

Fenland District Council

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Determination Statement:

Draft Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan

This determination statement has been produced by Fenland District Council (FDC) as “responsible authority”, to meet the requirements of Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

This Determination Statement forms a Submission Document for the purposes of neighbourhood planning, as required by The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) (reg. 15(e)(ii)).

A Screening Assessment was undertaken by FDC during the preparation of the draft Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan. As part of this assessment, FDC consulted the relevant statutory bodies. The SEA Screening Report follows this Determination Statement.

The Screening Report examines the strategic policy and environmental context relevant to the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan Area and presents the findings of the screening assessment. The report identifies that the draft Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to increase the overall quantum of growth beyond that which has already been permitted through the planning system. Other policies generally accord with the adopted Local Plan, the potential environmental effects of which were duly assessed through the local plan-making process.

The Screening Report was sent to the relevant consultation bodies for comment (8 January to 12 February 2026). Responses were received from Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Historic England confirmed that based on the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of ‘SEA’ Directive], they concur with the Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

Natural England confirmed that on the basis of the material supplied, that significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely.

The Environment Agency confirmed they reviewed the screening report, and do not disagree with the conclusion.

Based on the assessment undertaken in the SEA Screening Report and the responses received from statutory bodies, Fenland District Council considers that no likely significant environmental effects will arise from implementation of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan. Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan is not required.



Strategic Environmental Assessment & Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report

December 2025

On behalf of Wimblington & Stonea Parish Council

Date of assessment:	18 th December 2025
Date/ version of neighbourhood development plan to which Screening Report applies:	Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan (Reg. 14) October 2024

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Overview

Neighbourhood Development Plan to which this Screening Report applies:

Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan (Reg. 14) October 2024

Version/ date of Neighbourhood Development Plan to which this Screening Report applies:

Regulation 14 version dated October 2024

Neighbourhood area to which the Neighbourhood Development Plan applies:

Wimblington and Stonea Neighbourhood Area

Qualifying Body within the neighbourhood area:

Wimblington & Stonea Parish Council

Acronyms

DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
FDC	Fenland District Council
ha	Hectares
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
IRZ	Impact Risk Zone
NCA	National Character Area
NDP	Neighbourhood Development Plan
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPPG	National Planning Practice Guidance
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WSNP	Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to undertake a screening exercise against various criteria to determine whether the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan (WSNP) requires a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/ or Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).
- 1.2. This version of the Screening Report is referred to as a *Screening Report*. It has been prepared for consultation with statutory consultation bodies. Once consultation with the Statutory Bodies has been undertaken, the Screening Report will be finalised.
- 1.3. The Screening Report will support the WSNP in satisfying the basic conditions, and will be submitted as part of the evidence base which will accompany the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP).

Overview of requirements of the SEA Regulations in regard to Neighbourhood Plans

- 1.4. A NDP must meet the 'basic conditions' set out in 8(2) of *Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990*. This includes demonstrating that the NDP does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations, as incorporated into UK law, such as:
 - **Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment** (the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive), transposed into UK law by The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004; and
 - **Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora**, which was initially transposed into UK law by The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 with various amendments consolidated by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2018.
- 1.5. In addition, basic condition 'g' requires:

*prescribed conditions are met in relation to the Order (or plan) and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the order (or neighbourhood plan)*¹.
- 1.6. Notably, this includes demonstrating that the making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017*, which set out the habitat regulation assessment process for land use plans, including consideration of the effect on habitats sites.
- 1.7. Following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (i.e. *Brexit*), EU law no longer has supremacy over British laws. Whilst initially introduced by EU Directives, the processes for SEA and HRA have been transposed into UK law, namely *The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004* (as amended) and the *Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017* (as amended).

¹ [Neighbourhood planning - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/requirements-for-neighbourhood-planning)

- 1.8. In light of *Brexit*, to enable the continued operation of the HRA processes *The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019*² made a number of changes to the 2017 Regulations. Most of these changes involved transferring functions from the European Commission to the appropriate authorities in England and Wales, with all other processes or terms in the 2017 Regulations remaining unchanged and existing guidance remaining relevant. The obligations of competent authorities (in this case *FDC*) for the protection of sites or species do not change.
- 1.9. *Special Areas of Conservation* (SACs) were originally designated under the Habitats Directive and target particular habitats (Annex I) and/or species (Annex II) identified as being of European importance. *Special Protection Areas* (SPAs) are classified under the European Council Directive “on the conservation of wild birds” (79/409/EEC; ‘Birds Directive’) for the protection of wild birds and their habitats.
- 1.10. SPAs and SACs in the UK no longer form part of the EU’s Natura 2000 ecological network. The 2019 Regulations have created a ‘national site network’ on land and at sea, including both the inshore and offshore marine areas in the UK, and includes existing SPAs and SACs. Ramsar sites are designated wetlands of international importance. Ramsar sites do not form part of the national site network. Many Ramsar sites overlap with SPAs and SACs, and are designated for the same or different species and habitats. All Ramsar sites remain protected in the same way as SPAs and SACs.
- 1.11. This Screening Report uses the term ‘*European Site*’ when referring collectively to SPAs, SACs, and Ramsar sites. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also expects candidate SACs, potential SPAs and Ramsar sites to be included within the assessment.
- 1.12. In general terms, a NDP may require a full SEA following screening where its policies and proposals are likely to result in significant effects on the environment, particularly where such effects have not already been considered and dealt with, such as through a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of a Local Plan.
- 1.13. In the context of neighbourhood planning, following screening, should a NDP be deemed likely to result in a significant impact occurring on a protected European Site as a result of the plan’s implementation, the HRA proceeds to Appropriate Assessment. The aim of the HRA process is to assess the potential effects arising from a plan against the nature conservation objectives of any European Site designated for its nature conservation importance.

Responsibilities

Local Planning Authority (FDC)

- 1.14. As local planning authority, FDC is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the SEA requirements have been met prior to the Neighbourhood Plan being made. FDC is best placed to make a screening determination, given its access to environmental information and understanding of strategic-level planning issues relating to the Neighbourhood Area, Fenland district and the surrounding area.
- 1.15. FDC is responsible for coordinating consultation on this Screening Report

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2019/579/contents/made>

Qualifying Body (Wimblington & Stonea Parish Council)

1.16. Wimblington & Stonea Parish Council is the Qualifying Body for the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area (which is coterminous with the parish boundary). Only Wimblington & Stonea Parish Council has the legal right to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area.

Statutory Bodies

1.17. For the purposes of SEA, the statutory bodies are executive non-departmental public bodies with responsibilities for managing the environment on government's behalf, including:

- Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Natural England

1.18. For the purpose of SEA for the WSNP, the statutory bodies are requested to review and make representations during consultation on this Screening Report.

Report structure

1.19. Following this introductory section, Section 2 describes the strategic planning context against which the WSNP is being prepared.

1.20. Section 3 provides key information about the WSNP and Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area, including its relationship to other plans and strategies and a summary of key environmental characteristics and constraints within, or in proximity of, the Neighbourhood Area.

1.21. Section 4 describes the SEA methodology. Section 5 provides assessment of the WNP against various SEA themes to identify the likelihood of significant effects on the environment, drawing on the environmental constraints identified in section 3.

1.22. Section 6 sets out the procedure for consulting the Statutory Bodies on this Screening Report. Section 7 provides a summary of the Screening Report's conclusions.

2. Strategic Planning Context

- 2.1. The basic conditions require Neighbourhood Plans to be in *general conformity* with the strategic policies contained in the Development Plan (the Local Plan) for the area.
- 2.2. Through its strategic policies, the Local Plan effectively defines the parameters within which a Neighbourhood Plan may operate. Throughout their preparation, Local Plans are subject to SEA (generally incorporated through a SA) and HRA. Where a Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan, it is likely that many of the environmental effects of the plan will have already been considered through the Local Plan-making process.
- 2.3. National planning policy states that evidence should be 'adequate and proportionate'³. Repeating of policy assessment already undertaken should be avoided. It is therefore relevant to consider the strategic policy context for the purpose of avoiding duplication and to identify environmental effects not already considered and addressed through the Local Plan-making process.

Fenland Local Plan 2014 and Review

Current status

- 2.4. The current Fenland Local Plan was adopted in 2014. The Local Plan defines strategic and locally specific policies for the district, and covers a plan period from 2011 to 2031. During its preparation, the Local Plan was subject to a full SA (incorporating SEA) and HRA.
- 2.5. Being greater than five years old, it is necessary (by law) to regularly review its content to determine if the plan remains 'up to date'. At FDC's Full Council meeting of 21 February 2019, it was agreed that a full review of the Local Plan would commence. The Council undertook several consultation activities and prepared a range of technical evidence. The Draft Fenland Local Plan (2022) was published for consultation between 25th August 2022 and 19 October 2022. Following several delays and to reflect changes to national planning rules, Fenland District Council's Full Council agreed to withdraw the previous emerging Local Plan on 15 December 2025. By starting again under the new planning system, we can prepare a new Local Plan - Fenland 50 - that looks ahead to the future and better reflects the needs and ambitions of our communities.
- 2.6. At the time at which the WSNP reaches examination, it is likely that the Fenland Local Plan 2014 will remain the adopted Local Plan for the area. The basic conditions require Neighbourhood Plans to achieve 'general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the local area'. Therefore, for SEA screening, the WSNP is assessed in the context of the adopted Fenland Local Plan 2014.

Local Plan Strategy for Wimblington & Stonea

- 2.7. Local Plan Policy LP3 sets out a spatial strategy for Fenland, which directs growth to settlements based on their position in a 'settlement hierarchy'. The policy indicates that the majority of growth is directed to the 'market towns' at the 'top' of the hierarchy.
- 2.8. 'Growth Villages' are second in the hierarchy, where development and new service provision either within the existing urban area or as small village extensions will be appropriate albeit of a considerably more limited scale than that appropriate to the Market Towns. Wimblington is

³ Para. 32, NPPF 2024

identified as a 'growth village'. There is a note within Policy LP3 which states:

“Development at Wimblington and Doddington will be appropriate provided that capacity at, or in the sewerage network leading to, the Waste Water Treatment Work in Doddington can be addressed. Developers are advised to contact Anglian Water at the earliest opportunity.”

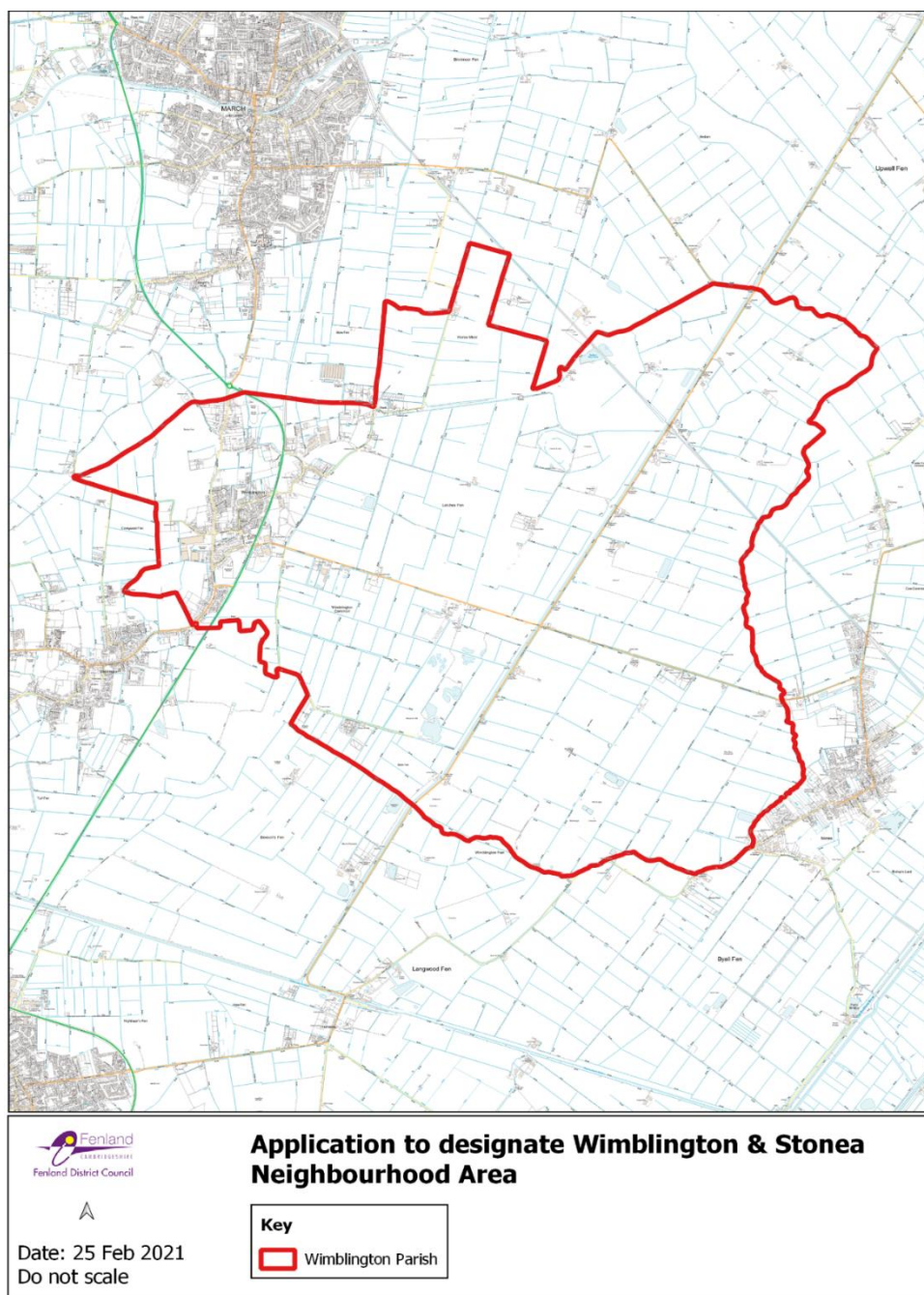
- 2.9. It is important to note that the Local Plan is settlement, rather than parish, focussed. Therefore, where the Local Plan makes reference to 'Wimblington' it is referring to Wimblington *village*. The Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood area applies to the whole of Wimblington & Stonea Civil Parish, which in addition to Wimblington village, includes the hamlets of Eastwood End and Stonea, and extensive open countryside.
- 2.10. For the remaining Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area, i.e. land falling outside any given settlement (such as the open countryside), development opportunities are restricted to that which is demonstrably essential to the effective operation of local agriculture, horticulture, forestry, outdoor recreation, transport or utility services; and to minerals or waste development in accordance with separate Minerals and Waste Local Development Documents.

3. Summary of Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan

Overview of the Neighbourhood Development Plan

- 3.1. The subject of this screening report is the draft Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan. The current stage of preparation of the WSNP is the Regulation 14 consultation.
- 3.2. The WSNP has been prepared by the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group on behalf of the Wimblington & Stonea Parish Council, the 'qualifying body' for the purposes of neighbourhood planning. The Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area was formally designated by FDC on 18 March 2021 and comprises the whole of the parish area of Wimblington & Stonea (see **Map 1**).

MAP 1: BOUNDARY OF THE DESIGNATED WIMBLINGTON & STONEA NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA (FDC)



3.3. The WSNP sets out the following Vision for the Neighbourhood Area:

“The community’s Vision is that Wimblington and Stonea remains a tranquil, rural parish. The tradition and history of the neighbourhood area will be celebrated and the community spirit will be fostered. Future housing design and developments will respect the character of the village and fulfil the needs of the community.”

3.4. The WSNP sets ten aims to achieve the vision:

- 1. The rural character of the parish, including its open landscape and Big Skies, will be maintained and enhanced through appropriate small-scale developments and improvements. The Woodman’s Way walking trail will be retained and enhanced.**
- 2. The natural environment, including water features will be enhanced and protected.**
- 3. The historic character and heritage assets of the parish will be preserved and enhanced.**
- 4. High quality, sustainable design will be secured in all new development reflecting the distinctive character of Wimblington.**
- 5. New housing growth will contribute to a compact and integrated village, meeting the needs of existing and future residents in terms of housing mix and tenure.**
- 6. The roads in the Parish will be safe and accessible for pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and motorists. New development will be required to make improvements to the road and pavement infrastructure to increase safety, including traffic calming on new access roads, reduce the impact of congestion and provide adequate parking. Public transport provision will be encouraged.**
- 7. The footpaths, cycle routes and bridleways network will be improved to be safe and accessible and additional links put in place to improve access to facilities and services.**
- 8. Existing community facilities will be retained. New facilities or improvements to existing facilities will be encouraged to enhance opportunities for community cohesion.**
- 9. Formal and informal amenity spaces will be protected and enhanced and Local Green Spaces designated to protect those spaces of particular community value.**
- 10. Small scale local businesses will be supported and the impact of new business development will be in keeping with the rural character of the area.**

3.5. To deliver the Vision and Aims, the WSNP proposes 17 policies in total, which are summarised in Table 1. Note that the table provides a *summary* of the policies intent, not the actual policy wording.

Table 1: Summary of Draft Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Policy	Summary
Policy RE1: Rural Character	The policy provides a list of design principles and requirements to ensure new development respects the rural character of Wimblington village, Stonea and the surrounding landscape.
Policy RE2: Rural Character: Public Rights of Way	The policy seeks to protect existing public rights of way and the open countryside character that contributes to their enjoyment. New development should enhance and provide links to the existing PRoW network.
Policy NE1: Protecting the Landscape	The policy requires development to protect and enhance the historic and natural landscape. This includes protecting open views, identifying

	a number of features to be protected and retained.
Policy NE2: Biodiversity	The policy seeks the protection and enhancement of existing natural features and provision of at least 10% biodiversity net gain. Requires new development to incorporate species related measures and to link opportunities for sustainable drainage solutions and nature conservation.
Policy NE3: Proposed Fens Reservoir	The policy seeks to support the Fens Reservoir project where it makes a positive contribution to the Neighbourhood Area, setting out a number of requirements.
Policy HE1: Protecting and enhancing local heritage assets	The policy requires development proposals to consider their effects on heritage assets, taking into account the character, context and setting of the assets.
Policy SD1: Development and the Settlement Boundary	The policy seeks to support appropriate new development within the settlement boundary. Exceptional circumstances are identified where development may be supported outside but adjacent to the settlement boundary.
Policy SD2: Strategic Gaps	The policy seeks to prevent the coalescence of settlements by identifying two strategic gaps between March and Wimblington and Doddington and Wimblington.
Policy SD3: High-Quality Design	The policy seeks to support new development which is in accordance with the Wimblington & Stonea Design Guidance and Codes, setting out a list of design principles and requirements to ensure new development is of high quality.
Policy SD4: Provision of energy and water efficient buildings	The policy seeks energy and water efficiency measures in new and existing buildings, with new development targeting net zero carbon emissions.
Policy SD5: Flood Risk	The policy ensures that development proposals appropriately manage flood risk.
Policy H1: Housing mix	To meet local housing need the policy requires major housing developments to provide a certain percentage of dwellings of a particular number of bedrooms, affordable housing, and suitable or adaptable for older people.
Policy TT1: Car Parking	The policy seeks parking in accordance with FDC parking standards.
Policy TT2: Provision for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders	The policy encourages new development to provide traffic calming measures and to improve the public rights of way network.
Policy C1: Community facilities	Policy resists the loss of or significant harm to a list of community facilities. Other uses may be considered where appropriate evidence is provided. New or improvements to existing facilities will be encouraged.
Policy C2: Local Green Spaces	The policy designates 24 green areas as Local Green Spaces, providing protection from development in accordance with national policy for Green Belts.
Policy C4: Supporting Local Employment and Agriculture	The policy encourages new small businesses and the expansion or diversification of existing businesses where they comply with a list of key principles.

Summary of Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area Characteristics

3.6. In order to determine the likely significant effects of the WSNP on the environment, it is important to consider the characteristics of the area likely to be affected. A range of sources of information have been used to gather this information, including DEFRA Magic Maps⁴,

⁴ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

LandIS Soilscape map⁵, the Environment Agency Flood Risk Map for Planning⁶, Nomis⁷, Cambridgeshire Insight parish profile⁸, Historic England National Heritage List⁹ and Fenland's Development Plan and accompanying documents, and Fenland Maps.

Geography

3.7. Wimblington & Stonea parish is located in the south of Fenland district in Cambridgeshire, and borders the parish of March to the north. It is a predominantly rural parish, containing the village of Wimblington and hamlets of Eastwood End and Stonea.

Population

3.8. The Census 2011 indicates there were 2,211 residents in the parish in 2011, with a population density of 0.7 people per hectare. Estimates from the Office for National Statistics indicate that the parish population in mid-2020 was 2,226 residents¹⁰.

3.9. The Census 2011 shows there were 941 households in Wimblington parish. Of which 80.4% were either owned outright or owned with a mortgage or loan. Wimblington has an average household size of 2.35 people per household.

3.10. 21.9% of all households in Wimblington at the time of the 2011 Census were retired. This is higher than the figure for Fenland (17.1%).

Internationally Designated Sites

3.11. There are no internationally designated nature sites within the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area. In identifying internationally designated habitats sites, an area of search of 30km has been applied due to the potential effects of development on functionally related land. The following European Sites (Ramsar, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) lie within 30km of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area (see **Map 2** for their location):

- Breckland - SAC SPA,
- Chippenham Fen (Fenland) - Ramsar, SAC
- Fenland (Wicken) - Ramsar, SAC
- Nene Washes - Ramsar, SAC, SPA
- Norfolk Valley Fens - SAC
- Orton Pit - SAC
- Ouse Washes - Ramsar, SAC, SPA
- Portholme – SAC
- Rex Graham Reserve – SAC
- Woodwalton Fen (Fenland) – Ramsar, SAC

3.12. There are no Proposed Ramsar sites, Possible Special Areas of Conservation, or Potential Special Protection Areas within or in proximity to the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area.

⁵ <https://www.landis.org.uk/soilscales/>

⁶ <https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

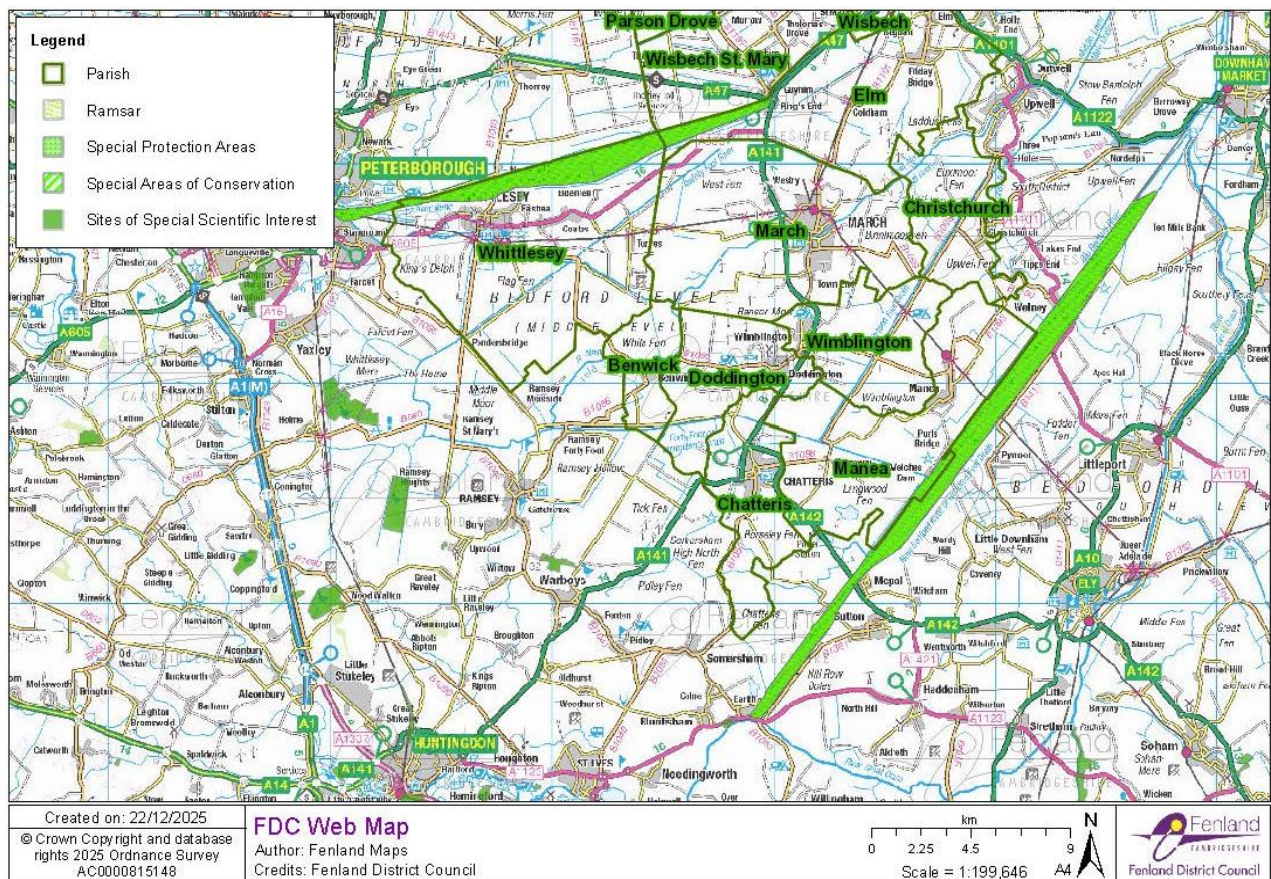
⁸ <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/population/census-2011/>

⁹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

¹⁰

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/13843parishpopulationestimatesformid2011tomid2020basedonbestfittingofoutputareastoparishes>

MAP 2: INTERNATIONALLY DESIGNATED SITES IN PROXIMITY TO WIMBLINGTON & STONEA NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA



Sites of Special Scientific Interest

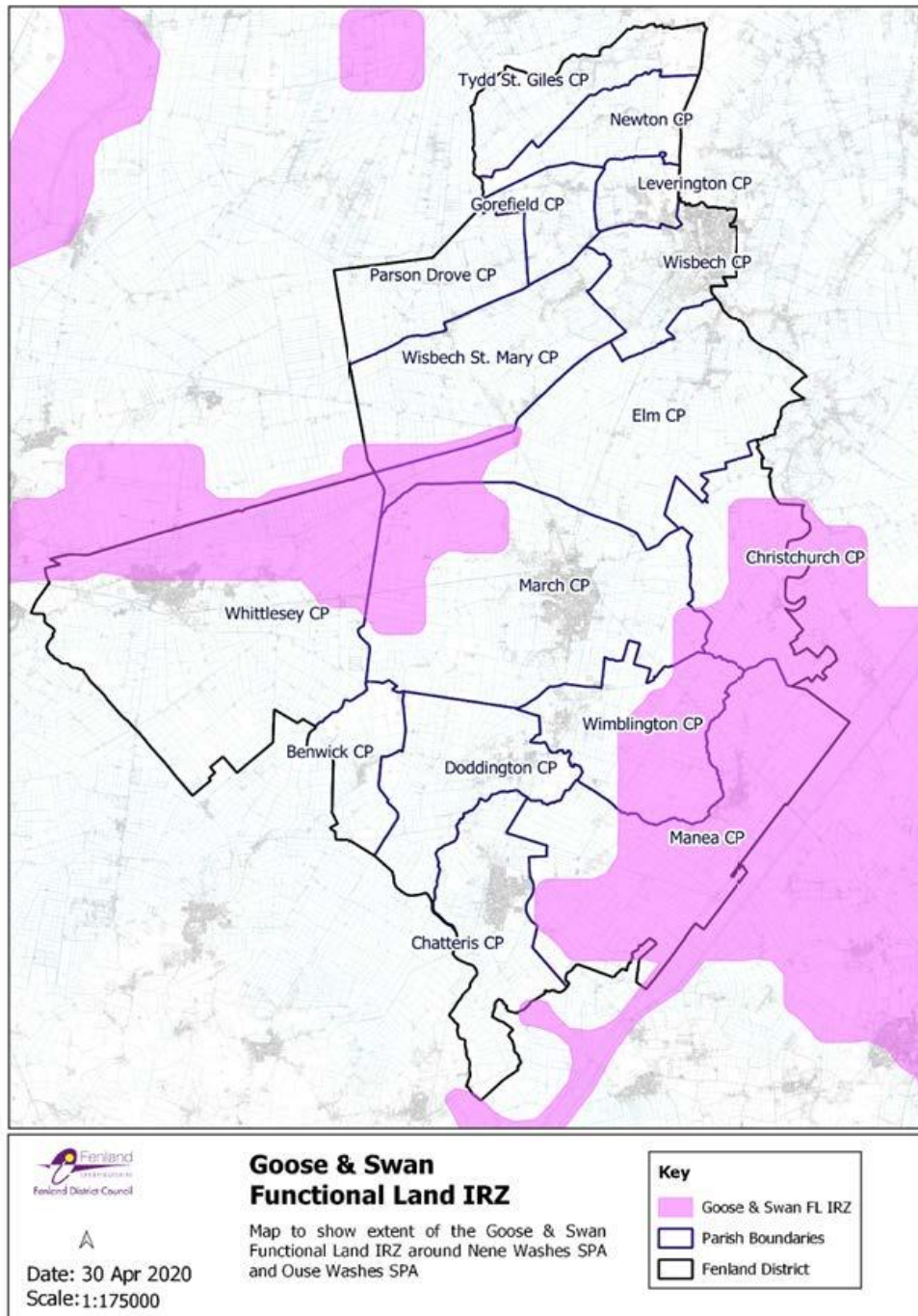
3.13. There are no Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the boundary of the WSNP area.

3.14. New development has the potential to increase visitor disturbance and recreational pressure on SSSIs. The Ouse Washes SSSI (at just under 2.0km) are located within 8km of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area, whilst the Nene Washes are around 8.5km away at the closest point.

SSSI Impact Risk Zones

3.15. The SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) relating to the **Ouse Washes SSSI** extend into the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area. IRZs are defined by Natural England and indicate zones around each SSSI site that reflect the particular sensitivities of the features for which it has been notified and indicate the types of development proposal which could potentially have adverse impacts. In the case of the Ouse Washes, the main IRZ which extends into the WSNP area is Goose and Swan Functional Land (see **Map 3**).

MAP 3: GOOSE & SWAN FUNCTIONAL LAND IRZ IN WIMBLINGTON & STONEA NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA



Locally Designated Sites

3.16. There are no local nature reserves (LNR) within the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area. The nearest one is the Rings End LNR north of March, about 6.5km away.

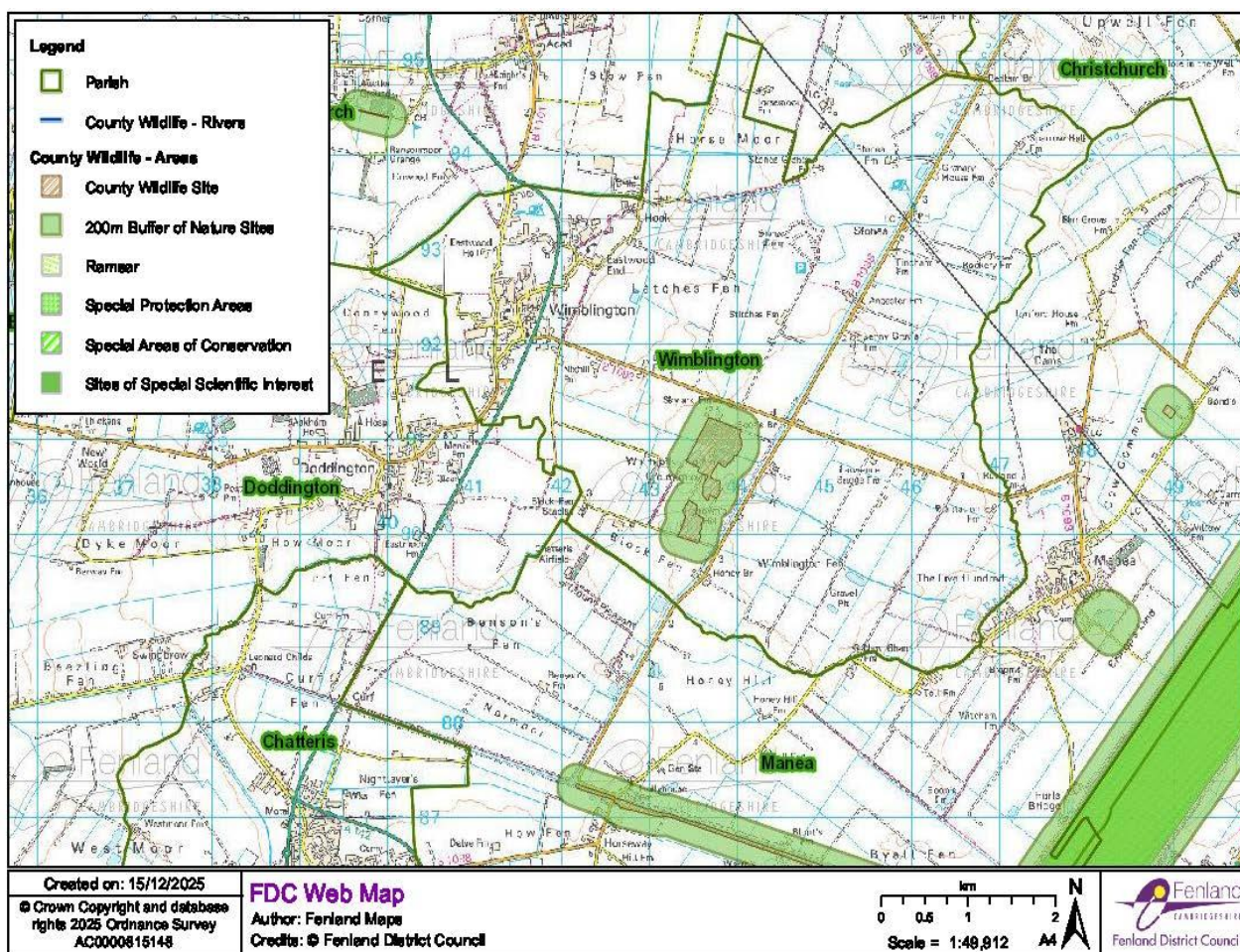
3.17. There is one County Wildlife Site (CWS) within the boundary of the WSNP area. The Wimblington Common CWS is located south of Manea Road and west of the Sixteen Foot Drain. There are three other CWS within a 2.0km radius of the Neighbourhood Area (see

Map 4):

- Wimblington Common CWS
- Gault Bank Pollard Willows CWS (to the north-west)
- Forty Foot Drain CWS (to the south)

- Bedlam Hill Pit CWS (to the east)

MAP 4: COUNTY WILDLIFE SITES IN OR WITHIN 2.0KM OF WIMBLINGTON & STONEA NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA



National Character Areas

3.18. The WSNP area lies The Fens National Character Area (NCA). The key characteristics of this NCA includes:

The Fens NCA¹¹

- Expansive, flat, open, low-lying wetland landscape influenced by the Wash estuary, and offering extensive vistas to level horizons and huge skies throughout, provides a sense of rural remoteness and tranquillity.
- Jurassic clays are overlain by rich, fertile calcareous and silty soils over the coastal and central fens and by dark, friable fen peat further inland. The soils are important for agriculture, which is hugely significant for the rural economy in the Fens. There are over 4,000 farms in the Fens; enough wheat is grown here annually to produce a quarter of a million loaves of bread and one million tons of potatoes are grown here. In addition to traditional vegetables, exotics such as pak choi are now cultivated. Some 40 per cent of England’s bulbs and flowers are also produced in the Fens.
- The Wash is the largest estuarine system in Britain, supporting internationally important intertidal and coastal habitats influenced by constant processes of accretion and deposition, forming salt marsh and mudflats and providing habitats for wildfowl, wading birds and other wildlife, including grey seals and approximately 90 per cent of the UK’s common seals. It also provides important natural sea defences and plays a key role in

¹¹ <https://nationalcharacterareas.co.uk/the-fens/key-characteristics/>

climate change regulation. Flood storage areas on the Nene, Cam, Lark and Ouse washes also provide significant biodiversity interest. True fen mainly occurs at remnant conservation sites, such as Baston or Wicken Fen.

- Overall, woodland cover is sparse, notably a few small woodland blocks, occasional avenues alongside roads, isolated field trees and shelterbelts of poplar, willow and occasionally leylandii hedges around farmsteads, and numerous orchards around Wisbech. Various alders, notably grey alder, are also used in shelterbelts and roadside avenues.
- The predominant land use is arable – wheat, root crops, bulbs, vegetables and market gardening made possible by actively draining reclaimed land areas. Associated horticultural glasshouses are a significant feature. Beef cattle graze narrow enclosures along the banks of rivers and dykes and on parts of the salt marsh and sea banks.
- Open fields, bounded by a network of drains and the distinctive hierarchy of rivers (some embanked), have a strong influence on the geometric/rectilinear landscape pattern. The structures create local enclosure and a slightly raised landform, which is mirrored in the road network that largely follows the edges of the system of large fields. The drains and ditches are also an important ecological network important for invertebrates, fish including spined loach, and macrophytes.
- The area is very rich in geodiversity and archaeology, with sediments containing evidence for past environmental and climate changes and with high potential for well-preserved waterlogged site remains at the fen edge, within some of the infilled palaeo-rivers and beneath the peat.
- Large, built structures exhibit a strong vertical visual influence, such as the 83 m-high octagonal tower of ‘Boston Stump’ (St Botolph’s Church), Ely Cathedral on the highest part of the Isle of Ely dominating its surrounding fen, wind farms and other modern large-scale industrial and agricultural buildings, while drainage and flood storage structures and embanked rail and road routes interrupt the horizontal fen plain.
- Settlements and isolated farmsteads are mostly located on the modestly elevated ‘geological islands’ and the low, sinuous roddon banks (infilled ancient watercourses within fens). Elsewhere, villages tend to be dispersed ribbon settlements along the main arterial routes through the settled fens, and scattered farms remain as relics of earlier agricultural settlements. Domestic architecture mostly dates from after 1750 and comprises a mix of late Georgian-style brick houses and 20th-century bungalows.

Historic environment

Conservation Area

3.19. There are no designated conservation areas within the WSNP area.

Listed Buildings

3.20. There are 12 listed buildings within the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area¹². They are concentrated within Wimblington. The listed buildings within the WSNP area are:

- The Manor House, Doddington Road, Wimblington (Grade II)
- Church of St Peter, Church Street, Wimblington (Grade II)
- War Memorial, Churchyard of the Church of St Peter, Church Street, Wimblington (Grade II)
- 7 Church Street, Wimblington (Grade II)
- North House, 2 Church Street, Wimblington (Grade II*)
- Addison House, Addison Road, Wimblington (Grade II)
- 6 & 8 Norfolk Street, Wimblington (Grade II)
- 31 Norfolk Street, Wimblington (Grade II)

¹² <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

- 13-15 Eastwood End, Wimblington
- Stonea Grange Farm Barn (Grade II)
- Barn to North East of Stonea Farmhouse (Grade II)
- Stonea Farmhouse (Grade II)

Scheduled Monuments

3.21. There are 3 Scheduled Monuments within the WSNP area:

- Stonea Camp: a multivallate hillfort at Latches Fen
- Bowl barrow 700m NNW of Bridge Farm
- Romano-British settlement near Honeybridge

Environmental Designations

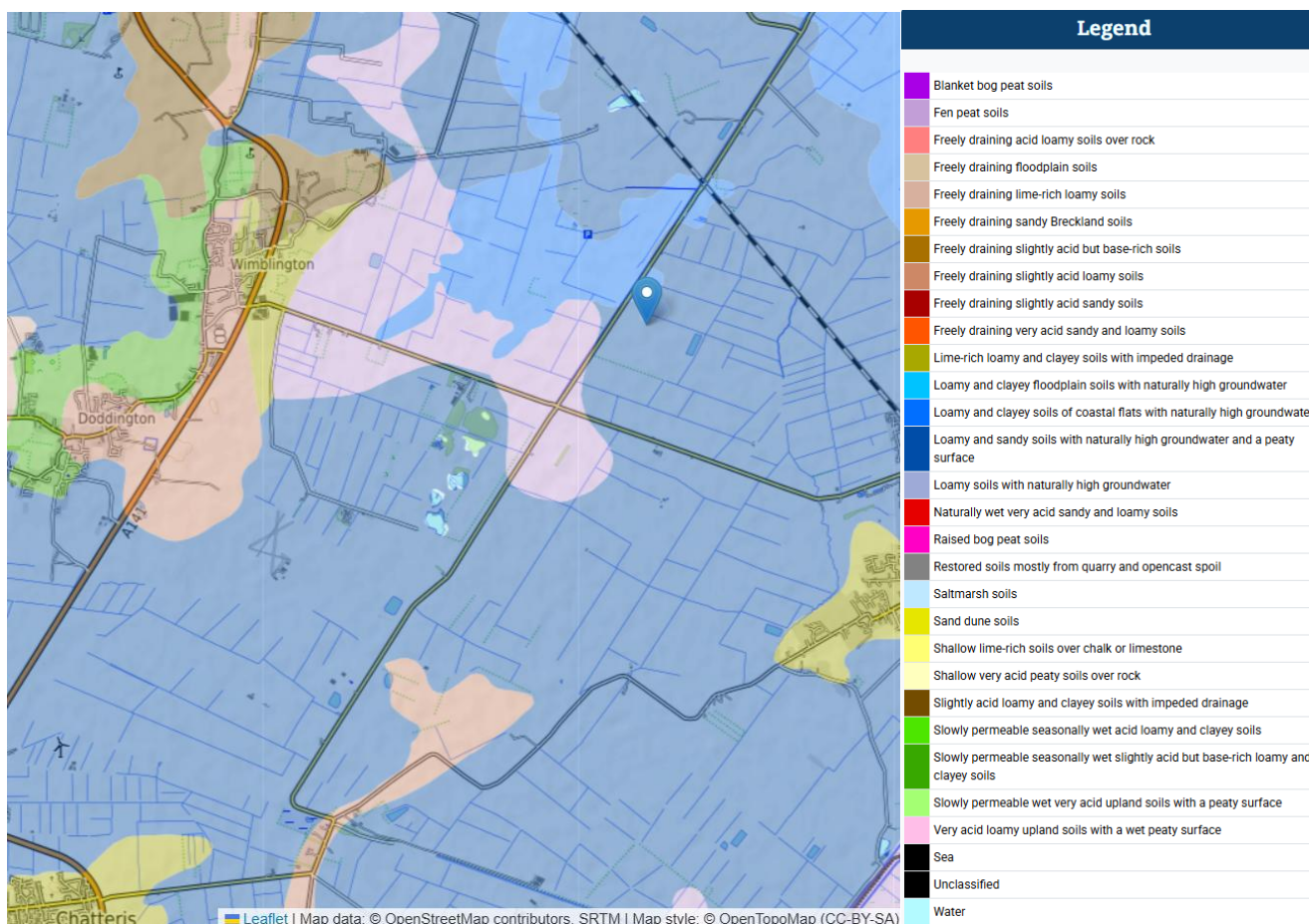
Air

3.22. There are no Air Quality Management Areas within the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area.

Soil

3.23. **Map 5** shows soil types in the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area. Much of the area has ‘loamy and sandy soils with naturally high groundwater and a peaty surface’. The core built area of Wimblington has ‘freely draining slightly acid loamy soils’. The location of differing soil types reflects the low lying fen landscape in the open countryside, and the higher ground in the built areas.

MAP 5: SOILSCAPE IN WIMBLINGTON & STONEA NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

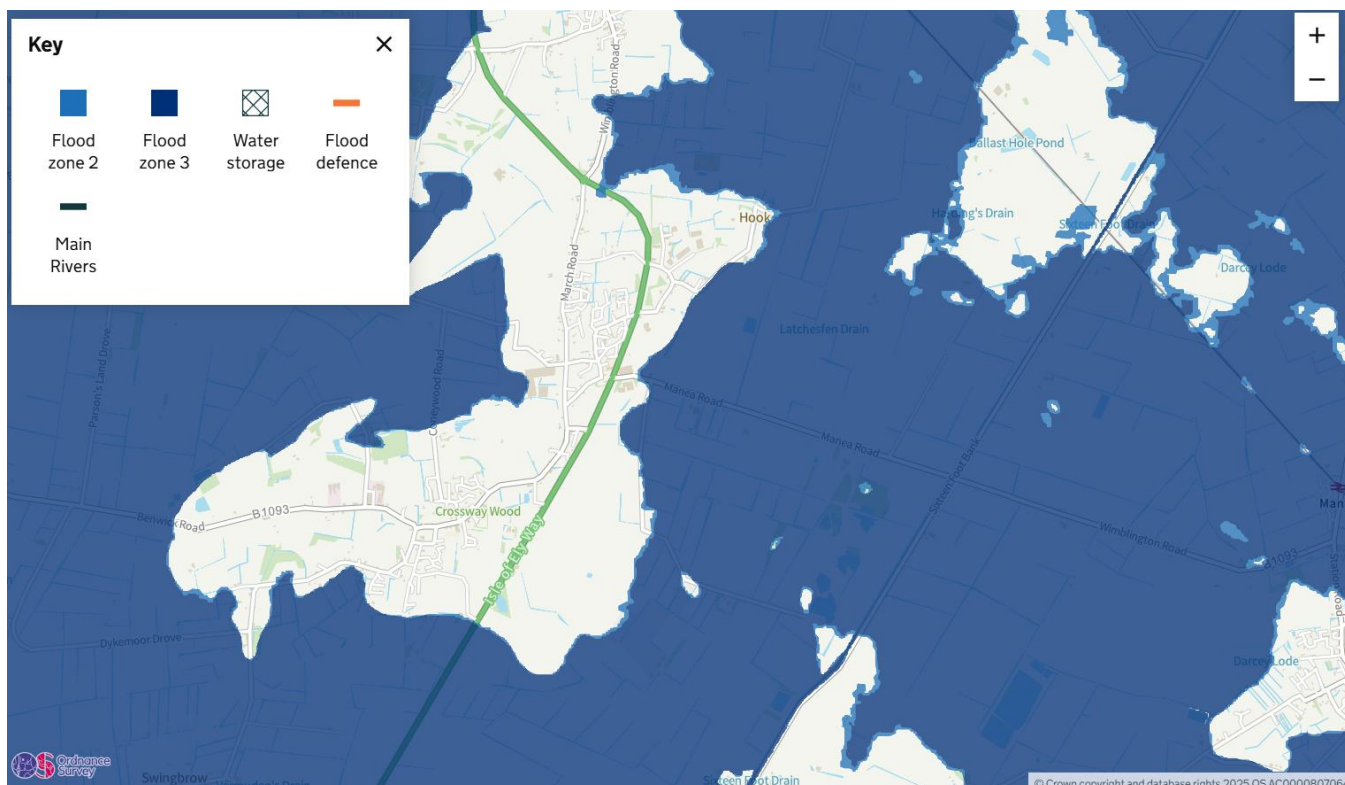


Water environment & flood risk

3.24. In terms of the water environment, the WSNP area falls within the Environment Agency's Old Bedford and Middle Level Management Catchment¹³. The Neighbourhood Area is included within the Middle Level Operational Catchment which is monitored by the Environment Agency for its chemical and ecological status and is currently classified as moderate.

3.25. According to the Environment Agency's Flood Risk Maps¹⁴ (see **Map 6**), a large part of Wimblington and Stonea Neighbourhood Area is at risk from fluvial flooding (i.e. flood risk zones 2 and 3). This reflects the low-lying fen topography of the parish. The existing built areas of Wimblington, Eastwood End and Stonea are generally located on higher land, predominantly in Flood Zone 1.

MAP 6: FLUVIAL FLOOD RISK (ENVIRONMENT AGENCY FLOOD MAP FOR PLANNING)



Source Protection Zones

3.26. Source Protection Zones are defined around large and public potable groundwater abstraction sites, including wells, boreholes and springs. There are no Source Protection Zones within the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan area.

¹³ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/ManagementCatchment/3069>

¹⁴ <https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/>

4. Screening Methodology: Criteria for Assessing the Effects of Neighbourhood Plans

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

- 4.1. The Localism Act 2011 (Schedule 9) introduced neighbourhood planning into the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The 1990 Act, as amended by Schedule 10 of the Localism Act 2011, requires that NDPs meet a set of basic conditions, one of which being that the making of the plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations, *incorporated into UK law*.
- 4.2. To ensure that a NDP meets this basic condition, a SEA may be required to determine the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the NDP. The basis for Strategic Environmental legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC, which was initially transposed into domestic law by the *Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*, or 'SEA Regulations'. Detailed guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive'¹⁵ and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (Paragraph: 073 Reference ID: 41-073-20190509)¹⁶. The NPPG advises that a NDP should be screened early. Whether a NDP proposal requires a SEA, and (if so) the level of detail needed, will depend on what is proposed within the plan.
- 4.3. Where a proposed plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or European offshore marine site (in relation to the Habitats Regulations), this will also trigger the need to undertake a SEA. Schedule 2 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 makes provision in relation to the Habitats Regulations. The regulations require that any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a European site must be subject to an Appropriate Assessment. To achieve this, paragraph 1 of Schedule 2 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 prescribes a basic condition that the making of a NDP is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site. Paragraphs 2 to 5 go on to amend the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 so as to apply its provisions to neighbourhood development orders and plans. A NDP's (or Neighbourhood Development Order) requirements for Appropriate Assessment are clarified further by the Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018.
- 4.4. Article 3(5) of Directive 2001/42/EC details the criteria for determining whether plans are likely to have significant environmental effects. These criteria are outlined in **Figure 1**.
- 4.5. The Department of the Environment document 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' includes a flow chart diagram which sets out the process for screening a planning document to ascertain whether a full SEA is required. The flow chart diagram is provided in **Figure 2**.
- 4.6. **Section 5** provides firstly, a screening assessment of the draft WSNP, against the assessment criteria (in **Figure 1**) to identify the significance of effects which may arise as a

¹⁵

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#basic-conditions-for-neighbourhood-plan-to-referendum>

result of the plan's implementation.

- 4.7. Secondly, **Section 5** applies the SEA Directive to the draft WSNP, as per the flow chart in **Figure 2**, to determine whether the principle of the NDP would warrant the need for SEA.
- 4.8. In order to decide whether a SEA is required, the Council needs to consider the following:
- How the policies in the NDP might affect the environment, community or economy;
 - Whether the policies are likely to adversely affect a "sensitive area", such as a Natura 2000 site (SAC, SPA, Ramsar) or a SSSI, NNR etc.;
 - Whether the policies propose a higher level of development than what is set out in the Fenland Local Plan and that has been assessed by the SA of that Plan;
 - Whether the implementation of the policies is likely to lead to new development;
 - Whether the cumulative impact of the policies taken together may give rise to a significant effect.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Case Law

- 4.9. A decision by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) (People Over Wind & Sweetman vs. Coillte Teoranta) in April 2018 has had a significant impact on the HRA process for both NDPs and Local Plans. In short, the ECJ ruled that in order to determine whether it is necessary to carry out a full HRA of the implications of a plan, it is not appropriate to take account of mitigation measures at the screening stage. Rather, consideration of mitigation will need to occur at the full Appropriate Assessment stage.
- 4.10. Following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, decisions by the ECJ are no longer legally binding but may continue to be relevant¹⁷.
- 4.11. A consequence of the ECJ's decision is that mitigation measures set out in a plan cannot be used at the screening stage to conclude there will be 'no likely significant effects' on European Sites. Therefore, if a NDP includes measures to counter the plan's effects on European Sites these should, in effect, be ignored at the screening stage.
- 4.12. Previously, plan-making in the UK has followed case law as set out in Application of Hart DC vs. Secretary of the State for Communities and Local Government in 2008, which concluded that: 'anything which encourages the proponents of plans and projects to incorporate mitigation measures at the earliest possible stage in the evolution of their plan or project is surely to be encouraged.'
- 4.13. The government has acknowledged that the ECJ's ruling has caused uncertainty in preparing NDPs, and could result in more plans requiring a full SEA or HRA. In December 2018, The Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018 came into force, amending the basic conditions and allowing affected NDPs and Orders to proceed.
- 4.14. For the avoidance of doubt, this screening assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the ECJ's ruling, insofar that the effects on European Sites of any mitigation measures set out in the policies of the WNP have not been considered.

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/16/section/6/enacted>

FIGURE 1: SEA ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

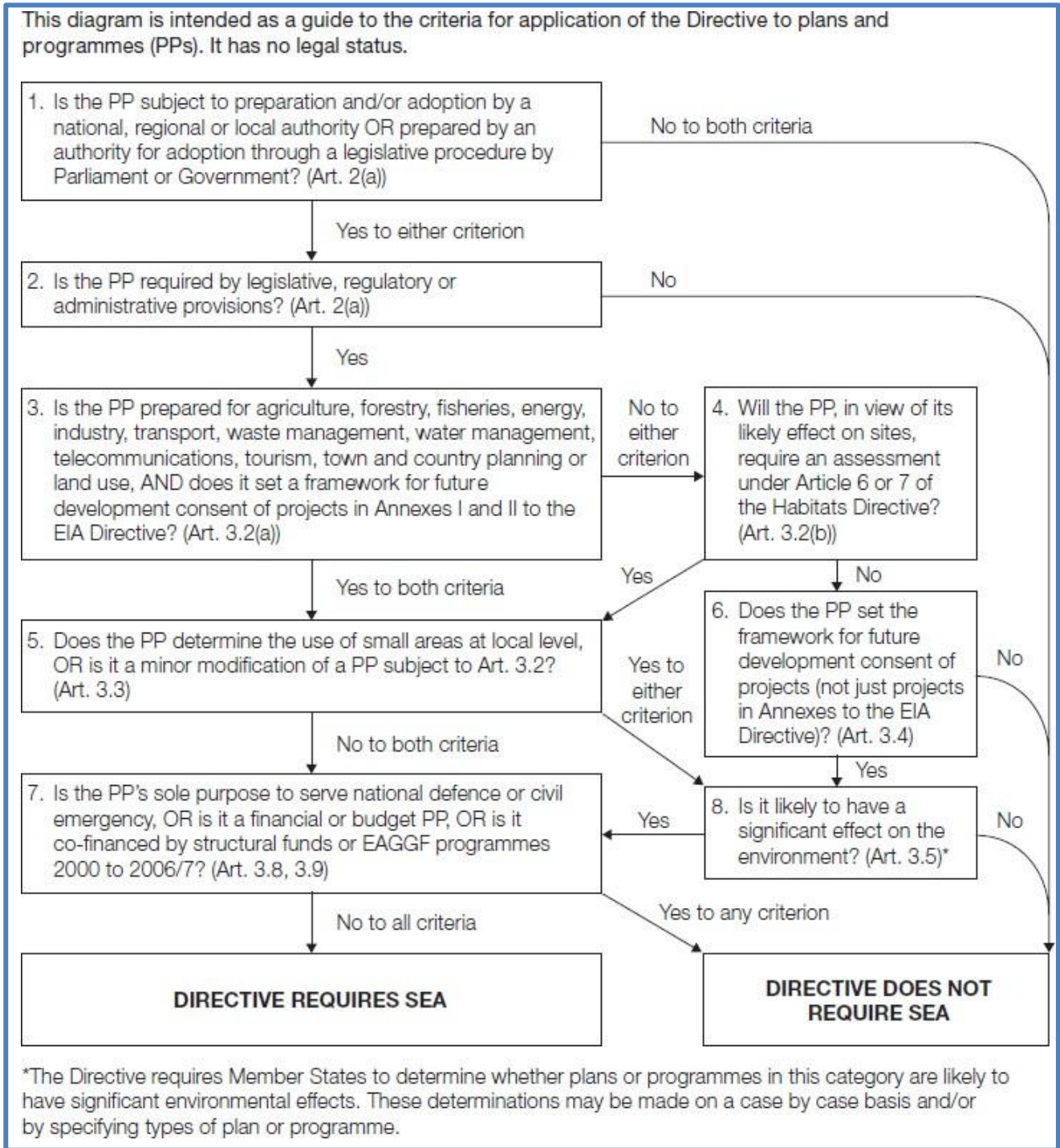
Article 3. Scope

5. Member States shall determine whether plans or programmes referred to in paragraphs 3 and 4 are likely to have significant environmental effects either through case-by-case examination or by specifying types of plans and programmes or by combining both approaches. For this purpose Member States shall in all cases take into account relevant criteria set out in Annex II, in order to ensure that plans and programmes with likely significant effects on the environment are covered by this Directive.

Annex II Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5)

1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to
 - 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 degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;
 - the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;
 - environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme;
 - 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
 - the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;
 - the cumulative nature of the effects;
 - the transboundary nature of the effects;
 - the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents);
 - the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
 - the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:
 - special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;
 - exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;
 - intensive land-use;
 - the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

FIGURE 2: APPLICATION OF THE SEA DIRECTIVE TO PLANS AND PROGRAMMES¹⁸



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5. SEA and HRA Screening Assessment of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan

Introduction

- 5.1. The 'responsible authority' in the case of SEA and the 'competent authority' in the case of HRA, must determine whether a plan or programme, in this case the WSNP, is likely to have a significant environmental effect with reference to specified criteria. The following section sets out an assessment of the WSNP against these criteria.
- 5.2. **Figure 3** and **Figure 4** consider the WSNP against the criteria from Annex II of the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Paragraphs **5.4 to 5.49** that follow consider the likely environmental effects of the WNP policies in relation to the topics set out in Annex I (f) of the SEA Directive. These are biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape, and includes the interaction between these factors.
- 5.3. Paragraphs **5.50 to 5.53** consider the likely significant effects of the WSNP policies in the context of the requirements of the Habitats regulations.

Determination of likely significant environmental effects - SEA Screening

Sustainability Appraisal of the Fenland Local Plan 2014

- 5.4 The Fenland Local Plan 2014 was subject to Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating SEA), and documented in a Sustainability Appraisal Report¹⁹ which fully considered the environmental, social and economic impacts of each of the policies and site allocations within the Local Plan.
- 5.5 As discussed in Section 2, the Local Plan's growth strategy concentrates growth in the market towns with lesser growth in settlements in the lower tiers of the settlement hierarchy. The SA Report considered a range of options for distributing growth, which included distributing growth across the market towns, concentrating growth in certain market towns, and increasing growth in other locations such as the 'Growth Villages' like Wimblington.
- 5.6 The SA Report concluded that the policy's 'approach of distributing growth across the four market towns will bring overall positive impacts across the district as a whole'.

Habitats Regulation Assessment Screening Report 2013

- 5.7 The Fenland Local Plan 2014 is accompanied by a HRA screening report which 'screened out' significant effects on European sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and strategies.
- 5.8 This conclusion was primarily driven by the fact that the growth, in general terms, is strongly directed to the four main market towns which are generally a significant distance from protected sites.

¹⁹ <https://fenland.gov.uk/article/15077/The-Planning-Policy-Library>

- 5.9 The WSNP does not seek to increase growth beyond that proposed by the Local Plan, and is therefore consistent with the Local Plan, Sustainability Appraisal and HRA.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna

- 5.10 As identified in section 3, the internationally designated *Ouse Washes Ramsar / SAC / SPA / SSSI* are in close proximity to the east of the Neighbourhood Area. The effects on internationally designated sites in the context of the HRA requirements are considered at “*Determination of likely significant effects on European Sites - HRA Screening*” – paras 5.50 to 5.53).

- 5.11 The Site Improvement Plan²⁰ (SIP) for the Ouse Washes SPA / SAC, provides the following description of the site:

The Ouse Washes SPA is one of the regions few remaining washland habitats. The site was created in the seventeenth century to provide a flood water storage area for the River Great Ouse. The traditional winter flood storage and summer grazing by cattle, as well as hay production, have given rise to a mosaic of rough grassland and wet pasture, with a diverse and rich ditch fauna and flora. The site regularly supports internationally and nationally important numbers of over-wintering and breeding bird species. Of particular note are the large number of Teal, Pintail, Wigeon, Shoveler, Pochard and Bewick's Swans. Many bird species that regularly use the site either during breeding or wintering periods are qualifying SPA features and qualifies as a wetland of international importance holding over the threshold of 20,000 individual waterfowl.

*The Ouse Washes SAC supports populations of Annex II species spined loach *Cobitis taenia*. The species occurs in the Counter Drain, Old Bedford/River Delph areas of the Ouse Washes, which contains clear water and abundant macrophytes which are of particular importance to maintain healthy populations of this species.*

- 5.12 Natural England's 'Detailed Sites View' database provides data on the condition and management of the Ouse Washes²¹. The data shows the condition of 24 identified features of the Ouse Washes SSSI as:

- Favourable: 54.17%
- Unfavourable – recovering: 4.17%
- Unfavourable - no change: 37.50%
- Not recorded – 4.17%

- 5.13 The SIP identifies the following threats to the integrity of the Ouse Washes:

1. **Inappropriate water levels:** Flooding during spring / early summer severely damages the breeding bird interest by flooding nests, drowning young and affecting habitat. Deep flooding during winter also impacts overwintering birds

²⁰ [Site Improvement Plan: Ouse Washes - SIP160](#)

²¹

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/ReportFeatureConditionSummary.aspx?SiteCode=S1000503&ReportTitle=Ouse%20Washes%20SSSI>

such as wigeon and impacts on the wetland fauna, especially invertebrate populations. Wetland flora is also affected through prolonged submersion, favouring swamp communities over the designated grassland species. Prolonged summer flooding disrupts essential management of the washland, affecting the condition of the grassland for breeding birds in subsequent spring/summer season(s).

2. **Water Pollution:** Inappropriate levels of nutrients from diffuse pollution in combination with inappropriate water levels from flooding have adversely affected the extent/composition of vegetation communities on the washes. Resulting changes to the grassland mosaic has potential to affect the notified bird interests by destroying habitat suitable for many of the birds that visit or breed at the site. Occasional incidences of low oxygen levels on River Delph and Counter Drain have potential to impact spined loach populations.

5.14 In addition, SSSI Impact Risk Zones extend across the Neighbourhood Area, notably those relating to the Ouse Washes SSSI including the *Goose and Swan Functional Land IRZ*. This indicates land which is functionally related to the Ouse Washes, providing opportunities for grazing and roosting for the protected bird species which utilise the Washes. Natural England requires local planning authorities to consult them on planning applications that might impact a SSSI including within Impact Risk Zones.²²

5.15 As discussed in Section 3, there are also a number of County Wildlife Sites within and in proximity of the Neighbourhood Area. The presence of such habitats is of particular relevance to the screening assessment, since new development can pose a potential threat, for example:

- Habitat damage and/or loss;
- Disturbance from urbanisation effects;
- Disturbance from increased recreational pressure;
- Reduced air quality as a result of increased vehicle journeys;
- Water quality changes from water consumption and abstraction; and/or
- Reduced water quality from pollution due to increased demand for waste-water treatment

5.16 *WSNP Policy SD1: Development and the Settlement Boundary* seeks to restrict development to infill or re-development sites within the Settlement Boundary around Wimblington and Eastwood End. Exceptionally development will be supported outside the Settlement Boundary subject to specific criteria including responding to an identified community need, having community support, being of an appropriate scale to serve local needs and according with the scale and character of the settlement. The Settlement Boundary is located to the west of the Neighbourhood Area furthest away from the Ouse Washes and associated IRZ and therefore away from more sensitive habitats located mainly in the east of the Neighbourhood Area.

5.17 The policy strictly limits development in the countryside, and crucially, does not seek to increase growth beyond that identified by the Local Plan. The policy is not expected to give rise to additional development not already considered through Sustainability Appraisal and HRA of the Local Plan and therefore is not expected to give rise to likely significant environmental effects in respect of biodiversity.

²² [A simpler, clearer and faster way to decide when to consult Natural England on planning applications that might affect a SSSI – Natural England](#)

- 5.18 There are a number of policies in the WSNP that seek to protect and enhance biodiversity and therefore should result in positive effects.
- 5.19 For example, *Policy C2: Local Green Spaces* designates around 24 green areas for protection from development, many of which are of biodiversity value. *Policy NE1 Protecting the Landscape* seeks to support the natural landscape of the Parish including ditches, field ponds, mature trees and hedgerows. *Policy NE2: Biodiversity* requires development proposals to retain natural features of sites and to provide at least or above 10% Biodiversity Net Gain.
- 5.20 Overall, the potential for significant negative impacts on biodiversity, flora and fauna to arise from the implementation of the plan are unlikely as the WSNP does not allocate sites for development, nor seek to create additional opportunities for growth beyond those already identified by the Fenland Local Plan 2014.
- 5.21 It is expected that the WSNP will help to protect and enhance biodiversity, flora and fauna in the Neighbourhood Area through the various policy measures it employs. However, for the purposes of SEA, such effects are not considered 'significant'.

Population and human health

- 5.22 The WSNP indirectly supports human health through creating or maintaining opportunities for recreation through *Policy RE2 Public Rights of Way* and *Policy C2: Local Green Spaces*.
- 5.23 *Policy H1 Housing Mix* includes a range of principles to ensure new development meets the housing needs of local people, identified by a local housing needs assessment commissioned by the Parish Council.
- 5.24 *Policy SD3: High Quality Design* and the *Wimblington and Stonea Design Guidance and Codes* provides a set of standards to ensure new development provides high standards of residential amenity.
- 5.25 Through its policy measures, the WSNP is likely to make a positive contribution to meeting the needs of the area's population and supporting health. However, no likely significant effects are identified.

Soil, air and water

- 5.26 WSNP *Policy SD1: Development and the Settlement Boundary* limits development in the open countryside, thereby protecting sensitive peat and fenland soils within the Neighbourhood Area.
- 5.27 The WSNP does not increase overall levels of growth, it is therefore not expected to affect air quality. *Policy SD4 Provision of energy and water efficient buildings* and the *Wimblington and Stonea Design Guidance and Codes* support proposals which incorporate renewable energy technologies. Such measures could support improvements in air quality.
- 5.28 As discussed in section 3, extensive areas of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area are affected by flood risk. *Policy SD5: Flood Risk* includes a series of requirements to ensure new development appropriately manages flood risk.
- 5.29 Overall, significant environmental effects in respect of soil, air or water are not expected to arise from implementation of the WSNP.

Climatic factors

- 5.30 Climatic factors involve the consideration of a plan or programme in relation to climate change. Climate change adaptation and mitigation are closely interrelated and are closely linked to other *environmental issues*.
- 5.31 The WSNP includes a range of policies which may contribute to mitigating and adapting to climate change. *Policy SD4* seeks development proposals to optimise energy efficiency and support the provision of renewable energy technologies. *Policy SD5: Flood Risk* encourages the use of sustainable urban drainage systems. The *Wimblington and Stonea Design Guidance and Codes* also includes various codes which encourage minimising energy use, lifetime and adaptable homes, minimizing construction waste, recycling materials and buildings, and electric vehicle charging points.
- 5.32 Overall, it is considered unlikely that there would be any significant effects in terms of climatic factors as a result of implementing the policies in the WSNP, with the potential to provide positive enhancement through reducing emissions.

Material assets

- 5.33 The SEA Directive does not define what is meant by ‘material assets’ and it can be interpreted in a number of ways. This screening report takes material assets to include a range of social, physical and environmental infrastructure, such as schools, health facilities, roads, railways, bus services, wastewater treatment works, minerals resources, flood defences, etc. Impacts on materials assets are likely to relate to a number of other SEA topics.
- 5.34 Objective 2 seeks ‘ongoing improvement to flood defences, utility infrastructure, and digital connectivity, especially mobile phone reception and broadband’. This is supported by *Policy C4: Supporting Local Employment and Agriculture* encourages the provision of high speed broadband services.
- 5.35 *Policy C1: Community Facilities* seeks to protect existing community facilities within the Neighbourhood Area and encourages the provision of new facilities.
- 5.36 It is considered not likely that the WSNP would have a significant environmental effects on material assets.

Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage

- 5.37 As identified above in section 3, there are several heritage assets within the Neighbourhood Area, including 12 Listed Buildings and 3 Scheduled Monuments.
- 5.38 The historic environment is important to the character and identity of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area. This is recognised by the WSNP through *Policy HE1: Protecting and enhancing local heritage assets*.
- 5.39 *Policy SD3: High Quality Design* sets out a number of development principles to ensure new development reflects local characteristics. Policy SD3 also states that new development will be supported where it is in accordance with the *Wimblington and Stonea Design Guidance and Codes*.
- 5.40 For the purposes of SEA, no significant effects on cultural heritage are expected to arise from implementation of the WSNP.

Landscape

- 5.41 Conservation of the parish's landscapes is an important theme of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.42 *Policy NE1: Protecting the Landscape* seeks to protect, strengthen and enhance the historic and natural landscape of the Parish along with open views.
- 5.43 *Policy SD2: Strategic Gaps* requires development proposals to respect the individual and distinct identities of settlements, ensuring that the distinct separation between Wimblington and Doddington and March is maintained.
- 5.44 *Policy SD3: High Quality Design* and the *Wimblington and Stonea Design Guidance and Codes* set out a number of development principles to ensure new development respects the historic landscape setting.
- 5.45 Significant effects on the environment are not expected to arise from implementation of the WSNP.

Summary of SEA themes

- 5.46 Following consideration of the WSNP's policies against the SEA themes, and taking into account the environmental constraints identified in Section 3, no likely significant environmental effects are identified.

Determination of likely significant effects on European Sites - HRA Screening

- 5.47 Section 3 identifies a number of European Sites within 30km of the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area. Of most significance is the Ouse Washes Ramsar / SAC / SPA, which is located to the east and within 2.0 km of the Neighbourhood Area.
- 5.48 The characteristics and specific threats to the Ouse Washes European Site are described at the '*Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna*' SEA theme (paras. 5.11-21).
- 5.49 As discussed at paras 5.7 – 5.9, the Fenland Local Plan 2014 is accompanied by a HRA screening report which 'screened out' significant effects on European sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and strategies.
- 5.50 The WSNP does not create opportunities for additional new development beyond those identified by the Local Plan. It is therefore concluded that implementation of the WSNP is not likely to have significant effects on the integrity of European Sites. The potential for effects of growth on European Sites were considered through the HRA Screening Report of the Local Plan. Consequently, it is concluded that a full Appropriate Assessment is not required.

SEA/HRA Assessment

- 5.51 **Figure 3** provides assessment of the WSNP against the SEA Directive criteria to identify likely *significant* effects on the environment.
- 5.52 **Figure 4** applies the SEA Directive criteria to the WSNP as per the flow chart in **Figure 2**, to determine whether the *principle* of the WSNP would warrant the need for SEA.

FIGURE 3: ASSESSMENT OF THE LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment	Likely <i>significant</i> environmental effect
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.	<p>The WSNP has been prepared for town and country planning purposes and would, if adopted, form part of the statutory Development Plan and contribute to the framework for future development projects.</p> <p>The principle of development in the Neighbourhood Area, including the nature of development, location and scale, has already been determined by the Fenland Local Plan 2014 and is therefore largely beyond the influence of the WSNP. Any significant effects arising from the proposals in the Local Plan have already been identified through the Sustainability Appraisal of that plan, and through the HRA Screening Report 2013.</p>	No

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment	Likely significant environmental effect
	The WSNP would only apply to a relatively small geographical area (the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area) where a limited number of proposals are anticipated over the plan period.	
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	<p>The WSNP must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Fenland Local Plan and national planning policy as set out in the NPPF.</p> <p>The WSNP provides policies for the Plan area, relevant to the parish area only. The WSNP would therefore not strongly influence other plans and programmes higher up the spatial planning hierarchy.</p>	No
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	<p>It is a basic condition that a NDP must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The WSNP seeks to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account. As discussed in paras. 5.4 to 5.46 (in the context of the various SEA themes), all policies in the WSNP play a role in integrating environmental considerations or promoting sustainable development.</p> <p>These policies are compatible with the adopted Fenland Local Plan, which was subject to both SA/SEA and a HRA screening assessment throughout the plan making process.</p>	No
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	There are no specific environmental problems relevant to the WSNP that have not been identified and assessed through the higher-level Local Plan and its accompanying SA/SEA.	No
(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 content of the WSNP is not in conflict with any plans or programmes within the wider area for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment.	No
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;	<p>This has been tested through the SA/SEA of the Local Plan.</p> <p>The WSNP does not allocate sites for development. The effects of the implementation of the WSNP are therefore uncertain to a certain extent, as they will</p>	No

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment	Likely significant environmental effect
	<p>depend on windfall sites that may come forward. However, such opportunities for windfall sites are expected to be limited and small scale, infill development, therefore the effects are not likely to be significant and are expected to be minimal. It is likely that some policies may result in positive effects by helping to preserve and enhance the environmental features within the Neighbourhood Area.</p> <p>See also paragraphs 5.4 to 5.46 above.</p>	
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	As above in 2(a)	No
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	The WSNP is not expected to give rise to any transboundary effects.	No
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);	The WSNP is not anticipated to give rise to any significant environmental effects that would pose risk to human health or the environment: the effects of the policies in the WSNP may enhance these elements.	No
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	<p>The Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area is coterminous with the boundary of the parish of Wimblington.</p> <p>The spatial extent of any effects of the implementation of the WSNP are expected to be limited to the immediate local area (i.e. the Neighbourhood Area), therefore the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects are expected to be limited in both the local and wider district context.</p>	No
(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	<p>As considered in paras 5.4 to 5.46, it is unlikely that the WSNP would adversely impact the special natural characteristics or cultural heritage of the Neighbourhood Area. The WSNP is not expected to exceed environmental quality standards or lead to intensive land use.</p> <p>The WSNP does not allocate any sites for development. Furthermore, the WSNP includes policies which promote environmental considerations and seek to provide greater protection for the character of the area. Therefore it is not considered that there will be any significant adverse impacts in terms of criteria (f) (i to iii).</p>	No

(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	<p>The Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area includes a number of areas and assets benefitting from protection through statute of local policies, including Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, International Sites, SSSIs and County Wildlife Sites. Since the WSNP does not create additional opportunities for growth, and since the WSNP includes a range of policies which seek to conserve such features, as discussed in paras 5.4 to 5.46, implementation of the WSNP is not likely to result in significant effects.</p> <p>Effects of the WSNP on landscapes are expected to be positive and localised. However, the effects are not likely to be significant in the context of SEA.</p>	No
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FIGURE 4: APPLICATION OF THE SEA DIRECTIVE TO WIMBLINGTON & STONEA NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Criteria	Response: Yes/ No/ Not applicable	Details
1. Is the NDP 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	<p>The preparation and adoption of the WSNP is allowed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by the Localism Act 2011. Whilst the WSNP has been prepared by Wimblington & Stonea Parish Council, it will be adopted by FDC as the local authority and will form part of the statutory development plan for Fenland district.</p> <p>GO TO STAGE 2</p>
2. Is the NDP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art 2 (a))	Yes	<p>Whilst the production of a NDP is not a requirement and is optional, it will, if made, form part of the statutory development plan for the Fenland area. It is therefore important that this screening process considers the potential effects.</p> <p>GO TO STAGE 3</p>
3. Is the NDP 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))	Yes – Town & Country Planning / land use; No - EIA Directive Annex I & II	<p>The WSNP is being prepared for town and country planning and land use, setting a framework for future development consents within the Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Area.</p> <p>However, the NDP does not set a framework for consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive.</p> <p>GO TO STAGE 4</p>

4. Will the NDP, 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 paras 5.47 to 5.50 and Figure 3 for assessment of the NP in terms of HRA. GO TO STAGE 6
5. Does the NDP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of an NDP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art 3.3)	n/a	
6. Does the NDP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Yes	Once 'made' the WSNP forms part of the Development Plan and will be used in the decision-making process on planning applications. It therefore sets the framework for future developments at a local level. GO TO STAGE 8
7. Is the NDP's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7?	n/a	The WSNP does not deal with these issues.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?	No	A NDP could potentially have a significant effect on the environment, dependent on the proposed policies within the NDP. This requires detailed assessment to determine – see 5.4 to 5.46 and Figure 3 , which identify that no likely significant effects are expected to arise through implementation of the WSNP.
Outcome: SEA NOT REQUIRED		

6 Consultation with Statutory Bodies

6.1 The assessment in **Section 5** concludes that it is unlikely that significant environmental effects will arise from the WSNP (as submitted at the date of this assessment) and concludes that SEA is not required. The relevant statutory consultation bodies: the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England, have been consulted on this SEA/HRA screening opinion based on the WSNP. The responses received during this consultation have been summarised below. A full transcript of the responses received are provided in Appendix 1.

Environment Agency

6.2 The Environment Agency confirmed they reviewed the screening report, and do not disagree with the conclusion.

Historic England

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

Natural England

6.4 Natural England confirmed that on the basis of the material supplied, that significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely.

7 SEA/HRA Screening Outcome

- 7.1 Having reviewed the environmental characteristics of the WSNP area and the vision, objectives and policies against the criteria set out in **Section 5** of this report, FDC consider it is unlikely that there will be any significant environmental effects arising from the WSNP and thus the WSNP can be **screened out** for further SEA.
- 7.2 **Sections 5** of this report also indicates that there are unlikely to be any significant effects on a designated European Site arising from the implementation of the WSNP, and therefore further HRA assessment under the Habitats Regulations can be **screened out**.
- 7.3 The WSNP does not allocate any land or sites for development, but provides guidance and criteria-based policies to be used to determine applications should they come forward. The policies in the WSNP generally accord with the adopted Fenland Local Plan, the potential environmental effects of which were duly assessed during the plan-making process through SA/SEA and HRA assessments.
- 7.4 A number of the WSNP policies are environmentally conscientious and address environmental issues positively by seeking to improve the quality of new development to reduce its impacts on the environment. For example, the WSNP includes policies that: seek to protect the landscape character, seek to preserve or enhance heritage assets and their settings, seek to protect and enhance open green spaces, and minimise energy use and waste.
- 7.5 To take an alternative approach, such as preparing evidence bespoke to the WSNP, would be disproportionate and result in unnecessary duplication. This would be contrary to national planning policy.
- 7.6 In the event that the vision, objectives and/or policies covered by the WSNP should change significantly during the plan-making process, or specific sites are allocated for development, this screening process should be repeated for the revised plan.

Appendix 1: Consultation Response from Statutory Bodies

Environment Agency

Dear Sir/Madam

WIMBLINGTON & STONEA NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SEA SCREENING REPORT

WIMBLINGTON AND STONEA PARISH

Thank you for consulting us on the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report for the Wimblington and Stonea Neighbourhood Plan.

We have reviewed the submitted document, and we do not disagree with the conclusion of the screening report.

We trust that this advice is useful.

Yours sincerely

Miss Lucy Fielder

Sustainable Places - Planning Advisor

Historic England

Dear Rachel,

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

The Screening Report indicates that the Council considers that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment. We note that the plan does not propose to allocate any sites for development.

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

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

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

We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you with your correspondence. To avoid any doubt, this does not reflect our obligation to provide further advice on later

stages of the SEA process and, potentially, object to specific proposals which may subsequently arise (either as a result of this consultation or in later versions of the plan) where we consider that, despite the SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its assessment. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), how the allocation, policy or proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.

Please do contact me, either via email or the number below, if you have any queries.

Kind regards,

Ross

Ross McGivern

Historic Places Adviser | Partnerships Team | East of England

Historic England, 24 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge, CB2 8BU

Natural England

Dear Ms Mottram

Wimblington & Stonea Neighbourhood Plan - SEA Screening Report

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 8 January 2026. Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

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

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

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

- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been

considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

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

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission standing advice.

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

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

Please send any new consultations, or further information on this consultation to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle
Consultations Team