



**Screening Statement on the determination of the need for a Strategic Environmental
Assessment / Habitat Regulations Assessment for the emerging Ringwood
Neighbourhood Plan**

December 2022

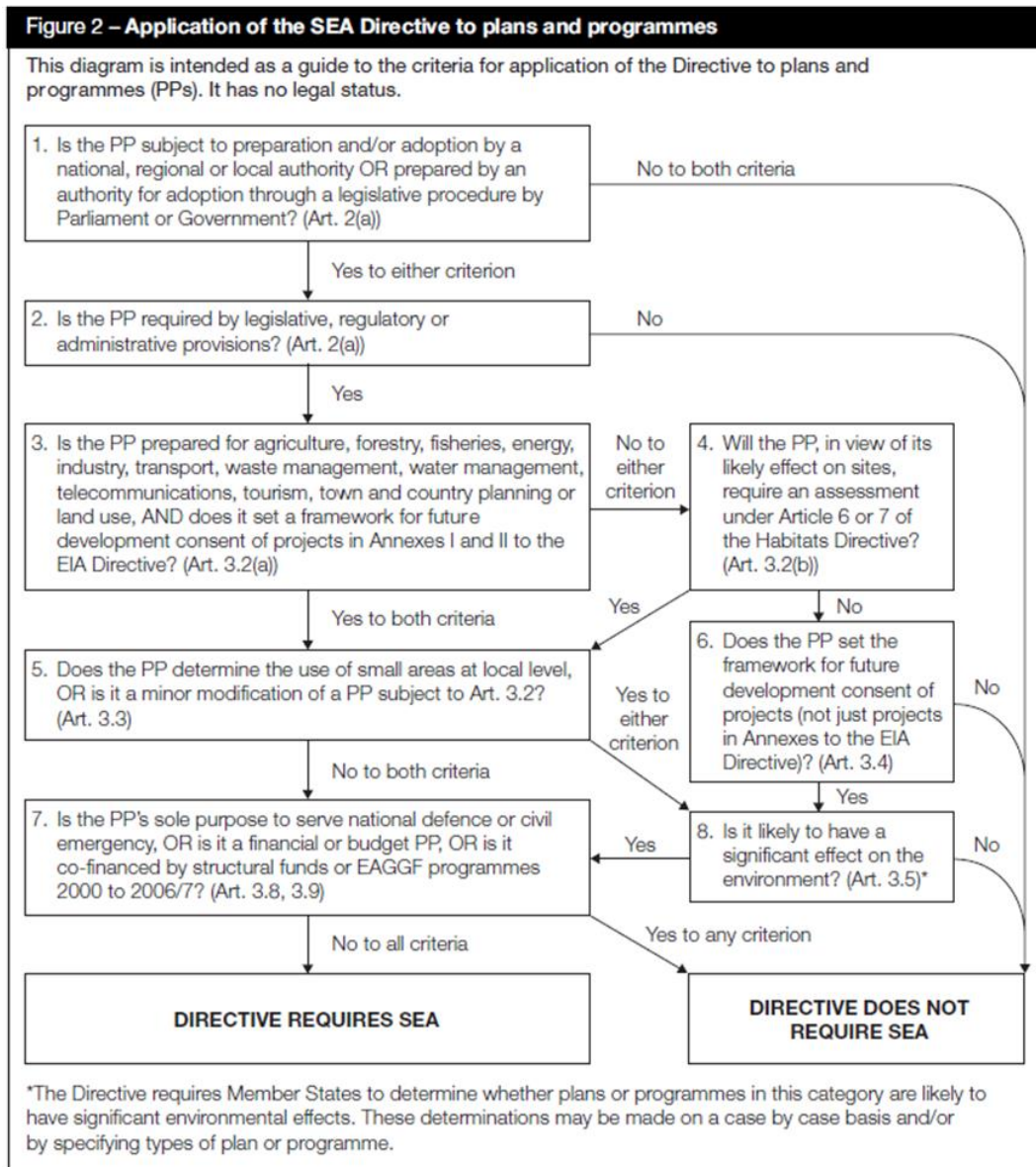
1. Introduction

- 1.1 The whole of the parish of Ringwood was formally designated as a ‘Neighbourhood Area’ under the relevant Neighbourhood Planning Regulations in February 2021 by the New Forest National Park Authority and New Forest District Council (as the parish includes land within both the District Council and National Park Authority planning administrative boundaries).
- 1.2 Ringwood Town Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the whole of the parish. Subject to approval at the Examination in Public and then local referendum, the Neighbourhood Plan will have formal status as part of the statutory ‘development plan’.
- 1.3 On 28 March 2022 Ringwood Town Council formally wrote to the New Forest National Park Authority (as the ‘responsible authority’ under the relevant Regulations) to request a formal screening opinion on the requirement for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/or a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. A similar request was also made to New Forest District Council regarding the area of the designated Ringwood Neighbourhood Area that falls within the District Council’s planning remit.
- 1.4 In May 2022 the National Park Authority (and, separately, New Forest District Council) advised that an SEA and HRA of the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan would be required. This conclusion was on the basis that the Neighbourhood Plan was giving consideration to the allocation of sites for development; and was likely to contain policies that may affect sensitive natural or built heritage assets (such as the nature conservation sites in the New Forest, Avon Valley and Dorset Heathlands; and the Ringwood Conservation Area).
- 1.5 Following further work on the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, Ringwood Town Council wrote to the National Park Authority (and separately to New Forest District Council) to seek a revised SEA and HRA screening opinion on 27 October 2022. In this request the Town Council provided a draft list of policies and indicated that the Neighbourhood Plan is now unlikely to: (i) allocate sites for housing development; (ii) contain policies that may affect sensitive natural or built heritage assets, such as the international nature conservation sites in the area and the Ringwood Conservation Area; and (iii) have other significant environmental effects that have not already been considered through the appraisal for the National Park’s Authority’s adopted Local Plan (2019).
- 1.6 The Authority’s screening opinion on the revised scope of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is formally requested in accordance with:
 - (i) European Directive 2001/42/EC (‘SEA Directive’) and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (‘SEA Regulations’) which require an SEA to be undertaken on any land use plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents. Regulation 9 of the Regulations states that the responsible authority must take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to Regulations and consult the consultation bodies in determining whether an SEA is required; and
 - (ii) European Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora (‘Habitats Directive’) and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (‘Habitat Regulations’), as amended.
- 1.7 This report sets out the National Park Authority’s formal screening opinion – based on the revised scope of the Plan and the list of draft policy areas - on whether the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/or Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). In issuing this revised screening opinion the Authority has had

regard to the draft list of policies provided by Ringwood Town Council and advice in the Government’s National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) resource. The NPPG guidance on ‘Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal’ confirms that whether a neighbourhood plan proposal requires a strategic environmental assessment will depend on what is proposed. An SEA may be required, for example, where: (i) a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development; (ii) the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan; or (iii) the neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the local plan or other strategic policies.

2. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Process

2.1 Set out below is an extract from ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’, DCLG (2005) which demonstrates the SEA screening process. The National Park Authority has adopted a consistent approach to that taken by New Forest District Council in determining whether the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects.



2.2 The key to the screening decision is the determination of whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects using the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the 2004 Regulations. These criteria are set out in the following tables, alongside an assessment against the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan. This is based on the information provided by the Town Council in October 2022, which has amended the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan from that originally screened in May 2022.

Table 1: Application of SEA Directive to the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (November 2022)

Stage	Yes / No	Explanation
1. <i>Is the Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))</i>	Yes	The preparation and adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan is enabled by the Localism Act 2011. The Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by Ringwood Town Council and will be “made” by the Authority as the local authority for the part of the Neighbourhood Area that falls within the National Park. The preparation of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is subject to the following regulations (as amended): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012; ▪ Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012; ▪ Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.
2. <i>Is the Neighbourhood Plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))</i>	Yes	Although the production of a Neighbourhood Plan is optional under the Localism Act 2011, once commenced its preparation is covered by relevant legislation and requirements. Once adopted the Plan will form part of the statutory ‘development plan’ for the National Park-part of Ringwood parish. It is important that the screening process considers whether it is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.
3. <i>Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II (see Appendix 2) to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))</i>	No	The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared for the purposes of town & country / land use planning and will set out a framework for future development consents as part of the statutory development plan covering Ringwood. In October 2022 Ringwood Town Council confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan is now unlikely to allocate additional sites for development. In addition, the Town Council confirmed that Plan policies for the town centre will focus on managing development on small areas of land. The sites are all located within the settlement boundary of Ringwood and are consistent with adopted policies in the overarching New Forest District Local Plan (2020), which itself went through the full SEA process. On that basis it is considered that the Neighbourhood Plan does not set a framework for future development consent of a scale referred to in Article 4(2) of the EIA Directive (listed at Annex II of the Directive).
4. <i>Will the Neighbourhood Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))</i>	No	The designated Ringwood Neighbourhood Area includes a range of protected habitats within and adjacent to the Plan Area (including the New Forest, River Avon and Dorset Heathland Natura 2000 sites). In October 2022 Ringwood Town Council confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan is now unlikely to allocate sites for development; contain policies that may affect sensitive designated sites; or have

		other environmental effects not already assessed through the NPA or NFDC Plan-making processes. On this basis it is concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have a detrimental impact on site integrity. The Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Opinion that follows in Section 3 provides more detail on this.
5. Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)	Yes	The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan may determine the use of sites at a local/parish level. In October 2022 Ringwood Town Council confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan policies for the town centre area seek to manage future development on small areas at a local level. This would be within the strategic context established by existing development plan policies (namely the adopted New Forest District Council Local Plan, 2020).
6. Does the Neighbourhood Plan set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Yes	Once adopted, the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will include policies to provide a framework to guide future development within the Parish. The Plan will form part of the statutory ‘development plan’ for the parish and in accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act will be the starting point for planning decisions on development proposals.
7. Is the Neighbourhood Plan’s sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)	No	N/A
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	Yes	The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will – once ‘made’ – be part of the statutory development plan for the area and a key factor in planning decisions. In October 2022 Ringwood Town Council confirmed that the Plan is unlikely to allocate sites for development; or contain policies that may detrimentally impact the natural and built environment of the Neighbourhood Area. This, allied to the fact that the strategic planning policies for the area contained within the adopted National Park Authority and New Forest District Council local plans have already gone through the full SEA process, means it is concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

2.3 The Government’s National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) resource recognises that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) may be required where a Neighbourhood Plan allocates sites for development and/or the Neighbourhood Area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan. Following the receipt of further information from Ringwood Town Council in October 2022, the National Park Authority has concluded that the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan does not trigger the need for an SEA under either of these tests. The following table assesses the likely significance of effects on the environment in accordance with the criteria established in Regulation 9 and [Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations](#).

Table 2 - Assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment (SEA) – based on Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

1. Characteristics of the plan, having regard to:	
<i>(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;</i>	The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan would, once adopted, form part of the statutory ‘development plan’ for the parish and provide the planning framework for consenting development proposals within the National Park-part of the parish. Under Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act it would therefore form part of the legal planning framework for the consideration and consenting of future development projects within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the strategic policies of the New Forest National Park Local Plan (2019). The proposed planning policies for the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan seek to celebrate Ringwood’s historic buildings and townscapes, conserve local built heritage assets and create a local nature recovery network – all of which will be positive for the local environment. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will be required to be in general conformity with the policies in the adopted development plan. It therefore cannot provide for development that significantly exceeds, at a strategic level, the intentions of the adopted development plan. Significant environmental impacts are therefore unlikely.
<i>(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans & programmes including those in a hierarchy;</i>	The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will be in conformity with two statutory National Park purposes (as originally established in the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949) and the relevant sections of the Government’s National Planning Policy Framework. The policies within the Neighbourhood Plan will also be in general conformity with the strategic planning policies contained within the adopted New Forest National Park Local Plan 2016 – 2036. Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.
<i>(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;</i>	In October 2022 Ringwood Town Council provided a policy list for the emerging Neighbourhood Plan to inform the SEA and HRA screening processes. The policy list confirms that the Plan will look to conserve local built heritage assets (including a Design Code), create a green infrastructure and local nature recovery network, deliver zero carbon buildings and help adaptation to climate change. These policies should have a positive environmental impact and help deliver sustainable development in the designated Neighbourhood Area. Neighbourhood Development Plans are required by legislation to help achieve sustainable development. This is one of the basic conditions against which the Plan will be tested at examination. Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.
<i>(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and</i>	The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area is situated close to a range of environmental designations. In terms of habitat designations, these include the following either within the Neighbourhood Area, or in close proximity to it. - River Avon SAC

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avon Valley SPA - Avon Valley Ramsar - Dorset Heathlands SAC - Dorset Heathlands SPA - Dorset Heathlands Ramsar - New Forest SAC - New Forest SPA - New Forest Ramsar - National SSSI designations (including the River Avon System SSSI, the Avon Valley (Bickton to Christchurch) SSSI and the New Forest SSSI) <p>Parts of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Area are also affected by flooding (fluvial and surface water). Ringwood Town Council has confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan is now unlikely to allocate any additional sites for development. The adopted National Park Authority and New Forest District Council local plans were informed by the New Forest Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and not additional sites are due to be allocated. Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.</p>
<p><i>(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).</i></p>	<p>The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is not directly relevant to any of these. The Plan is not relevant in this instance, as the matters described are guided by higher level legislation (and in some instances these matters fall under the category of ‘excluded development’ for Neighbourhood Development Plans). Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.</p>
<p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</p>	
<p><i>(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;</i></p>	<p>In October 2022 Ringwood Town Council provided a policy list for the emerging Neighbourhood Plan to inform the SEA and HRA screening processes. The policy list confirms that the Plan will look to conserve local built heritage assets (including a Design Code), create a green infrastructure and local nature recovery network, deliver zero carbon buildings and help adaptation to climate change. These policies should have a positive environmental impact and help deliver sustainable development in the designated Neighbourhood Area. The strategic planning policies for the area contained within the adopted National Park Authority and New Forest District Council local plans have already gone through the full Sustainability Appraisal/SEA process, setting out how key sustainability issues may be affected by the local plan policies.</p>

The New Forest National Park Local Plan Review Habitats Regulations Assessment work identified the following potential effects from development either within the National Park, or in combination with development proposed in surrounding areas that require consideration against the revised scope of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (October 2022).

Direct loss or physical damage due to construction:

The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area includes part of the internationally designated New Forest Ramsar, SPA and SAC; and parts of the Avon Valley SPA and Ramsar. The HRA work for the National Park Local Plan identified the potential effects of direct loss of or physical damage to designated habitats or habitats on which designated species rely or direct mortality of designated species. In addition, the HRA work identified the potential for development to result in loss of habitat which lies outside European site boundaries but which is used by the qualifying bird populations of Avon Valley SPA and Ramsar site; Dorset Heathlands SPA; and the New Forest SPA. Ringwood Town Council has confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to allocate additional development sites and therefore the consideration of direct loss of designated sites from housing site allocations has already been assessed through the HRAs of the adopted New Forest National Park Authority and New Forest District Council local plans.

Disturbance and other urban edge effects from construction or occupation of buildings: It is not possible to rule out the potential for urban edge effects such as pet predation from new residential development within 400 metres of New Forest SPA; or from effects such as noise pollution or light pollution from all types of built development. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area includes part of the New Forest SPA and areas of land within the east of the parish are located within 400 metres of the SPA. It should be highlighted that these urban edge impacts relate to the lowland heathland areas of the New Forest SPA and Dorset Heathlands and are not generic across all designated SPAs. To date Natural England have not raised issues around urban edge impacts on the Avon Valley/River Avon designations for example, where a 400m zone does not currently apply. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to allocate additional development sites to those contained within the New Forest District Council Local Plan (2020) and therefore these urban edge impacts have already been assessed through the HRA of the District Council's Local Plan. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will not increase these pressures.

Recreational pressure: The Local Plan HRA work concluded in relation to recreational impacts that, prior to mitigation, likely significant effects in-combination could not be ruled out for any residential development or visitor accommodation within New Forest National Park on the New Forest SAC and SPA. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area includes significant areas of land within the National Park and therefore affected by this issue. The National Park Authority adopted an updated Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD in 2020 which provides details on how the recreational impacts of new development within the National Park can be mitigated. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is not intending to allocate additional sites – any sites

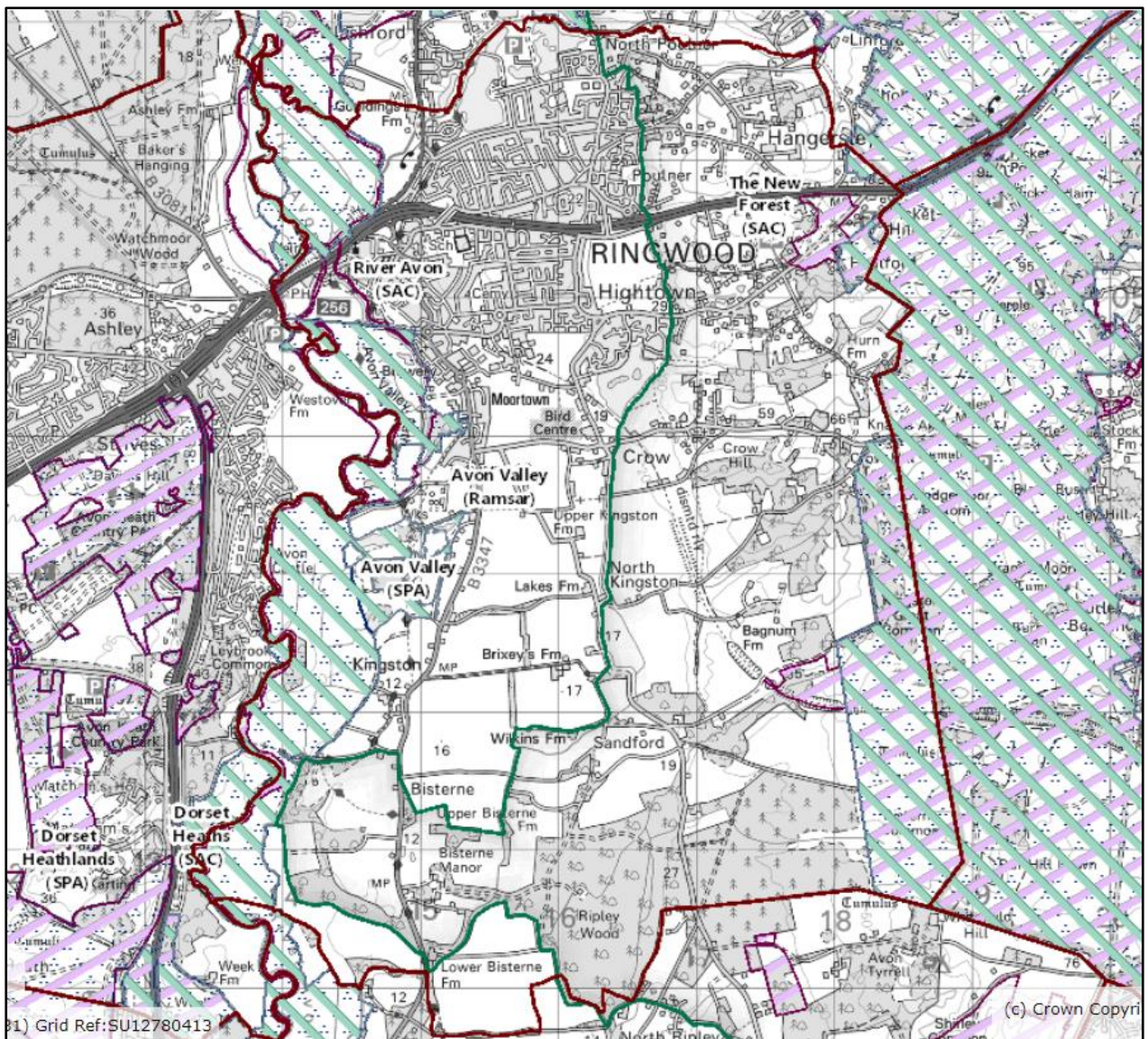
	<p>that come forward will be consistent with the provision of the existing development plans for the area – and there are established mitigation schemes in place to address recreational impacts associated with the scale of planned development.</p> <p><u>Changes in water quality:</u> The Authority’s Local Plan HRA work identified the European sites vulnerable to a deterioration in water quality as: River Avon SAC; Avon Valley SPA & Ramsar site; Dorset Heathlands SAC & Ramsar site; the New Forest SAC & Ramsar site; Solent & Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC; Solent Maritime SAC; Solent & Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site. The most relevant of these for the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan work is the Avon Valley/River Avon designations and the impacts arising from increased levels of phosphates. Although new development only makes a small contribution to the issue, Natural England’s updated methodology and budget calculator (March 2022) confirms new development in the Avon catchment must be ‘phosphate-neutral’. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is not intending to allocate additional development sites and therefore the overall scale and spatial distribution of new development in the area has been considered through the plan-making process of the two local planning authorities.</p>
<i>(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;</i>	<p>The HRA work undertaken for the New Forest National Park Local Plan Review 2016 – 2036 highlighted the cumulative, in-combination impacts of development around the New Forest’s Natura 2000 sites as potentially significant. These impacts included increased recreational pressures on the New Forest designations and (more recently) impacts on water quality on the River Avon designations arising from increased levels of phosphates. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is not proposing to increase the scale of development from that assessed as part of the local plan-making processes. Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.</p>
<i>(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;</i>	<p>The effects of the Plan are unlikely to have transboundary impacts (i.e. other Member States). Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.</p>
<i>(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);</i>	<p>There are no significant risks to human health or the environment. Elements of the Neighbourhood Plan – for example the draft policies on ‘Building for a Healthy Life’ and creating a sustainable travel network – are likely to be beneficial for human health. Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.</p>
<i>(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);</i>	<p>The full Neighbourhood Plan Area covers an area of nearly 30 square kilometres and a population of approximately 15,000 people, centred on the town of Ringwood. The revised scope of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan (October 2022) means that it is unlikely to enable a greater scale of development from that already assessed through the local plan-making processes undertaken by the two local planning authorities. Neighbourhood Development Plans have a very limited ability to influence the delivery of strategic levels of development and this particular Neighbourhood Development Plan only seeks to direct development to small areas at local level.</p>

<p>(f) <i>the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</i> <i>(i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;</i> <i>(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;</i> <i>or</i> <i>(iii) intensive land-use; and</i></p>	<p>There are a number of international nature conservation sites within and immediately adjacent to the Ringwood Neighbourhood Area. These sites are vulnerable to a variety of impacts, as set out in the assessment against criteria 2(a) above. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area also contains a range of built environment assets (designated and non-designated), including a number of listed buildings and the Ringwood Conservation Area, focused on the core of the town (located with the part of the Neighbourhood Area that falls within New Forest District Council’s planning remit). In addition, part of the Western Escarpment Conservation Area in the National Park extends into the north east of the parish of Ringwood around North Poulner and Hangersley. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is likely to include policies that seek to conserve local built heritage assets and the creation of a local nature recovery network – both of which should help protect the natural and built environment of the designated Neighbourhood Area. Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.</p> <p>Over half of the designated Ringwood Neighbourhood Area lies within the New Forest National Park. The first statutory Park purpose is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will need to have regard to the two statutory National Park purposes as it is prepared.</p>
<p>(g) <i>the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</i></p>	<p>As outlined above, there are a range of designated habitats within or adjacent to the Ringwood Neighbourhood Area that are protected at national and international level.</p> <p>In addition, over half of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Area lies within the New Forest National Park. National Parks – including the New Forest - have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty (paragraph 176 of the NPPF) and great weight should also be given to the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage within the National Park. Section 62(2) of the Environment Act 1995 requires relevant authorities to have regard to the two statutory Park purposes in making decision that could affect National Parks. This applies to the preparation of plans and projects outside National Parks, but which could impact on them, including Neighbourhood Plans. Significant environmental impacts are therefore considered unlikely.</p>

- 2.4 Following confirmation from Ringwood Town Council in October 2022 that the emerging Neighbourhood Plan is now unlikely to: (i) allocate sites for housing development; (ii) contain policies that may affect sensitive natural or built heritage assets, such as the international nature conservation sites in the area and the Ringwood Conservation Area; and (iii) have other significant environmental effects that have not already been considered through the appraisal for the National Park's Authority's adopted Local Plan (2019), the National Park Authority has prepared an updated SEA screening opinion. This has been informed by the intended Neighbourhood Plan policy list prepared by Ringwood Town Council and discussions between the Town Council, the National Park Authority and New Forest District Council. It is concluded that as the Neighbourhood Plan is now not seeking to allocate additional development sites over and above the overall quantum of development assessed through the respective local plans, then an environmental report is not required. In addition, the intended policy coverage of the Neighbourhood Plan includes several policies specifically intended to protect the natural and built environment of the Neighbourhood Area, supporting the delivery of sustainable development.

3. The Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening Process

3.1 On 27 October 2022 Ringwood Town Council also sought a formal screening opinion from the National Park Authority on the need for a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. This request was accompanied by details of the proposed areas of policy coverage in the Neighbourhood Plan. The Authority is the ‘competent authority’ under the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010, and therefore needs to ensure the emerging Neighbourhood Plan has been assessed through the Habitats Regulations process where necessary. This process looks at the potential for significant impacts on nature conservation sites that are of international importance, also referred to as Natura 2000 sites. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area includes, or is adjacent to, a number of internationally important habitats – including the New Forest SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites; the Avon Valley Ramsar and SPA; and the Dorset Heaths SAC and Dorset Heathlands SPA. The map below illustrates these designations in various hatchings in relation to the Ringwood parish boundary (brown line).



3.2 This screening assessment has regard to the letter from Ringwood Town Council dated 27 October 2022 setting out the scope of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. This included a list

of draft policy areas and commentary on the main policies. This updated screening assessment has also had regard to work on the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the New Forest National Park Local Plan Review (2016 – 2036), as well as considering information that has become available since the Authority’s Local Plan was adopted in 2019. New Forest District Council will be providing a separate HRA screening opinion to the Town Council relating to the area of the parish that lies within the District Council’s planning remit. It is also recognised that the Neighbourhood Plan will be in general conformity within the higher-level development plans prepared by the National Park Authority and New Forest District Council, which have themselves been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessments. This is particularly pertinent given that the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is now unlikely to allocate additional sites for development from the scale and quantum of development set out in the existing adopted development plan for the area.

- 3.3 From this process the Authority has determined whether the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is likely to result in significant impacts on Natura 2000 sites either alone or in combination with other plans and policies and, therefore, whether an ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is required.

Legislative Background

- 3.4 Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive provides that:

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [European] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”

Assessment

- 3.5 A Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) was undertaken for the New Forest National Park Local Plan Review (2016-2036). This assessment was undertaken in consultation with Natural England and other bodies. The HRA work on the National Park Local Plan concluded that significant impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites within and adjacent to the National Park could not be ruled out. This conclusion recognised the in-combination effects caused by the development plans prepared for areas surrounding the National Park. The main areas where potential impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites in the New Forest are highlighted the response to point 2(a) in Table 2 and summarised below.

Direct loss or physical damage due to construction:

The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area includes part of the internationally designated New Forest Ramsar, SPA and SAC; and parts of the Avon Valley SPA and Ramsar. The HRA work for the National Park Local Plan identified the potential effects of direct loss of or physical damage to designated habitats or habitats on which designated species rely or direct mortality of designated species. In addition, the HRA work identified the potential for development to result in loss of habitat which lies outside European site boundaries but which is used by the qualifying bird populations of Avon Valley SPA and Ramsar site; Dorset Heathlands SPA; and the New Forest SPA. Ringwood Town Council has confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to allocate additional development sites and therefore the consideration of direct loss of designated sites from housing site allocations has already been assessed through the HRAs of the adopted New Forest National Park Authority and

New Forest District Council local plans. On this basis it is concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan does not increase the risk of direct loss of designated sites.

Disturbance and other urban edge effects from construction or occupation of buildings: It is not possible to rule out the potential for urban edge effects such as pet predation from new residential development within 400 metres of New Forest SPA; or from effects such as noise pollution or light pollution from all types of built development. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area includes part of the New Forest SPA and areas of land within the east of the parish are located within 400 metres of the SPA. It should be highlighted that these urban edge impacts relate to the lowland heathland areas of the New Forest SPA and Dorset Heathlands SPA and are not generic across all designated SPAs. To date Natural England have not raised issues around urban edge impacts on the Avon Valley/River Avon designations for example, where a 400m zone does not currently apply. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to allocate additional development sites to those contained within the New Forest District Council Local Plan (2020) and therefore these urban edge impacts have already been assessed through the HRA of the District Council's Local Plan. As additional site allocations will not now be identified, the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will not increase these pressures and therefore increased disturbance and urban edge effects over and above those already considered through the HRA of the respective adopted local plans for the National Park area can be ruled out.

Recreational pressure: The Local Plan HRA work concluded in relation to recreational impacts that, prior to mitigation, likely significant effects in-combination could not be ruled out for any residential development or visitor accommodation within National Park on the New Forest SAC and SPA. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Area includes significant areas of land within the National Park and therefore affected by this issue. In addition, research reports published in 2020 and 2021 from the specialist consultants Footprint Ecology identified a 13.8km 'zone of influence' from the New Forest's designated sites within which the majority of recreational visits originated from. This work has been supported by Natural England and the zone covers the whole of the parish of Ringwood. New development will therefore be required to address recreational impacts on the New Forest designations. The National Park Authority adopted an updated Habitat Mitigation Scheme SPD in 2020 which provides details on how the recreational impacts of new development within the National Park can be mitigated. As the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is now not intending to allocate additional sites it is concluded that any development that comes forward in the designated Ringwood Neighbourhood Area will be consistent with the provisions of the existing development plans for the area. These have been through the full HRA process and there are established mitigation schemes in place to address recreational impacts associated with the scale of planned development. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will not increase the quantum of planned development and therefore additional impacts on site integrity from additional recreational pressures can be screened out.

Changes in water quality: The Local Plan HRA work identified the European sites vulnerable to a deterioration in water quality as: River Avon SAC; Avon Valley SPA & Ramsar site; Dorset Heathlands SAC & Ramsar site; the New Forest SAC & Ramsar site; Solent & Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC; Solent Maritime SAC; Solent & Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site. The most relevant of these for the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is the Avon Valley/River Avon designations and the impacts arising from increased levels of phosphates. Although new development only makes a small contribution to the issue, Natural England's latest methodology confirms development in the Avon catchment must be 'phosphate-neutral'. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is not intending to allocate additional development

sites and therefore the overall scale and spatial distribution of new development in the area has been considered through the plan-making process of the two local planning authorities. Any new development in the designated Neighbourhood Area is required to comply with the Habitats Regulations through primary legislation and the Neighbourhood Plan is not seeking to increase the overall quantum of development to that already considered through the local plan-making process.

- 3.6 On the basis that the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan does not intend to allocate additional land for development to that identified in the existing adopted development plan for the area, **it is concluded that the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan does not require a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)**. The draft policies list supplied by the Town Council in October 2022 indicates the focus of the Plan will be on supporting the role of the Town Centre, conserving local built heritage assets, creating a green infrastructure and local nature recovery strategy and adapting the climate change. The focus on Ringwood town centre is consistent with policies in the adopted New Forest District Local Plan (2020) and the strategic local plan policies for the National Park and District planning areas have already been subject to full HRA and, where necessary, appropriate assessment. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will not increase the quantum of development from that set out in the adopted development plan.

4 Statutory Consultees

- 4.1 The National Park Authority's initial SEA and HRA Screening Opinion was shared with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England - as statutory consultation bodies under Regulation 9 of the SEA Regulations – for comment in April 2022. The draft screening opinion was also shared with New Forest District Council before it was finalised.
- 4.2 Following the receipt of Ringwood Town Council's request for a revised SEA and HRA screening opinion in October 2022, the National Park Authority consulted the three consultation bodies on this revised opinion. The revised draft screening opinion was shared with the consultation bodies on 4 November 2022 and they were given 4 weeks to respond (i.e. to 2 December 2022). During this consultation period the following responses were received.
- Environment Agency (response received 22.11.22): Having taken account of the fact that there will no additional development sites coming forward as part of the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan, the Environment Agency do not consider there will be any significant environmental impacts associated with the plan. Therefore it is the Environment Agency's view that an SEA will not be required.
 - Historic England (response received 17.11.22): Historic England confirms that, with the removal of the intention to allocate sites for development, it agrees with the Authority's view that the plan does not merit SEA because of any potential likely significant environmental effects within areas of interest to Historic England, which is confined to the plan's potential effects for the historic environment, including the conservation of heritage assets. Historic England is not a statutory authority in respect of the Habitats Regulations, and therefore did not wish to comment on the HRA screening.
 - Natural England – no response received within the 4-week consultation period.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Following Ringwood Town Council’s request for a fresh SEA and HRA screening opinion dated 27 October 2022, the National Park Authority has considered the revised scope and content of the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan in preparing this revised screening report. The updated screening process undertaken by the National Park Authority concludes that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) are not required for the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan. Responses received from the Environment Agency and Historic England (in their capacities as statutory ‘consultation bodies’) endorse the Authority’s revised screening conclusions.
- 5.2 The Authority’s conclusion is based on the fact that the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to allocate additional sites for development. In addition, the draft policy list indicates that the Plan will focus on protecting the natural and built environment of Ringwood, with other policies on climate change and encouraging a vibrant town centre helping to deliver sustainable development. The NPPG resource on ‘Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal’ confirms that an SEA of a Neighbourhood Plan will only be required “...in some limited circumstances, where a [neighbourhood plan](#) is likely to have significant environmental effects.”¹ The NPPG goes on to advise that an SEA may be required where sites are allocated for development; and where the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through an assessment of the Local Plan. Neither of these circumstances are considered to apply in the case of the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.3 Table 2 of this report sets out an assessment as to whether the Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment. This assessment is based on the requirements of Regulation 9 and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations and recognises the statutory nature of the Neighbourhood Plan; its likely scope; and the value and vulnerability of the area (including national and internationally protected landscapes and habitats). The updated screening assessment concludes that significant environmental impacts are unlikely.
- 5.4 In terms of the requirement for HRA, the draft policies list supplied by the Town Council in October 2022 indicates the focus of the Plan will be on supporting the role of the town centre, conserving local built heritage assets, creating a green infrastructure and local nature recovery strategy and adapting to climate change. The focus on Ringwood town centre is consistent with policies in the adopted New Forest District Local Plan (2020) and the strategic local plan policies for the National Park and District planning areas have already been subject to full HRA and, where necessary, appropriate assessment. The Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan will not increase the quantum of development from that set out in the adopted development plan. It is therefore concluded that an HRA of the emerging Ringwood Neighbourhood Plan is not required.

¹ [Strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) - Paragraph: 027
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