

Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report to accompany
Regulation 14 consultation
on the Neighbourhood Plan

September, 2018

Quality information

Version	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
V1	Ian McCluskey Principal Consultant	Nick Chisholm-Batten Principal Consultant	Alan Houghton Technical Director
V2	Nicole Norman Graduate Consultant	Ian McCluskey Principal Consultant	Nick Chisholm-Batten Associate Consultant

Prepared for:

Hexham Town Council

Prepared by:

AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited
Bridgewater House, Whitworth Street, Manchester, M1 6LT
+44 (0)161 907 3500
www.aecom.com

© 2018 AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited. All Rights Reserved.

This document has been prepared by AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited ("AECOM") for sole use of our client (the "Client") in accordance with generally accepted consultancy principles, the budget for fees and the terms of reference agreed between AECOM and the Client. Any information provided by third parties and referred to herein has not been checked or verified by AECOM, unless otherwise expressly stated in the document. No third party may rely upon this document without the prior and express written agreement of AECOM.

Table of Contents

Non-Technical Summary	1
What is strategic environmental assessment?	1
What is the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan?	1
Purpose of the Environmental Report	1
Scoping	2
Assessment of alternative approaches for the HNP	2
Assessment of the current version of the HNP	4
Mitigation	4
Monitoring	5
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 SEA explained	2
1.3 Structure of this Environmental Report	3
2. Local Plan context and vision for the HNP	4
2.1 Local Plan context for the HNP	4
2.2 Vision for the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan	5
3. The Scope of the SEA	5
3.1 SEA Scoping Report	5
3.2 Key sustainability / environmental issues	7
3.3 SEA Framework	10
4. What has plan making / SEA involved to this point?	12
4.1 Introduction	12
4.2 Overview of plan making / SEA work undertaken	12
4.3 Assessment of reasonable alternatives for the Neighbourhood Plan	12
5. What are the appraisal findings at this current stage?	19
5.1 Introduction	19
5.2 Current approach in the Neighbourhood Plan	19
5.3 Approach to the appraisal	20
5.4 SEA Objective 1: Biodiversity	20
5.5 SEA Objective 2: Climate change mitigation	22
5.6 SEA Objective 3: Climate change resilience	23
5.7 SEA Objective 4: Cultural and natural heritage	24
5.8 SEA Objective 5: Landscape and townscape	26
5.9 SEA Objective 6: Water quality	27
5.10 SEA Objective 7: Population and community	28
5.11 SEA Objective 8: Health and wellbeing	30
5.12 SEA Objective 9: Travel and transport	31
5.13 Conclusions at this current stage	33
5.14 Recommendations at this current stage	34
5.15 Monitoring	35
6. What are the next steps?	36
Appendix A: Site Assessment Proformas	
Appendix B: Scoping Report	

Non-Technical Summary

What is strategic environmental assessment?

A strategic environmental assessment has been undertaken to inform the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan (HNP). This process is required by the SEA Regulations.

Neighbourhood Plan groups use SEA to assess Neighbourhood Plans against a set of sustainability / environmental objectives developed in consultation with interested parties. The purpose of the assessment is to avoid adverse environmental and socio-economic effects through the Neighbourhood Plan, and identify opportunities to improve the environmental quality of the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan and the quality of life of residents.

What is the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan?

The Hexham Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) presents a plan for the administrative area of Hexham for the period to 2031. Prepared to be in conformity with the Northumberland Local Plan, it sets out a vision and a range of policies for the Neighbourhood Plan area. These relate to a range of topics, including, but not limited to, housing, open space, recreation, accessibility and housing.

It is currently anticipated that the HNP will undergo a referendum in early 2019.

Purpose of the Environmental Report

The Environmental Report, which accompanies the current consultation on the HNP, is the second document to be produced as part of the SEA process. The first document was the SEA Scoping Report (September 2017), which includes information about the Neighbourhood Plan area's environment and community.

The purpose of the Environmental Report is to:

- Identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the HNP and alternatives; and
- Provide an opportunity for consultees to offer views on any aspect of the SEA process which has been carried out to date.

The Environmental Report contains:

- An outline of the contents and main objectives of the HNP and its relationship with other relevant policies, plans and programmes;
- Relevant aspects of the current and future state of the environment and key sustainability / environmental issues;
- The SEA Framework of objectives against which the HNP has been assessed;
- The appraisal of alternative approaches for the HNP;
- The likely significant environmental effects of the HNP;
- The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects as a result of the HNP; and
- Potential monitoring measures.

Scoping

The scoping stage involves the collection of information relating to:

- the state of the environment in the plan area; *and*
- relevant objectives and targets set out within plans, policies and programmes.

This information allowed for a range of key issues to be identified, and to establish what topics should be the focus of the SEA. The scoping process led to the following topics being scoped in or out of the SEA. These topics then formed the basis of an SEA Framework, which is the basis for appraising the Plan (and reasonable alternatives).

- Air Quality – **Scoped out**
- Biodiversity – **Scoped in**
- Climatic factors - **Scoped in**
- Landscape and historic environment – **Scoped in**
- Land, soil and water resources – Land and soil - **Scoped out**
- Land, soil and water resources – Water quality - **Scoped in**
- Population and community – **Scoped in**
- Health and safety – **Scoped in**
- Transportation – **Scoped in**

Assessment of alternative approaches for the HNP

The Plan proposes to allocate twelve sites for housing development. To inform the decision on which sites to allocate, the Group identified a range of sites that could potentially be allocated. These sites were appraised as part of a site selection process. A summary of the site performance and rationale for selection or rejection is provided below.

Site name	Rationale
Site 1 - Bunker Site, Alemouth Road - Not allocated	Within walking distance of town centre amenities and transport hubs. The site has been vacant over a long period of time (10+ years). The owner intends to dispose the site, making it available for redevelopment. However, there are flood risk issues on site.
Site 2 - Workhouse Site, Corbridge Road - Allocation	Large site (1.3ha) within close proximity of local services including the district Hospital and GP surgery. The site is within a walkable distance of the town centre and is well served by public transport.
Site 3 - Burn Lane Bus Depot, Burn Lane - Allocation	Collectively the sites provide an opportunity for a major housing scheme in a popular area for new housing. The sites are available for redevelopment. A housing allocation within the Neighbourhood Plan would inevitably support the relocation of the existing Bus Depot and Joinery to more suitable premises.
Site 4 - Site on Chareway Lane, behind Bus Depot - Allocation	
Site 5 - Site at caravan park, adjacent warehouse - Allocation	
Site 6 - Priestpopple, County Buildings - Allocation	The site is currently occupied with a temporary building in a prime location within the town centre and is available for development.
Site 7 - Graves Yard behind Army Reserve Centre - Allocated	Within walking distance of town centre amenities and transport hubs. The owner intends to dispose the site, making it available for redevelopment.
Site 8 - Dalesway Site - Not allocated	Within walking distance of town centre amenities and transport hubs. Site already partially cleared and is available for redevelopment. However, there are flood risk issues on site.

Site name	Rationale
Site 9 - Telephone Exchange Site, Eastgate - Allocation	Identified as a suitable site for housing in the Northumberland SHLAA. Existing pedestrian and vehicular access. The site is also within close proximity to many town centre amenities.
Site 10 - The Queen Elizabeth High School site - Not allocated	Both schools have merged into a single academy school and an alternative site has been allocated in the Core Strategy (2017) for a new build. Both sites are within residential areas and suitable for housing. However, plans for a new build are currently at an early stage and the school Governors are also considering options for an on-site conversion of existing buildings. As the site is not currently available for development, it has not been allocated in the HNP.
Site 11 - Hexham Middle School Site - Reserve site	
Site 12 - Broadgates behind bakery - Allocation	The site is within the town centre and is in walking distance of many local amenities and transport hubs. The change of use of the site from industrial/warehouse to residential use will be more in-keeping with the local area.
Site 13 - Corbridge Road - Not allocated	Site is within the Greenbelt but adjacent to new housing on the opposite side of the road. Therefore, the site is considered suitable to deliver a minor urban extension to help meet the local housing and affordable housing needs. However, as this need can be met on more sustainably located brownfield land, this site has not been allocated in the HNP.
Site 14 - West Orchard House - Not Allocated	Within easy walking distance of town centre amenities and public transport. This site is adjacent to Site 7 Graves Yard and sections of it could therefore become available as additions to form a single larger site for housing development. However, there are constraints which make deliverability uncertain.
Site 15 - Land at Edgewood - Allocation	This is a small in-fill site within a popular and attractive residential settlement in the east of the town. Within walking distance of town centre amenities, including especially the new bus station and hospital.
Site 16 - Bog Acre Cottage and Haulage Site - Allocation	Adjacent to existing residential settlement, the redevelopment of this somewhat neglected site will benefit also the surrounding area. Residential development will be in keeping with its surroundings.
Site 17- Police Houses - Allocation	Within easy walking distance of town centre amenities and public transport, this site is located within a popular residential area of the town. It is already a site of low density housing offering the opportunity a greater housing numbers within what could remain an attractive, pleasantly landscaped site.
Site 18 – Land West of Station Road - Allocation	Located on the edge of the town centre this site gives easy access to town centre amenities and services. It is particularly close to the town's hospital, the new bus station and the railway station.
Site 19 – Old Bus station- - Not allocated	On the edge of the town's principal retail area, this is a prime site for development. An existing planning permission for retail and housing units expires in November 2018. The retail provisions within this planning application have proved unsustainable, and any new development proposals should include increased housing provision.

Assessment of the current version of the HNP

The draft HNP has been appraised against each of the environmental objectives in the SEA Framework. In undertaking the appraisal, each of the policies in the Plan has been considered individually and collectively. A summary of the findings is presented below.

<i>Biodiversity</i>	<i>Climate change mitigation</i>	<i>Climate change resilience</i>	<i>Cultural and natural heritage</i>	<i>Landscape and townscape</i>	<i>Water quality</i>	<i>Population and community</i>	<i>Health and wellbeing</i>	<i>Travel and transport</i>
Significant +ve	Minor +ve	Minor +ve	Significant +ve	Minor +ve	Neutral	Significant +Ve	Significant +Ve	Minor +ve

The plan is predicted to have mostly positive effects, though in the main, these are not significant.

Four significant positive effects are predicted overall, relating to biodiversity, cultural heritage, housing and health and wellbeing.

The effects upon biodiversity are significant, as in the longer term there should be enhancement to wildlife corridors and green infrastructure networks more generally.

The effects upon cultural heritage are predicted to be significantly positive as the Plan offers a stronger policy framework for locally important buildings and features. The sensitive redevelopment of allocated sites should also lead to an improvement in the quality of the townscape.

The effects upon population and community are predicted to be significant, as the Plan should help to deliver housing to help meet specific local needs.

The effects upon health and wellbeing are predicted to be significant due to the cumulative positive effects associated with affordable housing provision, protection and improvement of recreational opportunities and improvements to accessibility.

No negative effects have been predicted.

A minor negative effect is predicted related to the potential for new homes to be located on sites that are at risk of flooding. However, these effects are uncertain, as there are flood engineering works planned that could reduce risks, and the plan policies also state the need to manage flood risk.

Mitigation

A number of recommendations were made to enhance the positive effects of the plan and mitigate any negatives. These are summarised below:

- The Plan could be improved by clarifying that enhancement and the creation of new habitats will be important to achieve a net gain in biodiversity (Policy HNP2).
- Policy HNP2 could also be enhanced through reference to green roofs as a measure for enhancement
- It is suggested that policy HNP21 could be strengthened by adding the following wording. ...They must also be well landscaped, and avoid unacceptable effects on biodiversity.
- Policy measures should be considered for the site allocations that fall into flood risk areas.
- Development at one of the allocated housing sites could potentially lead to the loss of a listed building. It was recommended that the policies seek to protect and enhance this heritage asset as part of any development if possible.

The Plan working group made changes to the plan as a result of these recommendations which minimised the negative effects identified for cultural heritage and climate change resilience (flooding). The changes also emphasised the need for enhancement to biodiversity, which was more positive.

Monitoring

There is a requirement to present measures that could be used to monitor the effects of the Plan identified through the SEA. It is particularly important to monitor effects that are predicted to be significant, whether this be positive or negative. Monitoring helps to track whether the effects turn-out as expected, and to identify any unexpected effects.

Significant effects	Monitoring measures
A significant positive effect on biodiversity is predicted relating to a potential improvement to wildlife corridors and green infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of new habitat / GI created (ha) • Connectivity of habitats and wildlife corridors
A significant positive effect is predicted on cultural and natural heritage due to an improved protection for locally important buildings and the potential improvement of townscape through redevelopment on allocated sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Townscape character analysis. • Number of locally important buildings identified for protection.
A significant positive effect is predicted for population and communities as the Plan will contribute towards meeting local housing needs in accessible locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net housing completions per annum • Number of homes for older people • Affordable housing target achievement
A significant positive effect is predicted on health and wellbeing due to cumulative effects of affordable housing, recreational facilities and accessibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of affordable homes delivered. • Achievement of open space and sport standards • Length of new cycle and pedestrian routes

This page has been left intentionally blank.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

AECOM has been commissioned to undertake an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Hexham Neighbourhood Plan (HNP).

The HNP is currently being prepared as a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Localism Act 2012. The Neighbourhood Plan area, which includes the administrative area of Hexham Parish (Figure 1.1), is being prepared in the context of the Tynedale Local Plan and emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

A Regulation 14 Consultation on the draft Plan was undertaken in February 2018, accompanied by an Environmental Report. The Plan has since been updated and it is intended that a second Regulation 14 consultation will be undertaken in September 2018. The Environmental Report has been updated to take account of these changes.

Key information relating to the HNP is presented in **Table 1.1**.

Table 1.1: Key facts relating to the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan

Name of Qualifying Body	Hexham Town Council
Title of Plan	Hexham Neighbourhood Plan (HNP)
Subject	Neighbourhood planning
Purpose	The Hexham Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared as a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The plan will be in conformity with the Northumberland Local Plan.
Timescale	2017-2031
Area covered by the plan	The emerging HNP will be used to guide and shape development within the area covered by the administrative area of Hexham Parish.
Summary of content	The Hexham Neighbourhood Plan will set out a vision, strategy and range of policies for the Neighbourhood Plan area.
Plan contact point	David Clegg Email address: davidclegg615@btinternet.com

1.2 SEA explained

The Hexham Neighbourhood Plan was 'screened-in' as requiring an SEA.

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely significant effects of an emerging plan, and reasonable alternatives in terms of key environmental issues. The aim of SEA is to inform and influence the plan-making process with a view to avoiding or mitigating negative environmental effects and maximising positive effects. Through this approach, the SEA for the HNP seeks to maximise the emerging Neighbourhood Plan's contribution to sustainable development.

The SEA has been prepared in line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations) which transpose into national law the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive¹.

The SEA Regulations require that a report is published for consultation alongside the draft plan that 'identifies, describes and evaluates' the likely significant effects of implementing 'the plan, and reasonable alternatives'. The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.

In line with the SEA Regulations this Environmental Report must essentially answer four questions:

- What is the scope of the SEA?
- What has plan-making/SEA involved up to this point?
 - 'Reasonable alternatives' must have been appraised for the plan.
- What are the appraisal findings at this stage?
 - i.e. in relation to the draft plan.
- What happens next?

These questions are derived from Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations, which present 'the information to be provided within the report'. **Table 1.2** presents the linkages between the regulatory requirements and the four SEA questions.

¹ Directive 2001/42/EC

1.3 Structure of this Environmental Report

This document is the Environmental Report for the HNP and hence needs to answer all four of the questions listed above with a view to providing the information required by the SEA Regulations.

Each of the four questions is answered in turn within this report, as follows:

Table 1.2: Questions that must be answered by the Environmental Report in order to meet regulatory² requirements

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... ³
What is the plan seeking to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes
What is the sustainability 'context'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
What's the scope of the SEA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key problems/issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e. provide a 'framework' for) assessment
What has plan-making/SEA involved up to this point?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (and thus an explanation of the 'reasonableness' of the approach) The likely significant effects associated with alternatives Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives appraisal/a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan.
What are the assessment findings at this stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan
What happens next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next steps for plan making/SEA process.

² Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

³ NB this column does not quote directly from Schedule II of the Regulations. Rather, it reflects a degree of interpretation.

2. Local Plan context and vision for the HNP

2.1 Local Plan context for the HNP

Due to the Neighbourhood Area's location within Northumberland, this Plan is being prepared in the context of planning policies and strategy for the County.

At the inception of the Plan preparation, the County Council were in the process of preparing a Local Plan for Northumberland. This set a draft housing target for Hexham, as well as specific allocations in the Green Belt. The Local Plan also sought to deliver a range of policies to support sustainable development.

The HNP was therefore prepared in the context of the emerging Local Plan for Northumberland and sought to help deliver the strategy for Hexham, whilst also dealing with local place-based issues not being considered through the Local Plan.

However, Northumberland County Council has withdrawn the 2017 draft Core Strategy from consideration by the DCLG after a change in control at County Council. A replacement Local Plan will be prepared.

In light of this (and until they are replaced), the adopted Core Strategies and the "saved" policies of a number of planning policy documents put in place by the former County Council and District/Borough Councils will be used to guide development proposals and will provide the starting point when considering planning applications. A number of neighbourhood plans in the County are also at various stages of preparation or "made". Once a neighbourhood plan has been approved by referendum, or is "made" by the Council, it will also form part of the statutory development plan.

- Tynedale Core Strategy (October 2007)
- Tynedale District Local Plan (April 2000) - Saved Policies
- Northumberland Minerals Local Plan (March 2000) - Saved Policies
- Northumberland Waste Local Plan (2001) - Saved Policies
- Northumberland County and National Park Joint Structure Plan (February 2005) Saved Policy S5

The policies in adopted Core Strategies and Local Plans, although aged, are still the starting point for decision making. However, the weight to be attached to them will depend on the degree to which they are consistent with the NPPF.

2.2 Vision for the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan

The vision / mission statement for the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan, which was developed during earlier stages of plan development, is as follows:

“ Hexham is the creative enterprising heart of the Tyne Valley. The medieval Abbey and market town has remained true to its heritage and is an attractive, sustainable place for all people across the generations who live, work and visit here. ”

Vision / Mission Statement for the Hexham
Neighbourhood Plan

To support the Neighbourhood Plan’s mission statement, the HNP sets out a number of Neighbourhood Plan policies. The latest iteration of these policies has been appraised in **Chapter 5** of this Environmental Report.

3. The Scope of the SEA

3.1 SEA Scoping Report

The SEA Regulations require that: “*When deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies*”. In England, the consultation bodies are Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England.⁴ These authorities were consulted on the scope of the HNP SEA in October – November 2017.

The purpose of scoping was to outline the ‘scope’ of the SEA through setting out:

- A context review of the key environmental and sustainability objectives of national, regional and local plans and strategies relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan;
- Baseline data against which the Neighbourhood Plan can be assessed;
- The key sustainability / environmental issues for the Neighbourhood Plan; and
- An ‘SEA Framework’ of objectives against which the Neighbourhood Plan can be assessed.

Baseline information (including the context review and baseline data) is presented in **Appendix B**.

Only one of the statutory consultees (Historic England) provided a response to the Scoping Report within the five week consultation period. The comments made and how they have been considered and addressed, are presented in **Table 3.1** below.

⁴ In-line with Article 6(3) of the SEA Directive, these consultation bodies were selected because ‘*by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes*’.

Table 3.1: Consultation responses received on the SEA Scoping Report

Consultation response	How the response was considered and addressed
Historic England	
Under 5.2 on page 22, the first paragraph omits mention of Grade II listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets (the heritage asset type which could be the largest in number within the neighbourhood plan area).	Scoping updated to include suggested assets.
Grade II listed buildings are incorrectly included in the list of heritage assets contained in the national heritage at risk register. The national register does not cover Grade IIs (unless they are places of worship). Neither does it cover individual buildings in conservation areas or non-designated heritage assets, both of which are likely to produce evidence of heritage at risk in the plan area. So it would be worth qualifying the fifth paragraph to make clear that there are no nationally identified at risk assets but that some are very likely to be found locally during the course of plan-making.	Updated as suggested
Figure 5.1 does not show all designated heritage assets. It omits the conservation area, and appears to omit (or at least does not annotate) Grade I listed buildings.	GIS data not available for Conservation Area
The county Historic Environment Record should be noted as a source of information on the historic environment and non-designated heritage assets in particular.	Noted
More should be done to set out evidence for the current and future likely condition of the historic environment in terms of its significance, sensitivity and capacity to accommodate change.	This information is reliant upon available information relating to sensitivity.
Paragraph 5.3 should consider heritage at risk (see above), development pressure, erosion of townscape or landscape quality, the impact of traffic, issues with non-designated heritage assets, etc. In addition, more could be said about the likely opportunities for the historic environment, such as new development, tourism, skills training or local involvement.	Updated
Section 5.5 and Table 5.1 do not go far enough to discuss the objectives and criteria which should be used in the SEA. Para 2.11 of HEAN 8 sets out more objectives and criteria which are likely to be relevant for the Hexham.	Amendments made to SEA Framework
The scoping report does not address indicators and monitoring of the plan's effects. Paragraphs 2.13-2.16 of HEAN 8 set out how historic environment indicators should be included to enable monitoring.	Monitoring measures are to be set out in the SEA Report where significant effects are identified.
In Table 10.2, SEA objective 4 does not go far enough to provide the basis for appraising a possible site's impact on the historic environment. A 500m threshold even as a starting point for considering impacts on setting is entirely arbitrary; most assets will have a complex setting which cannot be defined by a common distance.	Site Criteria amended

3.2 Key sustainability / environmental issues

Drawing on the review of the policy context and baseline information, the SEA Scoping Report was able to identify a range of sustainability / environmental issues that should be a particular focus of SEA. These issues are as follows, presented by eight environmental themes:

The selected environmental themes incorporate the 'SEA topics' suggested by Annex I(f) of the SEA Directive⁵. These were refined to reflect a broad understanding of the anticipated scope of plan effects (drawing from the screening opinion and local knowledge).

The scoping process allowed for some sustainability topics to be 'scoped out'; as it was considered the Plan is unlikely to have significant effects on certain factors.

3.2.1 Air quality

- There are no Air Quality Management Areas or Air Quality Action Plans within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- There is likely to be continued reliance on the car to access services, jobs and facilities.

Scoped out

3.2.2 Biodiversity

- Nationally designated nature conservation sites are present in the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- Watersmeet SSSI is within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- The Neighbourhood Plan Area borders the North Pennines AONB
- The Hexham Neighbourhood Plan Area is in close proximity to the internationally designated Tyne and Allen River Gravels Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and within 2km North Pennine Moors Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is also classed as a Special Protection Area (SPA).
- The Neighbourhood Plan area contains Priority Habitat areas of Deciduous woodland, Ancient Woodland, Woodpasture and Parkland, and Calaminarian Grassland.
- There are a number of priority species identified within the River Tyne.

Scoped in

3.2.3 Climatic factors

- Mitigation of and adaptation to climate change are national and local priorities that the Plan should seek to contribute towards.
- There are areas within the Plan area at risk of fluvial flooding and surface water flooding.

Scoped in

⁵ The SEA Directive is 'of a procedural nature' (para 9 of the Directive preamble) and does not set out to prescribe particular issues that should and should not be a focus, beyond requiring a focus on *'the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors'* [our emphasis]

3.2.4 Landscape and historic environment

- The distinctive surrounding landscape plays a significant role in the setting of Hexham;
- A number of areas within the town are characterised by the presence of a significant number of mature trees and hedgerows;
- Hexham Parish contains a significant level of listed and non-listed heritage assets, which could be affected by policies and proposals within the Plan (either positively or negatively).
- An insensitive approach that does not seek to conserve and enhance heritage assets could result in the erosion of the townscape or landscape quality;
- The high quality of local Heritage Assets provides opportunities for tourism, education and community involvement in their preservation.

Scoped in

3.2.5 Land, soil and water resources

- The only agricultural land in the Plan area is within areas already permitted or allocated for development. No further agricultural land is likely to be affected by the Plan.
- There are no groundwater source protection zones or nitrate vulnerable zones in the Plan area.

Soil – Scoped out

Waste – Scoped out

Water quality - Scoped in

3.2.6 Population and community

- The population of Hexham marginally increased between 2001 and 2015 (2.29%).
- Hexham has a lower proportion of residents within the 0-17 and 18-24 age groups than the regional and national averages. Conversely the proportion of residents within the 65+ and 84+ groups is higher. However, the Hexham area has a lower proportion of those in the 25-44 age bracket when compared to the county, region and national figures.
- With the number of elderly residents projected to increase, this may require provision of specialist housing.
- The main pocket of deprivation is to the east of Railway Station in the Dene Park / Peth Head area, with relatively affluent areas to the west and east of the Parish.

Scoped in

3.2.7 Health and Wellbeing

- Hexham has lower childhood obesity rates than Northumberland, the North East and England;
- The percentage of those with a limiting lifelong illness or disability is higher than the English average figure;
- The average life expectancy for males is slightly higher than the English average, whilst the average life expectancy for females is slightly lower than the national average; both male and female life expectancy is however higher than the county, and the region.
- There are a considerable number of parks, leisure and fitness facilities within the Neighbourhood Area.

Scoped in

3.2.8 Transportation

- The plan area has lower private vehicle commuting to work figures than either the County or England and Wales;
- The plan area has a higher percentage of people who walk to work;
- National Cycle routes pass through the area;
- A key issue for people in Hexham with regard to transport is the lack of parking in the town, and the management of parking;
- There is traffic congestion at certain times of day, with particular concerns about the impacts of increasing amounts of traffic in the town centre, and on safety for children walking to school in the town.

Scoped in

3.3 SEA Framework

The SEA framework has been established through the identification of key issues and environmental objectives as part of the scoping exercise. This draws upon the baseline position and policy context that has been prepared for a range of SEA topics.

The framework consists of a set of headline objectives and ancillary questions, which has been used to appraise the environmental effects of the draft Plan (and any reasonable alternatives).

Table 3.2 below outlines the full SEA Framework, which focuses on those issues that have been identified as the most important to consider in the preparation of the Plan; but acknowledging the limited influence that the Plan can/will have in some areas.

These issues were then translated into an 'SEA Framework'. This SEA Framework provides a methodological framework for the appraisal of likely significant effects on the baseline.

Table 3.2: SEA Framework for the Hexham Neighbourhood Plan

SEA Objective	Supporting questions (Will the option/proposal help to...)
1. Protect and enhance the function and connectivity of biodiversity habitats and species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support connections between habitats in the Plan area? • Support continued improvements to the designated sites in the Plan area? • Achieve a net gain in biodiversity? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity?
2. Contribute to climate change mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote high quality design? • Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport? • Reduce the need to travel?
3. Support the resilience of Hexham to the potential effects of climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve green infrastructure networks in the plan area to support adaptation to the potential effects of climate change? • Sustainably manage surface water run-off, ensuring that the risk of flooding is not increased (either within the plan area or downstream) and where possible reduce flood risk? • Ensure the potential risks associated with climate change are considered through new development in the plan area? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the plan area to the effects of climate change?
4. Protect, enhance and manage the fabric and setting of cultural and natural heritage assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and better reveal the significance of buildings and features of architectural or historic value; including those of local interest? • Conserve and enhance the character of the town centre? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic environment? • Improve linkages between the town centre, residential areas and open space?

SEA Objective	Supporting questions (Will the option/proposal help to..)
5. Protect and enhance the character and quality of landscapes and townscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance landscape and townscape features? • Support the integrity of the surrounding landscape? • Support the integrity of the Conservation Area?
6. Protect ground and surface water quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise water consumption? • Reduce surface water pollution and encourage the use of SUDS to manage water quality?
7. Cater for existing and future residents' needs as well as the needs of different groups in the community, and improve access to local, high-quality community services and facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the option/proposal help to: • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes? • Support enhancements to the current housing stock? • Meet the needs of all sectors of the community? • Provide quality and flexible homes that meet people's needs? • Improve the availability and accessibility of community facilities
8. Protect and improve the health and wellbeing of residents by enhancing access to health facilities, open space and facilities for recreation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the option/proposal help to: • Promote accessibility to a range of leisure, health and community facilities, for all age groups? • Provide and enhance the provision of community access to green infrastructure, in accordance with Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards? • Improve access to the countryside for recreation? • Ensure good access to health facilities.
9. Reduce the need to travel and support modal shift to active and sustainable modes of travel such as walking, cycling and public transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote accessibility to the town centre? • Improve linkages between the town centre and other community facilities? • Improve parking provision for commuters and residents? • Reduce the need to travel to access services and facilities?

4. What has plan making / SEA involved to this point?

4.1 Introduction

In accordance with the SEA Regulations the Environmental Report must include...

- An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with; and
- The likely significant effects on the environment associated with alternatives / an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of alternatives appraised.

The 'narrative' of plan-making / SEA up to this point is told within this part of the Environmental Report. Specifically, this section explains how preparation of the current version of the HNP has been informed by an assessment of alternative site options.

4.2 Overview of plan making / SEA work undertaken

Northumberland County Council formally designated the whole of the Hexham Parish area as a Neighbourhood Plan area on 22nd April 2015.

Following this, the Town Council have gathered a range of evidence, and undertaken consultation with communities and other key stakeholders to identify the issues and opportunities that need to be addressed in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The first key stage of the process was the distribution of a questionnaire in 2015, seeking the local community's views on a 'vision' for the HNP and a series of 'objectives'.

Following this, ongoing consultation has been undertaken via a series of quarterly Public Forum events, reporting back on Plan progress and the status of evidence reports.

The first step in the SEA Process was the development of a Scoping Report, which was published for Consultation in September 2017. The SEA process is being delivered by AECOM as part of the Locality Technical Support Programme.

AECOM worked alongside the Town Council to identify and appraise any reasonable alternatives, to ensure that the SEA helped to inform the approaches and policies within the draft Plan.

Once the draft Plan had been prepared, it was shared with AECOM, who undertook an appraisal of the Plan 'as a whole', taking into account each of the individual policies in combination.

The appraisal findings were presented in an Environmental Report, which accompanied the draft Plan at a Regulation 14 consultation.

Following the consultation period, the Plan has been updated to take account of the Environmental Report findings, new evidence and consultation responses.

The latest version of the Environmental Report (i.e. this document), presents an appraisal of the most recent version of the neighbourhood plan.

4.3 Assessment of reasonable alternatives for the Neighbourhood Plan

A key element of the SEA process is the appraisal of 'reasonable alternatives' for the HNP. The SEA Regulations⁶ are not prescriptive as to what constitutes a reasonable alternative, stating only that the Environmental Report should present an appraisal of the '*plan and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan*'.

⁶ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

The following sections therefore describe how the SEA process to date has informed the development strategy for the Neighbourhood Plan area. Specifically, this chapter explains how the HNP's plan policies relating to housing and site allocations have been dealt with in the SEA.

4.3.1 Housing Strategy

Overall housing numbers (targets) are primarily the responsibility of the Planning Authority, NCC.

The draft NCC Core Strategy (Local Plan) in its 2017 iteration proposed a target of 900 homes for Hexham, 600 of which were to be located on one large site on green belt land to the west of the town. This superseded a 2015 version that had attempted to locate a target of 750 on a number of smaller sites, mainly green belt, on the edges of the town.

Green belt issues are very contentious in a town which is bordered to the north by the River Tyne and to the south by steep hills. The use of green belt land can only be decided at NCC/Local Plan level. Therefore, the only development potential for consideration in the HNP lies along roads to the east and west on mostly brownfield sites.

The Town Council worked alongside NCC to ensure that the HNP supported the emerging strategy for the County and Hexham in particular.

In light of the housing targets and green belt sites being dealt with through the emerging Local Plan, the HNP has concentrated on the development potential of brownfield sites within the perimeter of the settlement. This is a reasonable strategy, as most of the development opportunities offer easy (relatively flat) access to the town centre and local shops, services and transport.

A housing needs assessment for the town revealed a very high level of housing need, with a range of types of home and tenure necessary to address the backlog of need and new need. This is a further reason to emphasise in the HNP the development potential of brown field sites that are suitable for housing, give access to services and obviate car dependency.

Are there any other reasonable alternatives?

Given that the Plan is not dealing with the overall housing target or potential release of Green Belt land, it is considered that there are no alternative strategic approaches for supporting additional housing provision in Hexham.

Though the Local Plan has been withdrawn since the draft Hexham Neighbourhood Plan was prepared, the strategic level of housing growth and the consideration of Green Belt release will be considered in a new iteration of the Local Plan. Therefore, it is not considered necessary or appropriate to explore these factors through the Neighbourhood Plan.

4.3.2 Site allocations

The Plan proposes to allocate twelve sites for housing development plus one 'reserve site'. To inform the decision on which sites to allocate, the Group identified a range of sites that could potentially be allocated.

Twenty eight such sites were identified by residents (at a Public Forum), and Steering Group. Research reduced these to 13 viable sites with owner consent.

These sites were assessed by AECOM (through a separate technical support package), with the findings helping the Group to identify which sites should be allocated and those which should be discarded.

The Site Selection package report can be found at on the Neighbourhood Planning Website for Hexham at www.hexhamneighbourhoodplan.co.uk/documents and includes a detailed discussion of the site sieving and appraisal process.

The site appraisal framework identified for the SEA overlaps considerably with the criteria within the site assessment package report.

Therefore, information has been drawn from this report as much as possible. Where there has been a need to gather additional information to fill any gaps in the SEA site appraisal framework, this has been undertaken.

The result of this exercise was the production of a proforma for each of the 13 reasonable site options, setting out the performance against the SEA criteria. These can be found at **Appendix A**.

Following the Regulation 14 consultation period, six additional sites were identified as potential reasonable site options. These sites have consequently been appraised against the same site assessment criteria.

A summary of the findings for all nineteen sites is presented in **Table 4.1** below, along with a short discussion of how each site performs. Those sites that are proposed for allocation are shaded blue.

A green score reflects a strong performance by means that the development of the site will not result in any adverse impacts on the environment and is sustainable.

Where environmental harm is possible but it can be avoidable or mitigated or development would not achieve a reasonable amount of sustainability, an amber score is given.

A red score reflects severe environmental harm or low sustainability.

Table 4.1: Summary of site appraisal findings

Site name	Biodiversity			Climate change		Cultural and natural heritage assets			Water	Community services			Health and wellbeing			Sustainable travel		
	Effects On SSSI	Local nature reserves	Protected Trees	Fluvial flood risk	Surface water flood risk	Heritage	Townscape / open space	Natural landscape	SUDS and GI	Distance to local centre	Primary school	Secondary school	Access to green space	Access to a GP	Access to recreation	Distance to supermarket	Distance to cycle routes	Proximity to bus stop
Site 1 - Bunker Site, Alemouth Road																		
Site 2 - Workhouse Site, Corbridge Road																		
Site 3 - Burn Lane Bus Depot, Burn Lane,-																		
Site 4 - Site on Chareway Lane, behind Bus Depot																		
Site 5 - Site at caravan park, adjacent warehouse																		
Site 6 - Priestpopple, County Buildings																		
Site 7 - Graves Yard behind Army Reserve Centre																		
Site 8 - Dalesway Site																		
Site 9 - Telephone Exchange Site, Eastgate																		
Site 10 - The Queen Elizabeth High School site																		
Site 11 - Hexham Middle School Site																		
Site 12 - Broadgates behind bakery																		
Site 13 - Corbridge Road																		
Site 14 - West Orchard House																		
Site 15 - Land at Edgewood																		
Site 16 - Bog Acre Cottage and Haulage Site																		

Site name	Biodiversity			Climate change		Cultural and natural heritage assets			Water	Community services			Health and wellbeing			Sustainable travel		
	Effects On SSSI	Local nature reserves	Protected Trees	Fluvial flood risk	Surface water flood risk	Heritage	Townscape / open space	Natural landscape	SUDS and GI	Distance to local centre	Primary school	Secondary school	Access to green space	Access to a GP	Access to recreation	Distance to supermarket	Distance to cycle routes	Proximity to bus stop
Site 17- Police Houses																		
Site 18 – Land West of Station Road																		
Site 19 – Old Bus station																		

Outline reasons for selecting the preferred site options

This section presents a brief discussion as to why sites were selected for allocation or not. In compliance with the NPPF, two housing-focused public forum events demonstrated strong local support for the sustainable redevelopment of brownfield sites to meet the local housing need.

The availability of sites for development has also been considered when allocating the preferred options to ensure allocations are deliverable.

Table 4.2: Rationale for site selection.

Site name	Rationale
Site 1 - Bunker Site, Alemouth Road - Not allocated	Within walking distance of town centre amenities and transport hubs. The site has been vacant over a long period of time (10+ years). The owner intends to dispose the site, making it available for redevelopment. However, the site falls in areas of flood risk and there are alternative sites that are not at risk of flooding.
Site 2 - Workhouse Site, Corbridge Road - Allocation	Large site (1.3ha) within close proximity of local services including the district Hospital and GP surgery. The site is within a walkable distance of the town centre and is well served by public transport.
Site 3 - Burn Lane Bus Depot, Burn Lane - Allocation	Collectively the sites provide an opportunity for a major housing scheme in a popular area for new housing. The sites are available for redevelopment. A housing allocation (consisting of all three individual sites) within the Neighbourhood Plan would inevitably support the relocation of the existing Bus Depot and Joinery to more suitable premises.
Site 4 - Site on Chareway Lane, behind Bus Depot - Allocation	
Site 5 - Site at caravan park, adjacent warehouse - Allocation	
Site 6 - Priestpopple, County Buildings - Allocation	The site is currently occupied with a temporary building in a prime location within the town centre and is available for development.
Site 7 - Graves Yard behind Army Reserve Centre - Allocated	Within walking distance of town centre amenities and transport hubs. The owner intends to dispose the site, making it available for redevelopment.
Site 8 - Dalesway Site - Not allocated	Within walking distance of town centre amenities and transport hubs. Site already partially cleared and is available for redevelopment. However, the site falls in areas of flood risk and there are alternative sites that are not at risk of flooding.
Site 9 - Telephone Exchange Site, Eastgate - Allocation	Identified as a suitable site for housing in the Northumberland SHLAA. Existing pedestrian and vehicular access. The site is also within close proximity to many town centre amenities.
Site 10 - The Queen Elizabeth High School site - Not allocated	Both schools have merged into a single academy school and an alternative site has been allocated in the Core Strategy (2017) for a new build. Both sites are within residential areas and suitable for housing. However, plans for a new build are currently at an early stage and the school Governors are also considering options for an on-site conversion of existing buildings. As the site is not currently available for development, it has not been allocated in the HNP.
Site 11 - Hexham Middle School Site - Reserve site	
Site 12 - Broadgates behind bakery - Allocation	The site is within the town centre and is in walking distance of many local amenities and transport hubs. The change of use of the site from industrial/warehouse to residential use will be more in-keeping with the local area.

Site name	Rationale
Site 13 - Corbridge Road - Not allocated	Site is within the Greenbelt but adjacent to new housing on the opposite side of the road. Therefore, the site is considered suitable to deliver a minor urban extension to help meet the local housing and affordable housing needs. However, as this need can be met on more sustainably located brownfield land, this site has not been allocated in the HNP.
Site 14 - West Orchard House – Not allocated	Within easy walking distance of town centre amenities and public transport. This site is adjacent to Site 7 Graves Yard and sections of it could become available as additions to form a single larger site for housing development. However, there are constraints which make deliverability uncertain.
Site 15 - Land at Edgewood - Allocation	This is a small in-fill site within a popular and attractive residential settlement in the east of the town. Within walking distance of town centre amenities, including especially the new bus station and hospital.
Site 16 - Bog Acre Cottage and Haulage Site - Allocation	Adjacent to existing residential settlement, the redevelopment of this somewhat neglected site will benefit also the surrounding area. Residential development will be in keeping with its surroundings.
Site 17- Police Houses - Allocation	Within easy walking distance of town centre amenities and public transport, this site is located within a popular residential area of the town. It is already a site of low density housing offering the opportunity a greater housing numbers within what could remain an attractive, pleasantly landscaped site.
Site 18 – Land West of Station Road - Allocation	Located on the edge of the town centre this site gives easy access to town centre amenities and services. It is particularly close to the town's hospital, the new bus station and the railway station.
Site 19 – Old Bus station- - Not allocated	On the edge of the town's principal retail area, this is a prime site for development. An existing planning permission for retail and housing units expires in November 2018. The retail provisions within this planning application have proved unsustainable, and any new development proposals should include increased housing provision.

5. What are the appraisal findings at this current stage?

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the Regulation 14 version of the HNP.

5.2 Current approach in the Neighbourhood Plan and the development of Neighbourhood Plan policies

Sustainable development policies

HNP1	Sustainable development in the neighbourhood Plan area
HNP2	Sustainable and high quality design in the neighbourhood Plan area.

Built Environment policies

HNP3	Design in the Conservation Area
HNP4	Non Designated Heritage Sites
HNP5	Shop Front Signage
HNP6	Hexham Market Place
HNP7	Listed Parks and Gardens in Hexham

Housing policies

HNP8	Housing Site Allocations
HNP9	New Housing Development
HNP10	Affordable Housing and Community-led Housing
HNP11	Exception Sites for Affordable housing
HNP12	Housing for Older People

Natural environment, health and community wellbeing

HNP13	Local Green Spaces in Hexham
HNP14	Tyneside River Park and Tyne Green
HNP15	Wildlife Corridors
HNP16	Allotments
HNP17	Hedgerows, Trees and Verges in Hexham
HNP18	Dark Skies
HNP19	Community Facilities
HNP20	Community Renewable Schemes
HNP21	Walking and Cycling in Hexham

Local economy

HNP22	Key Shopping Area in Hexham
HNP23	Hotel and Tourism Accommodation
HNP24	New Business Units
HNP25	New Car Parking Facilities

5.3 Approach to the appraisal

The appraisal is structured under each of the SEA Objectives that are set out in the SEA Framework.

For each theme 'significant effects' of the current version of the plan on the baseline are predicted and evaluated. Account is taken of the criteria presented within Schedule 2 of the Regulations.⁷ So, for example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of effects as far as possible. These effect 'characteristics' are described within the assessment as appropriate.

Every effort is made to identify / evaluate effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the high level nature of the plan. The ability to predict effects accurately is also limited by understanding of the baseline and the nature of future planning applications. Because of the uncertainties involved, there is a need to exercise caution when identifying and evaluating significant effects and ensure all assumptions are explained. In many instances it is not possible to predict significant effects, but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) in more general terms.

5.4 SEA Objective 1: Biodiversity

Sustainable Development Policies

Policy HNP1 is not likely to have significant effects on biodiversity as it is largely a reflection of national policy requirements. However, it is broadly positive, as it seeks to protect environmental assets and make best use of previously development land (which should help to avoid the loss of greenfield land). It is important to ensure that previously develop land does not provide a habitat for species.

Policy HNP2 explicitly seeks to achieve a net gain in biodiversity through mitigation, protection and enhancement. This is positive with regards to the avoidance of negative effects and the potential for improvements, which could help to lead to a net gain in biodiversity.

A range of natural environment policies already exist in the current Local Plan (Tynedale District Core Strategy including Saved Policies (2007)). These policies already provide protection for designated sites, and wildlife species and habitats more generally. The requirements set out in policy HNP2 could lead to positive effects, but are not likely to be significant improvements over what can be achieved using the current planning framework (including the emerging Core Strategy). Therefore only minor positive effects are predicted.

In combination, minor positive effects are predicted from these policies.

Built environment policies

Built environment policies HNP3, HNP4, HNP5 and HNP6 are focused more specifically upon conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.

Whilst wildlife features might contribute to the setting of some assets (for example, trees and open green space), these policies are unlikely to have direct effects upon biodiversity.

Policy HNP7 could help to protect any wildlife associated with listed parks and gardens, but again, these assets would already be afforded protection through existing plan policies and the NPPF.

Overall, the benefits are likely to be minor.

Housing policies

None of the allocated housing sites are likely to have significant effects upon wildlife habitats given their distant location from designated sites.

⁷ *Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*

Two site specific policies ought to have benefits for wildlife as they explicitly mention the need to consider elements of importance to wildlife (for example, policy 8.10 seeks to protect trees and 8.11 mentions the need to protect the wildlife corridor).

Policy HNP9 specifically requires new development to demonstrate how wildlife corridors will be protected and how links could be made to other corridors (i.e. improving connectivity).

There is also encouragement for the retention of trees and hedgerows. Whilst other policy covers the protection of wildlife corridors (HNP15), a minor positive effect is predicted, as there is mention of connecting corridors from specific sites.

Policies HNP9, HNP10 and HNP12, which are more specifically about the type and mix of housing delivery, are not likely to have any implications for biodiversity.

Overall, a neutral effect is predicted.

Local economy policies

None of the local economy policies are likely to have an effect on biodiversity. Those which deal with the usage and appearance of town centre buildings are not relevant to biodiversity, whilst those which support small scale development (HNP24, HNP25) are not expected to lead to significant effects given that they would need to be delivered in accordance with other plan policies and the magnitude of effects would likely be very small.

Natural environment, health and wellbeing policies

Several policies could contribute to a positive effect on biodiversity. Policy HNP13 is positive, as it identifies specific green spaces for designation. Some of these will have value for biodiversity, and ought to benefit from this policy. Similarly, policy HNP14 will provide protection for biodiversity that relies upon the Tyne Green Country Park.

Policy HNP15 deals with wildlife corridors, seeking to improve links between networks and avoid further fragmentation. This is predicted to have a positive effect on biodiversity, as it enhances the current policy position.

Policies HNP15 and HNP18 both seek to prevent light pollution, which is positive for biodiversity, as it reduces disturbance to nocturnal species.

Policy HNP17 is predicted to have positive effects, as it provides greater clarity on the need to avoid the loss of hedgerows, trees and verges and the requirement for a 2:1 replacement should they be lost. The loss of green verges will also be resisted (though the focus of protection is on their value to the street scene).

Policy HNP16 is concerned with the protection and compensation of allotment space. This is not considered likely to have a significant effect on biodiversity.

In combination, policies HNP13, HNP14, HNP15, HNP17 and HNP18 are predicted to have a **significant positive effect** on biodiversity. This would be more likely to happen in the medium to longer term as opportunities for biodiversity enhancement are realised on sites with links to existing corridors.

Policies HNP19 and HNP20 are unlikely to have effects on biodiversity.

Policy HNP21 could improve access to the countryside and open space, thereby enhancing access to biodiversity for the local population. This is positive in one respect, but there is a need to ensure that routes do not lead to unacceptable disturbance to species. The policy therefore seeks that enhancements to biodiversity are sought where possible.

Overall (cumulative) effects

The majority of plan policies have no effects upon biodiversity, particularly those relating to the built environment, local economy and housing types.

However, policies that seek to protect and enhance the natural environment are likely to have **significant positive effects** due to their greater focus on enhancement and links between ecological networks.

5.5 SEA Objective 2: Climate change mitigation

Sustainable Development Policies

Policy HNP1 is more focussed on sustainable development in terms of social factors such as facilities for residents and access to local services therefore it will not have much of an effect on climate change mitigation.

Policy HNP2 specifically deals with sustainable design, which could help to contribute to the mitigation of climate change emissions. Several factors would be beneficial in reducing emissions from new buildings including the need to consider renewable and low carbon technologies, water efficiency and provision for recycling facilities. However, these measures are encouraged in the NPPF already.

The policy does set requirements to meet specific sustainability standards, which is positive; but these 'requirements' are not enforceable given that national standards exist. Therefore, the likelihood of implementation is not certain.

However, encouraging achievement of such standards ought to lead to some improvement in the quality of developments. Overall a minor positive effect on climate change mitigation is predicted.

Overall there will be a minor positive effect from these policies.

Built environment policies

Policies HNP3, HNP4, HNP5, HNP6 and HNP7 are more focused on the appearance and character of the environment, rather than improving the efficiency of development patterns. Therefore a neutral effect is predicted.

Housing policies

The allocated housing sites (HNP8) are well located in terms of access to facilities and services. This ought to reduce the use of the car for local journeys, which would lead to minor decreases in greenhouse gas emissions.

Furthermore, policy HNP9 requires development to demonstrate how cycle and pedestrian access will be achieved, including links to the town centre. This should help to encourage greater levels of walking and cycling on new developments.

Policies HNP9, HNP10 and HNP12 which deal with the types of housing to be delivered are not likely to lead to any direct effects on climate change mitigation. However, the provision of local homes in accessible locations could help to retain community members and reduce the need to travel.

Overall, a minor positive effect is predicted for the housing policies.

Local Economy

Policies HNP22 and HNP24 ought to discourage travel, as they support local facilities (HNP22) and employment opportunities (HNP24). This could have some minor benefits in terms of emissions. However, policy HNP23 could encourage increased travel into the area from visitors, with resulting increases in emissions from transport. Policy HNP25, is also supportive of travel by cars, despite the requirement to ensure cycling and pedestrian access to the town centre from these areas.

Overall the effects would be mixed, but unlikely to be significant in any event. Therefore, the overall effect on climate change mitigation is predicted to be neutral.

Natural environment, health and wellbeing

Policies HNP13-HNP19 are predicted to have neutral effects in terms of climate change mitigation because they are not likely to lead to changes in travel patterns or the use of resources.

Policy HNP20 is concerned with renewable energy schemes, outlining support for suitable developments. This policy position is no advancement upon the general requirements of the NPPF and existing local policies. Therefore, neutral effects are predicted.

Policy HNP21 ought to support increased walking and cycling, which could have some minor positive effects in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Overall (cumulative) effects

The majority of plan policies are unlikely to have effects upon climate change mitigation. However, policy HNP2 contains some specific measures that should help to encourage resource efficiency.

The general approach to development in accessible locations, and support for cycling and walking, should also help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport. The effects would be small scale though.

Overall, a **minor positive effect** is predicted.

5.6 SEA Objective 3: Climate change resilience

Sustainable Development policies

Policy HNP1 does not have much of an effect of climate change resilience as it focusses more on the social wellbeing factors of sustainable development.

Policy HNP2 ought to have positive effects, as it seeks the incorporation of SUDs, a net gain in biodiversity, and water saving measures. These factors can help to improve resilience by maintaining green infrastructure in urban areas (which can benefit human health, flood management and biodiversity), and better managing water resources. The effects are minor, as there are no specific targets, standards or opportunities identified.

Overall these policies will give a minor positive effect.

Built environment policies

Several of the built environment policies are predicted to have neutral effects in terms of climate change resilience. This includes HNP3, HNP4, HNP5, HNP6 and HNP7, and relates to their focus on the appearance / character of the built environment, rather than the potential for climate change resilience.

Housing policies

All but one of the allocated housing sites fall outside areas at risk of fluvial flooding.

The Burn Lane Bus Depot is partially within flood zone 3, but it ought to be possible to avoid areas of flood risk in the main at this site.

It should also be acknowledged that engineering works are underway to improve flood defences in the area, and this ought to reduce flood risk on any allocated sites.

With regards to surface water flooding, the Middle School reserve site falls within areas that could be affected. It will be important to ensure that effects are managed.

Policy HNP9 is positive for resilience, as it requires the protection and enhancement of trees and hedgerow (which will become more important for ensuring resilience to climate change). Retention of trees and hedgerows can also contribute to green infrastructure which helps with urban cooling.

Policies HNP11 and HNP12 will have neutral effects on resilience to climate change as they relate specifically to the types of housing. This would not lead to differential effects in terms of resilience.

Improving housing affordability is possible without affecting climate change resilience. However, the requirement for 40% affordable housing could mean that other elements of a scheme are not viable. Should this be at the expense of green infrastructure enhancement for example, there are potential negative implications for resilience. The magnitude and likelihood of these effects is low though.

Overall, neutral effects are predicted. Whilst there are some small benefits as a result of policy HNP9, the magnitude of effects is very small. Conversely, there could be some minor negative effects with regards to flooding. These ought to be possible to mitigate or avoid though, and there are already flood protection measures in place to help address such issues.

Local economy policies

The local economy policies are predicted to have neutral effects on climate change resilience. Support for town centre development, tourism, business units, car parking and signage is not likely to lead to a loss or enhancement of green infrastructure or lead to an increase in flood risk.

Natural Environment, health and wellbeing

The protection of local green spaces and other vegetation (HNP13, HNP14, HNP15, HNP17) contributes positively to resilience, by maintaining green infrastructure (which helps with urban cooling).

Policy HNP15 should also have minor positive effects through the potential enhancement of wildlife corridors (which could strengthen resilience by giving certain species a greater habitat range). The effects are not predicted to be significant.

Overall (cumulative) effects

Overall, the effects of the plan are **broadly positive**. This relates to the benefits for resilience that could be gained through enhancement of green infrastructure, the need for SUDs and water saving measures and a net gain in biodiversity. The effects are unlikely to be significant given that resilience will be dependent upon a much wider range of factors.

5.7 SEA Objective 4: Cultural and natural heritage

Sustainable Development Policies

Policy HNP1 is likely to have a limited effect on cultural and natural heritage due to it focussing more on the social factors of sustainable development.

Policy HNP2 is not likely to have effects on cultural and natural heritage, with the focus being upon sustainable design.

Overall a neutral effect is expected to occur from these policies.

Built environment policies

Policy HNP3 is predicted to have positive effects on the historic environment by requiring development to be sympathetic to its character and make a positive contribution to the setting of heritage assets. The effects are predicted to be minor, as there is already a degree of protection for the built environment in existing plan policies and the NPPF. Having said this, the policy does identify specific views of importance that must be protected. Policy HNP4 also requires consideration of non-designated heritage assets, which provides more thorough consideration for the built environment as a whole.

Policy HNP5 is predicted to have positive effects as it provides a more robust policy approach regarding shop front signage compared to the current policy position. Over the longer term (as older shop front designs are restored) the setting of the town centre ought to be improved.

Policy HNP6 provides specific consideration of the Market Place, which should also ensure that the setting of important buildings in this area is protected.

Housing policies

Several of the allocated site options are adjacent to heritage assets; Graves Yard (HNP8.8), Bog Acre Cottage and Haulage (HNP8.6) and / or within the Conservation Area; Workhouse (HNP8.1), Priestpople County Buildings (HNP8.7), Graves Yard (HNP8.8), Bog Acre Cottage and Haulage (HNP8.6), Land West of Station Road (HNP8.5).

Development at sites that are adjacent to heritage assets and within the Conservation Area are not likely to have significant effects, as the sites do not form an important part of the setting of the historic environment.

In fact, the development of several of the site options ought to improve the character of the built environment given that there are vacant buildings and land. Minor positive effects are predicted in this respect.

Development at Bus Depot and Chareway Lane (HNP8.11) could potentially lead to the harm of a listed building, which would be a significant negative effect. It was recommended that the associated policy seek to protect and enhance this heritage asset as part of any development if possible. Subsequent to the SA, changes were made to the policy, which should ensure that adverse effects are not significant and possibly positive.

Policy HNP9 ought to have some slight positive effects on heritage through the retention of trees, hedgerows and historic features.

Policies HNP9, HNP10 and HNP12 are predicted to have neutral effects upon the historic environment, as they relate to the type of housing, rather than its appearance or location.

Local economy policies

Policy HNP22 should help to retain the character of the town centre and primary shopping area, by only allowing suitable uses.

Policy HNP23 could help to improve access to heritage features, by supporting suitable accommodation in Hexham.

Policies, HNP24, HNP25 and LE5 are unlikely to have effects on the built environment, as development would need to adhere to the provisions of BE1.

Natural environment, health and wellbeing

Policies HNP13-HNP16 are predicted to have neutral effects. Whilst open space / green infrastructure can help contribute to the character of the historic environment, the protection of these areas is unlikely to have significant effects on Hexham's character.

Policy HNP17 explicitly mentions the need to protect trees, hedges and verges that add to the street scene, and so a minor positive effect is predicted.

Policy HNP18 is predicted to contribute positively to the night time appearance of the town by controlling lighting in new development

By listing buildings of important community value, they ought to be better managed and protected, helping to conserve the character of the town.

Policy HNP20 is predicted to have a neutral effect. Protection for the historic environment from renewable energy schemes is already afforded in the NPPF.

Policy HNP21 could have some minor positive effects by improving the links between the town centre and residential areas.

Overall the policies are predicted to have a **minor positive effect**. Although the policies add some locally specific protection for community facilities and open space, the magnitude of effects is predicted to be low (and so effects are not significant).

Overall (cumulative) effects

The site allocations identified in the Plan are largely unlikely to have significant effects upon the historic environment. In most instances, the townscape ought to be improved as the sites do not contribute positively to the character of the settlement. With good design (which should be promoted through the policies in the plan) there could therefore be an improvement in the character of the town in these locations.

Further plan policies provide an enhancement to the local policy context by affording greater protection to locally important buildings, a more robust approach to shop-front signage, and a strategy for the Market Place. In combination with the positive effects that ought to be generated from the development of the allocated sites, a **significant positive effect** could be accrued in the long term.

5.8 SEA Objective 5: Landscape and townscape

Sustainable Development Policies

Policy HNP1 is predicted to have a minor positive effect on landscape and townscape due to it supporting the regeneration and redevelopment of previously developed land in Hexham.

Policy HNP2 is also predicted to have a positive effect on Landscape and townscape by supporting high quality design of new developments in Hexham and making them sustainable in an environmental and physical aspect. The policy focusses on keeping the local character of the area and protecting and enhancing biodiversity, which could also benefit landscape character.

Overall a positive effect is likely to occur from these policies.

Built environment policies

Policy HNP3 is predicted to have positive effects by seeking to maintain the integrity of the Conservation Area. This would be achieved by seeking high quality design that respects local character, with specific mention of the need to protect the setting of the Conservation Area.

Further supporting the integrity of the townscape are policies HNP4, HNP5, HNP6 and HNP7, which all seek to protect the character of the town, and its important features.

Overall, minor positive effects are predicted, as a degree of protection would already be afforded by the existing policy framework.

Housing policies

The approach of allocating brownfield sites (HNP8) should relieve some pressure from urban fringe development, which ought to benefit landscape character. However, the Plan does not preclude development proposals coming forward on greenfield land, so the effects are not considered to be significant.

Policy HNP9 seeks to protect and enhance wildlife corridors, trees and hedgerows and open space; all of which have some overlap with landscape features and townscape. This should help to protect landscape and townscape character. The effects are predicted to be minor.

Policies HNP10-HNP12 are concerned with the type of housing, which does not necessarily have a bearing on the design quality of schemes and how they relate to the townscape. Therefore, effects are predicted to be neutral.

Local economy policies

The townscape is likely to benefit from local economy policies, as they seek to maintain the character of the town centre by protecting the function of primary shopping areas (HNP22) and encouraging tourism (which could add to the vibrancy of the town centre).

Though development is supported on small business units, this is unlikely to have negative effects upon character, as they would be small scale and need to meet the requirements of other plan policies relating to design.

Natural environment, health and wellbeing policies

Policies HNP13, HNP14 and HNP15 all seek to protect and enhance local green space. This is likely to have benefits for landscape and townscape by helping to ensure that the town retains an open character. Similarly, policy HNP17 will protect features that help to provide character in the urban areas such as trees, hedges and verges.

Policy HNP18 should have a positive effect on landscape by protecting sensitive areas from light pollution.

Policies HNP19 and HNP20 are predicted to have neutral effects.

Policy HNP21 could have mixed effects, on one hand, improved cycle and walking links could improve access to the countryside and the quality of routes. Conversely, routes could potentially disturb areas that are currently more tranquil. Overall, the positive effects are likely to outweigh any minor negatives.

Overall (cumulative) effects

The Plan is predicted to have mostly positive (though minor) effects on townscapes and landscapes through the protection of existing open space, and ensuring that development respects the character of the settlement.

The approach of allocating brownfield sites should also relieve some pressure from urban fringe development, which ought to benefit landscape character.

Overall, a **minor positive effect** is predicted.

5.9 SEA Objective 6: Water quality

Sustainable Development Policies

Policy HNP1 is unlikely to have an impact on water quality as it is more concerned with the types of developments and services that ought to be supported in Hexham.

Policy HNP2 requires development to implement SUDs and to conserve water, which are both positive measures with regards to water quality. A minor positive effect is predicted as the magnitude of effects is likely to be low.

Overall a minor positive effect will be achieved with these policies.

Built environment policies

The built environment policies are predicted to have neutral effects on water quality, as they are primarily concerned with the appearance of development.

Housing policies

The sites do not fall within areas of ground water protection. Though flood risk is unlikely on most of the sites, there could be pollution of water sources should development at these sites lead to spillage of pollutants during construction.

It is considered likely that effects could be managed through the application of SUDs. Therefore, significant effects ought to be avoided.

Policies HE2-HE5 are predicted to have neutral effects on water quality. The types of housing delivered do not affect the potential to minimise water consumption or to manage surface water pollution.

Local economy policies

The local economy policies are predicted to have neutral effects.

Management of town centre uses (HNP22) will not have an effect on water quality, as it will not lead to an increase in development as such.

Policies HNP23 and HNP24 encourage growth of tourism and small business units in Hexham. This could have a very small effect in terms of an increased use of water.

Policies HNP25 could lead to an increased amount of hardstanding, which can lead to surface water pollution. However, the magnitude of effects would be negligible.

Natural environment, health and wellbeing

The retention of green spaces and vegetation (HNP13, HNP14, HNP15, HNP17) can have a positive effect in the management of surface water run-off and water pollution. However, there are no specific measures that explicitly seek to manage water quality.

Policies HNP18-HNP21 have no direct relationship to water quality, and so the effects are predicted to be neutral.

Overall (cumulative) effects

Although there are some benefits associated with the plan policies (such as the retention of open and green space) the majority of policies in the plan are likely to have neutral effects.

Overall, the effects on water quality are likely to be neutral.

5.10 SEA Objective 7: Population and community

Sustainable Development Policies

Policy HNP1 will likely have a positive effect on Population and community as the policy discusses making provision for services to local people such as education, leisure and employment facilities it also discusses provision or transport particularly active transport modes and public transport.

Policy HNP2 sets out principles of sustainable design, which can affect viability. However, the policy is flexible by mentioning practicality and viability. Sustainably constructed homes can also be more attractive to the market. On balance, neutral effects are predicted.

Overall a positive will likely be achieved from these policies.

Built environment policies

Policy HNP3 sets out design principles for development, which would apply to housing. The provisions of the policy are reasonable and should be achievable without affecting the delivery or viability of housing.

Having said this, some housing developments do apply fairly standardised designs, which help with viability/profitability. Some house builders looking to deliver such a model of development could be deterred by the policy.

Policies HNP5 and HNP6 are not specifically related to housing, and so neutral effects are predicted.

Housing policies

Policy HNP8 allocates land with capacity to deliver approximately 164 dwellings in accessible brownfield locations, with a further 140 at the reserve site. This will contribute positively to the achievement of local housing needs.

Policy HNP9 should ensure that housing is high quality, whilst policies HNP9, HNP10, HNP11 and HNP12 will help to deliver a range of housing types to meet identified local needs of different community groups.

In combination, the policies are predicted to have a **significant positive effect** by supporting housing development opportunities and addressing specific housing needs.

Local economy policies

Policy HNP22 supports residential development on upper floors within the town centre, which could contribute a small positive effect to housing delivery.

Policy HNP23 is unlikely to affect housing provision.

Policy HNP24 supports live-work units which could positive a small positive effect to housing delivery.

Policies HNP25 and LE5 have no relevance to housing delivery and so neutral effects are predicted. Overall, the policies would be beneficial in terms of housing delivery in specific locations. However, the effects would not be significant.

Natural environment, health and wellbeing

Policy HNP13 is not likely to affect housing delivery as it seeks to conserve existing green spaces.

Policy HNP16 seeks to protect allotment sites and as none of the allocated housing sites are currently being used for allotments, housing delivery is unlikely to constrain the preservation of allotment capacity in the area.

Policies HNP17, HNP18, HNP20 and HNP21 are not likely to present a constraint to housing development, nor are they likely to support housing. Therefore, neutral effects are predicted.

Policy HNP19 is unlikely to have any adverse effects on the provision of facilities in the plan area. There are also no community facilities on the allocated housing sites which could be lost through development.

Overall (cumulative) effects

Overall, the plan is predicted to have a **significant positive effect** upon local people and the community. Collectively, the plan policies will make a positive contribution in achieving local housing need whilst seeking to maintain or enhance social infrastructure.

5.11 SEA Objective 8: Health and wellbeing

Sustainable Development Policies

Policy HNP1 will likely have a positive effect on health and wellbeing due to the policy focusing on social wellbeing factors of sustainable development such as public and active transport modes. The policy states about making the provision for leisure facilities, allotments, and other community facilities.

Although policy HNP2 should lead to higher quality developments (which could contribute to wellbeing), the effects are mostly neutral as the policy does not affect access to services, facilities or greenspace.

Overall a minor positive effect is predicted.

Built environment policies

Policies HNP3, HNP4 and HNP5 are predicted to have neutral effects on health and wellbeing. The policies would not have an effect on access to services and facilities, nor would they significantly affect wellbeing.

Policies HNP6 and HNP7 could lead to the protection and enhancement of public spaces, which can have benefits for wellbeing. However, the effects are likely to be minor.

Housing policies

The housing allocations (HNP8) are located in accessible locations, and so access to services, facilities and green space ought to be good. Policy HNP9 also seeks to encourage walking and cycling, and to incorporate local green space into development. Together a minor positive effect is predicted from these policies.

Policies HNP10, HNP11 and HNP12 will not improve access to facilities and services as such, but ought to have positive effects on health by providing the types of housing that people need and can afford. Therefore, positive effects are likely to occur.

Local economy policies

Policy HNP22 is unlikely to have a significant effect on health and wellbeing.

Policy HNP23 supports enhancements to tourism facilities, which could be beneficial to existing residents.

Policy HNP24 should help to improve access to jobs locally, though the benefits would be small scale.

Policy HNP25 should help to improve access to town centre facilities, including healthcare.

In combination, the local economy policies are predicted to have a minor positive effect on health and wellbeing by supporting access to local facilities and services.

Natural environment, health and wellbeing

Policies that seek to protect and enhance open and green spaces (HNP13-HNP17) ought to have positive effects on health and wellbeing by maintaining and improving access to local recreational opportunities. Policy HNP21 further supports accessibility by active modes of travel by encouraging an improved cycle and walking network.

Policy HNP18 could have some localised benefits on wellbeing by helping to maintain areas of tranquillity.

By identifying assets of community value (HNP19), important local facilities should be better protected, which is beneficial to health and wellbeing.

Overall, the environmental policies are predicted to have minor positive effects on health and wellbeing.

Overall (cumulative) effects

Overall, the plan ought to have a **significant positive effect** upon health and wellbeing. Though the plan policies are only predicted to have minor positive effects in isolation, each would contribute towards an overall improvement in health and wellbeing.

This would be achieved through improvements to accessibility, retention and enhancement of recreational facilities, and provision of housing to help meet local needs.

5.12 SEA Objective 9: Travel and transport

Sustainable development Policies

Policy HNP1 will likely have some positive effect on transport and travel due to it mentioning developing places where car travel is reduced and there is a general encouragement to increase active travel modes and public transport.

Policy HNP2 will likely have some positive effect on travel and transport due to supporting facilities such as electric car charging points, cycle storage, and landscaping which could be tailored for active travel modes.

Built environment policies

Policy HNP3 will likely have some minor positive effects on travel and transport as it states that there should be a connection between existing space patterns and that new development should complement this. The effects are likely to be minor.

Housing policies

On the whole, the housing allocations (HNP8) are located in broadly accessible locations, which should help to reduce the need to travel to access services and facilities (for new residents). Furthermore, policy HNP9 seeks to ensure that development demonstrates how cycle and pedestrian access to the town centre will be achieved, which should help encourage these modes of travel.

The provision of local affordable housing (HNP10) and homes for older people (HNP12) in accessible locations should also help to ensure that the need to travel is reduced and that people can remain in Hexham.

Overall, a minor positive effect on travel and transport is predicted.

Local economy policies

By protecting the function of the town centre and primary shopping areas (HNP22) access to retail in a central location should be maintained.

Policy HNP23 encourages increased visitors, which could increase the number of trips in and out of Hexham. However it is clear that facilities and accommodation should be in accessible locations.

Policy HNP24 would help to support access to local business units, thereby reducing the need to commute out of the town. This could have minor positive effects in terms of reducing travel.

Policy HNP25 could have mixed effects. On one hand it will help to improve accessibility to the town centre by providing better facilities for parking. However, increased parking does not encourage the use of alternative modes of travel.

Overall, the policies are likely to have minor positive effects in terms of reducing the need to travel and improving accessibility to the town. However, policies that promote tourism and parking are likely to increase the amount of trips by car. On balance, neutral effects are predicted.

Natural environment, health and wellbeing

Protection of open/green space and community facilities (HNP13- HNP16, HNP19) and promotion of cycle and walking access to these facilities has minor positive effects by reducing the need to travel to access recreation, and promoting active modes of travel. The magnitude of effects is low.

Policies HNP17, HNP18 and HNP20 have no direct relation to travel and transport, so neutral effects are predicted.

Policy HNP21 ought to have benefits for travel and accessibility by seeking to protect and improve cycle and pedestrian networks.

Overall the policies are likely to have a minor positive effect by ensuring that new development is accessible to facilities and encouraging walking and cycling.

Overall (cumulative) effects

The plan is predicted to have a **minor positive effect** overall. Although new development is likely to be located in accessible locations, and support is provided for improved cycle and transport links; the magnitude of effects is low and is unlikely to have significant effects on the baseline position (*i.e. the dominant mode of travel is likely to remain the private vehicle*).

5.13 Conclusions at this current stage

5.13.1 Summary of effects

This section summarises the overall effects of the Plan against each of the SEA Topics. It is important to differentiate between significant effects, which are predicted to lead to changes in the baseline position, and those effects that are broadly positive or negative, but are less likely to lead to substantial changes.

Table 5.1: Summary of overall effects for each SEA Topic.

<i>Biodiversity</i>	<i>Climate change mitigation</i>	<i>Climate change resilience</i>	<i>Cultural and natural heritage</i>	<i>Landscape and townscape</i>	<i>Water quality</i>	<i>Population and community</i>	<i>Health and wellbeing</i>	<i>Travel and transport</i>
Significant +ve	Minor +ve	Minor +ve	Significant +ve	Minor +ve	Neutral	Significant +Ve	Significant +Ve	Minor +ve

The plan is predicted to have mostly positive effects, though in the main, these are not significant.

Four significant positive effects are predicted overall, relating to biodiversity, cultural heritage, housing and health and wellbeing.

The effects upon biodiversity are significant, as in the longer term there should be enhancement to wildlife corridors and green infrastructure networks more generally.

The effects upon cultural heritage are predicted to be significantly positive as the Plan offers a stronger policy framework for locally important buildings and features. The sensitive redevelopment of allocated sites should also lead to an improvement in the quality of the townscape.

The effects upon population and community are predicted to be significant, as the Plan should help to deliver housing to help meet specific local needs.

The effects upon health and wellbeing are predicted to be significant due to the cumulative positive effects associated with affordable housing provision, protection and improvement of recreational opportunities and improvements to accessibility.

No significant or minor negative effects have been predicted.

5.14 Recommendations

In order to enhance the positive effects and minimise any identified negative effects, a number of recommendations were made throughout the development of the Plan. These are listed in table 5.2 below, along with a record of the response to each recommendation from the group.

Table 5.2: Mitigation and enhancement measures

Issue / opportunity	Recommendations	Response
Potential to improve the policy by clarifying that enhancement is crucial if a net gain in biodiversity is to be achieved.	Policy HNP2 could be improved by referring to enhancement measures, and the creation of new habitats to achieve a net gain. This would clarify that development ought to deliver improvements rather than focus on conservation. These changes would lead to a positive effect and would improve the current policy position with regards to biodiversity enhancement	The group reworded this policy to strengthen its focus on the enhancement and extension of habitats and the creation of new ones.
Improved access to the countryside through policy HNP21 could lead to minor negative effects with regards to disturbance of biodiversity.	It was suggested that policy HNP21 could be strengthened by adding the following wording. <i>...They must also be well landscaped, and avoid unacceptable effects on biodiversity.</i>	The group wishes to avoid a requirement to define 'acceptable' and has therefore added the alternative wording ' <i>..., and include measures to enhance biodiversity.</i> '
Potential enhancement to policy HNP2.	HNP2 could be enhanced through reference to green roofs as a measure for enhancement (though it is already mentioned in the supporting text).	The group has inserted additional wording that would include green roofs where these are possible: ' <i>... and reduce water run-off through the installation where possible of green roofs, with their additional net gain in biodiversity.</i> ' See attached
There is potential for new homes to be located in areas of flood risk	Include policy measures for the site allocations in flood risk areas to ensure that development is designed so that it is more resilient to flood risk.	The group made amendments to ensure that flood risk is explicitly mentioned. Sites at risk of flooding have since been removed as housing allocations.
Potential loss or negative effects on the setting of Grade 2 Listed Buildings.	Development at Site Option 5 (Caravan Park) could potentially lead to the loss of a listed building, which would be a significant negative effect. It is recommended that the policies seek to protect and enhance this heritage asset as part of any development if possible.	The group added wording to the site policy to ensure that significant negative effects do not occur and enhancement is secured if possible. <i>"any scheme here must take opportunities to enhance the setting of this listed building, and ensure that any scheme does not compromise its setting".</i>

5.15 Monitoring

There is a requirement to present measures that could be used to monitor the effects of the Plan identified through the SEA. It is particularly important to monitor effects that are predicted to be significant, whether this be positive or negative. Monitoring helps to track whether the effects turn-out as expected, and to identify any unexpected effects.

Five significant effects have been predicted in the SEA. Whilst four of these are positive, it is still important to monitor whether the effects that occur in reality are as positive as expected. Potentially suitable indicators are identified below for each of the significant effects.

Significant effects	Monitoring measures
A significant positive effect on biodiversity is predicted relating to a potential improvement to wildlife corridors and green infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of new habitat / GI created (ha) • Connectivity of habitats and wildlife corridors
A significant positive effect is predicted on cultural and natural heritage due to an improved protection for locally important buildings and the potential improvement of townscape through redevelopment on allocated sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Townscape character analysis. • Number of locally important buildings identified for protection.
A significant positive effect is predicted for population and communities as the Plan will contribute towards meeting local housing needs in accessible locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net housing completions per annum • Number of homes for older people • Affordable housing target achievement
A significant positive effect is predicted on health and wellbeing due to cumulative effects of affordable housing, recreational facilities and accessibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of affordable homes delivered. • Achievement of open space and sport standards • Length of new cycle and pedestrian routes

At this stage, the monitoring measures are not 'decided'; rather they are suggested as potentially suitable indicators.

6. What are the next steps?

Subsequent to the consultation on the Regulation 14 version of the HNP, the plan has now been updated and changes to several policies have been made.

A further round of consultation will be undertaken on the revised Plan, and this will be accompanied by the updated Environmental Report.

Following consultation, the HNP will then be submitted to the Local Planning Authority, (Northumberland), for its consideration with the updated Environmental Report.

Northumberland County Council will consider whether the plan is suitable to go forward to Independent Examination in terms of the HNP meeting legal requirements and its compatibility with the Local Plan.

Subject to Northumberland Council's agreement, the HNP will then be subject to independent examination. The Examiner will consider whether the plan is appropriate having regard to national policy and whether it is in general conformity with local policies.

The Examiner will be able to recommend that the HNP is put forward for a referendum, or that it should be modified or that the proposal should be refused. Northumberland will then decide what should be done in light of the Examiner's report. Where the report recommends modifications to the plan, Northumberland Council will invite the HNP Steering Group to make modifications to the plan, which will be reflected in an updated Environmental Report. Where the Examiner's Report recommends that the proposal is to be refused, Northumberland will do so.

Where the examination is favourable, the HNP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Northumberland Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the plan, then it will be passed to Northumberland Council with a request it is 'made'. Once 'made', the HNP will become part of the Development Plan for the County.

Appendix A – Site Assessment Proformas

Appendix B: Scoping Report

