

**Babergh and Mid Suffolk District
Councils**

**Hoxne Neighbourhood
Development Plan
SEA Screening Opinion**

Final report

Prepared by LUC

November 2021

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

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SEA Screening Opinion**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Hoxne Parish Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). Hoxne is located within Mid Suffolk District, five miles south east of Diss and near to the border with Norfolk. LUC has been appointed by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils to consider whether there is a need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be undertaken for the NDP.

1.2 SEA may be required for a Neighbourhood Plan if it is likely to have significant environmental effects. Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is similar to SEA but includes assessment of the likely significant effects of a plan or programme on economic and social factors, as well as environmental factors. Planning Practice Guidance¹ (PPG) clarifies that there is no legal requirement for a Neighbourhood Plan to be subject to SA, but that SA can be used to demonstrate how the plan will contribute to sustainable development.

1.3 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have commissioned LUC to carry out SEA Screening of the Pre-Submission Draft Version of the Hoxne NDP (November 2021) in order to determine whether an assessment is required under European Directive 2001/42/EC (the SEA Directive), transposed into UK law through the SEA Regulations².

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

² The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SI 2004/1633), as amended by The Environmental Assessments and Miscellaneous Planning (Amendment) (EU Exit)

Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/1232). It should be noted that the purpose of the amendments to the SEA Regulations is to ensure that the law functions correctly after the UK has left the European Union. No substantive changes are made to the way the SEA regime operates.

Chapter 2

SEA Screening

Scope of the NDP

2.1 Hoxne Parish Council has prepared the Pre-Submission Draft version of the NDP (November 2021) which is being subject to public consultation between January and February 2022.

2.2 The Hoxne NDP covers the entire parish. The Pre-Submission NDP includes six objectives for the long-term future of Hoxne, as follows:

1. Retain and protect the heritage and historic character of the village.
2. Maintain and improve its green spaces and surrounding landscape.
3. Support local services which underpin the cohesion of the community.
4. Create a safe environment with traffic managed.
5. Support small scale, high quality, new housing development suitable for younger households and older people.
6. Support small scale high quality business development appropriate to the village.

2.3 The NDP then sets out 16 planning policies (Policies Hoxne 1 – 16) and two Community Policies (A and B) to realise and deliver the objectives. Policy Hoxne 10 allocates around 66 new dwellings over the plan period (2021-2037), which includes existing planning permissions for 13 dwellings as well as two site allocations which are made through Policy Hoxne 13 and Policy Hoxne 14. Those new housing policies provide for 38 homes at Shreeves Farm and 15 homes at the land between Denham Low Road and Hoxne Playing Field. A portion of the homes on each site will be affordable and for older people. Policy Hoxne 15 supports the retention and future development of the existing employment site at Abbey Farm.

2.4 The remaining policies address a range of topics including housing types and the protection of local green spaces, with many of the policies being criteria-based policies covering topics such as landscape, heritage assets, biodiversity networks and flood risk. The NDP also sets out two Community Policies that seek to reduce the impact of traffic throughout the Parish. Together these policies seek to

ensure that new development is high quality and sensitively designed so as not to have adverse impacts on the surroundings.

Baseline Information

2.5 This section summarises baseline information for the parish of Hoxne, drawing from the information set out in the Pre-Submission NDP (November 2021) and published supporting evidence.

Context

2.6 Hoxne is a village within the Suffolk District of Mid Suffolk, eastern England. It is located to the south east of Diss, near to the border with Norfolk.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna

2.7 The entirety of the Hoxne Brick Pit Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies within the north western portion of the parish. There are Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) around the SSSI which flag up various scales and types of developments as a potential risk, and some of these extend into Hoxne Parish including the main built up area of the village. There are also three County Wildlife Sites (Hoxne Wood, Hoxne Meadow and Deeperhaugh Wood) that lie within the parish. There are no internationally designated sites within the parish, the nearest being Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens approximately 13km to the west.

2.8 There are nine Priority Habitats within the parish, including hedgerows, mixed deciduous woodland, ponds, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, wet woodland, lowland meadows, wood pasture and parkland, traditional orchards, and rivers and streams. There are also 64 UK and Suffolk Priority Species that have been recorded across the parish.

2.9 The principal ecological network within the parish is associated with the Rivers Waveney and Dove and their associated habitats, as well as the Gold Brook and Chickering Beck. The network of hedgerows, ditches, ponds and woodlands also provide local connectivity. There are also eight areas within the parish that are designated as Local Green Spaces.

Population

2.10 The population of Hoxne was 889 residents according to the 2011 Census; however the mid-year estimate for 2018 indicates that the population has reduced to 861. The gender balance was 49.2% male and 50.8% female. The village has a proportionally older population than is typical for both England and Mid-Suffolk: 7.9% of people are aged 20-29 in Hoxne compared to 9.4% in Mid-Suffolk and 13.7% in England. The

proportion of over 60s in Hoxne is 37.1% compared to 27.9% in Mid- Suffolk and 22.4% in England overall.

2.11 Ethnic diversity is very low with only 0.8% of Hoxne's residents being of non-white ethnicities. Only 1% of residents have a first language other than English. The 2011 Census showed that 66.2% of the population was in some form of employment (full-time, part-time or self-employed), with a small number unemployed or in full-time education. A further 33.8% were retired, providing care, long-term sick or disabled.

2.12 There is no predominant employment sector in the parish, with employment largely in wholesale and retail trade, construction, professional services and education.

Human Health

2.13 The majority of Hoxne's residents are in good or very good health (78.5%) with a small proportion (6.3%) in bad to very bad health. Information from the 2011 Census indicates that the proportion of the Hoxne population that is in very good health (46.6%) is slightly lower than the Mid Suffolk (47.9%) and England (47.2%) averages.

Soil

2.14 Hoxne Parish comprises mainly Grade 3 agricultural land; however, it is not known if any or all of this is Grade 3a (classed as best and most versatile agricultural land) or rather the lower quality Grade 3b. There is an area of Grade 2 agricultural land to the east of the parish centre at Cross Street.

Water

2.15 The Environment Agency's Flood Risk Maps for planning indicate that the majority of the north western section of Hoxne Parish lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3. These areas of higher flood risk are associated with the Rivers Waveney and Dove which run through the parish. Much of the area within Flood Zones 2 and 3 lies outside of the built up areas of the parish. However, there is flood risk where the Goldbrook and its tributary Chickering Beck merge in the low-lying meadow land between Low Street and Goldbrook/Abbey Hill. The rest of parish lies within Flood Zone 1 and therefore has a lower probability of flooding.

Air and Climatic Factors

2.16 There are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) that have been declared within or near to Hoxne Parish, the nearest being in Norwich 24 miles away to the north.

2.17 Climate data are not available at parish level, but within Mid Suffolk District as a whole, reductions in overall carbon emissions of 28% were achieved between 2005 and 2019. This reduction was mostly due to progress in reducing

emissions from large industrial installations followed by electricity from industrial and commercial sectors and domestic sources. There was minimal progress on reducing transport emissions, which make the largest contribution to carbon emissions in Mid Suffolk District.

2.18 Most households had a car according to the 2011 Census, with only 11% having no car.

Material Assets

2.19 Hoxne has 409 dwellings, a village hall, public house, St. Peter & St. Paul's Church, playing field and Public Rights of Way. The Public Rights of Way run throughout the centre of the Parish and provide access to the wider countryside to the north and south. There is one primary school, St. Edmund's primary school, within the parish. There is also an employment site at Abbey Farm.

2.20 In terms of public transport, the options are limited to the bus service to Syleham and Eye. The service runs on weekdays.

2.21 There are no GP surgeries within Hoxne Parish.

2.22 All of Hoxne Parish is included within a Minerals Consultation Area in the Suffolk Minerals Core Strategy.

Cultural heritage

2.23 The parish is of considerable archaeological and historical importance. The former Hoxne brick pits are of historic and international importance for research into the evidence for early human life during the Ice Age.

2.24 The centres of the parish at Low Street and Cross Street lie within the Hoxne Conservation Area. The parish has one Grade I Listed Building (Church of St. Peter and St. Paul), six Grade II* Listed Buildings, 69 Grade II Listed Buildings, three Scheduled Monuments (Moated site at the vicarage of St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Remains of Hoxne Priory at Abbey Farm and Remains of Medieval Fishponds at the Leys)

and other non-designated assets. None of these assets are on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk' register.

Landscape

2.25 There are no designated landscapes within or close to Hoxne Parish, the nearest being the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which is approximately 24km to the east.

2.26 The Suffolk County Landscape Character appraisal identifies three landscape character types within the parish, these are as follows:

- Plateau Claylands
- Rolling Valley Claylands
- Wooded Valleys Meadowlands and Fens

2.27 The most sensitive landscapes are along the River Dove to the west of the parish and between Low Street and Cross Street where the Gold Brook joins the Dove.

2.28 Additionally, the District-level Heritage and Settlement Sensitivity Assessment identified 25 important views within the parish.

SEA Screening

2.29 An assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the Pre-Submission version of the Hoxne NDP (November 2021) requires SEA in accordance with the SEA Regulations.

2.30 **Figure 2.1** overleaf presents the flow diagram entitled 'Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes' which is taken from the Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, published in September 2005. This is a useful guide when considering whether a plan should be subject to SEA (The Practical Guide has been superseded by the National Planning Practice Guidance; however, it still provides a useful and relevant guide to the process to use in making SEA screening decisions).

Figure 2.1 Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes

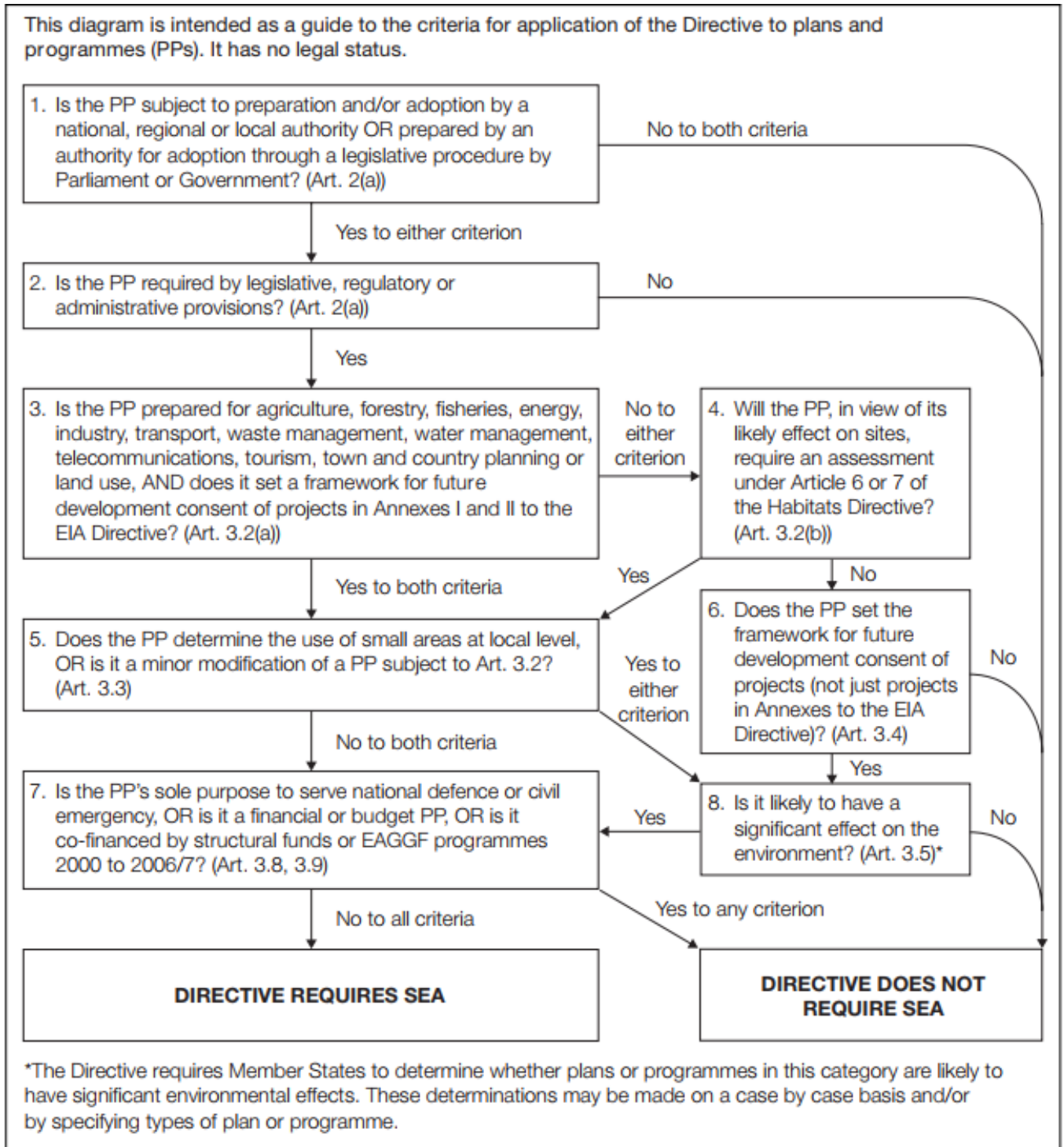


Table 2.1: Application of SEA Directive to the Hoxne NDP

| Stage | Yes/No | Reason |
|--|------------|--|
| 1. Is the PP (plan or programme) 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)) | Yes | The NDP is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and will be adopted ('made') by the Local Authority (Mid Suffolk District Council) as part of the statutory development plan. Move to Q2. |
| 2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a)) | No | The NDP is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. However, there is no requirement to produce a Neighbourhood Plan; it is an optional plan. Once made it will become part of the statutory development plan. Therefore, it should continue to be screened. Move to Q3. |
| 3. Is the PP 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 to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a)) | Yes and No | The NDP is being prepared for town and country planning and land use, but it does not set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive. Move to Q4. |
| 4. Will the PP, 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)) | Uncertain | HRA screening of the NDP is being undertaken separately on behalf of Mid Suffolk District Council and the outcome of that work is unknown at the time of writing. Therefore, it is necessary at this stage to consider both scenarios under Q4. Yes: Move to Q5. No: Move to Q6. |
| 5. Does the PP 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 and No | The NDP allocates small-scale sites for housing development. It is not a minor modification of a PP. Move to Q8. |
| 6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4) | Yes | The NDP allocates two sites for housing development, setting the framework for future development consent. The NDP also supports proposals for the retention and future development of the existing employment site at Abbey Farm. Move to Q8. |
| 8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5) | Yes | See Table 2.2. SEA IS REQUIRED. |

2.31 Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations sets out the criteria for determining the likely significant of effects. These are listed in **Table 2.2** below along with comments on the extent to which the Hoxne NDP meets these criteria.

Table 2.2: Likely Significant Effects

| SEA Requirement | Comments |
|--|---|
| The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to: | |
| 1.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 | <p>Once made, the NDP will become part of the statutory development plan and will guide the delivery of development in Hoxne Parish, including in terms of design. The NDP provides for 66 new dwellings, 53 of these are allocated over two sites and the additional 13 dwellings have been granted planning permission which are yet to be completed.</p> <p>The adopted Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008, review 2012) identifies Hoxne (excluding Low Street) as a Primary Village in Policy CS1 – Settlement Hierarchy. This policy seeks to direct development to towns and key service centres but also with some provision for meeting local housing needs in primary and secondary villages. The Core Strategy has made provision for 300 homes to be delivered within Primary Villages over the Plan period to 2025.</p> <p>The emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan identifies Hoxne – Cross Street/Heckfield Green and Hoxne – Low Street as Hinterland Villages. While the new Local Plan is not yet adopted (this is expected to be sometime in 2022), it has been taken into consideration in the preparation of the NDP. It is noted that the Regulation 19 (Pre-Submission) version of the Joint Local Plan (November 2020) makes provision for building at least 12,616 new homes across Mid Suffolk between 2018 and 2037 and that it is proposed that 10% of these will be in the Hinterland Villages. For Hoxne specifically, the emerging Joint Local Plan identifies a minimum figure of 43 new homes.</p> |
| 2.the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy | <p>The NDP has to be in general conformity with the local strategic framework (i.e. the adopted Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008, review 2012) and the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan). The NDP must also have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework. The NDP does not have influence over other plans. Once made, the NDP will form part of the statutory development plan for Hoxne Parish and will be used in conjunction with the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (once adopted) to determine planning applications.</p> |
| 3. the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development, | <p>One of the Basic Conditions which the NDP must meet is to contribute to sustainable development.</p> |
| 4. environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme, | <p>Baseline information relating to Hoxne Parish was described earlier in this chapter. Key issues of relevance to the NDP are the presence of Hoxne Brick Pit SSSI, the presence of high-quality agricultural land in the parish, the presence of land within Flood Zone 3 and a number of designated heritage assets.</p> |
| 5. the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection). | N/A |
| Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: | |
| 6. the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects, | <p>The NDP provides for 66 new dwellings, 53 of these are allocated over two sites and the additional 13 dwellings have been granted planning permission which are yet to be completed. The Hoxne NDP covers the period 2021-2037 and the effects of housing development that occurs during the plan period are expected to be long-term and permanent. Any effects associated specifically with construction are likely to be short-term and temporary.</p> |

| SEA Requirement | Comments |
|---|---|
| 7. the cumulative nature of the effects, | <p>Cumulative effects could result from the NDP in combination with development that takes place in the surrounding towns and villages – albeit the parish of Hoxne is rural.</p> <p>The Adopted Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008) identifies Hoxne as a 'primary village' in the settlement hierarchy. Over the plan period, 2010-2025, primary villages are expected to provide at least 300 new homes and associated infrastructure.</p> <p>The emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan identifies a minimum housing requirement for Hoxne of 43 new homes. It is noted that the Hoxne NDP proposes allocating two housing sites which would accommodate 53 new dwellings, these are in addition to 13 dwellings that have been granted planning permission that are yet to be completed.</p> |
| 8. the transboundary nature of the effects, | The NDP focuses on Hoxne Parish only. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers transboundary effects on other EU Member States; therefore, they are not relevant to this NDP. |
| 9. the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents), | There are no anticipated risks to human health or the environment from the NDP. |
| 10. the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected), | The NDP covers all of Hoxne Parish. According to the 2011 Census the population of the parish was 889. |
| 11. the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, ■ exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, ■ intensive land-use, | The nationally designated Hoxne Brick Pit SSSI lies within the north western section of the parish and there is a County Wildlife Site within the north of the parish. The main built up areas of the village, Low Street and Cross Street, are designated as a Conservation Area and there are numerous listed buildings both within and outside of those parts of the parish. There are also three Scheduled Monuments throughout the Parish. There is an area of high quality (Grade 2) agricultural land to the east of Cross Street. |
| 12. the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status. | The parish does not lie within or near to an AONB or National Park. |

SEA Screening Conclusion

2.32 A screening assessment has been undertaken by applying the criteria from the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations to determine whether or not the Hoxne NDP is likely to have significant environmental effects when assessed against the topics listed in the SEA Regulations.

2.33 The NDP sets out objectives and planning policies to shape development in the Parish up to 2037. It provides for 66 new dwellings, 53 of these are allocated over two sites and the additional 13 dwellings have been granted planning permission which are yet to be completed. The residential development allocated through the NDP could have a range of environmental effects during the construction period and afterwards, in particular in relation to additional traffic generation and demand for water treatment.

2.34 Both of the housing allocations, Shreeves Farm and the land between Denham Low Road and Hoxne Playing Field, lie

to the south of Heckfield Green and are within close proximity to the Conservation Area and a number of listed buildings. Of particular significance is that both housing allocations are located within IRZs associated with the Hoxne Brick Pit SSSI. The presence of high quality agricultural land and a County Wildlife Site within the parish add to its sensitivity.

2.35 There are policies in the NDP and in the adopted Mid Suffolk Core Strategy that may provide mitigation, and mitigation may also be provided by the policies in the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan. However, given the sensitivity of the area in which the allocated sites are located, **it is considered that the Hoxne NDP has the potential to have significant environmental effects and that SEA is therefore required.**

Next Steps

2.36 This SEA screening opinion will be sent to the three statutory consultees (Natural England, Historic England and

the Environment Agency) and will be reviewed as appropriate in light of any comments received.