



Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Determination Statement

**Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan
2021 – 2035**

March 2021

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Determination Statement
for Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan

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Executive Summary

This statement sets out the reasons for the Council's determination that the Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan proposal is unlikely to result in significant environmental effects and therefore does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. In addition, this statement determines that the Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to result in significant effects on any European sites and consequently the plan does not require Habitat Regulation Assessment.

This determination statement is intended to support Meppershall Parish Council in demonstrating that the Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan proposal is compatible with certain European Union obligations as required by the basic conditions, namely:

- Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment; and
- Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

This determination has been made on 29th March 2021. Within 28 days of this determination, the Council will publish a statement, setting out its decision. Central Bedfordshire Council will publicise this determination statement in accordance with regulatory requirements. A copy of the statement will be available for inspection at the Council website at:

https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/45/planning_policy/473/neighbourhood_planning/3

It will also be available on request at: Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, SG17 5TQ.

If you require any further information, then please contact Tom Price by email at tom.price@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

1. Introduction

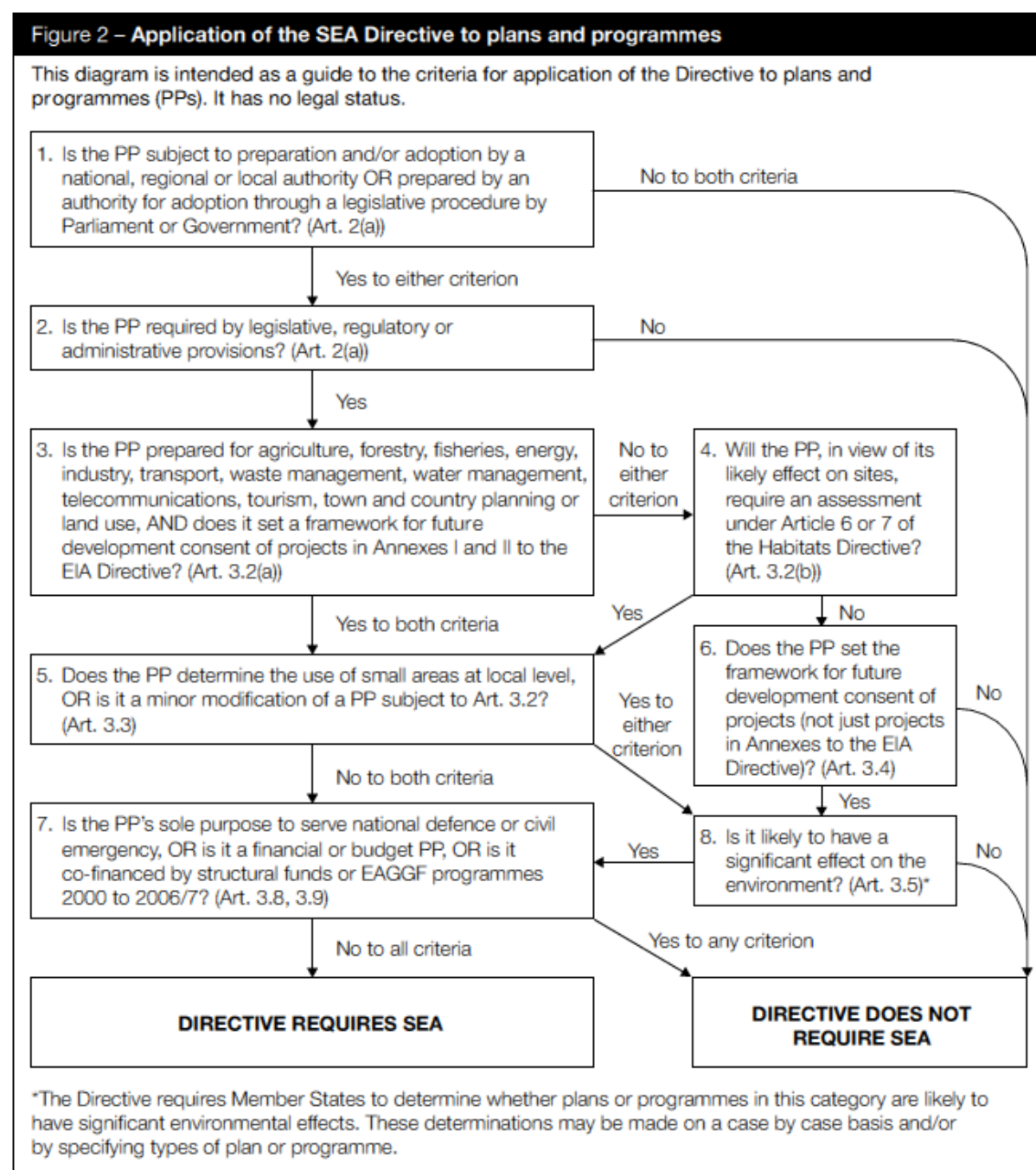
- 1.1 Meppershall Parish Council have requested a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening opinion of their Neighbourhood Plan (NP). Central Bedfordshire Council is legally required to determine whether the Meppershall NP will require SEA.
- 1.2 This document is a final Screening Determination Statement which is being issued to Meppershall Parish Council and the statutory bodies.
- 1.3 The Council undertook a screening exercise to determine whether or not the content of the Meppershall NP requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. These require an SEA to be undertaken for:
 - 1.3.1 Plans which are prepared for town and country planning or land use and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive; or
 - 1.3.2 Plans which have been determined to require an assessment under the Habitats Directive.
- 1.4 Following the screening process, the Council determined that the Meppershall NP is unlikely to result in significant effects on the environment. The Council consulted the findings with the statutory consultation bodies: Historic England, Natural England and Environment Agency.
- 1.5 Section 2 of this report outlines the regulations that set the need for this screening exercise. Process and criteria of the assessment are set out in Section 3.
- 1.6 A summary of the Meppershall NP is provided in Section 4.
- 1.7 The screening assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the NP is set out in Sections 5 & 6 and the justification for the determination that the Meppershall NP does not require a full SEA with further recommendations is provided in Section 7.

2. Legislative Background

- 2.1 The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation is the European Directive 2001/42/EC and was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004, or SEA Regulations. Detailed guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' (ODPM 2005).
- 2.2 The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is prepared for spatial plans. It is considered best practice to incorporate requirements of the SEA Directive into an SA.
- 2.3 The Government has stated that SAs are not needed for NPs, but it must be demonstrated how the NP contributes to achievement of sustainable development in the area.
- 2.4 The Localism Act 2011 requires NPs to not breach and be otherwise compatible with EU and Human Rights obligations. Ambitious and complex NPs may trigger the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and Habitat Directive and may need to undertake SEA and Appropriate Assessment depending on the scale and the impact of the plan proposals.
- 2.5 Schedule 2 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 refers to the Habitat Directive. The Directive requires that any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on European sites must be subject to an appropriate assessment. Paragraphs 2-5 of Schedule 2 amend the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 so that its provisions apply to Neighbourhood Development Orders (NDOs) and NPs. The Regulations state that NPs are not likely to have significant effects on a site designated at European level for its biodiversity, however, this needs to be ascertained through Habitat Regulations Assessment's screening process.
- 2.6 This report focuses on screening for both HRA and SEA and the criteria for establishing whether a full assessment is needed.

3. Screening Assessment Process

- 3.1 The screening opinion assessment is undertaken in two parts: the first part will assess whether the plan falls into a category of plans requiring SEA; and the second part of the assessment will consider whether the NP is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, using criteria drawn from Schedule 1 of the EU SEA Directive and the UK Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 3.2 The Government guidance 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' sets out the following approach to be taken in determining whether SEA is required, see flowchart below.



3.3 Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of Directive 2001/42/EC are set out below:

1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard to:

- 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
- the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy
- the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,
- environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme
- 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)

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard to:

- the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects
- the cumulative nature of the effects
- the transboundary nature of the effects
- the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)
- the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)
- the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:
 - special natural characteristics or cultural heritage
 - exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values
 - intensive land-use
 - the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status

Source: Annex II of SEA Directive 2001/42/EC

4. Summary of Neighbourhood Plan

- 4.1 Meppershall NP covers the administrative boundary of Meppershall Parish Council. Meppershall is a small, rural hilltop village in the central/eastern area of Central Bedfordshire and sits approximately 12 miles south of Bedford and 13 miles north of Luton, adjacent to the A507. The Parish is surrounded by agricultural land and has a Conservation Area, two Scheduled Ancient Monuments, two County Wildlife Sites, several Listed Buildings and sits just east of the Greensand Ridge Nature Improvement Area.
- 4.2 Meppershall draft NP covers a range of land use and environmental issues that relate to the Parish. These are addressed through a number of policies to guide development in the Parish. The policies cover the following areas:
- Sustainable Development
 - Rural Character
 - Natural Environment
 - Heritage
 - Green Space & Recreation
 - Housing
 - Design of New Development
 - Community Facilities
 - Local Employment & Business
 - Traffic & Transport
- 4.3 Sustainable Development policies aim to: ensure development is appropriate in its scale, location, design, character, provide sufficient infrastructure and connectivity, and mitigate against adverse impacts.
- 4.4 Rural Character policies aim to: ensure development respects local character, is sympathetic to the existing landscape, and prevent undue urbanisation of the village.
- 4.5 Natural Environment policies aim to: protect and enhance the natural landscape, ensure development respects the skyline and landscape and respects existing sloping areas of land, enhance biodiversity and promote the use of native species in landscaping.
- 4.6 Heritage policies aim to: protect and enhance local heritage assets through sensitive design, suitable mitigation and resisting their loss or any substantial harm.
- 4.7 Green Space & Recreation policies aim to: designate seven areas of Local Green Space, protect existing areas of open space and recreation facilities and ensure adequate levels of open space on new developments, including suitable arrangements for their ongoing maintenance.
- 4.8 Housing policies aim to: guide new development within the existing Settlement Envelope, ensure a varied mix of house types and tenure, and provide more affordable homes for those wanting to downsize or buy their first home.

- 4.9 Design of New Development policies aim to: support well-designed schemes for new development, ensure new proposals respect the rural character of the village and take into account the existing built form, scale, density, dwelling heights, materials, connections, local landscape and topography, views, parking and drainage.
- 4.10 Community Facilities policies aim to: resist the loss of identified important local facilities, support the improvement of these and encourage the provision of new facilities.
- 4.11 Local Employment & Business policies aim to: support the development of new small businesses and the suitable expansion of existing ones, support the provision of home working spaces and encourage the provision of superfast broadband networks.
- 4.12 Traffic & Transport policies aim to: ensure new developments provide sufficient mitigation against impacts on highway safety and that these highway features are designed to complement the rural character of the village, improve the provision of sustainable connections, and ensure new development provides adequate parking and alleviates congestion issues.

5. Assessment (Part 1)

5.1 The first part of the assessment is to establish the need for the SEA. The table below shows the assessment determining whether the Meppershall NP falls into a category of plans requiring SEA.

Stage	Y/N	Reasons
1. Is the NP subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? [Art. 2(a)]	Y	The preparation and adoption of the NP is allowed under the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Neighbourhood Plan will be prepared by Meppershall Parish Council (as the 'relevant body') and will be 'made' by the Central Bedfordshire Council as the local authority. The preparation of NPs is subject to the following regulations: The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012 GO TO STAGE 2
2. Is the NP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? [Art. 2(a)]	Y	Whilst the NP is not a requirement and is optional under the provisions of The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, it will, if 'made', form part of Local Plan for the unitary area. It is therefore important that the screening process considers whether it is likely to have a significant effect on environment and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive GO TO STAGE 3
3. Is the NP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? [Art. 3.2(b)]	Y	The NP is being prepared for town and country planning and land use. The plan supports development at an appropriate scale and design in the village, but does not allocate any sites and does not set a framework for future development consent for projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive GO TO STAGE 4
4. Will the NP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? [Art. 3.2 (b)]	N	The plan supports development at an appropriate scale and design for the village but does not allocate any sites. There are no Natura 2000 sites within close proximity of the parish boundary, the closest is Eversden & Wimpole Woods, 23.5km away. Annex I of this report looked at the effects on these sites and concluded that there is no need for Appropriate Assessment GO TO STAGE 5

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Stage	Y/N	Reasons
5. Does the NP 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]	N/A	NOT APPLICABLE
6. Does the NP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? [Art. 3.4]	Y	The NP will set the framework for future development of projects not included in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive GO TO STAGE 8
7. Is the NP's sole purpose to serve national defence or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? [Art. 3.8 & 3.9]	N/A	NOT APPLICABLE
8. Is the NP likely to have a significant effect on the environment? [Art. 3.5]	N	See Assessment Part 2: Likely significant effects on the environment DIRECTIVE DOES NOT REQUIRE SEA

6. Assessment (Part 2)

6.1 The next step in the screening assessment is to establish whether the Meppershall NP is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. The criteria for determining the likely significance of effects are drawn from Annex II of the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC.

Criteria for determining the likely significant effects (Annex II SEA Directive)	Summary of significant effects	Likely to have significant environmental effects Y/N
1a. 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	The NP will contribute to the framework for considering future development consents of projects: it sets out policies to guide future development, but it does not allocate sites for development. The Plan and its policies sit within a wider framework of the NPPF (2018), the Core Strategy (2009) and the emerging CBC Local Plan (2018). The Plan's policies must be compliant with policies within the above documents. This NP sets a framework for development that is localised in nature and has limited resource implications	N
1b. The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	The NP will be in conformity with the NPPF. The policies within the NP are in general conformity with the Council's strategic policies and complement the adopted and emerging Local Plan's policies. The NP is unlikely to significantly influence other plans and programmes	N
1c. The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	The Plan includes policies to protect and enhance rural character, landscape, heritage, biodiversity and promotes sustainable travel and high-quality design. All potential development will need to comply with Central Bedfordshire Council planning policies and be in conformity with NPPF. Given the scope of the NP, it is considered that the Plan integrates environmental considerations and promotes sustainable development	N
1d. Environmental problems relevant to the plan	The NP includes policies on the protection and enhancement of the natural environment; protection of local character; promotion of sustainability and adequate infrastructure. The Plan is not allocating sites for residential or commercial development, and therefore the Plan is unlikely to result in significant environmental effects	N

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Criteria for determining the likely significant effects (Annex II SEA Directive)	Summary of significant effects	Likely to have significant environmental effects Y/N
1e. 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 or renewable energy generation)	The NP sits within the wider framework of the National Planning Policy Framework (2018), the Core Strategy (2009) and the emerging CBC Local Plan (2018), and is not directly relevant to the implementation of European legislation	N
2a. Probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	The NP is somewhat likely to have short-term effects resulting from activity associated with improvements to local infrastructure, but they are likely to be localised in their nature and not significantly negative for environmental factors	N
2b. The cumulative nature of the effects	The impacts of the NP are likely to be very localised and unlikely to contribute significantly to impacts of other Plans in the hierarchy	N
2c. The trans-boundary nature of the effects	Given the localised nature of the Neighbourhood Plan there are not expected to be any significant trans-boundary effects	N
2d. The risk to human health or environment (e.g. due to accidents)	The NP is unlikely to pose significant risks to human health or the environment	N
2e. The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	No areas or landscapes with this level of protection status in the parish/wider area	N
2f. The magnitude spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The NP covers the area of Meppershall Parish and it is unlikely to have impacts beyond its boundary	N
2g. 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 • Intensive land use 	<p>Within the Parish there are some environmental designations and the NP policies are looking to protect and enhance them. However, impacts of the Plan are unlikely to have significant effects</p> <p>The NP is not expected to exceed environmental quality standards or limit values</p> <p>The NP does not propose development likely to result in intensive land use</p>	N


7. Screening Outcome

- 7.1 The screening assessment undertaken in Sections 5 & 6 concludes that, it is unlikely there will be any significant environmental effects arising from the Meppershall NP. **As such, Meppershall NP does not require a full SEA to be undertaken.**
- 7.2 The Council consulted on its findings with three statutory consultation bodies: Historic England, Natural England and Environment Agency. The consultation period was from 23rd February to 23rd March 2021. The consultation email stated that if a response was not received it would be assumed that the consultee agrees with the Council's findings and conclusions.
- 7.3 The Council received a response from each statutory consultee, noting that they agreed with the Council findings that the Meppershall NP does not require a full SEA to be undertaken. The received consultation responses can be found in Appendix 1.
- 7.4 Following the screening process and consultation, the Council determines that **Meppershall NP does not require a full SEA to be undertaken.**
- 7.5 As part of this screening, Habitat Regulations screening was undertaken because plans that are likely to have significant impact on European sites require a Strategic Environmental Assessment in addition to an Appropriate Assessment (Habitat Regulation Assessment). This screening concluded that the Meppershall NP is unlikely to have significant impact on European sites and therefore the **Meppershall NP does not require a full HRA to be undertaken.**
- 7.6 Although SEA is not required, Meppershall Parish Council may wish to consider voluntarily undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) that covers all three aspects of sustainable development: environmental, social and economic. The advantage of undertaking an SA is that it can assess the impact of the NP on the environmental, social and economic factors and therefore demonstrate to an examiner how sustainable development has been considered in the preparation of the Plan and that the Plan as prepared is the most sustainable compared with any reasonable alternatives.

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Appendix 1: Consultation Responses

RE: Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan



James, Edward <Edward.James@HistoricEngland.org.uk>
To: Tom Price
Cc: Clerk to Meppershall Parish Council

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Dear Tom,

Thank you for inviting Historic England to comment on this consultation. As the Government's adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process. Therefore we welcome this opportunity to review the Screening Report for this plan. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, "Is it (the Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan) likely to have a significant effect on the historic environment?". Our comments are based on the information supplied with the Screening Opinion.

The Screening Report indicates that the Council considers that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment. We note that the plan does not propose to allocate any sites for development.

On the basis of the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of 'SEA' Directive], Historic England concurs with the Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

The views of the other two statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for an SEA is made.

I should be pleased if you can send a copy of the determination as required by REG 11 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you with your correspondence. To avoid any doubt, this does not reflect our obligation to provide further advice on later stages of the SEA process and, potentially, object to specific proposals which may subsequently arise (either as a result of this consultation or in later versions of the plan) where we consider that, despite the SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its assessment. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), how the allocation, policy or proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.

Please do contact me, either via email or the number below, if you have any queries.

Kind regards,

Edward

Edward James
Historic Places Adviser - East of England
Historic England

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RE: Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan



Benn, Neville <neville.benn@environment-agency.gov.uk>
To: Tom Price

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Hi Tom

We agree with the conclusions reached.

Kind regards

Neville Benn
Senior Planning Advisor
Sustainable Places
East Anglia Area (West)

Environment Agency, Bromholme Lane, Bampton, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE28 4NE

Internal: 51906

External: 0203 0251906

Mobile: 07471 021540

neville.benn@environment-agency.gov.uk

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Date: 25 February 2021
Our ref: 344474
Your ref: Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan



Mr Tom Price
Central Bedfordshire Council
tom.price@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Mr Price

Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening Opinion

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 23 February 2021 which was received by Natural England on 23 February 2021.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment

It is our advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, in so far as our strategic environmental interests (including but not limited to statutory designated sites, landscapes and protected species, geology and soils) are concerned, that there are unlikely to be significant environmental effects from the proposed plan.

Neighbourhood Plan

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in light of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended), is contained within the [National Planning Practice Guidance](#). The guidance highlights three triggers that may require the production of an SEA, for instance where:

- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.

We are not aware of significant populations of protected species which are likely to be affected by the policies / proposals within the plan. It remains the case, however, that the responsible authority should provide information supporting this screening decision, sufficient to assess whether protected species are likely to be affected.

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Notwithstanding this advice, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all potential environmental assets. As a result the responsible authority should raise environmental issues that we have not identified on local or national biodiversity action plan species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites or local landscape character, with its own ecological and/or landscape advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local landscape and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by this plan, before determining whether an SA/SEA is necessary.

Please note that Natural England reserves the right to provide further comments on the environmental assessment of the plan beyond this SEA/SA screening stage, should the responsible authority seek our views on the scoping or environmental report stages. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make.

For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Corben Hastings
Consultations Team