



Northumberland
County Council

**The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes
Regulations 2004**

**Belford Neighbourhood Plan
Regulation 16 Adoption Statement**

Published April 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Belford Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan) was made (brought into force) on 3 April 2024. It now forms part of the development plan for Northumberland and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in Belford Parish. Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the policies in the Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 1.2. Preparation of the Plan included consultation with the statutory consultation bodies, stakeholders and the local community. In parallel with the preparation of the Plan, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was undertaken. SEA is a process by which the Plan and its policies, and any reasonable alternative approaches to achieve the objectives of the Plan, were appraised against a set of environmental objectives. The purpose of SEA is to help ensure that potential significant adverse environmental effects are identified and then avoided or mitigated; and to consider opportunities for improving expected outcomes from implementing the Plan.
- 1.3. SEA is undertaken as a series of stages in line with the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations). Once a plan that has been subject to SEA is brought into force Regulation 16 of the SEA Regulations require the local authority that brings the plan into force to publish an 'adoption statement'.

This document is the Regulation 16 Adoption Statement for the Belford Neighbourhood Plan for the purposes of the SEA Regulations.

- 1.4. In accordance with the SEA Regulations this adoption statement includes the following prescribed information:
- an overview of the process that has been undertaken;
 - how environmental considerations have informed the development of the Plan, including consideration of reasonable alternatives;
 - how the results of any consultations have been taken into account; and
 - the measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan.
- 1.5 The Belford Neighbourhood Plan, the SEA Environmental Report, and this statement are available on the County Council’s website through this link: [Northumberland County Council - Neighbourhood Plans](#)

Printed copies of these documents can be inspected by prior appointment by contacting the Neighbourhood Planning Team at:

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2. Overview of the process

- 2.1 SEA was completed over a series of stages in parallel with the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. The key stages are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 – Key Stages in the SEA Process for the Belford Neighbourhood Plan

Date	Description
October 2019	A Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening was carried out on an early draft of the Plan which determined that appropriate assessment was necessary because the Plan would be likely to have significant effects on European sites. This conclusion automatically triggered the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). AECOM were appointed to undertake the SEA.
August 2020	Scoping Report published and consulted upon.

Date	Description
May 2021	A revised scoping report is published following changes to the Neighbourhood Area (following a boundary review) and to take into account earlier feedback from the consultation bodies and changes made to the Plan.
November 2021	The SEA Environmental Report is published. This report recommended modifications to the Plan. In addition, the qualifying body made further changes to two policies. An addendum to the original Environmental Report was prepared in April 2022. These two documents were consulted upon as part of the Regulation 14 Consultation between July – August 2022.
November 2022	A revised SEA Environmental Report is published to take into account feedback from consultation bodies and changes made to the Plan.

- 2.2. The SEA stage informed the creation of an SEA Framework, which comprised a list of objectives under six environmental themes, against which the Plan and its policies were assessed throughout its preparation. This SEA Framework is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Environmental Themes and Objectives for the SEA of the Plan

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives
Biodiversity	Protect, maintain, restore and enhance biodiversity habitats and species; achieving a net environmental gain and stronger ecological networks.
Climatic Factors (mitigation and adaptation)	Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the Neighbourhood Area. Avoid and manage flood risk and support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Area to the potential effects of climate change.
Population and human health	Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality housing which people can afford, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures.
Population and human health	Support a vibrant, mixed economy which enables residents of the neighbourhood area to work locally.
Population and human health	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.
Population and human health	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.
Soil	Manage soil and land resources in a sustainable manner.

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives
Water	Use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of landscapes.

- 2.3 A full SEA Environmental Report (November 2021) was prepared and published alongside the pre-submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan. This provided a comprehensive assessment of the draft Plan including consideration of reasonable alternatives to the policies proposed in the Plan. The findings helped to inform a review of the Plan. This aligns with the purpose of SEA which must be seen as a continuous process applied throughout the period of plan preparation.

3. How SEA has informed the development of the Plan

- 3.1 SEA has been undertaken as an iterative process to ensure that environmental considerations have guided the neighbourhood plan-making process. Policies have been developed having regard to objectives established in the SEA Framework and the need to deliver, through planning policies, the plan's objectives. Together, these seek to place environmental considerations at the heart of decision-making.
- 3.2 The process for preparing a neighbourhood plan requires an independent examination of the draft plan. This requires an independent person to consider and make recommendations on whether the plan meets a range of legal and policy requirements. That examination concludes with the publication of a report by the independent person appointed to examine the plan. The Examiner's Report for the Belford Neighbourhood Plan was published in July 2023. Paragraph 51 of that Report confirms the examiner's conclusions that the relevant statutory requirements in respect of SEA were satisfied through the plan-making process.

Reasonable Alternatives

- 3.3 In preparing the Plan, alternative options were considered in relation to a settlement boundary for Belford Village and Local Green Spaces.

Settlement boundary for Belford Village

- 3.4 The objectives proposed for the Neighbourhood Plan, particularly Objective 5, envisage the Plan providing some general protection of the countryside and valued landscapes within the Parish. The alternative of preparing criteria based policies would fail to accord with the stated intentions of the Objectives for the Plan. Not having a settlement boundary for Belford is therefore not a reasonable alternative within the context of the Plan's Objectives. It was therefore considered that the Plan should include a settlement boundary for the village.

Local Green Spaces

3.5 In developing the Neighbourhood Plan, a number of green spaces were identified for consideration for protection through community engagement. The suitability of the locally important sites were considered and five Local Green Spaces which met the criteria defined in national policy were designated. Two further areas, identified as being important to the local community, were not considered to be of sufficient value to merit this level of protection. It was proposed to designate these as protected open spaces. Accordingly, reasonable alternatives were assessed through the SEA process.

Policy Appraisals

3.6 The Plan's policies were appraised against the SEA Framework at various stages to help inform the final policies in the made version of the Plan. The results of the policy appraisal are summarised in Table 3 below. Notably, there were no policies which were expected to result in significant negative impacts. SEA findings helped give assurance that the Plan would contribute positively toward meeting environmental objectives.

Table 3 – Summary of Policy Appraisal by Environmental Objectives

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives	Summary of Effects
Biodiversity	Protect, maintain, restore and enhance biodiversity habitats and species; achieving a net environmental gain and stronger ecological networks.	Where relevant, the policies as drafted, are likely to result in a minor positive effect on this SEA Objective. An additional policy was recommended for inclusion to address the issue of pollution and its effects on the Lindisfarne SSSI.
Climatic Factors (mitigation and adaptation)	Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the Neighbourhood Area. Avoid and manage flood risk and support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Area to the potential effects of climate change.	Where relevant, policies are likely to have a minor positive effect on the achievement these SEA Objectives. It was recommended however, that Policy 6 is modified in line with the advice from the Environment Agency to protect existing flood defences, taking into account the likely future effects of climate change.

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives	Summary of Effects
Population and housing	Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing which meets the needs of occupiers throughout their lives.	Overall, the relevant Neighbourhood Plan policies support the provision of good quality and affordable homes and are assessed as having a minor positive effect on the achievement of this objective.
Population and human health	Support a vibrant, mixed economy which enables residents of the neighbourhood area to work locally.	Where relevant, the Neighbourhood Plan policies are assessed as having a minor positive effect on the achievement of this objective.
Population and human health	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.	Overall, the Neighbourhood Plan is assessed as having a minor positive effect on the objective of reducing the need to travel and promoting sustainable transport. The likely scale of development would be small and therefore any effects are unlikely to be significant. The rural nature of the area, however, means reliance will continue to be placed on the use of private cars.
Population and human health	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.	In general, the Neighbourhood Plan policies are assessed as having a minor positive effect on the achievement of this objective.
Soil	Manage soil and land resources in a sustainable manner.	The Neighbourhood Plan policies are assessed as having a minor positive effect on the achievement of this objective.
Water	Protect and enhance water quality.	Overall, the Neighbourhood Plan policies are not considered to have a significant effect on the achievement of the objective.
Landscape	Protect, enhance and manage the distinctive character and appearance of landscapes.	Overall, the Neighbourhood Plan policies are assessed as having a minor positive effect on the achievement of this objective. In particular, through policies such as

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives	Summary of Effects
		Policy 16 (Valued landscapes) which requires particular care to be taken in decision making to ensure development impacts on important local landscapes are fully understood and properly considered prior to development in those areas being supported.

4. How the Results of Consultations have been taken into account

- 4.1 As illustrated in Table 1, the Plan and corresponding SEA have been subject to consultation.
- 4.2 An SEA Scoping Report was published for consultation in late 2020 and again in Spring 2021 with the statutory consultation bodies (Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England).
- 4.3 A draft SEA Environmental Report (November 2021) was published for consultation.
- 4.4 The final SEA Environmental Report was submitted to Northumberland County Council along with the final draft version of the Plan in March 2023. These documents were subsequently publicised by the County Council for a period of not less than 6 weeks in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended). All representations made in response to that publicity were considered by the Examiner during the independent examination of the Plan.
- 4.5 In addition to the statutory consultation stages, the Parish Council also engaged with the local community and stakeholders at a number of informal consultation events throughout the preparation of the Plan. This community engagement provided a further opportunity for the Town Council to consider local environmental considerations. Further information is available in the Consultation Statement.

5. Monitoring Measures

- 5.1 The SEA Regulations require that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Plan should be monitored.
- 5.2 The final SEA Environmental Report (November 2022) highlighted the range of significant positive effects that could arise as a result of the implementation of the Plan, with no identified significant negative effects.
- 5.3 Whilst the Belford Neighbourhood Plan does not set out a framework to monitor the effects of implementation of the policies in the Plan, the County Council will provide,

periodically, relevant information and updates through the annual Authority Monitoring Report process.

6. Sources

6.1 The following documents have informed this Adoption Statement:

- The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

[The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

- Belford Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report Addendum Report April 2022

[Belford-ER-Addendum_1.pdf \(northumberland.gov.uk\)](#)

- The Final Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Belford Neighbourhood Plan Environmental Report, November 2022.

[Belford-SEA-Environmental-Report-FINAL_1.pdf \(northumberland.gov.uk\)](#)

- Report to the Northumberland County Council on the Independent Examination of the submission draft Belford Neighbourhood Plan, July 2023.

[Belford-Examiners-report.pdf \(northumberland.gov.uk\)](#)

- The Belford Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Statement, March 2023.

[Consultation Statement Belford NP.pdf \(northumberland.gov.uk\)](#)

- The Belford Neighbourhood Plan, Submission Version, March 2023.

[BELFORD-NP-Submission-March-23.pdf \(northumberland.gov.uk\)](#)