



Northumberland  
County Council

# Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

## Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion

### FINAL REPORT

Prepared by the Neighbourhood Planning & Infrastructure Team,  
Northumberland County Council

**2 August 2018**

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## 1. Introduction and Summary

### **Wooler Neighbourhood Plan**

- 1.01 Neighbourhood Plans are prepared by a qualifying body under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by Wooler Parish Council (as the “relevant body”) and will be ‘made’ by Northumberland County Council as the Local Planning Authority.
- 1.02 The preparation of Neighbourhood Plans is subject to The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012 (and subsequent amendments) and the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017.
- 1.03 Communities have a right to be able to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. However, communities are not required by legislative, regulatory or administrative purposes to produce such a plan.
- 1.04 Wooler Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Wooler administrative Parish area. Once ‘made’ it will form part of the statutory development plan for Northumberland.

### **Strategic Environmental Assessment**

- 1.05 To be ‘made’, a Neighbourhood Plan must meet certain basic conditions, including compliance with EU Obligations. One such obligation is the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment<sup>1</sup>. This is often referred to as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive.
- 1.06 The purpose of the SEA Directive is to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to integrate considerations of the environment into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 1.07 The SEA Directive sets out criteria for assessing the significance of the impact of a plan or programme on the environment. Any assessment must consider both positive and negative effects.
- 1.08 In the first instance, it is necessary to ascertain if SEA is required. This process is referred to as ‘screening’.
- 1.09 This report presents the findings of an SEA screening opinion on the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan, provided by Northumberland County Council as the Local Planning

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<sup>1</sup> [European Directive 2001/42/EC \(SEA Directive\)](#)

Authority. It adopts a proportionate approach in applying a series of criteria, as set out in the SEA Directive<sup>2</sup>, to look at the draft Wooler Neighbourhood Plan and determine whether a significant effect or effects are likely.

- 1.10 Based on the characteristics of the draft Wooler Neighbourhood Plan and the area characteristics, Northumberland County Council concludes that: **The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment when considered against the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations and will therefore need to be subject to SEA.**
- 1.11 A Screening Opinion was sent to the statutory consultation bodies<sup>3</sup>, that is: the Environment Agency; Historic England; and Natural England, in order to seek their views on its conclusions<sup>4</sup>.
- 1.12 This Final Report considers the responses made by the consultation bodies on the Screening Opinion. The responses provided by the consultation bodies can be found in Appendix 1 to this Report.
- 1.13 The responses received from the consultation bodies have confirmed that, in their view, Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan is required and that a Scoping Report and subsequent Environmental Report will need to be produced.

#### **Habitats Regulations Assessment**

- 1.14 A Neighbourhood Plan could potentially have impacts on sites covered by the Habitats Regulations. The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a separate HRA screening assessment to ascertain whether an Appropriate Assessment is required under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, which relate to Articles 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive.

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<sup>2</sup> See footnote above, plus [Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 \(SEA Regulations\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> As set out in Regulation 4(1) of the SEA Regulations 2004.

<sup>4</sup> As set out in Regulation 9(2)(b) of the SEA Regulations 2004.

## 2. Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 2.01 Regulation 15 of The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) requires that certain specified information is provided alongside a draft neighbourhood plan when it is submitted to the local planning authority. In summary, this information is:
- (a) A map or statement which identifies the area to which the proposed neighbourhood development plan relates;*
  - (b) A consultation statement;*
  - (c) The proposed neighbourhood development plan;*
  - (d) A 'basic conditions statement'; and*
  - (e) (i) an environmental report, or*  
*(ii) a screening opinion indicating that an environmental report is not required.*
- 2.02 The SEA process is a means of testing the environmental impacts of plans and programmes. It should shape and hone a neighbourhood plan's content to ensure the plan effectively ensures sustainable development.
- 2.03 In order to determine whether the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, there are criteria for assessment set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive. They are split into two categories: those relating to the characteristics of the plan and those to the characteristics of the effects and areas likely to be affected (see Figure 1). An assessment of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan against these criteria is set out accordingly in Figure 1 and Table 1 of this report.

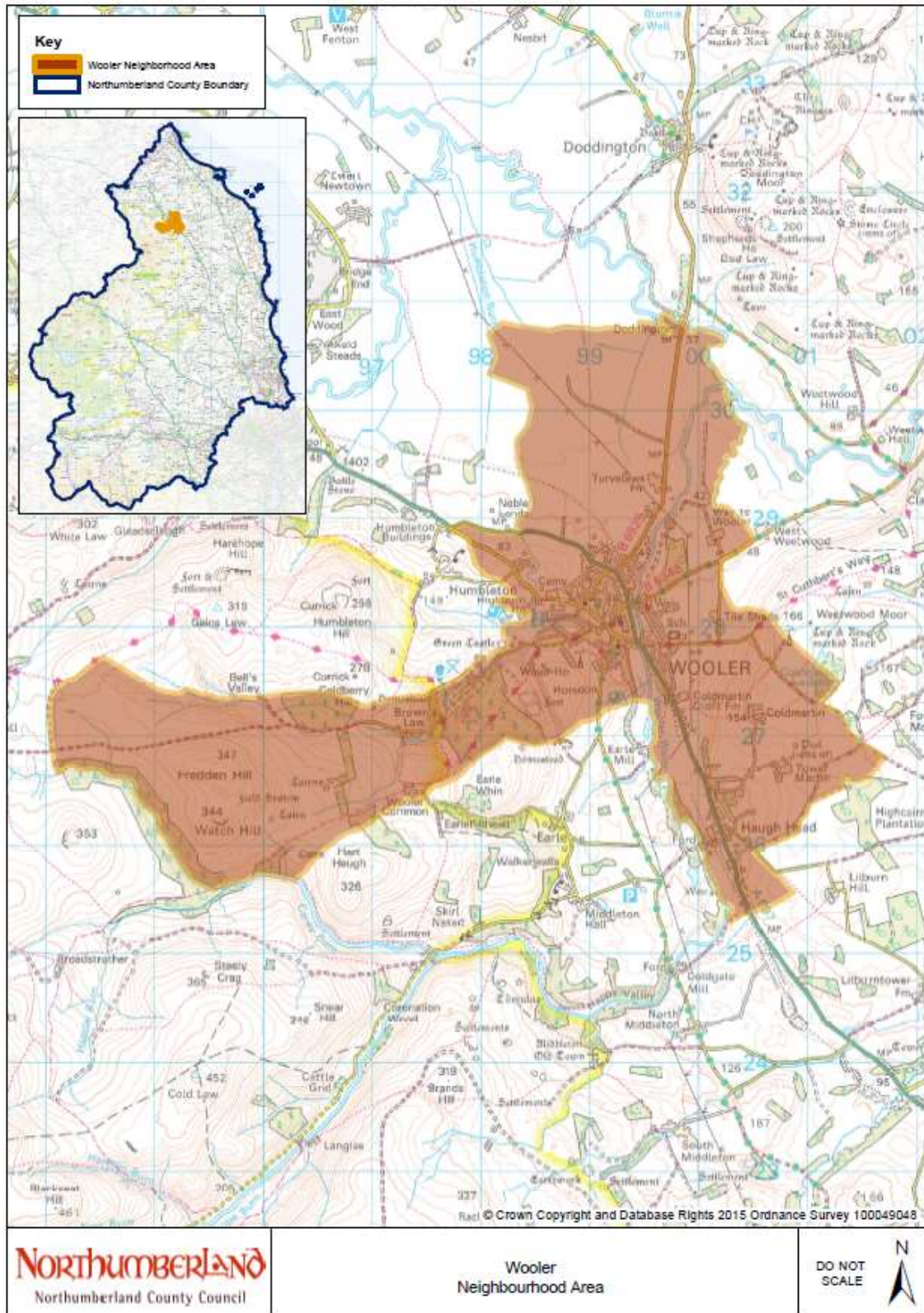
### **Figure 1: Criteria for determining likely significance of effects on the environment**

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

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

### 3. Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

3.01 Wooler parish is a rural civil parish in Northumberland, situated south of Berwick and north-east of Alwick. The Wooler Neighbourhood Area covers the entire civil parish of Wooler. The Neighbourhood Area is shown below:



3.02 The Vision Statement and Objectives of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan are set out below:

**Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Vision:**

*“By 2036 Wooler, as the Gateway to the Northumberland National Park and an important service-centre to the surrounding area, will be a sustainable, vibrant and friendly place for all ages to live work and play. It will be a place with a strong sense of community: a place which attracts visitors and welcomes new residents. To sustain shops and services, and to achieve a more even mix of young and old, Wooler will grow, ensuring that new development provides the right type and mix of housing to cater for all ages. Our town centre will continue to flourish, and Wooler will have more opportunities for business enterprise to start and to grow with an emphasis on providing more employment opportunities, especially for younger people. All these aspirations are set within the context of respecting and making the most of our special landscapes, natural environment, townscape and distinct local heritage.”*

**Neighbourhood Plan Objectives**

**Objective 1: Landscape, Natural Environment, Townscape and Heritage**

*“To cherish our distinctive landscapes, natural environment, townscape and local heritage by ensuring new development is located to encourage improvements in key areas of the town and to ensure that the design of new development reflects the distinctive character of Wooler. Our historic environment will be an inspiration to shape new development and our heritage assets will be protected for future generations.”*

**Objective 2: Local Economy**

*“To enhance Wooler’s economy with increased opportunities for business growth and to maintain a vibrant town centre to attract a variety of businesses.”*

**Objective 3: Housing**

*“To encourage the provision of well-designed new housing which respects Wooler’s distinctive landscape and townscape and provides variety and choice for our population, encouraging more young families to stay or to move into the area, and to help those on lower incomes, and the elderly, to meet their housing needs.”*

**Objective 4: Community Life**

*“We will protect existing community facilities and services and support the development of new ones to maintain a vibrant local community and attract visitors to the area.”*



### **Objective 5: Accessibility**

*“Ensure new development contributes to the accessibility of Wooler for residents and visitors. We want better access links between the town centre, the countryside, housing areas and employment areas. We also want to ensure that parking is managed in a way that does not have a negative impact on the landscape.”*

### **Summary**

- 3.03 The Plan contains a series of policies which seek to deliver the aims and objectives. In summary, the plan seeks to allocate land for housing, employment and mixed uses, as well as designating areas of Local Green Space. The Plan identifies important community facilities and active travel routes, and provides a planning framework for development.
- 3.04 The Plan is supportive of sustainable development within the overall policy context of the statutory development plan in terms of the built and natural environment.

## 4. SEA Screening Assessment

4.01 The policies set out in the draft version of the pre-submission Wooler Neighbourhood Plan have been used to undertake the screening assessment based on the criteria within the SEA Directive.

**Table 1: Assessment of the likelihood of significant effects on the environment**

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant Environmental Effect likely?	
	Yes/no	Justification
<b>The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:</b>		
<b>(a)</b> the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	Yes	The main framework will continue to be at the Local Plan level, which is itself subject to SEA as a matter of course. However, the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan will be seeking to allocate land for development and will specify the nature and location of development in the neighbourhood area.
<b>(b)</b> the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	No	It is possible that the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan could inform future supplementary guidance in the area. The neighbourhood plan must be in accordance with existing higher-level plans and programmes, in this case the Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Local Plan (1999).
<b>(c)</b> the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	No	The Plan contains a series of policies which seek to deliver the aims and objectives. In summary, the plan seeks to allocate land for housing, employment and mixed uses, as well as designating areas of Local Green Space. The Plan identifies important community facilities and active travel routes, and supports sustainable development in the Neighbourhood Area.
<b>(d)</b> environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	Yes	Due to the scale and location of development proposed, the Neighbourhood Plan may result in significant environmental effects.

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant Environmental Effect likely?	
	Yes/no	Justification
<b>The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:</b>		
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection)	Yes	<p>The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan has to be in conformity with the strategic policies contained within other relevant planning documents. The current adopted local plan for the area consists of the saved policies in the Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Local Plan (1999). Policies in this plan are material planning considerations where they comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (2012).</p> <p>New planning policies are emerging in Northumberland. Northumberland County Council is due to commence consultation on its Regulation 18 draft Local Plan in July 2018.</p> <p>While the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan supports the implementation of higher level policies at the Neighbourhood Area level, it is proposing a level of development in addition to that which is proposed in the emerging Local Plan. It is therefore considered that significant environmental effects are likely.</p>

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant Environmental Effect likely?	
	Yes/no	Justification
<b>Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</b>		
<b>(a)</b> the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	Yes	The Wooler Neighbourhood plan intends to allocate land for residential, employment and mixed-use development, as well as seeking to designate land as Local Green Space.
<b>(b)</b> the cumulative nature of the effects	Yes	It is possible that significant environmental effects would be observed as a result of the policies contained within the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan. Since the Plan seeks to allocate a number of sites for development, it is possible that cumulative effects could result. The Neighbourhood Plan intends to facilitate a level of development above that of higher-level documents in the existing development plan.
<b>(c)</b> the transboundary nature of the effects	No	The Civil Parish of Wooler is contained wholly within Northumberland. While it is not anticipated that the scale of development included within the Neighbourhood Plan would result in transboundary effects, the Civil Parish does straddle the administrative areas of Northumberland County Council and the Northumberland National Park Authority.
<b>(d)</b> the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	No	It is considered unlikely that there would be risks to human health or the environment arising from the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan.
<b>(e)</b> the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).	Not known	The Neighbourhood Plan intends to facilitate a level of development above that of higher-level documents within the development plan. It is possible that significant environmental effects would be observed as a result of the policies contained within the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan.
<b>(f)(i)</b> the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to special natural characteristics or cultural heritage.	Yes	The Wooler Neighbourhood Area contains a number of designations, including listed buildings and a conservation area. The Neighbourhood Area also contains a number of important environmental designations. The Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a separate Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Opinion which will be consulted on in due course.
<b>(f)(ii)</b> the value and vulnerability of the area	No	This would be unlikely to result from the proposals.

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant Environmental Effect likely?	
	Yes/no	Justification
likely to be affected due to exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values.		
<b>(f)(iii)</b> the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to intensive land use.	No	This would be unlikely to result from the proposals.
<b>(g)</b> the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	Not known	It is possible that significant effects may result from the Plan's proposals. The Neighbourhood Plan is proposing a scale and level of development above that set out in the existing development plan.

## 5. SEA Screening Opinion Summary and Conclusion

5.01 **On the basis of the SEA Screening Assessment set out in Table 1 above, and having regard to the responses received from the consultation bodies in relation to the County Council’s Screening Opinion, the conclusion is that the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan *is likely to have significant effects on the environment* when considered against the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations and will therefore need to be subject to SEA. The main reasons for this conclusion are:**

- The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan intends to allocate land for residential, employment and mixed-use development, at a scale and distribution above that in the existing development plan. The potential effects of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan on the environment have therefore been found to be potentially significant;
- The Wooler Neighbourhood Area includes a number of sensitive receptors including listed buildings and a conservation area, as well as a number of important environmental designations. The Plan will be subject to a separate Screening Opinion under the Habitats Regulations.

5.02 **The conclusion of this Final Report is that Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan is required and that a Scoping Report and subsequent Environmental Report will be necessary.**

## Appendix 1: Responses to Screening Opinion received from Consultation Bodies



NORTH EAST OFFICE

Northumberland County Council  
Communities & Infrastructure  
County Hall  
Morpeth  
Northumberland  
NE61 2EF

Direct Dial: 0191-2691232

Our ref: PL00452047

13 July 2018

Dear

### **Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Consultation on Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion**

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the above. Within the areas of interest to Historic England, I agree that the draft plan would be likely to result in significant environmental effects and, therefore, does need to be subject to SEA. In coming to this view I have taken the following factors into consideration:

- The plan area contains several designated heritage assets as well as areas with potential for non-designated heritage assets.
- Heritage assets are fragile and irreplaceable and can be damaged by change through development both directly and indirectly by development in their setting.
- The draft plan seen to date proposes to make housing and other allocations, the scope and extent of which have yet to be included.

I agree that the plan is likely to result in significant environmental effects within our area of interest and does need to be subject to SEA. We reserve the right to review this opinion should the plan change materially in its content and direction.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries relating to our comments.

Yours sincerely,

Historic Places Adviser



BESSIE SURTEES HOUSE 41-44 SANDHILL NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE NE1 3JF

Telephone 0191 269 1255  
HistoricEngland.org.uk



*Historic England is subject to both the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and Environmental Information Regulations (2004). Any information held by the organisation can be requested for release under this legislation.*

Date: 18 July 2018

Our ref: 250772

Your ref: Wooler Neighbourhood Plan - SEA Screening Opinion  
Consultation



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BY EMAIL ONLY

T 0300 060 3900

Dear

**Screening consultation: Wooler Neighbourhood Plan, Consultation on Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion**

**Location: Wooler, Northumberland**

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 27 June 2018 which was received by Natural England on the same date.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

#### **Strategic Environmental Assessment - Screening**

It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests are concerned (including but not limited to statutory designated sites, landscapes and protected species, geology and soils), that there are likely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan.

#### **Neighbourhood Plan**

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans in light of the SEA Directive is contained within the National Planning Practice Guidance at:

<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal/sustainability-appraisal-requirements-for-neighbourhood-plans>.

The guidance highlights three triggers that may require the production of an SEA, for instance where:



- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development;
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan;
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect. As we have no evidence of these effects having been assessed within a Local Plan, we consider that there should now be an assessment in order to determine the potential impact on these sensitive sites and what possibilities exist for the avoidance/mitigation of the effects.

The following sites have been identified as being potentially significantly affected by the plan policies:

- Tweed Catchment Rivers – England: Till Catchment Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Till Riverbanks Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Humbleton Hills & Trows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- River Tweed Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Northumberland National Park

We are not aware of significant populations of protected species which are likely to be affected by the policies within the plan. It remains the case, however, that the responsible authority should provide information supporting this screening decision, sufficient to assess whether protected species are likely to be affected.

Notwithstanding this advice, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all potential environmental assets. As a result the responsible authority should raise environmental issues that we have not identified on local or national biodiversity action plan species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites or local landscape character, with its own ecological and/or landscape advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local landscape and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by this plan, before determining whether an SA/SEA is necessary.

Please note that Natural England reserves the right to provide further comments on the environmental assessment of the plan beyond this SEA/SA screening stage, should the responsible authority seek our views on the scoping or environmental report stages. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact on 0208 0265319. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to: [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

Yours sincerely

Northumbria Area Team

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## Wooler Neighbourhood Plan - Consultation on SEA Screening Opinion

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NA NE, Planning <planning.nane@environment-agency.gov.uk>  
To: NeighbourhoodPlanning Mailbox <neighbourhoodplanning@northumberland.gov.uk>  
Cc:

23 July 2018 at 12:13

Dear

### The Environment Agency Position

We would agree with NCC's analysis that the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan *is likely to have significant effects on the environment* when considered against the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulation and will therefore need to be subject to SEA.

Kind regards

Planning Advisor, Sustainable Places

Environment Agency | Tyneside House, Skinnerburn Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 7AR

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