

Wetheringsett cum Brockford Neighbourhood Development Plan SEA Screening

Final report

Prepared by LUC

October 2023

**Wetheringsett cum Brockford Neighbourhood
Development Plan
SEA Screening**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Wetheringsett cum Brockford Parish Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). Wetheringsett cum Brockford is located within Mid Suffolk District, 16 miles north of Ipswich and nine miles from Stowmarket to the south west. 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 second Pre-Submission Draft Version of the Wetheringsett cum Brockford NDP (October 2023) 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.

1.4 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 NDP

2.1 Wetheringsett cum Brockford Parish Council has prepared the second Pre-Submission Draft version of the NDP (October 2023) which is being subject to public consultation between 16th October and 30th November 2023.

2.2 The Wetheringsett cum Brockford NDP covers the entire parish. The Pre-Submission NDP includes a vision and four objectives for the long-term future of Wetheringsett cum Brockford, as follows:

- 1.** To manage appropriate new housing, business, and employment development for the benefit of the community and ensure it meets the needs of residents.
- 2.** To champion sustainable high-quality design and celebrate the village's historic environment and heritage assets.
- 3.** To protect the rural character, biodiversity, and open spaces of the parish.
- 4.** To safeguard the parish's existing facilities and encourage the greater use of the school, church and village hall buildings by the whole community.

2.3 The NDP then sets out 14 planning policies to realise and deliver the vision and objectives. Policy WCB1: Location of new housing does not allocate additional sites for housing but states that the focus for new development will be the defined settlement boundaries, and that new infill or windfall development within the settlement boundaries will be small scale. Similarly, while WCB4: Employment and Economic Development does not propose sites for economic development, the policy supports small scale new business uses at existing employment locations.

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 amenity and dark skies. The NDP also sets out two policies that seek to protect community facilities and the Mid Suffolk Light Railway and Museum (the Middy), a popular tourist attraction. 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 Wetheringsett cum Brockford, drawing from the information set out in the Second Pre-Submission Draft NDP (October 2023) and published supporting evidence.

Context

2.6 Wetheringsett cum Brockford is a civil parish in Hartismere Hundred within the Mid-Suffolk District of eastern England. It is located to the north of Ipswich and to the north east of Stowmarket. The parish consists of a central village, Wetheringsett, and several outlying hamlets spread over a large area of nearly 4,000 acres.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna

2.7 There are no internationally designated biodiversity sites within the parish, the nearest being Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens SAC approximately 13km to the northwest. However, Mickfield Meadow Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies just outside of the parish boundary to the south. 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 the southern portion of the parish.

2.8 There are two Roadside Nature Reserves within the parish: Roadside verge (RNR 116) and a ditch alongside Old Brook Lane. These are designated for the flora and the rare Tassel stonewort, respectively. There are also eight areas within the parish that are designated as Local Green Spaces.

2.9 Land in the centre of the village has been identified as a Habitat Network Enhancement Zone by Natural England. Within this zone there are three priority habitats: deciduous woodland, parkland and traditional orchards. There is also another patch of traditional orchard near Wetheringsett Manor and All Saints Church. There are also a number of priority species that have been recorded within the parish, such as, common toad, grass snake, hedgehog and brown hare.

Population

2.10 The population of Wetheringsett cum Brockford was 692 residents according to the 2021 Census, an increase of 0.34% from 2011. The gender balance was 50.8% male and 49.2% female. The median age within the parish in 2011 was 45.

2.11 Ethnic diversity is low, with only 3.2% of residents being of non-white ethnicities. The 2011 Census showed that 74.2% of the population was in some form of employment (full-time, part-time or self-employed), with 5.4% unemployed or in full-time education. A further 25.8% were economically inactive which consists of being 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, manufacturing, construction and education. However, the largest employer at Cedars Hill business centre is a medical services company with 32 full time staff.

Human Health

2.13 The majority of the parish's residents are in good or very good health (85%) with a small proportion (4%) in bad or very bad health. Information from the 2011 Census indicates that the proportion of the Wetheringsett cum Brockford population that is in very good health (52.2%) is slightly higher than the Mid Suffolk (47.9%) and England (47.2%) averages.

Soil

2.14 The 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 west of the parish centre at Wetheringsett.

2.15 The parish is made up of two types of soils: slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage and slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils, which is subject to seasonal waterlogging.

Water

2.16 The Environment Agency's Flood Risk Maps for planning indicate that the north eastern section of the parish lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3. These areas of higher flood risk are associated with the River Dove which runs through the parish. Much of the area within Flood Zones 2 and 3 lies outside of the built-up areas of the parish. The rest of the parish lies within Flood Zone 1 and therefore has a lower probability of flooding.

Air and Climatic Factors

2.17 There are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) that have been declared within or near to Wetheringsett cum Brockford Parish, the nearest being in Ipswich 16 miles away to the south.

2.18 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.

2.19 Most households had a car according to the 2011 Census, with only 7% having no car. It has been noted that there is an issue with traffic on the parish's narrow roads, especially with heavy agricultural vehicles during the grain harvest and sugar beet seasons.

Material Assets

2.20 Wetheringsett cum Brockford has 280 dwellings, a village hall, primary school, nursery, Mid Suffolk Light Railway and Museum (the Middy) and a few business centres.

2.21 Community facilities and services are limited within the parish. There are no general stores, post offices or public houses within the parish. Furthermore, there are no GP surgeries within the parish.

2.22 In terms of public transport, the only bus stop in Wetheringsett is on Brockford Street, approximately 1km from the village centre. There are four buses to Ipswich Monday to Friday, three on Saturday and no service on Sunday. The Hakluyt cycle route links all parts of the parish, however, the footpath network is disjointed and restricted.

2.23 According to the Suffolk Minerals and Waste Plan, the parish does not fall within any Mineral Safeguarding Areas.

Cultural heritage

2.24 The parish has 53 listed buildings, most of them converted farmhouses and agricultural buildings, with the largest concentration of post-war and modern developments in the main part of Wetheringsett itself. The Church of All Saints is a Grade I listed building, while the rest of the listed buildings are Grade II. The main village lies within the Wetheringsett Conservation area. None of these assets are on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk' register.

2.25 There are also six non-designated heritage assets within the parish that are considered to be locally important. The

Suffolk County Historic Environment Record lists over 50 archaeological finds scattered across the parish. Furthermore, the Middy is an important cultural tourist attraction within the parish.

Landscape

2.26 There are no designated landscapes within or close to Wetheringsett cum Brockford parish, the nearest being the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which is approximately 24km to the southeast.

2.27 The parish is dominated by open fields interspersed with small woodland areas. The parish is located within the National Character Area: South Norfolk and Suffolk Claylands. The Suffolk County Landscape Character appraisal identifies one landscape character type within the parish: plateau claylands.

2.28 There are also seven important public local views within the parish.

SEA Screening

2.29 An assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the Second Pre-Submission version of the Wetheringsett cum Brockford NDP (October 2023) 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

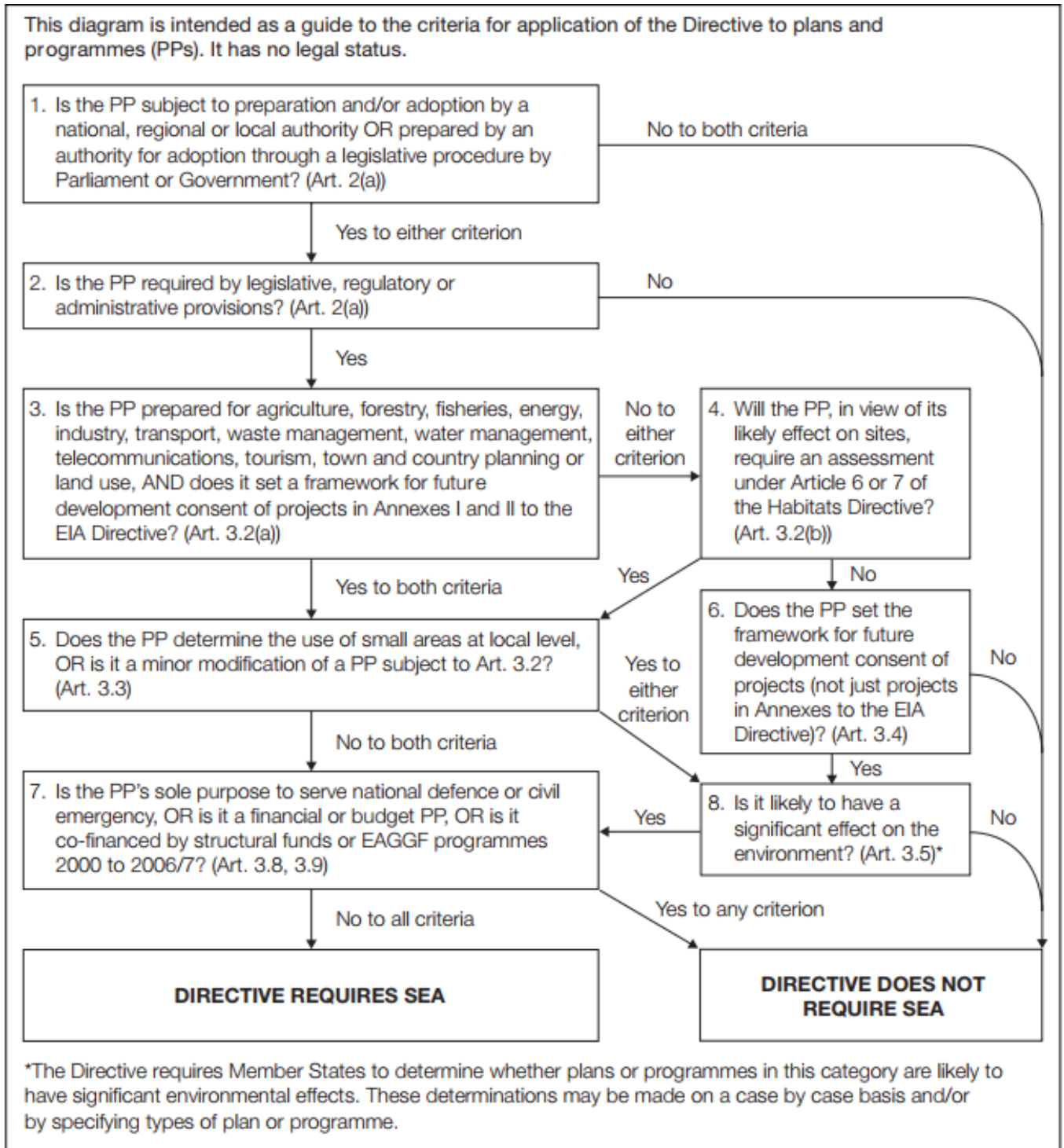


Table 2.1: Application of SEA Directive to the Wetheringsett cum Brockford Neighbourhood Plan

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 NDP 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.

2.31 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 Wetheringsett cum Brockford 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 Wetheringsett cum Brockford 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 Wetheringsett cum Brockford as a Secondary Village in Policy CS1 – Settlement Hierarchy. This policy seeks to direct

SEA Requirement	Comments
	<p>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 not made provision for homes to be delivered within Secondary Villages over the Plan period to 2025.</p> <p>The submitted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (Nov 2020) identified the historic core of the village, the area around the Church, as a Hinterland Village, however the rest of the parish (Brockford Street, Wetherup Street and Park Green) was identified as a Hamlet. However, following Examination the Joint Local Plan has been subject to Main Modifications and is now presented as a Part 1 Plan, with Part 2 to be prepared at a later date (adoption of Part 1 is expected imminently at the time of writing). An up-to-date settlement hierarchy will now come forward in Part 2 of the Plan, which is unlikely to be adopted until late 2025.</p>
2.the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	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 Wetheringsett cum Brockford Parish and will be used in conjunction with the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (once adopted) to determine planning applications.
3. the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,	One of the Basic Conditions which the Neighbourhood Plan must meet is to contribute to sustainable development.
4. environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,	Baseline information relating to Wetheringsett cum Brockford Parish was described earlier in this chapter. Key issues of relevance to the Neighbourhood Plan are the presence of a Habitat Network Enhancement Zone and Mickfield Meadow SSSI just outside of the parish, the presence of high-quality agricultural land in the parish, and the presence of land within Flood Zone 3 and a number of designated heritage assets.
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,	The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for housing or other forms of development. The Neighbourhood Plan covers the period up to 2037. Effects of the Wetheringsett cum Brockford Neighbourhood Plan are expected to be indirect (due to not allocating sites) but long-term and permanent.
7. the cumulative nature of the effects,	<p>Cumulative effects could result from the Neighbourhood Plan in combination with development that takes place in the surrounding towns and villages – albeit the parish of Wetheringsett cum Brockford is rural.</p> <p>The Adopted Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008) identifies Wetheringsett cum Brockford as a ‘secondary village’ in the settlement hierarchy. The Core Strategy has not made provision for homes to be delivered within Secondary Villages over the Plan period to 2025.</p> <p>The emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan does not identify a minimum housing requirement for Wetheringsett cum Brockford.</p>

SEA Requirement	Comments
8. the transboundary nature of the effects,	The Neighbourhood Plan focuses on Wetheringsett cum Brockford Parish only. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers 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 Wetheringsett cum Brockford Parish. According to the 2021 Census the population of the parish was 692.
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 Mickfield Meadow SSSI lies just outside the parish boundary and a Habitat Network Enhancement Zone has been identified by Natural England within the parish. The main built up area of the village, Wetheringsett, is designated as a Conservation Area and there are numerous listed buildings both within and outside of that part of the parish. The Middy is also a very important cultural tourist attraction.
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 Wetheringsett cum Brockford Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects when assessed against the topics listed in the SEA Regulations.

2.33 The Neighbourhood Plan sets out 14 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. It does not directly impact on land use through the allocation of sites for housing or other forms of development.

2.34 On this basis, it is considered that the Wetheringsett cum Brockford Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and that full SEA is therefore not required.

Next Steps

2.35 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.