the main settlement is that of Whitchurch, which is one of the borough's larger settlements with a population of 4,676 (2011, Whitchurch Parish Plan). Whitchurch is an attractive rural town with town centre facilities, a conservation area and a number of listed buildings. The town is situated in an attractive landscape bordering an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB) to the north and west with the River Test to the south of the settlement.
- 4.2 Appendix 1 includes a map showing the main environmental constraints associated with the town itself and the wider area. This shows that in addition to the above, the area includes flood zones (zones 2 and 3) along the River Test, and the river is also designated as an SSSI. There are also various Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) within the neighbourhood area.
- 4.3 Whitchurch Town Council, who are producing the Neighbourhood Plan, have provided the following details regarding their intentions for the Neighbourhood Plan:

### ***“Objectives and aims of the plan?”***

*The aims of the plan will be to Plan for the controlled sustainable growth of Whitchurch in line with the emerging Local Plan the BDBC saved policies and the wishes of the community. The Vision has been drafted as follows;*

*“We love our town. We appreciate its setting in the Hampshire countryside, the variety of people who live here and the local facilities that support a self-contained community.*

*In the next 15 years, development of our town will take place at a steady pace, maintaining the variety of residents and respecting its existing architectural character. Developments will be of an appropriate size, and well-integrated with the town. They will be designed to minimise the impact of traffic, parking constraints and road noise that detract from our current enjoyment of the town.*

*Business and industry will be encouraged to develop in line with the growth in housing to provide local jobs, shopping and tourism opportunities. Infrastructure and services will be expanded in lockstep with housing growth. The river will be even more visibly the heart of the town, as we take opportunities to improve access to it. The town centre will be cleaner, brighter, and more accessible to pedestrians, cyclists and car users.*

*In 15 years' time, those of us living here today will be proud to say  
Whitchurch has changed for the better."*

**Scope of the Plan and how may the Plan affect the environment,  
community and economy?**

*The scope of the plan covers housing, employment, town centre and conservation, traffic and parking, infrastructure, sports and leisure, and education. It is probable that we will also address increased prosperity through tourism and industry and we will be considering sustainability and the environment including green spaces and landscape. Emphasis will be on controlled growth within the constraints of infrastructure and environment.*

**Is the level of housing development higher than already identified in the emerging Local Plan?**

*The Plan will allocate housing sites to accommodate the numbers of houses identified for Whitchurch namely 350 houses over the next 15 years. It is possible that we will allow a small contingency either as a site or as flexibility in the number of houses per site.*

**Are there any land allocations for housing employment infrastructure etc., that are not included in the emerging Local Plan?**

*There will be sites allocated for housing development that are not identified specifically in the emerging Local Plan.*

*It is possible that sites for housing which are not part of the SHLAA assessment will also be allocated however such allocation will await the Community Consultation which is at the end of September.*

*There is no land allocated for employment use in Whitchurch in the emerging Local Plan*

**What policies is the plan likely to include and do you have any draft policies?**

*The exact range of Policies has not yet been agreed however they will include housing, employment, town centre and conservation.*

**Will the proposals affect a sensitive area such as a SSSI?**

*None of the land allocations are likely to directly affect any SSSI however the Plan will likely promote greater access to the River Test which is an SSSI and there is the possibility that an industrial estate will be promoted by the landowners to the north of the railway which is in an AONB."*

## 5. SEA Screening Assessment

- 5.1 At this stage in the Neighbourhood Planning process it is difficult to know exactly what will be proposed in the final version of the Neighbourhood Plan. However, the approximate parameters of the development and policies being proposed for inclusion in the draft Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in Section 4 of this report, have been used to undertake this screening assessment.
- 5.2 If it is found that an SEA is required in relation to the Neighbourhood Plan, any changes to the quantum of development can be assessed for environmental impact through the SEA process. If the conclusion of a screening exercise is that an SEA is not required, any changes to the quantum of development and/or policies being proposed should be subject to a further screening assessment to ensure that significant effects are not likely.
- 5.3 Under Criteria 8 of the assessment in Figure 3.1, it was concluded that Neighbourhood Plans may have a significant effect on the environment depending on the specific policies and proposals within it and that a case by case assessment is required. The criteria for undertaking such an assessment are set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive. Figure 5.1 below outlines the results of this assessment against the Annex II parameters.

### SEA assessment of neighbourhood plan

Figure 5.1 - Assessment of likelihood of significant effects on the environment

Significant effect criteria	Assessment
The characteristics of the plan having regard to:	
(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 Neighbourhood Plan will set a framework for various types of projects and activities, including site allocations, and in so doing will influence the size, location and operating conditions of the development in question. The policies in the plan will also set criteria which will be applied to planning applications.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	The Neighbourhood Plan could inform supplementary planning documents (such as design guidance), development briefs or site specific guidance.

(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	The Neighbourhood Plan will have regard to the objective of achieving sustainable development in the local area. It will be in conformity with the strategic policies in the Adopted Local Plan, and will have regard to the policies in the emerging Local Plan.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	The Neighbourhood Plan will seek to address environmental, economic and social issues in the neighbourhood area.
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	The Neighbourhood Plan is relevant to various aspects of Community legislation, such as environmental protection and conservation of biodiversity.
Characteristics of the effects likely having regard, in particular, to:	
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;	The Neighbourhood Plan will set the local vision, objectives and policies to guide new development in neighbourhood area. It is likely to result in long-term effects associated with changes to land use and physical development of land.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	There are likely to be local cumulative effects arising from and between the different proposal and policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects (in relation to other member of the EU);	There will be no transboundary effects (in relation to other EU member states).
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents);	There are unlikely to be any significant risks to human health, though there is a limited risk of harm to the environment during construction.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	The magnitude of the effects are likely to be largely localised (i.e. within the neighbourhood area). However, there could be effects over a larger area in relation to issues such as landscape impact and highways.

<p>(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to –</p> <p>(i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; .</p> <p>(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or .</p> <p>(iii) intensive land-use; and</p>	<p>There are various parts of the Neighbourhood Area which are both highly valued and vulnerable, namely the River Test SSSI, various SINCs and the Whitchurch Conservation Area. There are also listed buildings which could be affected (including their setting).</p>
<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>The neighbourhood area includes an AONB, which could be affected by development covered by the Neighbourhood Plan.</p>

**5.4 As a result of the assessment undertaken to analyse the potential effects on the environment resulting from the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan, it is considered that significant effects on the environment are likely. Therefore an Environment Report in accordance with the EAPP Regulations 2004 needs to be submitted with the Neighbourhood Plan.**

5.5 The conclusion reached above is informed by the sensitivity of the area, which includes various valued and vulnerable areas such as an AONB, SSSI, various SINCs, a conservation area and a number of listed buildings. When this level of sensitivity is combined with the scale and nature of development potentially covered by the Neighbourhood Plan (including a housing allocation(s) for approximately 200 residential units, employment site allocation(s), infrastructure and industrial development), it is considered that significant effects on the environment are likely.

## 6. HRA Screening Assessment

- 6.1 The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the assessment required for any plan or project to assess the potential implications for what are termed 'European sites'. Such sites consist of areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA). There is also an international designation known as RAMSAR sites, which whilst being covered by different legislation should be subject to the same consideration as European sites.
- 6.2 There are no European sites in the borough. However, there are a number of SPAs and SACs located outside of the borough which could be affected by development taking place within the Basingstoke and Deane borough (please see Appendix 2 for the details of those areas). Therefore, it is still necessary to consider whether there could be any potential impact on European sites stemming from neighbourhood planning.
- 6.3 European sites are offered the highest level of protection under European law and the consequent national legislation transposing it into English law (The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, known as the Habitats Regulations). The Habitats Regulations sets out the process to assess the potential implications of a Neighbourhood Plan on European sites.
- 6.4 The first stage is to screen the Neighbourhood Plan in order to establish whether it may have a significant effect on a European site. Only if there may be such an effect will it be necessary to undertake a process called 'appropriate assessment'<sup>4</sup> in relation to a European site.
- 6.5 In undertaking the screening to establish whether there will be a significant effect, the 'precautionary principle' will need to be followed. The requirement to adhere to the precautionary approach is established by case law and clarified by European Union and domestic government guidance<sup>5</sup>. The use of the precautionary principle requires that when considering the likelihood of a possible effect on a European site it will be assumed that such impacts will occur if there is insufficient evidence to the contrary.

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<sup>4</sup> The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010

**61.**—(1) A competent authority, before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which—

(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and

(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site, must make an appropriate assessment of the implications for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives.

<sup>5</sup> Landelijke Vereniging tot Behoud van de Waddenzee v. Secretary of State for Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Fisheries (Case C127/02), ECJ 7/9/04

6.6 In carrying out the screening assessment, the borough council has addressed the various requirements set out in the European Commission guidance<sup>6</sup>. The guidance sets out various steps which need to be followed:

- i) description of project or plan
- ii) characteristics of the European site
- iii) assessment of significance

The description of the Neighbourhood Plan has been set out in section 4 above. Therefore, this section focuses on the characteristics of any relevant European sites, their significance, and ultimately whether there are likely to be any significant effects.

6.7 The Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council emerging Local Plan has been subject to a Habitats Regulations Screening Assessment. This contains a detailed assessment of each of the 8 European sites within 10km of the borough boundary. These are set out in Appendix 2 below, and inform the assessment process documented in this report. Appendix 3 includes maps of these sites, also taken from the Habitats Regulations Screening Assessment.

6.8 The implications of the policies and proposals in the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan have been assessed against each of the European sites within 10km of the neighbourhood area boundary in order to establish the likelihood of a significant effect on the reason for designation of the European site in question. This assessment has been undertaken having regard to the results and information in the HRA screening assessment prepared for the emerging Local Plan for Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, and in the light of the relevant European Commission guidance (as referred to above), which forms the basis for the assessment criteria set out below.

### **Assessments of any European sites with 10km of the neighbourhood area**

**6.9 There are no European sites within a 10km radius of the neighbourhood area. Therefore, it is considered that there are not likely to be significant effects on any European sites flowing from the Neighbourhood Plan. Accordingly, an HRA is not required.**

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<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/natura\\_2000\\_assess\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/docs/art6/natura_2000_assess_en.pdf)  
Pages 18 - 23

## 7. Conclusions

- 7.1 This report contains the assessment as to whether the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan should be subject to the requirement for the submission of an Environmental Report as required by the EAPP Regulations 2004 and/or Appropriate Assessment as required by the Habitats Regulations 2010.
- 7.2 The assessment for both of these requirements has been undertaken on the basis of proposals and policies outlined in Section 4 of this report and within the strategic framework established by the 'saved policies' of the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Local Plan Review Adopted Local Plan Review 1996-2011. The assessment also takes account of the relevant evidence base supporting the emerging Local Plan.
- 7.3 **The conclusion, based on the above assessment, is that an Environment Report in accordance with the EAPP Regulations 2004 is required. However, it is considered that an HRA is not necessary.** These conclusions have been supported by the consultation bodies (please see Appendix 4 below).

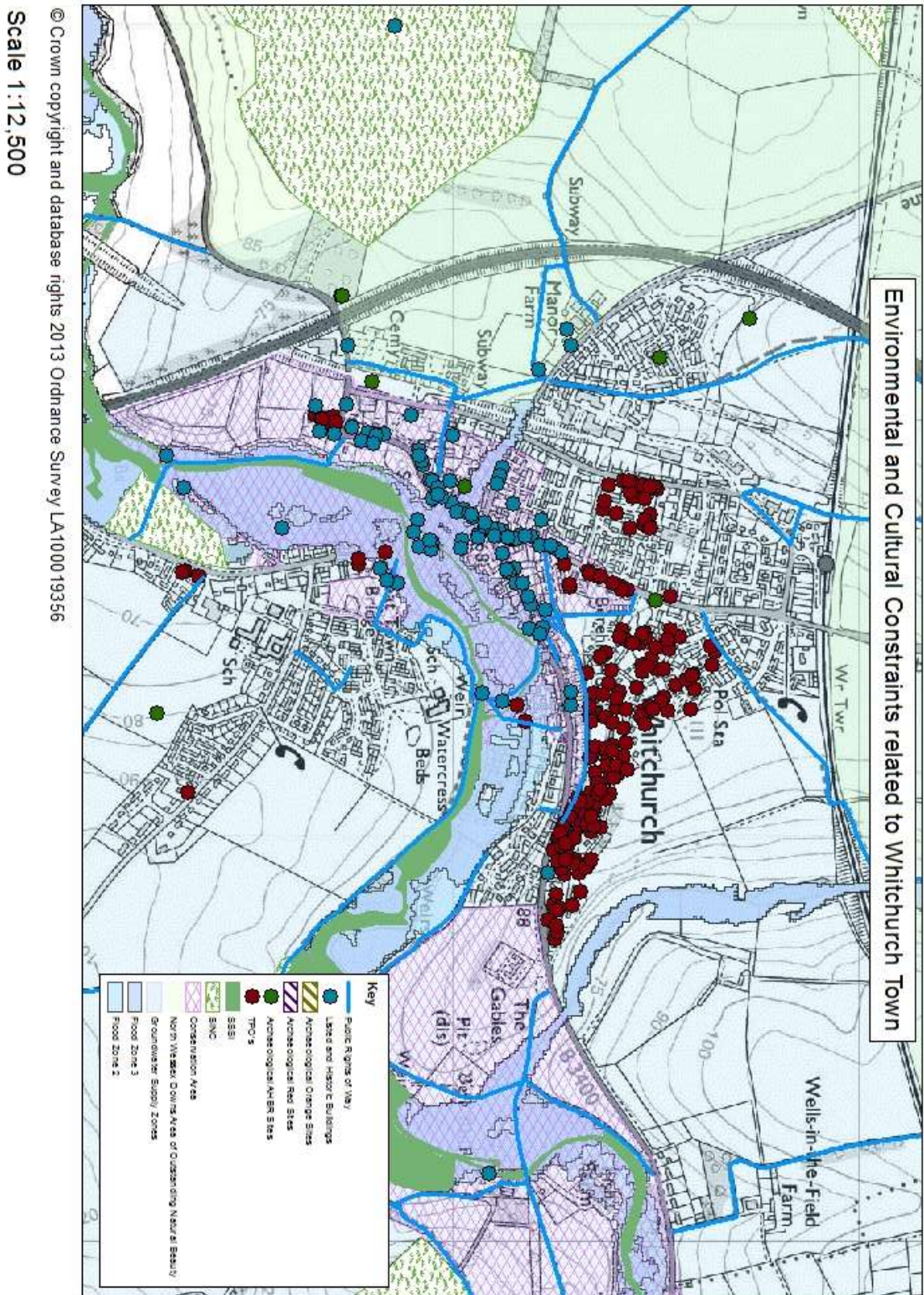
### Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 7.4 The conclusion reached above is informed by the sensitivity of the area, which includes various valued and vulnerable areas such as AONB, SSSI, SINC, Conservation Area and a number of listed buildings. When this level of sensitivity is combined with the scale and nature of development potentially covered by the Neighbourhood Plan (including approximately 200 residential units, employment sites, infrastructure and industrial development), it is considered that significant effects on the environment are likely.

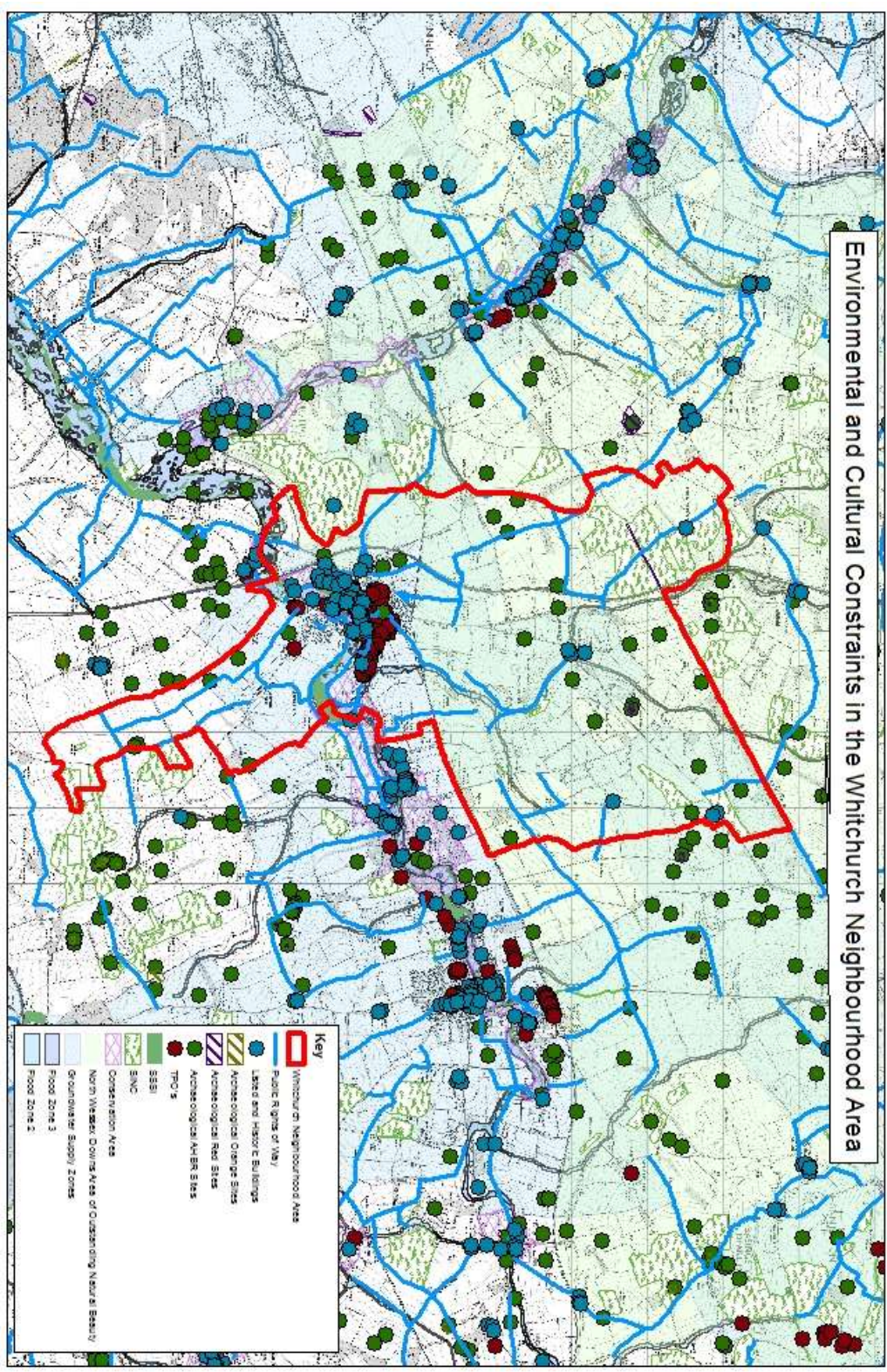
### Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 7.5 There are no European sites within a 10km radius of the neighbourhood area. Therefore, it is considered that there are not likely to be significant effects on any European sites flowing from the Neighbourhood Plan. Accordingly, an HRA is not required.

## Appendix 1 – Environmental and cultural constraints



# Environmental and Cultural Constraints in the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Area



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 Scale 1:70,000

## **Appendix 2 – Details of European sites within 10km of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council**

### **Thames Basin Heaths SPA**

#### **Introduction**

The Thames Basin Heaths cover an area of 8,400 hectares and comprise a rare example of lowland heathland across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. The heaths support significant populations of 3 important bird species and consist of 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Hazeley Heath SSSI is the nearest part of the SPA to the borough (located within 5km of the borough boundary).

Due to the size, location and nature of this site and the surrounding development pressure, English Nature published a draft Delivery Plan for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA in May 2006. This was updated by the „Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Delivery Framework“ published in January 2009 (Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board). The document sets out a strategic approach for development by providing a consistent method through which local authorities can meet the requirements of the Habitats Regulations through avoidance and mitigation measures.

#### **Features of European Interest**

Annex I birds and regularly occurring migratory birds not listed on Annex I:

- *Caprimulgus europaeus* (nightjar)
- *Lullula arborea* (woodlark)
- *Sylvia undata* (Dartford warbler)

#### **Key environmental conditions/ vulnerability of the site**

The mosaic of habitats which form the internationally important lowland heathland are dependent on active heathland management. Lack of grazing and other traditional management practices therefore pose a threat.

Development pressure on neighbouring land, urbanisation issues and the cumulative and indirect effects of neighbouring developments also pose a potential long-term problem. A strategic approach to accommodating development whilst ensuring compatibility with the Habitats Regulations is being addressed through the Thames Basin Heaths Area Based Delivery Project. This seeks to address the detrimental impacts of recreational pressure, particularly dog walking, on ground nesting bird populations.

## Wealden Heaths phase II SPA

### Introduction

The Wealden Heaths Phase II SPA is located across the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and West Sussex and comprises 4 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, namely Woolmer Forest SSSI and SAC, Broxhead and Kingsley Commons SSSI, Bramshott and Ludshott Commons SSSI and Devil's Punchbowl SSSI. A small area to the south east of the borough is located within 10km of the SPA.

### Features of European Interest

Annex I birds and regularly occurring migratory birds not listed on Annex I:

- *Caprimulgus europaeus* (nightjar)
- *Lullula arborea* (woodlark)
- *Sylvia undata* (Dartford warbler)

### Key environmental conditions/ vulnerability of the site

The heathland habitats of the Special Protection Area are very dependent upon grazing and other traditional management practices. The SPA is vulnerable to urbanisation issues, fly tipping and heathland fires and there is increasing pressure for development associated with military training activities. Formal and informal recreation activities are a potential threat to the breeding success of Annex 1 birds. The heaths are also dependent on high water tables to maintain their features of interest, and are therefore sensitive to any potential lowering of water levels due to water abstraction. In the most recent condition assessment process, parts of the heathland were not in favourable condition, with concerns about inappropriate vegetation species, vehicle damage and invasive species.

## East Hampshire Hangers SAC

### Introduction

The East Hampshire Hangers SAC is a large complex of predominantly broadleaved deciduous woodland comprising seven Sites of Special Scientific Interest:

- Upper Greensand Hangers: Wyck to Wheatley
- Wick Wood and Worldham Hangers
- Coombe Wood and The Lythe
- Selborne Common
- Noar Hill
- Wealden Edge Hangers
- Upper Greensand Hangers: Empshott to Hawkley

### Features of European Interest

The East Hampshire Hangers qualify as a SAC for both habitats and species. Firstly, the site contains the following Habitats Directive Annex I habitats:

- Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone, including important orchid sites: Noar Hill in particular, has an outstanding assemblage of orchids, including one of the largest UK populations of the nationally scarce musk orchid *Herminium monorchis*;
- Beech forests on neutral to rich soils: the site is extremely rich in terms of vascular plants;
- Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes: along with Rook Clift SAC, in the south-east of England, this habitat is only represented here;
- Dry grasslands or scrublands on chalk or limestone (though not a primary reason for site selection);
- Yew-dominated woodland (though not a primary reason for site selection).

Secondly, the site contains the Habitats Directive Annex II species early gentian *Gentianella anglica* and *Triturus cristatus* (great crested newt).

The key environmental conditions that have been defined for this site are:

- Maintenance of grazing;
- Absence of direct fertilisation; and
- Low nutrient runoff from surrounding land although the Hanger woodlands are vulnerable to nutrient run-off leading to eutrophication;
- Minimal air pollution – nitrogen deposition may cause reduction in diversity, sulphur deposition can cause acidification;
- Well-drained soils.

### **Key environmental conditions / vulnerability of the site**

Being steep and narrow, the Hanger woodlands are vulnerable to nutrient runoff from adjacent agricultural land, leading to eutrophication and growth of ruderal vegetation when, for example neglected coppice is cut. Within the Hangers over-maturity and outbreaks of beech disease have been observed. Management is hampered by sparse mast years, few seed trees, the presence of deep litter layers and difficulties in extracting felled timber due to the steep slopes present.

Natural England will be exploring mechanisms that can be put in place to curtail damaging agricultural activities in the vicinity of the site. Natural England is liaising closely with the Forestry Commission regarding positive management of these woodlands through Woodland Grant Schemes and, for example, the Challenge Fund.

## **Kennet & Lambourne Floodplain SAC**

### **Introduction**

The Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain SAC is a composite site of approximately 114 hectares located within West Berkshire and Wiltshire. The site has the general character of 59% bogs, marshes and water fringed vegetation, 40% humid and Mesophile grassland, and 1% standing or running water.

The cluster of sites selected in the Kennet and Lambourn valleys support one of the most extensive known populations of Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) in the UK. The conservation objective related to the sites' designation is to maintain in favourable condition, the habitat for the population of Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*).

### **Features of European Interest**

The Kennet and Lambourne Floodplain SAC qualify as a SAC for both habitats and species. Firstly, the site contains the following Habitats Directive Annex I habitats:

- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitrichio-Batrachion* vegetation

Secondly, the site contains the Habitats Directive Annex II species:

- *Lampetra planeri* (Brook Lamprey)
- *Cottus gobio* (bullhead)

### **Key environmental conditions / vulnerability of the site**

The River Lambourn has one of the least modified catchments in southern England and has one of the lowest levels of abstraction. Water quality, water quantity and habitat quality are all considered to be high. However, localised higher water nutrient levels and siltation problems are at present associated with sewage treatment works. Natural England and the Environment Agency have produced an agreed protocol for dealing with issues affecting the river.

## **Kennet Valley Alderwoods SAC**

### **Introduction**

The Kennet Valley Alderwoods SAC consists of two sites of approximately 56 hectares in total located within West Berkshire in the Kennet floodplain. Its general site characteristic is of broad leaved deciduous woodland. The woodlands are the largest remaining fragments of damp, ash-alder woodland in the Kennet floodplain area. The conservation of the site is dependent upon maintaining a constantly high groundwater level.

### **Features of European Interest**

The Kennet Valley Alderwoods SAC qualify as a SAC for containing the following Habitats Directive Annex I habitats:

- Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Alno- Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae)

### **Key environmental conditions/ vulnerability of the site**

The conservation interest of the site is critically dependent upon maintenance of constantly high groundwater levels. However, there are no known threats to groundwater levels. The site is subject to low levels of intervention and natural processes are allowed to prevail to a large extent. A Woodland Grant Scheme is in place which favours the maintenance of the characteristic alder woodland composition.

## River Itchen SAC

### Introduction

The River Itchen is a chalk river that rises from the chalk aquifer of the Hampshire Downs (near Alresford) and flows through Winchester to join the Solent at Southampton. It hosts a number of habitats which support nationally and internationally important plants and animals. These require certain water levels with little variation over the course of a year, and fast flow rates. The whole river, including its three headwater tributaries, are designated as a SSSI.

### Features of European Interest

The River Itchen SAC qualify as a SAC for both habitats and species. Firstly, the site contains the following Habitats Directive Annex I habitats:

- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculus fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation

Secondly, the site contains the following Habitats Directive Annex II species:

- *Vertigo moulinsiana* (Desmoulin's whorl snail)
- *Coenagrion mercuriale* (Southern damselfly)
- *Austropotamobius pallipes* (white-clawed crayfish)
- *Petromyzon marinus*
- *Lampetra planeri* (Brook Lamprey)
- *Lampetra fluviatilis*
- *Salmo salar* (atlantic salmon)
- *Cottus gobio* (bullhead)
- *Lutra lutra* (otter)

### Key environmental conditions/ vulnerability of the site

The river's ecology depends on maintaining a uniform, fast flow of water. A principal threat to the habitats within this SAC is considered to be the decrease in flow velocities and increase in siltation, in turn affecting macrophyte cover. Recent surveys have shown declines in *Ranunculus* cover since 1990, attributable to increased abstractions in the upper catchment,

coupled with a series of years with below-average rainfall. Low flows interact with nutrient inputs from point sources to produce localised increases in filamentous algae and nutrient-tolerant macrophytes at the expense of *Ranunculus*.

The Environment Agency is initiating a major study of the river's macrophytes, from which a predictive model will be developed which will aid decisions on whether to reduce water abstraction at critical times. Efforts are currently being made to increase the viability of the southern damselfly population through population studies and a Species Action Plan.

## River Lambourn SAC

### Introduction

The River Lambourn SAC consists of the River Lambourn water body over an area of 27 hectares. The River Lambourn rises in the chalk of the Berkshire Downs, is 26 km long, and flows through the Kennet Valley to Newbury where it joins the River Kennet. It has one important tributary, the Winterbourne stream, which flows into the Lambourn from the north-east, just upstream of Newbury. It is also a designated SSSI.

### Features of European Interest

The River Lambourn SAC qualify as a SAC for both habitats and species. Firstly, the site contains the following Habitats Directive Annex I habitats:

- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculus fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation

Secondly, the site contains the following Habitats Directive Annex II species:

- *Lampetra planeri* (Brook Lamprey)
- *Cottus gobio* (bullhead)

### Key environmental conditions/ vulnerability of the site

The River Lambourn has one of the least modified catchments in southern England and has one of the lowest levels of abstraction. Water quality, water quantity and habitat quality are all considered to be high. However, localised higher water nutrient levels and siltation problems are at present associated with sewage treatment works. Natural England and the Environment Agency have produced an agreed protocol for dealing with issues affecting the river.

## **Shortheath Common SAC**

### **Introduction**

Shortheath Common is a heathland site located on the western Weald. It comprises a single SSSI which covers approximately 58 hectares. The site was historically grazed but now is recovering from the encroachment of scrub.

### **Features of European Interest**

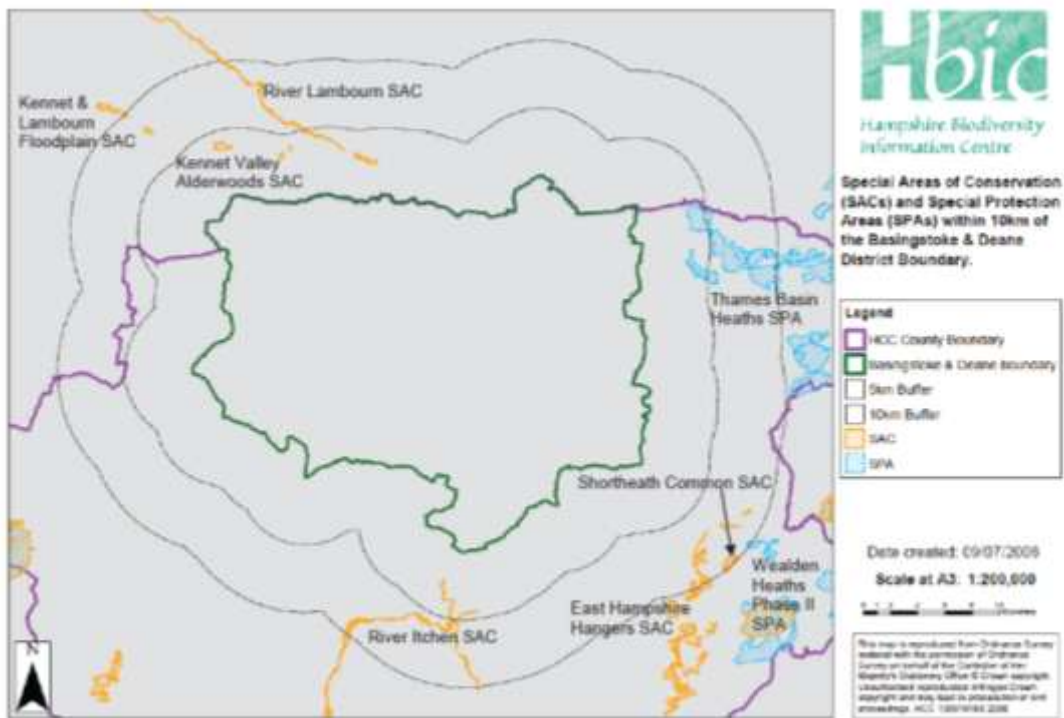
The Shortheath Common SAC qualifies as a SAC for containing the following Habitats Directive Annex I habitats:

- Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
- European dry heaths
- Transition mires and quaking bogs
- Bog woodland

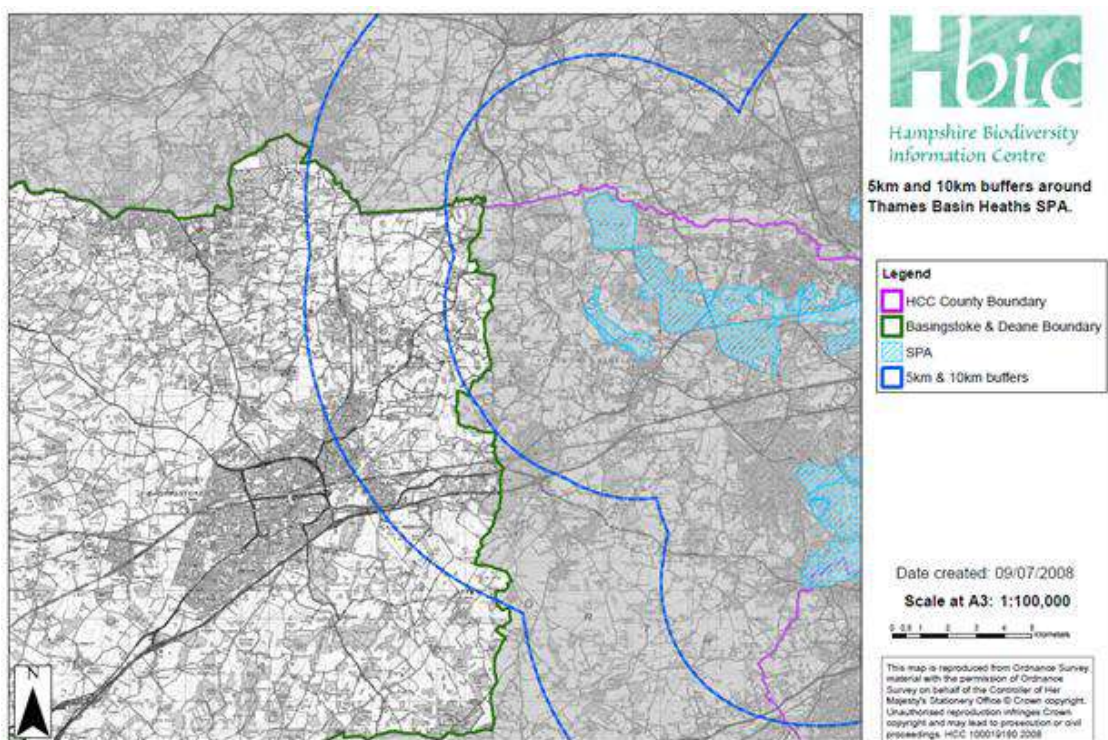
### **Key environmental conditions/ vulnerability of the site**

The site is vulnerable to encroachment of invasive scrub and trees due to cessation of traditional grazing management. Erosional risk and fire are also threats. A Natural England Wildlife Enhancement Scheme agreement has been entered into in an attempt to address the ecological deterioration. The heaths are also dependent on high water tables to maintain their features of interest, and are therefore sensitive to any potential lowering of water levels due to water abstraction. Protection of the site therefore relies on careful management of water levels and recreational activities and good air quality.

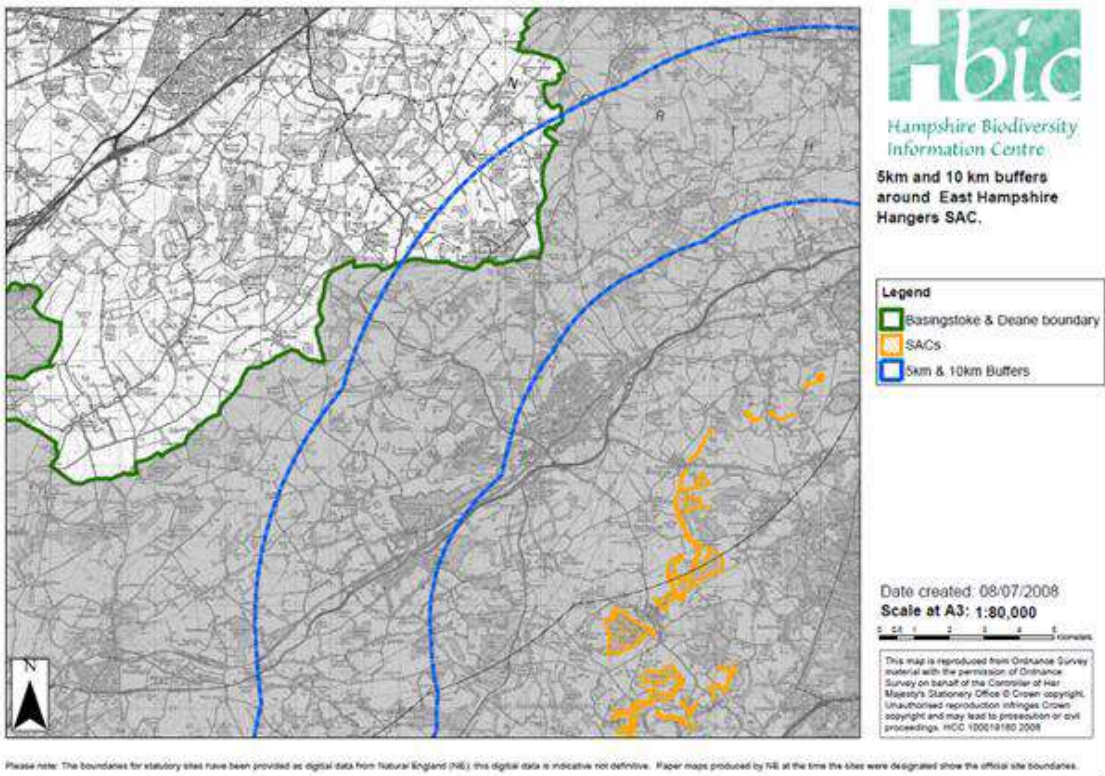
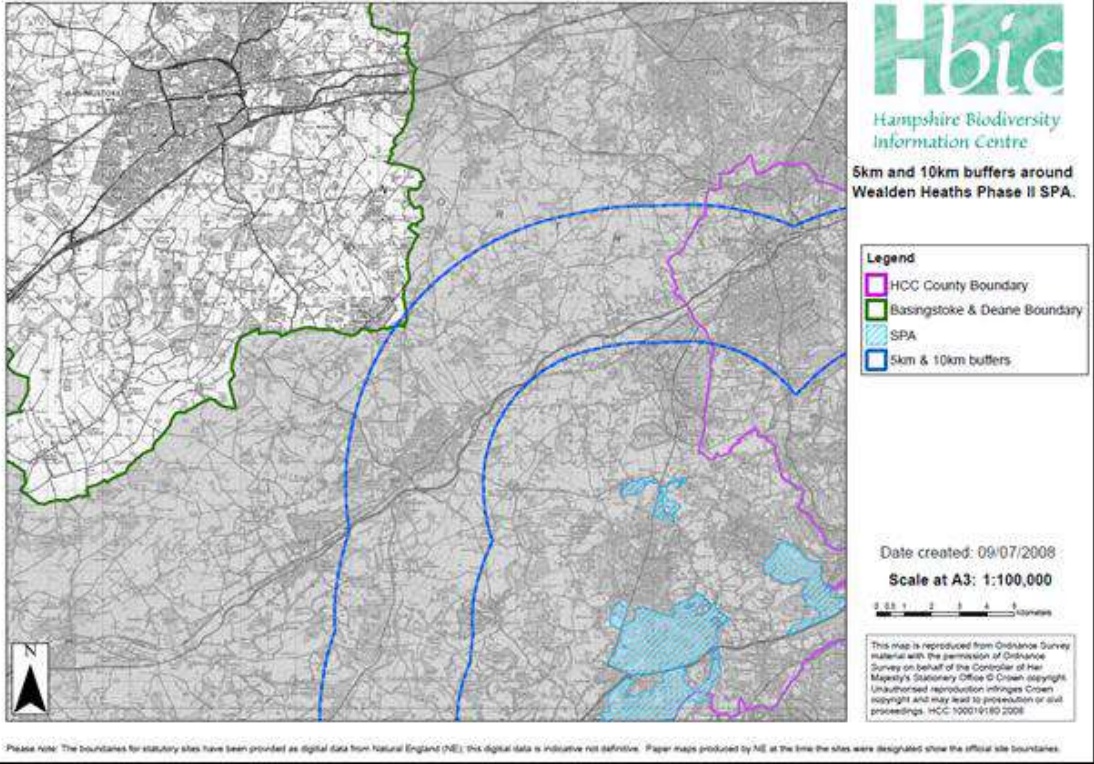
## Appendix 3 - Maps of European sites within 10km of Basingstoke and Deane Borough

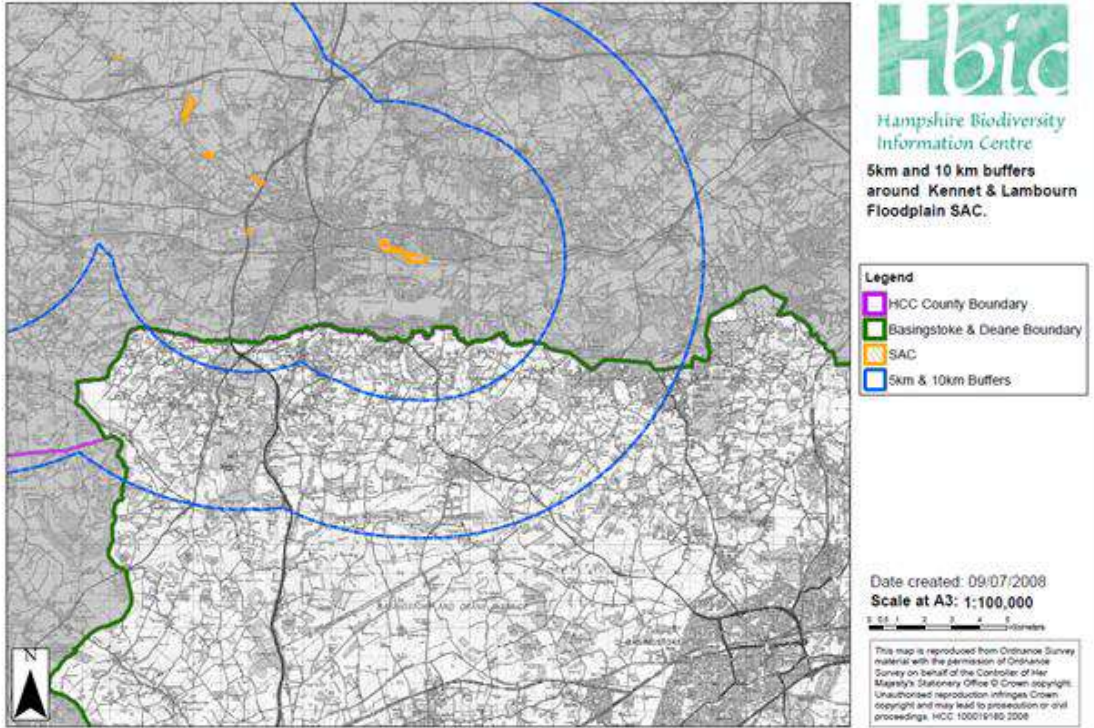


Please note: The boundaries for statutory sites have been provided as digital data from Natural England (NE); this digital data is indicative not definitive. Paper maps produced by NE at the time the sites were designated show the official site boundaries.

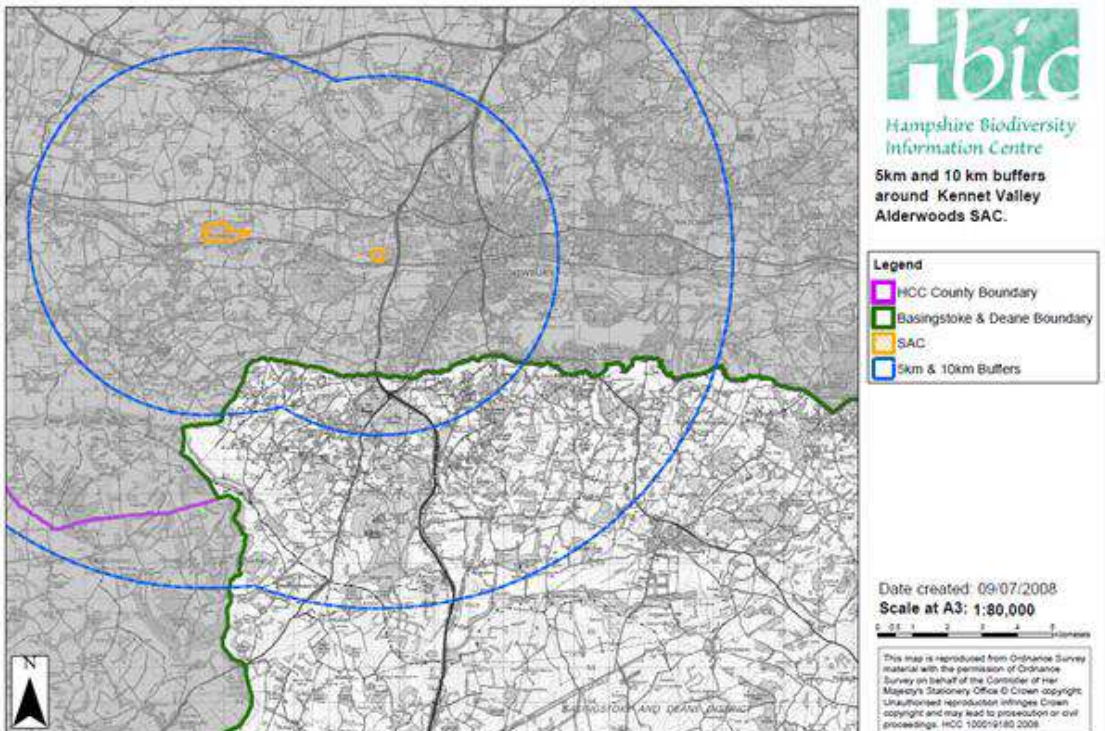


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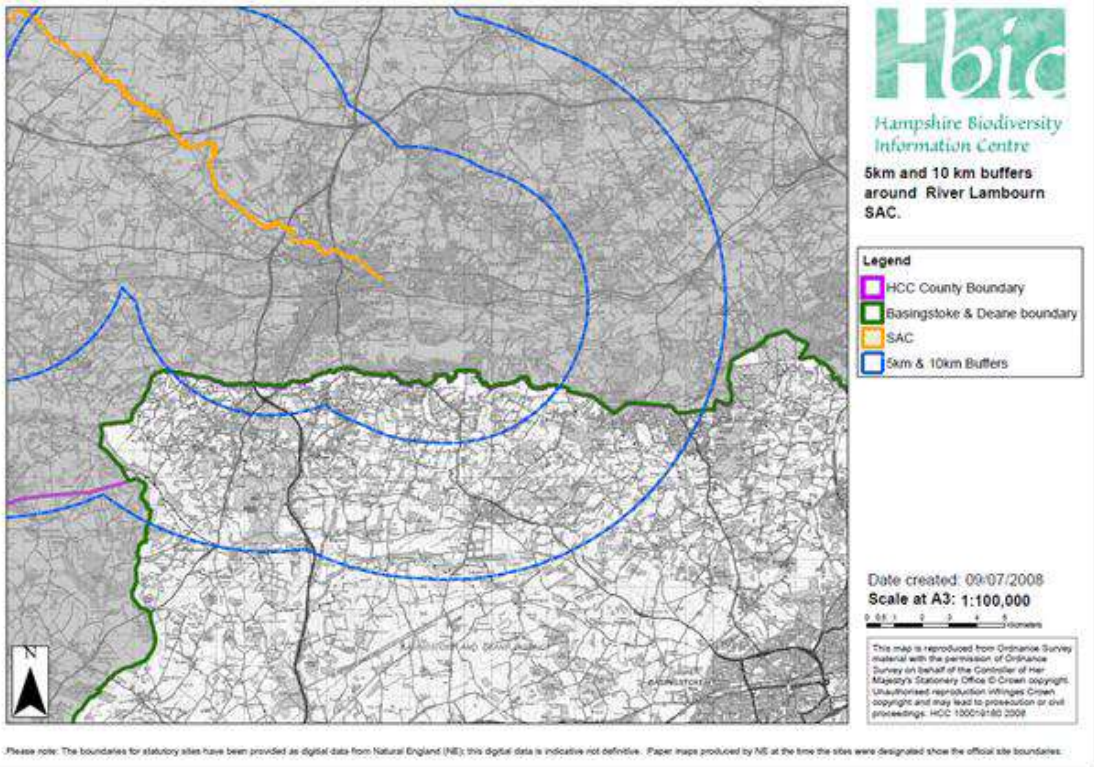
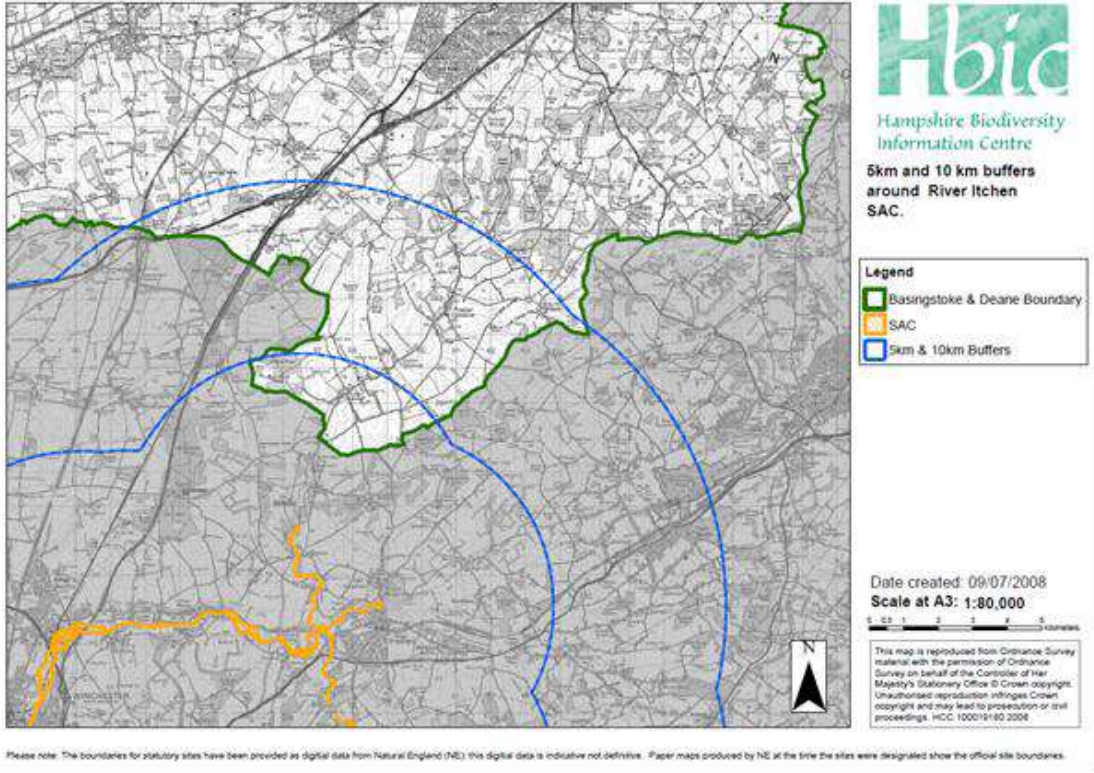


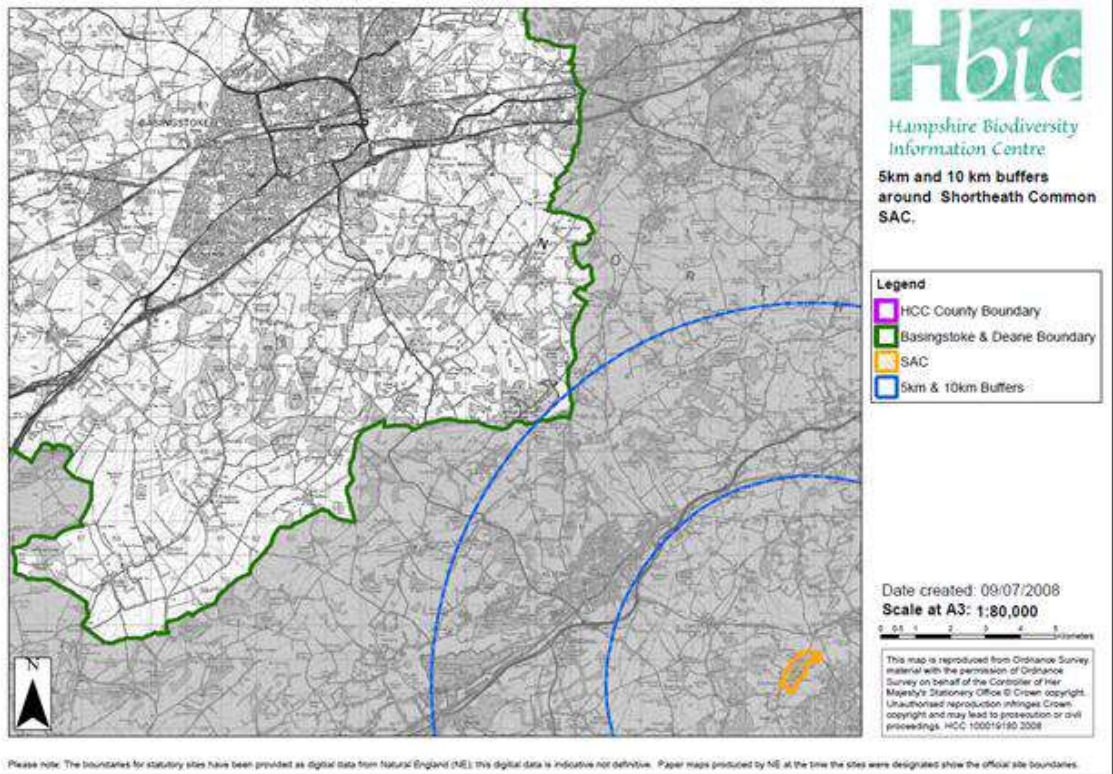


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(Source for all: Basingstoke and Deane Pre-Submission Local Plan Habitats Regulations Screening Assessment)

## Appendix 4 – Responses from Consultation Bodies

### Environment Agency

creating a better place



Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council  
Planning Policy  
Civic Offices London Road  
Basingstoke  
Hampshire  
RG21 4AH

**Our ref:** WA/2011/109908/OR-11/PO1-L01  
**Your ref:**  
**Date:** 11 September 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Strategic Environment Impact Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report for the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan**

Thank you for consulting us the above screening opinion. This consultation was received on 11 August 2014. After reviewing the scoping report we have the following comments to make:

**Strategic Environment Impact Assessment (SEA)**  
From a Water Framework Perspective (WFD) the Whitchurch area is in a sensitive location. As identified in the scoping report the River Test is a SSSI. The area is also underlain by a principal aquifer (Chalk) and there are a number of source protection zones for drinking water abstraction.

The scoping report also correctly identifies that part of the area is affected by flood zones 3 and 2.

Due to the above constraints if development was not managed appropriately then there could be a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, we concur that an Environmental Report is necessary.


**Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)**  
We have no comments to make on this.

**Further Information**  
We would also like to offer the advice contained within our leaflet 'Planning for the environment at the neighbourhood level'. A PDF copy is attached to this email for your convenience.

If you have any queries then please do not hesitate to contact me. We look forward to working with you and the community on future stages of the plan.

Yours faithfully

Environment Agency  
Goldcrest House, Alice Holt Lodge, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LH.





ENGLISH HERITAGE  
SOUTH EAST

Mr Andrew Rushmer  
Senior Planning Policy Officer  
Planning Policy Team  
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council  
Civic Offices  
London Road  
Basingstoke, RG21 4AH

Our ref: HD/P5229/01/PC3  
Your ref:  
Telephone 01483 252040  
Fax

15<sup>th</sup> September 2014

Dear Andrew,

**Strategic Environment Impact Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report for the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan**

Thank you for your letter and e-mail of 11<sup>th</sup> August regarding the above.

I apologise for the last minute response, but I confirm that English Heritage agrees with the Council's opinion that an SEA Environmental Report **is** required for the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan. We leave the Habitats Regulation Assessment to Natural England.

Thank you for consulting English Heritage.

Yours sincerely,



Martin Small  
Historic Environment Planning Adviser  
(Bucks, Oxon, Berks, Hampshire, IoW, South Downs National Park and Chichester)

E-mail: [martin.small@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:martin.small@english-heritage.org.uk)

## Natural England

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**From:** Routh, Charles (NE) [mailto:charles.routh@naturalengland.org.uk]  
**Sent:** 19 September 2014 14:45  
**To:** Andrew Rushmer  
**Subject:** RE: Screening of Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan - SEA and HRA. NE ref: 129036

\*\*\*\* PLEASE NOTE: This message has originated from a source external to Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council, and has been scanned for viruses. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council reserves the right to store and monitor e-mails \*\*\*\*

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Dear Andrew, apologies for not meeting your deadline request. Unfortunately a colleague put a standard 6 week deadline on our system, so I have only just looked at this consultation.

I can confirm that we concur with your screening conclusions, namely:

The preliminary findings are that the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan will need to be accompanied by an Environmental Report in accordance with the requirements of the EAPP Regulations 2004, but will not require Appropriate Assessment as per the Habitats Regulations.

Please find attached an associated feedback form which we would appreciate if you would complete and return.

Charles Routh  
Lead Adviser, on behalf of Hampshire and Dorset Team, Natural England. 07990 773630