



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) 2041:
Pre-Submission Consultation Draft March 2025**

**Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) &
Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)
Screening Report**

March & updated May 2025

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Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) 2041: Pre-Submission Consultation Draft (March 2025)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) & Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report

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<i>prepared for:</i>	<i>West Oxfordshire District Council</i>	
<i>prepared by:</i>	<i>Barbara Carroll</i>	<i>Enfusion</i>
<i>quality assurance:</i>	<i>Barbara Carroll</i>	<i>Enfusion</i>



environmental planning and management for sustainability

The Train Shed
1 Ancliff Square, Avoncliff
Bradford on Avon BA15 2HD
www.enfusion.co.uk

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); Sustainability Appraisal (SA) & Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

- 1.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)¹ is a systematic process used during the preparation of plans and policies and it aims to provide a high level of protection for the environment; it contributes to the integration of environmental considerations in plan preparation with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 1.2 Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a process that similarly investigates plans and policies, including consideration of socio-economic factors in the same way as environmental factors and to the same level of detail. SA incorporating SEA is a mandatory requirement for Local Plans in accordance with planning legislation² and paragraph 33 of the National Planning Policy Framework (revised December 2024)³. Government advises⁴ that an integrated approach is taken so that the SA process incorporates the requirements for SEA – and to the same level of detail.
- 1.3 There is no statutory requirement⁵ for Neighbourhood Plans to be subject to SA. However, a qualifying body must demonstrate how its plan will contribute to achieving sustainable development. In some limited circumstances, where a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, it may require a SEA since the Localism Act 2011 requires neighbourhood plans to comply with EU legislation. This is determined through a SEA screening process by the responsible authority with regard to the SEA Directive and UK SEA Regulations – for this Neighbourhood Plan, the West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC).
- 1.4 Plan-makers are also required to consider whether a Habitats Regulations⁶ Assessment (HRA) is required. The aim of the HRA process is to assess the potential effects arising from a plan against the nature conservation objectives of any site designated for its nature conservation importance. The HRA process has its own legislative drivers and requirements and, while the different processes can inform each other, it is important that the HRA remains distinguishable from the wider SA/SEA process.

¹ EU Directive 2001/42/EC

² Section 19(5) of the 2004 Act and Regulation 22(a) of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework>— National Planning Policy Framework (2012, revised 2018, updated 2019, revised 2021, updated 2023, revised 2024)

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal>

⁶ The Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/490/contents/made>

- 1.5 It may be noted that under planning reform proposed through the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA)⁷ there were included proposed changes to environmental assessment requirements. A new system of environmental assessment – Environmental Outcomes Reports (EORs) – was proposed to replace the current processes of SEA and its associated project level environmental impact assessment (EIA). Between 17 March and 9 June 2023, these proposals⁸ were consulted upon.
- 1.6 The new Government published its Planning & Infrastructure Bill in March 2025⁹ and this aims to speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes and critical infrastructure. The Bill does not include any mention of changes to environmental assessment requirements. The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared and will be consulted upon during the extant system and according to established procedures for SEA and HRA screening.
- 1.7 The local planning authority has commissioned independent SA, SEA, HRA specialists Enfusion Ltd to undertake the SEA and HRA screening on behalf of the Council.

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 & new Local Plan to 2041

- 1.8 West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) prepared a Local Plan¹⁰ (adopted September 2018) to guide future development in the Local Authority area during the period up to 2031. In accordance with legislative and policy requirements¹¹, the Council carried out a SA incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of its Local Plan.
- 1.9 The Council has commenced preparation of a new Local Plan to 2041¹² to ensure that policies and proposals are up to date. Initial scoping and further focused consultation was undertaken in 2022 and 2023, supported by various evidence studies ongoing and planned (including SA/SEA and HRA). The council intends to further consult on a series of preferred policy options in May 2025 – to inform preparation of a final draft of the new Local Plan for public consultation in October 2025.
- 1.10 A Neighbourhood Plan attains the same legal status as the Local Plan once it has been agreed at a referendum and is adopted or “made” (brought into legal force) by the local planning authority. At this point it becomes part of the statutory development plan. Applications for planning permission must be

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/55>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/environmental-outcomes-reports-a-new-approach-to-environmental-assessment/environmental-outcomes-report-a-new-approach-to-environmental-assessment#background-to-environmental-assessment>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill/guide-to-the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill#part-2-planning>

¹⁰ <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/localplan2031#>

¹¹ Town & Country Planning Regulations (2011, 2012); National Planning Policy Framework (2012, revised 2018, updated 2019, revised 2021, updated 2023, revised 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

¹² <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2041/>

determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise¹³.

This SEA & HRA Screening Report

- 1.11 This document provides a screening determination of the need to carry out an SEA and an HRA of the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan 2041 (SNP Pre-Submission consultation draft March 2025). West Oxfordshire District Council, as the "Responsible Authority"¹⁴ under the SEA Regulations, and the "Competent Authority"¹⁵ under the HRA Regulations, is responsible for undertaking this screening process that will determine if the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have any significant environmental effects and therefore, whether an SEA and an HRA is required.
- 1.12 This Screening Report was sent to the environmental consultation bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) for the statutory five weeks consultation period during end March to 5 May 2025.

¹³ PCPA 2004 section 38(6)

¹⁴ The organisation that adopts ("makes") the neighbourhood plan

¹⁵ The organisation that ensures that the plan will not have any likely significant effects on the integrity of the designated nature conservation sites

2.0 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS & GUIDANCE; METHOD

Legislative Requirements

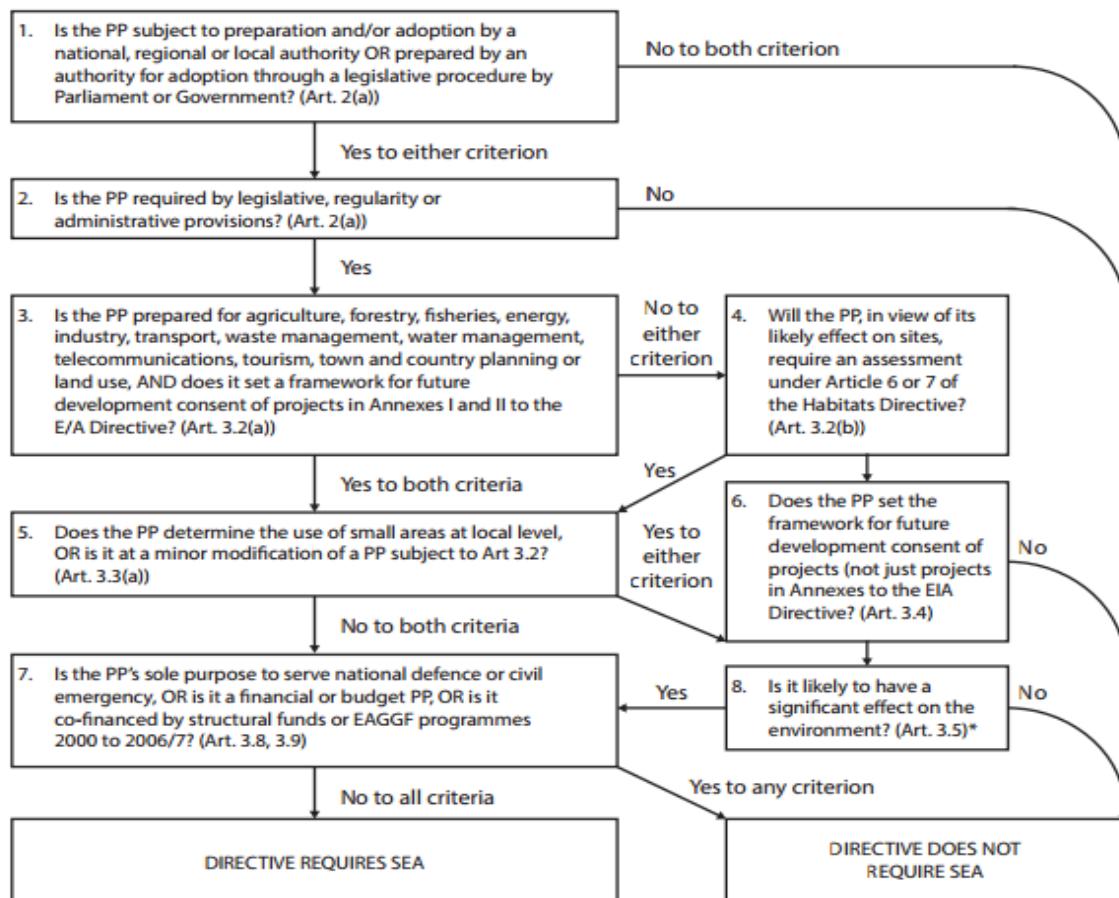
- 2.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires neighbourhood plans to comply with EU legislation. Regulation 5 of the SEA Regulations requires an environmental assessment of plans which:
1. *are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use (Regulation 5, para. (2)(a), and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annex I or II to Council Directive 85/337/EEC (EIA Directive) on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (Regulation 5, para. (2)(b)*
 2. *in view of the likely effect on sites, have been determined to require an assessment pursuant to Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) (Regulation 5, para. (3)*
 3. *set the framework for future development consent of projects¹⁶ (Regulation 5, para. (4)(b)*
 4. *are determined to be likely to have significant environmental effects as determined under regulation 9(1) (Regulation 5, para. (4)(c)*
- 2.2 An environmental assessment need not be carried out for:
- a) *plans which determine the use of a small area¹⁷ at local level (Regulation 5, para. (6)(a); or*
 - b) *plans which are a minor modification¹⁸ to a plan or programme (Regulation 5, para. (6)(b) unless it has been determined under regulation 9(1) that the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects.*
- 2.3 UK Government guidance provides a flow diagram with questions/criteria for the SEA Directive and its application to the plan-making process as follows:

¹⁶ European Commission guidance states that plans and programmes which set the framework for future development consent of projects would normally contain 'criteria or conditions which guide the way a consenting authority decides an application for development consent'. Development consent is defined in the EIA Directive as "the decision of the competent authority or authorities which entitled the developer to proceed with the project" (Article 1(2) of the EIA Directive).

¹⁷ European Commission guidance suggests that plans which determine the use of small areas at local level might include "a building plan which, for a particular, limited area, outlines details of how buildings must be constructed, determining, for example, their height, width or design"

¹⁸ 'Minor modifications' should be considered in the context of the plan or programme which is being modified and of the likelihood of their having significant environmental effects. A modification may be of such small order that it is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.

Figure 2.1: Flow Diagram¹⁹ for Determining if a Plan is likely to have Significant Environmental Effects



Note: The figure is intended as a guide to the criteria for application of the Directive to plans & programmes (PPs); it does not have legal status. Where a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) must be carried out and an Environmental Report (ER) prepared.

- 2.4 There is no legal requirement for a Neighbourhood Plan (NP)²⁰ to have a Sustainability Appraisal as set out in section 19 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Government advises that in some limited circumstances, where a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, it may require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. In order to decide whether a draft NP might have significant environmental effects, it must be screened at an early stage according to the requirements set out in regulation 9 of the SEA Regulations. This includes a requirement to consult with the SEA consultation bodies (in England - Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England); each body can advise on particular topics relevant to its specific area of expertise and responsibility.

¹⁹ Based on ODPM 2005 - 'A Practical Guide to the SEA Directive' 2005

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal#neighbourhood-plan-require-sustainability-appraisal>

Guidance on SA/SEA & HRA/AA

- 2.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) have advised that a Neighbourhood Plan:
- would need SEA “...in limited circumstances...”
 - should be screened early
 - screening should consult with the consultation bodies
 - if ‘screened out’, should have a ‘statement of reasons’ prepared
- 2.6 Whether a Neighbourhood Plan proposal requires a SEA, and (if so) the level of detail needed, will depend on what is proposed. An SEA may be required, for example, 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 is likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.
- 2.7 Government planning guidance further advises that before deciding whether significant environmental effects are likely, the local planning authority should take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1²¹ to the SEA Regulations (2004) and consult the statutory environmental consultation bodies. Schedule 1 sets out the criteria for determining likely significant effects on the environment taking into account the characteristics of plans and the characteristics of the effects and the area likely to be affected.
- 2.8 The qualifying body (ie WODC for the SNP 2041) is required to provide the following – to demonstrate that the basic condition²² in the planning legislation has been met:
- “a statement of reasons for a determination... that the proposal is unlikely to have significant environmental effects; or
 - An environmental report”
- 2.9 Planning practice guidance²³ also provides advice on HRA screening and the subsequent appropriate assessment (AA) stage of the process for neighbourhood planning. An appropriate assessment for a more strategic plan, such as the Local Plan, can consider the impacts on sites and confirm the suitability or likely success of mitigation measures for associated non-strategic policies and projects. An individual assessment of non-strategic policies and projects may not be necessary in some limited cases where the

²¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukssi/2004/1633/schedule/1/made>

²² A Neighbourhood Plan should not breach, and must be compatible with, European Union obligations in order for it to be legally compliant.

²³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/appropriate-assessment>

strategic appropriate assessment is sufficiently robust. This needs to contain conclusions capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt on the impacts of non-strategic policies, such as in neighbourhood plans.

Method

- 2.10 In order to be able to decide whether a SEA will be required, the Council needs to know about the policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan, and in particular, as follows:
- how they might affect the environment, community, or economy
 - whether they propose a higher level of development than is already identified in WOLP planning policies
 - whether any of the proposals are likely to affect a “sensitive area”, such as a Site of special Scientific Interest (SSSI), protected heritage, or designated European Site for nature conservation (Special Area of Conservation SAC, Special Protection Area SPA)
 - whether implementation of policies in the plan might lead to new development in the future
 - Whether the cumulative impact of the policies and proposals when assessed together may give rise to a likely significant effect, for example, several relatively small housing proposals may have cumulative significant effects on a nearby important wildlife habitat
- 2.11 Available information, for example, from Defra Magic maps, Environment Agency flood risk maps, the Council's evidence base for the WODC Local Plan, and the evidence base for the SNP, together with professional judgment, was used to identify the sensitivity of the Stonesfield NP area environment and whether significant effects are likely that have not been previously assessed through SA/SEA, such that an SEA would be required, and whether an HRA/Appropriate Assessment is necessary.

3.0 THE STONESFIELD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2041 (SNP)

Context

- 3.1 The Stonesfield Parish Council (SPC)²⁴ is the qualifying body designated for the purpose of preparing the SNP and who have approved the draft plan for submission to WODC for SEA/HRA screening. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) on behalf of the SPC has progressed the draft SNP. The village and civic parish of Stonefield is located in Oxfordshire within the Cotswolds National Landscape – about 12 miles north west of Oxford, between Witney, Woodstock and Charlbury. The Stonefield Parish was formally designated²⁵ as a Neighbourhood Area by the West Oxfordshire District Council²⁶ on 17 November 2021 and the boundary is shown in the figure 3.1 on the following page.
- 3.2 The SNP must be in general conformity with the strategic policies set out in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan WOLP, 2031²⁷ (adopted September 2018). Stonesfield is located within the Burford-Charlbury sub-area. The strategy for the sub-area, as set out in Policy H1, applies a more restrictive approach to new housing development than the other four sub-areas – recognising that much of the sub-area is rural and covered by the Cotswolds National Landscape.
- 3.3 The amount of housing proposed in the sub-area is based on past completions and existing commitments only. Proposals will be considered on a case by case basis and it will need to be convincingly demonstrated that a scheme would give rise to benefits. Housing proposals which constitute 'major development' will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Proposals will need to accord with other relevant plan policies, in particular OS2, H1, H2 and EH1. The anticipated housing delivery in Stonesfield has been built out. A Housing Needs Assessment (HNA, April 2024)²⁸ was prepared for the Stonesfield Parish Council, including taking into consideration housing delivery and the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan to 2025²⁹. The HNA concluded that there was no exceptional need identified for the next 5 years and no requirement for additional market housing; there may be a very small shortfall of social/affordable housing. The SNP does not propose any site allocations for new development.
- 3.4 The SNP must also be in general conformity with the Oxfordshire Minerals & Waste Local Plan 2031 (Part 1 Core Strategy³⁰ adopted 2017). The Minerals &

²⁴ <https://stonesfield.online/>

²⁵ Localism Act 2011

²⁶ <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning/neighbourhood-plans-in-development/>

²⁷ <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2031/>

²⁸ <https://stonesfield.online/neighbourhood-plan/>

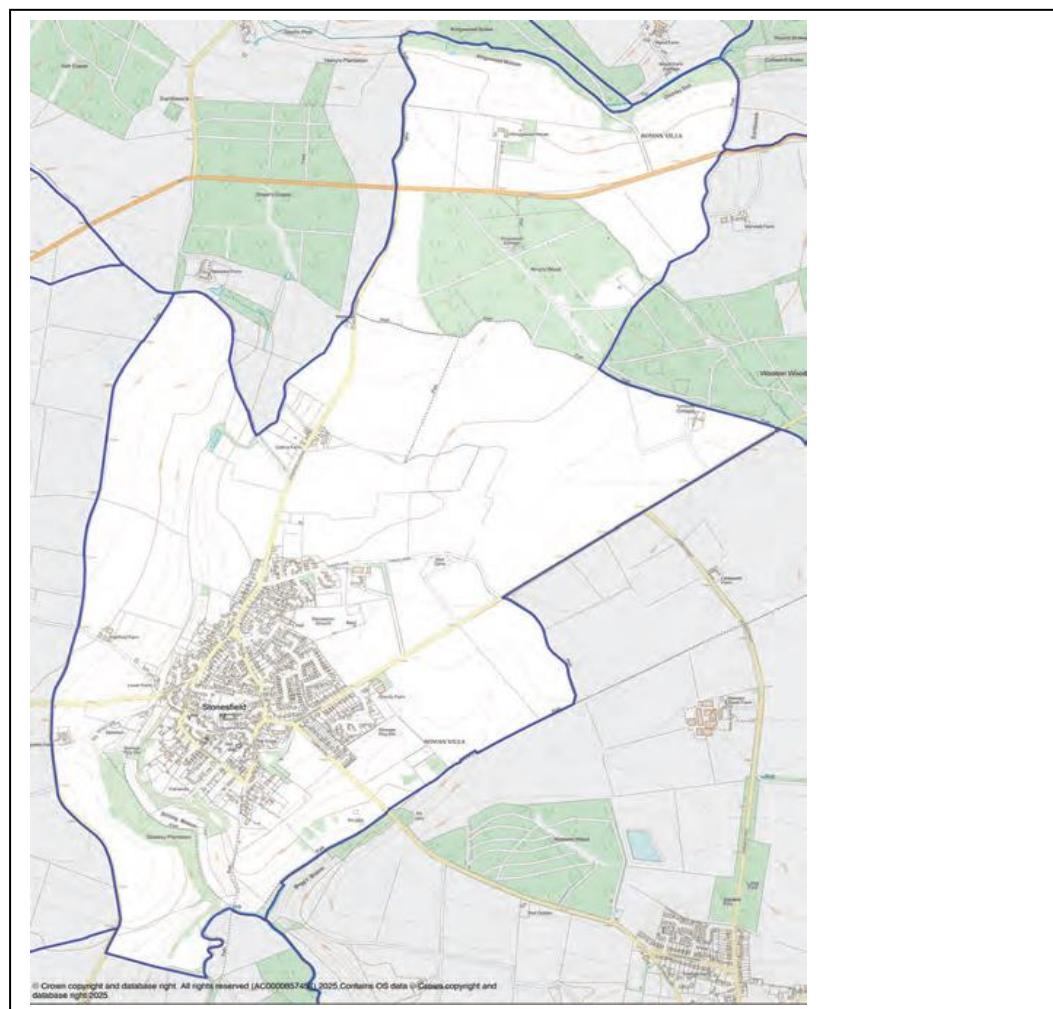
²⁹ <https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/our-work/cotswolds-national-landscape-management-plan/>

³⁰ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-policy/minerals-and-waste-policy/core-strategy#:~:text=The%20Minerals%20and%20Waste%20Local%20Plan%202031%20is%20the%20main%20plan%20for%20minerals%20and%20waste%20development%20in%20Oxfordshire.>

Waste Local Plan Part 2 Site Allocations was adopted in October 2021³¹.
Stonesfield is not mentioned in the Minerals & Waste Local Plan to 2031.

- 3.5 In June 2019, WODC declared a climate and ecological emergency and made a pledge to become a carbon-neutral council by 2030³². The Council published a Carbon Action Plan in 2020, updated in March 2024 to cover the period to 2030 and focused on reducing emissions from council activities. The WODC Climate Change Strategy 2021-2025 seeks to facilitate the reduction of wider district emissions.
- 3.6 This SEA & HRA screening has been carried out on the pre-submission draft SNP dated March 2025. This Report sets out the screening assessments and decisions to demonstrate that due processes have been followed in line with regulatory requirements.

Figure 3.1: Boundary for the Area Designation of the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Area



³¹ https://www.cmsdev.theocn.org/sites/default/files/file/planning-minerals-and-waste/MineralsandWasteDevelopmentScheme2021_12thEdition.pdf

³² <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/climate-action/climate-action-and-what-we-are-doing/>

The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan 2041 (Pre-Submission Consultation Draft March 2025)

- 3.7 The aims of the Neighbourhood Plan are:
- 1** To maintain and enhance the community of Stonesfield
 - 2** To encourage growth in economic activity in order to maintain and enhance current services
 - 3** To ensure that housing development in Stonesfield meets the specific needs of the village, and those of the District as far as required by national or district policy, and is sustainable
 - 4** To enhance community facilities and their accessibility to all age groups
 - 5** To conserve the environment of Stonesfield's landscape and countryside as appropriate for its position within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
 - 6** To conserve Stonesfield's historic village character
 - 7** To take appropriate measures toward addressing climate change at the local level
- 3.8 The SNP 2041 comprises eleven sections with the first four sections providing an introduction and context. The seven Aims with their Objectives are set out in Section 1 with Section 2 providing the context for plan-making, including NP period, monitoring and review. Section 3 describes the village of Stonesfield, together with key challenges including the climate emergency. Section 4 explains how the Neighbourhood Plan has been developed.
- 3.9 Sections 5-11 detail planning policies to be applied within the parish of Stonesfield – set out by themes: Housing; Economy & Amenity; Transport & Road Use; Community Health & Education; Countryside & Natural Environment; Historic Environment; and Building & Environmental Design Guidelines. The proposed policies are presented with explanatory text and are aligned with aims, justification and supporting evidence.

4.0 SEA SCREENING ASSESSMENT

4.1 West Oxfordshire District Council, as the responsible authority, consider that the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) 2041 is within the scope of the SEA Regulations since it is a plan that:

- is subject to preparation or adoption by an authority at national, regional or local level (Regulation 2)
- is prepared for town and country planning or land use and it is a plan that sets the framework for future development consent of projects generally (Regulation 5, para. 4)
- will apply to a wider area other than a small area at local level and is not a minor modification to an existing plan or programme (Regulation 5, para. 6).

A determination under Regulation 9 is therefore required as to whether SNP 2041 is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

4.2 The screening requirements set out in Regulation 9 and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations include two sets of characteristics for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment:

- the characteristics of the plan itself and
- the characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected by the plan

Therefore, this screening assessment is structured in the following table according to the criteria specified in Schedule 1 of the Regulations:

Table 4.1: Screening Assessment of the draft SNP 2041 (Pre-Submission Draft March 2025)

Criteria (Schedule 1 SEA Regulations)	Are significant environmental effects likely? Yes/ No	
	Justification and evidence	
1. The characteristics of 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	No	The NP does not propose allocation of sites for development projects & thus, the degree to which the plan sets a framework for new development projects is limited. However, the SNP does seek to influence housing development through requirements for housing location & type (Policies SH1-SH11); conserving & enhancing the natural environment (Policies SEL1-SEL9); protecting the

Criteria (Schedule 1 SEA Regulations)	Are significant environmental effects likely? Yes/ No
Justification and evidence	
conditions or by allocating resources	<p>historic environment (Policies SHE1-SHE2); and guiding building & environmental design (Policies SBD1-SBD2).</p> <p>SNP Policies (SH1-SH11) explain how housing proposals that meet identified need & are in accordance with other relevant policies in the NP & the WOLP 2031 will be accepted, with particular support for affordable/social housing; housing proposals on greenfield land adjoining the built-up area will not be supported unless they demonstrate exceptional circumstances for Stonesfield.</p> <p>SNP Policies (ST1-ST4) support development that would maintain or enhance public transport, be safety with easy access for all, & promote walking & cycling.</p> <p>SNP Policy SEL1 protects the Cotswolds National Landscape, Policy SEL2 important views, Policy SEL3 Evenlode Valley, Policy SEL4 designates 11 Local Green Spaces, Policy SEL5 blue/green corridors, Policy SEL6 biodiversity & trees, Policy SEL7 footpaths, Policy SEL8 water quality & quantity/flow, and Policy SEL9 tranquillity & dark skies.</p> <p>SNP Policy SHE1 protects archaeology & heritage, and Policy SHE2 protects non-designated heritage assets.</p> <p>SNP Policy SBD1 sets out the matters that will be used to guide the acceptability of planning applications with regard to locally appropriate design, and Policy SBD2 sets out requirements for environmental design standards, seeking excellent environmental performance.</p> <p>The Local Plan to 2031 was subject to SA/SEA, including the strategic policy for the Burford-Charlbury sub-area, and this concluded that there were no significant negative residual effects arising from Policies in the Plan. The SA/SEA process has commenced with the scoping stage for the ongoing preparation of the new Local Plan to 2041. Thus, the higher-level SA/SEA was undertaken during the preparation of the adopted WOLP to 2031, and is ongoing aligned with the preparation of the new WOLP to 2041.</p> <p>The SNP does seek to influence the framework for development projects and other activities; and there could be the potential for environmental effects. The SNP is located within an area of particularly significant environmental sensitivity – the Cotswold National Landscape – and includes nationally protected historic environmental assets (Listed Buildings) & locally protected (Stonesfield Conservation Area).</p>

Criteria (Schedule 1 SEA Regulations)	Are significant environmental effects likely? Yes/ No Justification and evidence	
		Overall, the extent of such influence from the SNP is limited as it is very localised and no development sites are proposed; however, there are environmental sensitivities.
(b) the degree to which the plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	No	The NP is prepared by the local community to influence development at the parish level. It does not strongly influence strategic plans higher up in the spatial planning hierarchy, although the District Council does need to consider the proposals in the NP during preparation of the Local Plan.
(c) the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	No	The NP is a spatial/land-use plan that seeks to promote the objectives of sustainable development. It is not specifically relevant as a plan for integrating environmental considerations. Any development proposed must be in accordance with the environmental protection policies in the adopted WOLP and the NPPF.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan	No	There are no specific environmental problems relevant to this plan that have not been identified and assessed through the higher-level Local Plan and its accompanying SA/SEA.
(e) the relevance of the plan for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	No	The NP is not relevant as a plan for implementing community legislation.
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	No	This has been tested through SA/SEA at the Local Plan level & with strong mitigation measures through LP policies, the SA/SEA concluded that there will be no significant residual negative environmental effects. The SNP does not propose allocation of sites for development projects.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	No	As above in 2(a)
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects	No	No significant transboundary effects with other EU countries are likely from the proposals.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	No	No significant negative environmental effects are considered likely to risk human health or the environment.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical	No	The SNP does not propose allocation of sites for development projects. The geographical size of the plan area is small, with a population of 1,700 (ONS 2021) and

Criteria (Schedule 1 SEA Regulations)	Are significant environmental effects likely? Yes/ No Justification and evidence	
area and size of the population likely to be affected);		the number of dwellings is small at over 700 in 2023 (SNP HNA, 2024). The sub-area housing target of 774 homes is based on past completions and existing commitments. Therefore, no likely significant adverse effects.
(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; or (iii) intensive land-use;	No	<p>As above. No likely significant negative effects on locally important characteristics – the SNP does not propose allocation of sites for development projects.</p> <p>The SNP has identified the value & vulnerability of the local area's character with its location in the north-east part of the Cotswolds National Landscape (see below (g)) & the importance of the rural setting for the village.</p> <p>The Stonesfield Climate Emergency Group (since 2022) now functions as an information hub with various topic specific groups.</p> <p>The SNP has identified locally important natural characteristics and cultural heritage that are important to residents – geology, landscape, ecology & blue/green wildlife corridors, dark skies, and historic/archaeological assets.</p> <p>Community life is strong with many groups & volunteer/activities, including the White Horse community-owned pub, playing fields/Sports & Social Club, & a library.</p> <p>The SNP has identified locally important green spaces, including allotments, that are of local value such that the SNP seeks formal designation for these 15 Local Green Spaces (LGSs).</p> <p>With regard to exceedances of environmental quality standards, the SNP area is not within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).³³</p> <p>The watercourses through and around the SNP area are within Flood Zones 2&3 with low flood risk from rivers³⁴. The SNP reports that the River Evenlode is prone to flooding at any time of the year, but floods are most common in the winter months.</p> <p>The Thames (Leach to Evenlode) Water Body has Poor ecological status³⁵; it is a heavily modified waterbody & pressures are reported from physical modifications, and pollution from agriculture & wastewater discharges. A 10</p>

³³ <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/aqma/>

³⁴ <https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/map>

³⁵ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB106039030333>

Criteria (Schedule 1 SEA Regulations)	Are significant environmental effects likely? Yes/ No	
	Justification and evidence	
	<p>year plan to protect & enhance the River Evenlode catchment commenced in 2021 with diverse partners³⁶.</p>	
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	No	<p>The SNP area is located within the Cotswolds National Landscape, the third largest protected landscape in England and designated due to its rich, diverse & high quality landscape. The Cotswolds Management Plan³⁷ identifies key issues – climate emergency, nature's decline, health & societal changes.</p> <p>The SNP area is not within the Green Belt³⁸ that is located over 6km to the south-east.</p> <p>The nationally designated landscape is protected by LP Policy EH1 that places great weight on the conservation of the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB), and LP Policy EH2 that seeks to conserve and enhance the character & features of the landscape. SNP Policy SEL1 Protecting the Cotswolds AONB requires that all development proposals should ensure that they conserve and enhance the landscape, countryside & natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB, including its wildlife & heritage.</p> <p>There are 12 Listed Buildings³⁹ (11 Grade II & 1 Grade II*); there are no Scheduled Monuments within the SNP area. The SNP has proposed a local heritage list.</p> <p>Historic assets and their settings are protected by LP Policy EH9 Historic Environment, supported by other policies such as OS4 that provide clear mitigation measures. The SA of the Local Plan considered that there should be sufficient mitigation provided by the LP Policies to reduce any potential negative effects to at least neutral. SNP Policy SHE1 Archaeology & Heritage requires that the importance of designated & non-designated assets associated with the heritage of the village should be carefully considered when planning any development.</p> <p>There are no Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites within or nearby to the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan boundary⁴⁰. The nearest internationally protected Special Area of Conservation (SAC)⁴¹ is Oxford Meadows located approximately 15 km to the south-east of the SNP area. WOLP Policy EH3 Biodiversity & Geodiversity specifically refers to the Oxford Meadows SAC & ensures that there is embedded policy mitigation in place.</p>

³⁶ <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/media-library/home/about-us/responsibility/smarter-water-catchments/updates/river-evenlode-update.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/our-work/cotswolds-national-landscape-management-plan/>

³⁸ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.html>

³⁹ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

⁴⁰ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

⁴¹ <https://sac.incc.gov.uk/site/UK0012845>

Criteria (Schedule 1 SEA Regulations)	Are significant environmental effects likely? Yes/ No
	Justification and evidence
	<p>The HRA (June 2018)⁴² of the Local Plan concluded that likely significant effects will not occur, either alone, or in combination, on the integrity of any European designated site. HRA screening of the draft SNP concluded that there will not be any adverse effects on the integrity of designated sites due to the limited size and extent of any likely development in Stonesfield and the distance from and/or absence of identified environmental pathways to any sites.</p> <p>There are no National or Local Nature Reserves⁴³ (LNR or NNR) located within or near to the Stonesfield area. There is a nationally designated biological Site of Special Scientific Interest SSSI⁴⁴ - Stonesfield Common, Bottoms & Banks – five SSSI units composed of steeply sloping banks & valleys of unimproved grassland/shrub & some beechwood ancient woodland.</p> <p>The River Evenlode forms the southernmost boundary of Stonesfield parish and much of the southern area of the built village is part of the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area⁴⁵ where the water environment is especially valued for rare wildlife habitats.</p> <p>WOLP Policy EH3 Biodiversity & Geodiversity avoids loss, deterioration, or harm to locally important wildlife & habitats and net gain in biodiversity is sought from new development. WOLP Policies to protect water quality & resources are provided through Policy EH8 Environmental Protection & EH7 Flood Risk.</p> <p>SNP Policy SEL5 Blue/Green corridors requires that Stonefield's natural environment should be protected, and where practicable enhanced to achieve an overall net gain in biodiversity. Corridors are aligned with the Evenlode Valleys Conservation Target Areas. SNP Policy Biodiversity & Trees, and SEL4 Local Green Spaces provide further protection locally.</p> <p>The SA of the Local Plan considered that there should be sufficient mitigation provided by LP Policies to reduce any potential negative effects on important biodiversity to at least neutral. Policy EH3 Biodiversity & Geodiversity requires an overall net gain in biodiversity and impacts on geodiversity to be minimised. LP Policy EH6 Environmental</p>

⁴² <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/localplan2031#>

⁴³ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

⁴⁴ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

⁴⁵ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/v/c3-plan/RiverBasinDistrict/6/protected-areas>

Criteria (Schedule 1 SEA Regulations)	Are significant environmental effects likely? Yes/ No
	Justification and evidence
	<p>Protection and Policy OS3 Prudent Use of Natural Resources also apply.</p> <p>The Local Plan was adopted in September 2018; it was subject to iterative SA/SEA and HRA that independent examination found to be sound. Therefore, the approach & policies in the SNP refer to Policies in the Local Plan that have been previously subject to SA/SEA (and HRA), found sound, and adopted.</p> <p>It is considered that the WOLP SA/SEA (& HRA) remain valid & that there is no new material or relevant information that should be considered.</p>

5.0 SEA SCREENING DECISION

- 5.1 Regulation 9 of the SEA Regulations requires that the responsible authority shall determine whether or not a plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. The responsible authority shall:
- (a) take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to these Regulations, and
 - (b) consult the consultation bodies
- 5.2 Where the responsible authority determines that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, accordingly, does not require an environmental assessment), it shall prepare a statement of its reasons for the determination.
- 5.3 West Oxfordshire District Council considers that the draft Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan (SNP2041, March 2025) is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and thus does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This decision is made for the following key reasons:
- The likely significant effects on the environment in the NP area were identified at an early stage of plan development during initial investigations for strategic options for the Local Plan – all subject to SA incorporating SEA. Mitigation measures for negative effects have been embedded in the Local Plan to 2031 (adopted September 2018) through the Burford-Charlbury sub-area strategy. Further mitigation measures are provided through other Local Plan Policies such as H1, EH1, EH2, EH9 and OS4 - ensuring that there will be no residual significant negative effects. The SNP does not propose to allocate any sites for development projects.
 - There will be no significant negative effects on the nationally designated and locally important environmental and cultural heritage assets and settings of the village.
 - Likely significant effects have been previously assessed through SA incorporating SEA and therefore, further SEA of the SNP is not required.
 - There will not be any adverse effects on the integrity of European sites designated for nature conservation due to the limited size and extent of any likely development in Stonesfield and the distance from and/or absence of identified environmental pathways to any designated sites.

6.0 HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT (HRA) SCREENING

- 6.1 There are no Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites within or nearby to the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan boundary⁴⁶. The nearest European designated site Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC)⁴⁷ is approximately 15km km to the south-east of the village at its nearest boundary edge. The qualifying features for the Oxford Meadows SAC are lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*) and creeping Marshwort (*Apium repens*) – to ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored.
- 6.2 The grassland type is confined to lowland situations and is mostly associated with relatively fertile alluvial soils in floodplain situations which are subject to seasonal (i.e. winter) flooding. These traditional hay meadows are vulnerable to degradation through excessive nutrient input, changes to cutting/grazing, and changes in hydrology. Creeping Marshwort is a rare plant of seasonally-flooded habitats and is confined to a narrow ecological zone of seasonally inundated hollows. It is unlikely that there would be environmental pathways indicated through the drains, ponds, and watercourses in the SNP area. There are strong mitigation measures provided by the adopted WOLP (2031) Policies – including Policy EH3 that specifically refers to the Oxford Meadows SAC and thus ensures protection of the designated habitats.
- 6.3 The HRA Report that accompanied the West Oxfordshire Local Plan to 2031 concluded that the development proposed in the Local Plan will not lead to likely significant effects either alone or in-combination with other plans or programmes. The HRA studies⁴⁸ were updated in line with the then recent EU Court Judgments in 2018 and confirmed that the development proposed through the WODC Local Plan in the Burford-Charlbury sub-area and through implementation of the local plan as a whole would not lead to likely significant effects either alone or in-combination with other plans or programmes. The updated HRA Report concluded that there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of any European site.
- 6.4 The new Local Plan to 2041⁴⁹ is being prepared with consultation on the preferred policy options scheduled for May 2025 and publication of pre-submission draft Local Plan in October 2025. The emerging new WOLP is being subject to SA/SEA and HRA. The updated HRA will consider any changes to threats and pressures, vulnerabilities, and analysis of potential impact pathways, including air pollution, public access and disturbance, and hydrological changes. This will inform the updating of the WOLP policies, including Policy EH3.

⁴⁶ <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.html>

⁴⁷ <https://sac.jncc.gov.uk/site/UK0012845>

⁴⁸ <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/1867474/West-Oxfordshire-Local-Plan-2018-HRA-June-2018.pdf>

⁴⁹ <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2041/>

- 6.5 In consideration of the small geographical area of the SNP, and its distance from European sites outside the SNP and Local Plan boundaries, this HRA screening considers that the Stonesfield NP is not likely to have significant effects on EU designated sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. The implications of effects from planned development on the integrity of European sites has been previously tested through HRA of the Local Plan 2031 and will be tested again through HRA of the new Local Plan to 2041. The HRA of the Local Plan remains valid and there is no new material and relevant information that should be considered.

7.0 STATUTORY SCREENING CONSULTATION & OVERALL CONCLUSION

- 7.1 This Screening Report was sent to the statutory environmental bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England) for the formal five weeks consultation (end March to 5 May 2025) to demonstrate that due processes have been undertaken to screen the draft Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan 2041 (March 2025) with regard to HRA and SEA. No comments were received from Historic England or the Environment Agency.
- 7.2 Natural England responded by letter, indicating that guidance on SEA is available through Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). It may be noted that this national guidance has been applied to this screening and as explained in paragraphs 2.5-2.9 of this report. NE further advised that it “does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA” nor “routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets”, and recommended that “advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a SEA is necessary”.
- 7.3 Overall, Natural England advised, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that
- **significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and,**
 - **significant effects on Habitats sites, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.**