



Northumberland
County Council

Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

Regulation 16 Adoption Statement

Published December 2021

1. Introduction

1.1. The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan) was made (brought into force) at Cabinet on 7 December 2021. It now forms part of the development plan for Northumberland and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in Wooler 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 Wooler 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 Wooler Neighbourhood Plan, the SEA Environmental Report, and this statement are available on the County Council's website through this [link](#).

A hard copy of these documents can be inspected by prior appointment by contacting the Neighbourhood Planning Team at:

Planning Services

Northumberland County Council

County Hall

Morpeth

NE61 2EF

(office hours: Monday – Thursday, 9am – 5pm, Friday 9am – 4:30pm).

Tel: 0345 600 6400

Email: Neighbourhoodplanning@northumberland.gov.uk

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 Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

Date	Description
August 2018	Northumberland County Council (NCC) published a SEA Screening Opinion, prepared in consultation with the statutory consultation bodies. The report concluded that SEA of the Plan was required as the Plan was considered to result in significant effects on the environment.
December 2018	A SEA Scoping Report was published for consultation with the statutory consultation bodies. Their comments helped inform the final scope of the SEA for the Plan.
March 2019	The SEA Environmental Report is published.
January 2020	An addendum to the Environmental Report was prepared to deal with the following matters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The methodology for determining effects with regards to the historic environment • To clarify / rectify factual and typographical errors in the SA Report.

2.2. The SEA Scoping Report helped to inform the creation of an SEA Framework, which comprised a list of objectives under seven 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 Plan

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives
Biodiversity	<i>Achieve net gains in biodiversity through the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats and associated species.</i>
Climate change	<i>Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan area to the risks of flooding and other potential effects of climate change.</i>
Landscape and historic environment	<i>Protect, maintain and enhance the historic environment. Protect and enhance the character and quality and appreciation of the landscape surrounding Wooler.</i>

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives
Land, soil, and water	<i>Minimise the loss of the most valuable soils and agricultural land. Protect water quality and contribute towards the achievement of Water framework Objectives.</i>
Population and community	<i>Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures. Support and maintain a strong and sustainable local economy.</i>
Health and wellbeing	<i>Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Area.</i>
Transportation	<i>Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.</i>

2.3 A full SEA Environmental Report (March 2019) was prepared and published alongside the 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 Wooler Neighbourhood Plan was published in May 2020. Paragraph 2.55 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 There were two areas where reasonable alternatives were considered: housing growth and housing distribution.

3.4 Early discussions during the preparation of the Plan included options for housing growth. The first option was not to allocate any sites, and to rely upon existing commitments, windfall development and any site allocations made through the Local Plan process. However, as there is no certainty that existing permissions will go ahead as planned, and as a key objective of the Neighbourhood Plan is to provide variety and choice for local people to meet their housing needs, this approach was discarded as unreasonable.

3.5 The scale of development involved in the site allocations is relatively small (50 dwellings). This therefore limited the range of strategic options to be tested. One option was to allocate all homes on one large site rather than allocating several sites in a dispersed manner. However, this would necessitate allocating green field land for development which is contrary to a key objective of the Plan, i.e. to support brownfield regeneration. For this reason, this option was rejected. The only strategic approach considered to be reasonable was a dispersed approach to development seeking to support brownfield land release as much as possible (but not exclusively). and have sites that support a range housing types and mix of tenure. The Site Selection Assessment details the appraisal of possible sites and the reasons for the sites selected.

Policy Appraisals

3.6 The Plan policies were appraised against the SEA Framework at various stages to help inform the final policies in the made version of the Plan. The appraisal commentary for each sustainability theme does not necessarily discuss every single

Plan policy, only those where notable effects are predicted. 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 Objective

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives	Summary of Effects
Biodiversity	Achieve net gains in biodiversity through the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats and associated species.	<i>Overall, mixed effects, with the proposed allocations within SSSI IRZs and within proximity to the River Tweed SAC potentially having negative effects. However, the Plan has the potential to have long term positive effects through conserving and enhancing the natural environment by applying the principle of environmental net-gain in the design of new developments.</i>
Climate change	Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan area to the risks of flooding and other potential effects of climate change.	<i>Implementing policies in the Plan will contribute positively towards supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation, however, this is not seen to be significant in the context of the SEA theme. This is because of the scale of proposals. Whilst Site 3 (Policy 4.3 (Land on South Road known as Redpath's/ Ferguson's Yard)) is partially located within an area of flood risk, the significance of impacts will be limited by the provisions of the NPPF and the Local Plan</i>
Landscape and historic environment	Protect, maintain and enhance the historic environment. Protect and enhance the character and quality and appreciation of the landscape surrounding Wooler.	<i>The Plan policies take a proactive approach in conserving and enhancing the distinctive character and landscape and heritage interests of Wooler which will lead to long term positive effects. Development at sites 1, 3 and 4 would be within or adjacent to the conservation area. However, these sites could be improved in terms of their contribution to the townscape. Therefore, negative effects on the setting of heritage assets, or the character of the conservation area are considered unlikely.</i>

SEA Themes	SEA Objectives	Summary of Effects
Land, soil, and water	Minimise the loss of the most valuable soils and agricultural land. Protect water quality and contribute towards the achievement of Water framework Objectives.	<i>The plan is predicted to have mixed / neutral effects in relation to this theme. Three of the sites have the potential to lead to the loss of greenfield land, with associated negative effects in relation to soils resources. However, a number of positive effects will arise from the Plan, including through the intensification of uses at some locations, and the protection and enhancement of water quality.</i>
Population and community	Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures. Support and maintain a strong and sustainable local economy.	<i>The plan is predicted to have significant positive effects overall in relation to this theme. This reflects the Plan's close focus on delivering housing for local needs, protecting and enhancing community facilities, supporting accessibility and promoting the quality of life of residents. It also has a close focus on promoting economic vitality in the Neighbourhood Area.</i>
Health and wellbeing	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Area.	<i>Overall, the Plan is considered likely to lead to long term significant positive effects for this theme, including the provision of high quality, affordable homes, supporting the delivery of community facilities, and through protecting and enhancing green infrastructure provision in the Parish.</i>
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.	<i>The plan is predicted to have a minor positive effect overall. This is because development is likely to be located in accessible locations, and support is provided for improved cycle and transport links. The magnitude of effects is however likely to be low and is unlikely to lead to significant effects on the baseline position (i.e., the dominant mode of travel is likely to remain the private vehicle).</i>

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 2019 with the statutory consultation bodies (Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England). Comments were received from all three consultation bodies.

4.3 A draft SEA Environmental Report (March 2019) was published for consultation. Comments were received on the Environmental Report from Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England.

4.4 The final SEA Environmental Report was submitted to Northumberland County Council along with the final draft version of the Plan in July 2019. The County Council raised concerns about submitting the Plan for examination, primarily because of comments made by Historic England about site selection and the corresponding SEA process. An addendum (January 2020) was prepared to address these issues.

4.5 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.

4.6 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 and Addendum (March 2019 and January 2020) highlighted the range of significant positive effects that had the potential to arise as a result of the implementation of the Plan, with no identified significant negative effects.

5.3 Whilst the Wooler 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. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/part/4/made>
- The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan, [Referendum Plan](#), April 2020.
- The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan [Consultation Statement](#), February 2020.
- The Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan [Environmental Report](#), March 2019.
- The Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Environmental Report, [Addendum](#), January 2020.
- Report to the Northumberland County Council on the [Independent Examination](#) of the submission draft Wooler Neighbourhood Plan, May 2020.