

East Herts Council Non-Key Decision Report

Date: 8 March 2021

Report by: Councillor Jan Goodeve – Executive Member
for Planning and Growth

Report title: Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan HRA
Screening Report and SEA Environmental
Report

Ward(s) affected: Much Hadham

Summary

- The purpose of this report is to determine whether or not a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the submission Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan is required. The report also notes the submission of the Much Hadham SEA (Environmental Report).
- The report concludes that the Neighbourhood Plan does not require a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) because the Plan is not likely to have any significant effects upon the relevant sites.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION: That Much Hadham Parish Councils be advised that:

- A. The emerging Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have a significant effect upon a Natura 2000 designation and therefore does not require an HRA; and**
- B. That the submission of the Much Hadham Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which has been prepared in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3) of regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, is noted.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 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 Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). This report determines whether the Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan requires one.
- 1.2 One of the Basic Conditions is whether legal obligations have been met include Strategic Environmental Assessment. Either an SEA screening opinion that concludes that the proposal is unlikely to have significant environmental effects; or an environmental report is required to accompany a Neighbourhood Plan when it's submitted to the local planning authority.

2.0 Background

HRA Legislative Background

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.

- 2.3 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'.
- 2.4 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.

SEA Legislative Background

- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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.
- 2.8 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.

- 2.9 Where a Plan is 'screened in' for likely significant environmental effects an environmental report must be prepared in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3) of regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

3.0 Reason(s)

HRA:

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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.

- 3.4 The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any additional sites or growth not accounted for in the District Plan. Therefore the Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan is not thought to generate any additional impact not previously considered.
- 3.5 Given the conclusions of the HRA on the District Plan and the fact that the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any further development sites and is generally 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.

SEA:

- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 The local planning authority is required to put in place a process to provide a screening opinion to the qualifying body (in this case, Much Hadham 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.
- 3.8 Following the required consultation with the relevant bodies in November 2019; Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency (the 'statutory consultees'), the Council 'screened-in' the Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan as being likely to have significant environmental effects.
- 3.9 Therefore Much Hadham were required to prepare and submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with

paragraphs (2) and (3) of regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

- 3.10 Much Hadham have duly provided the relevant document alongside their submission plan in February 2021. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan (Environmental Report) is included, for information, at **Appendix A**.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 In order for a Neighbourhood Plan to meet the Basic Conditions it must be compatible with relevant legal obligations. Therefore the Local Planning Authority must determine whether the Plan requires a Habitats Regulations Assessment and has provided the relevant SEA Environmental Report.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 A Neighbourhood Plan cannot proceed through examination without fulfilling the legal requirements of the HRA and SEA process.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 The Neighbourhood Plan process requires statutory public consultation.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

SEA and HRA processes as described above ensure that environmental sustainability is considered in detail during the Neighbourhood Plan process.

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

A Neighbourhood Plan cannot proceed through examination without fulfilling the legal requirements of the HRA and SEA process.

Specific Wards

Much Hadham Ward

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

- 7.1 **Appendix A:** Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan (Environmental Report) August 2020

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