

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

NON-KEY DECISION – NKD19/14

REPORT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

THUNDRIDGE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2018-2033 DRAFT
SUBMISSION VERSION SEA SCREENING REPORT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: THUNDRIDGE AND STANDON

Purpose/Summary of Report

- The purpose of this report is to determine whether or not a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and/or a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the emerging Thundridge Neighbourhood Plan is required.
- The report concludes that the Neighbourhood Plan does not require either a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) because the Plan is not likely to have any significant environmental effects.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION:</u> That Thundridge Parish Council be advised that:	
(A)	In accordance with Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, East Hertfordshire District Council, as the responsible authority, has determined that an environmental assessment of the emerging Thundridge Neighbourhood Plan is not required as it is unlikely to have significant environmental effects. In making this determination, East Hertfordshire District Council has had regard to Schedule 1 of the Regulations and has carried out consultation with the consultation bodies; and
(B)	The emerging Thundridge Neighbourhood Plan is

unlikely to have a significant effect upon a Natura 2000 designation and therefore does not require an HRA.
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1.0 Background

- 1.1 In order for a neighbourhood plan to meet the Basic Conditions to proceed to Referendum, the Local Planning Authority must determine whether a neighbourhood plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and/or a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). This report determines whether the Thundridge Neighbourhood Plan requires either.

SEA Legislative Background

- 1.2 The European Directive 2001/42/EC requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA Directive) to be carried out for certain plans and programmes to assess their effects on the environment. This Directive was transposed in law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood Plans fall within the scope of this legislation. They are a plan as defined by Article 3(2) of the SEA regulations and Regulation 5 paragraph 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 1.4 Under Article 3(2) of the SEA Directive and Regulation 5 paragraph 6 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is only required for documents that determine land use in small areas at the local level where it is considered that they are likely to have 'significant environmental effects'. This is carried out through a screening determination.
- 1.5 The role of a screening exercise is to determine whether the effect of the implementation of a plan or programme is likely

to have a significant effect on the environment.

HRA Legislative Background

- 1.6 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended in 2012) transpose the requirements of the European Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC into UK law. The Habitats Directive and Regulations afford protection to plants, animals and habitats that are rare and vulnerable in a European context.
- 1.7 Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is a systematic process through which the performance of a plan or project can be assessed for its likely impact on the integrity of a European Site. European Sites, also referred to as Natura 2000 sites, consist of Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC); Potential Special Protection Areas and candidate Special Areas of Conservation (pSPA and cSAC); and listed or proposed Ramsar sites.
- 1.8 Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive states: 'Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives'.
- 1.9 The first stage of HRA is to screen a plan or programme to identify if there are likely to be any significant effects on Natura 2000 sites. This will indicate whether a full Appropriate Assessment is required.

2.0 Report

SEA

- 2.1 To decide whether a draft neighbourhood plan might have significant environmental effects, its scope needs to be

assessed against the criteria set out in Schedule 1 to the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

- 2.2 The local planning authority is required to put in place a process to provide a screening opinion to the qualifying body (in this case, Thundridge Parish Council) on whether the proposed neighbourhood plan will require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The qualifying body should work with the local planning authority to ensure that the authority has the information that it needs to provide a screening opinion.
- 2.3 When deciding on whether proposals are likely to have significant environmental effects, the local planning authority is required to consult Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency (the 'statutory consultees').
- 2.4 Thundridge Parish Council (the qualifying body) has produced a draft Neighbourhood Plan covering Thundridge Parish. The draft Neighbourhood Plan contains policies on:
- Housing and Development;
 - Local Green Spaces and Protected Recreational Open Space;
 - Biodiversity and Green Corridors;
 - Heritage assets and Important Views
 - Climate Change and Sustainable Energy;
 - Community Facilities;
 - Business and Infrastructure;
 - Design;
 - Parking Facilities
- 2.5 The Plan also allocates two sites for housing development for approximately 22 dwellings.
- 2.6 Thundridge Parish Council has prepared a Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report. The Strategic

Environmental Assessment concludes that the Thundridge Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have significant environmental effects. A copy of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Screening Report are included, for information, at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.

- 2.7 The Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England have all been consulted on the draft Neighbourhood Plan and have confirmed that a SEA is not required for the Neighbourhood Plan. Their responses are attached at **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**.
- 2.8 Having regard to Schedule 1 of the Regulations and following consultation with the consultation bodies it is concluded that an environmental assessment of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan is not required as it is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.

HRA

- 2.9 The Local Authority is the 'competent authority' under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, and needs to ensure that Neighbourhood Plans have been assessed through the Habitat Regulations process. This looks at the potential for significant impacts on nature conservation sites that are of European importance, also referred to as Natura 2000.
- 2.10 There are three key Natura 2000 sites that lie partly within East Hertfordshire – Lee Valley SPA; Lee Valley Ramsar site; and Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SAC (although there are also sites in neighbouring authorities, namely Epping Forest SAC). Because Neighbourhood Plans must conform with the development plan for the area (in this case, the East Herts District Plan), which has been subject to an HRA, the key issue will be whether the Neighbourhood Plan will potentially result in an impact not previously considered.

- 2.11 The HRA on the District Plan concludes that the District Plan will not result in a likely significant effect, either alone or in combination, upon any European sites. In particular Policy NE1 of the District Plan provides for the protection of internationally designated sites.
- 2.12 The Neighbourhood Plan does allocate sites for housing as set out in Policy VILL2 of the District Plan and accounted for in Policy DPS3 under windfall allowance. The allocation of these developments is not thought to generate any additional impact not previously considered.
- 2.13 Given the conclusions of the HRA on the District Plan and the fact that the Neighbourhood Plan only allocates approximately 22 dwellings for development, in accordance with the policy approach set out in the District Plan (which has been subject to HRA) it is concluded that an HRA on the Neighbourhood Plan is not required.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Essential Reference Papers

Essential Reference Paper 'A': Corporate Implications

Essential Reference Paper 'B': Thundridge Neighbourhood Development Plan – Draft Submission Version SEA Screening Report (2019)

Essential Reference Paper 'C': Letters from Historic England (3 July 2019); Environment Agency (10 September 2019); and Natural England (9 August 2019).

Background Papers

Thundridge Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2033 – the Regulation 14 Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan is available online at:
<https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/article/36573/Thundridge>

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