

Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening Opinion

Final report

Prepared by LUC
November 2022

**Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan
SEA Screening Opinion**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan Steering group is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish of Walsham le Willows.

1.2 Walsham le Willows is located within Mid Suffolk District, 12 miles north east of Bury St Edmunds and 11 miles north of Stowmarket. 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 Neighbourhood Plan.

1.3 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.

1.4 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have commissioned LUC to carry out SEA Screening of the Pre-Submission Draft of the Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan 2023 – 2037 (October 2022) 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.

1.5 On 11th May 2022 the Government published the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill, which sets out in detail the Government's proposals for reforming the planning system. Amongst other things, the Bill proposes the replacement of the current SEA regime with a new requirement for an Environmental Outcomes Report. The specific requirements will be set out in forthcoming regulations, along with information about transition arrangements; however at present the requirement for SEA remains as set out in existing legislation.

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 Neighbourhood Plan

2.1 A Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, comprising residents from around Walsham le Willows parish and Parish Councillors has prepared the Pre-Submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan (October 2022). The plan has been commissioned by Walsham le Willows Parish Council.

2.2 The plan was subject to several stages of public consultation and community engagement beginning in 2018. A further consultation is currently taking place until 2nd December 2022.

2.3 The Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan covers the entire parish. The Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan includes a vision for the long-term future of Walsham le Willows along with six objectives relating to the following themes:

- Built Environment and Design
- Housing
- Community Infrastructure
- Transport and Accessibility
- Natural and Historic Environment
- Economy

2.4 The Neighbourhood Plan then sets out 15 planning policies (WLW1 – 15) which cover the same themes to realise and deliver the vision. While the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any new dwellings, the following policies support suitable development that enhances the form, character and setting of the area commensurate with its designation as a ‘core village’ in the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (JLP).

- Policy WLW2: Housing Strategy - determines that housing development should be located within the settlement boundary, and supports proposals which would maximise the amount of affordable housing provided at the site east of Wattisfield Road, which is allocated in the emerging JLP.
- Policy WLW4: Community Facilities - supports the provision of new, expanded or improved community facilities, and gives support to the development of multi-use and shared spaces.

- Policy WLW15: New and Existing Businesses – supports the retention and development of existing employment and other business uses.
- Policy WLW6: Pedestrian and Cycling Connectivity - supports the development of pedestrian and cycle routes, including a new route along Summer Road, and new pedestrian route at Palmer Street.
- Policy WLW13: Renewable energy – supports renewable, decentralised and community energy generating proposals.

2.5 The remaining policies address the protection of local green spaces, recreation facilities and landscape character.

Baseline Information

2.6 This section summarises baseline information for the parish of Walsham le Willows, drawing from the information set out in the Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan (October 2022).

Context

2.7 Walsham le Willows is a rural village located within the Mid Suffolk District of Suffolk, eastern England. It is located approximately 12 miles, north east of Bury St Edmunds, 10 miles south west of Diss and 12 miles south east of Thetford.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna

2.8 There are no internationally designated sites within the parish, the nearest being Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens SAC approximately 6.1km to the north and Redgrave and South Lopham Fens Ramsar site 6.4km to the north.

2.9 The parish does not contain any nationally designated sites, but it is within close proximity to three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These include Stanton Woods, around 2km to the west, The Gardens, Great Ashfield, around 2km to the south and Westhall Wood and Meadow, around 2km to the east. Westhall Wood and Meadow is also classed as an Ancient Woodland. The Walsham le Willows boundary is within the outer Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) for each SSSI, which flags up various scales and types of development as a potential risk.

2.10 There are two priority habitats within the parish, including deciduous woodland and Woodpasture and Parkland BAP Priority Habitats.

2.11 There are no County Wildlife Sites or Local Wildlife Sites within Walsham le Willows, however there are 13 areas within the parish that are designated as Local Green Spaces. There is also a local designation of Roadside Nature Reserve No 156 which was identified by Suffolk County Council due to the presence of the Adder's Tongue Fern.

2.12 The parish is also home to a local community wild space known as Wild wood which seeks to enhance biodiversity in the area. The Wild Wood Group plan to expand this further on an adjacent two acres of land.

Population

2.13 The population of Walsham le Willows was 1,213 residents according to the 2011 Census. The gender balance was 49.8% male and 50.2% female. The median age within the parish was 41.5.

2.14 Ethnic diversity is low with only 0.7% of residents being of non-white ethnicities. The 2011 Census showed that 68.8% of the population was in some form of employment (full-time, part-time or self-employed), with 4.8% unemployed or in full-time education. A further 26.5% were economically inactive which consists of being retired, providing care, long-term sick or disabled.

2.15 There is no predominant employment sector in the parish, with employment largely in wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing and human health and social work activities.

Human Health

2.16 Most Walsham le Willows' residents are mainly in good or very good health (85.4%) with a small proportion (4.3%) in bad to very bad health. Information from the 2011 Census indicates that the proportion of the Walsham le Willows population that is in very good health (50.5%) is slightly higher than the Mid Suffolk (47.9%) and England (47.2%) averages.

Soil

2.17 Walsham le Willows 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 the lower quality Grade 3b.

2.18 There are three types of soils found within Walsham le Willows: a mix of slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage at its centre, slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils to the south, and loamy and clayey floodplain soils with naturally high groundwater to the west.

Water

2.19 The Environment Agency's Flood Risk Maps for planning indicate that most of the parish lies within Flood Zone 1 and therefore has a lower probability of flooding, but there are some areas of the parish within Flood Zones 2 and 3. These areas of higher flood risk are associated with The Stream that runs through the village which is a tributary to the Little Ouse River. The main areas of risk are along Finningham Road, at

Cranmer Green and areas in the central built-up area of the village.

2.20 Additionally, the parish lies within Medium and High priority areas for vulnerability for groundwater and a high priority area for safeguarding groundwater particularly for phosphate runoff.

Air and Climatic Factors

2.21 There are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) that have been declared within or near to Walsham le Willows, the nearest being in Norwich approximately 30 miles to the north east.

2.22 Climate data are not available at parish level, but within Mid Suffolk District as a whole, reductions in overall carbon emissions of 38% were achieved between 2005 and 2020. 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.

2.23 According to the 2011 Census, only 8% of households within the parish do not have access to a car.

Material Assets

2.24 Walsham le Willows has 536 dwellings with a further 60 homes under construction.

2.25 Community facilities include one village hall, two churches, one sports club, one primary school and Public Rights of Way. The Public Rights of Way run to and from the centre of the parish into the wider countryside from various angles, however the network is disjointed. The parish also contains several 'permissive paths'.

2.26 There are no GP surgeries or local food stores within the Walsham le Willows Parish.

2.27 Regarding public transport, the nearest train station to the parish is 6km away in the market town of Stowmarket. Walsham le Willows also has bus services to Bury St. Edmunds.

Cultural Heritage

2.28 The historic core of the village runs east to west and is heavily populated by listed buildings along the main street. There is also another distinct cluster of listed buildings to the

south of the Grade I listed Church of St Mary. The Conservation Area covers this area, and extends to Four Ashes to the south, including The Grove, a listed country house and its historic grounds.

2.29 In total, the parish has 60 listed buildings, 59 of these are Grade II, and one is Grade I, Church of St. Mary. There are a further 35 Non-designated Heritage Assets.

2.30 None of these assets are on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk' register.

Landscape

2.31 There are no designated landscapes within or near to Walsham le Willows, the nearest being Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which lies 32km to the south.

2.32 The majority of the landscape surrounding Walsham le Willows is classified as Ancient Plateau Claylands, with areas of Plateau Claylands located to the south-east of the parish.

2.33 The village is surrounded by farmland which gently slopes down towards the stream in the valley bottom which divides the parish longitudinally. The surrounding landscape is interspersed with woodland, copses and mature hedgerows. These form wooded horizons and combine with the wide-open views. There are 21 views within the village that have been designated as having significant local importance.

2.34 The importance of the high-quality landscape and countryside in the Neighbourhood Plan area is highlighted in the Neighbourhood Plan. It is proposed to retain an Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity.

SEA Screening

2.35 An assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the Pre-Submission version of the Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan 2023 – 2027 (October 2022) requires SEA in accordance with the SEA Regulations.

2.36 **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

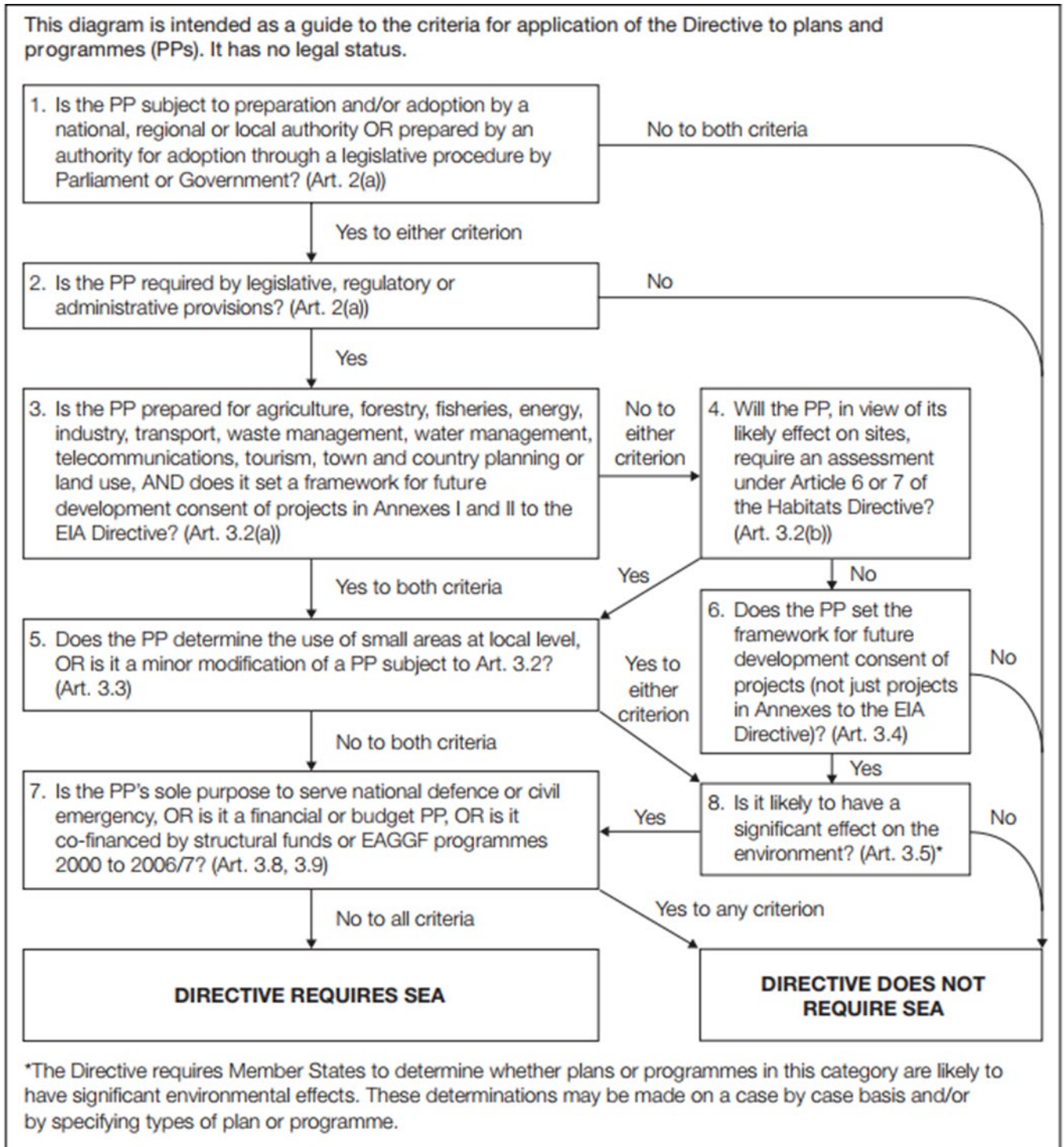


Table 2.1: Application of SEA Directive to the Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan

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 Neighbourhood Plan 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 Neighbourhood Plan 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 Neighbourhood Plan 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))	No	HRA screening of the Neighbourhood Plan has been undertaken separately on behalf of Mid Suffolk District Council and has concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have significant effects on European sites, either alone or in combination. No: Move to Q6.
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 Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for development; however it includes policies which proposals for development within the parish will be assessed against. Move to Q8.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	No	See Table 2.2. SEA IS NOT REQUIRED.

2.37 Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations sets out the criteria for determining the likely significance of effects. These are listed in **Table 2.2** below along with comments on the extent to which the Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan 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	Once made, the Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the statutory development plan and will guide the delivery of development in Walsham le Willows Parish, including in terms of design. The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for residential or other forms of development. The adopted Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008, review 2012) identifies Walsham le Willows 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 (2008) made provision for 300 homes to be delivered

SEA Requirement	Comments
	<p>within Primary Villages over the Plan period to 2025. In the Focused Review (2012), this figure remains the same over a 15-year period ending in 2027.</p> <p>The emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan identifies Walsham le Willows as a Core Village. While the new Local Plan is not yet adopted (this is expected to be sometime in 2023), it has been taken into consideration in the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. 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 it is proposed that 38% of these will be in Core Villages. For Walsham le Willows specifically, the emerging Joint Local Plan proposes an additional 90 homes in the parish, of which 8 had planning permission as of 1 April 2018 and the remainder of which have received planning permission since then.</p>
<p>2. the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan 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 Neighbourhood Plan must also have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework. The Neighbourhood Plan does not have influence over other plans. Once made, the Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the statutory development plan for Walsham le Willows Parish and will be used in conjunction with the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (once adopted) to determine planning applications.</p>
<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>	<p>One of the Basic Conditions which the Neighbourhood Plan must meet is to contribute to sustainable development.</p>
<p>4. environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,</p>	<p>Baseline information relating to Walsham le Willows Parish was described earlier in this chapter. Key issues of relevance to the Neighbourhood Plan are the proximity of SSSIs, the presence of high-quality agricultural land in the parish, the presence of land within Flood Zone 3 and several designated heritage assets.</p>
<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).</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</p>	
<p>6. the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for housing or other forms of development. The Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan covers the period up to 2037. Effects of the Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan are expected to be indirect (due to not allocating sites) but long-term and permanent.</p>
<p>7. the cumulative nature of the effects,</p>	<p>Cumulative effects could result from the Neighbourhood Plan in combination with development that takes place in the surrounding towns and villages, although the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for housing or other forms of development.</p> <p>The Adopted Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008) identifies Walsham le Willows as a Primary Village in the settlement hierarchy. Over the plan period, 2010-2025, Primary Villages are expected to provide 300 new homes and associated infrastructure. This housing number remained the same in the Focused Review (2012).</p> <p>The emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan identifies a minimum housing requirement for Walsham le Willows of 90 new homes, all of which is met through existing permissions.</p>
<p>8. the transboundary nature of the effects,</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan focuses on Walsham le Willows Parish only. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers</p>

SEA Requirement	Comments
	transboundary effects on other EU Member States; therefore, they are not relevant to this Neighbourhood Plan.
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 Neighbourhood Plan.
10. the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),	The Neighbourhood Plan covers all of Walsham le Willows Parish. According to the 2011 Census the population of the parish was 1,213.
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, 	There are three SSSIs within 2km of the parish. There are numerous listed buildings within Walsham le Willows and the core of the village is designated as a Conservation Area. There is potentially high quality (Grade 3) agricultural land in the parish.
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

2.38 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 Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects when assessed against the topics listed in the SEA Regulations.

2.39 The Neighbourhood Plan sets out 15 planning policies to shape development in the parish up to 2037 and decision makers will need to consider the criteria of these policies when determining future applications in the parish. The Neighbourhood Plan does not directly impact on land use through the allocation of sites for housing or other forms of development.

2.40 On this basis, it is considered that the Walsham le Willows Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and that full SEA is therefore not required.

Next Steps

2.41 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 considering any comments received.

LUC

November 2022