



Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

Meppershall Neighbourhood Plan

2021 – 2035

February 2021

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1. Introduction

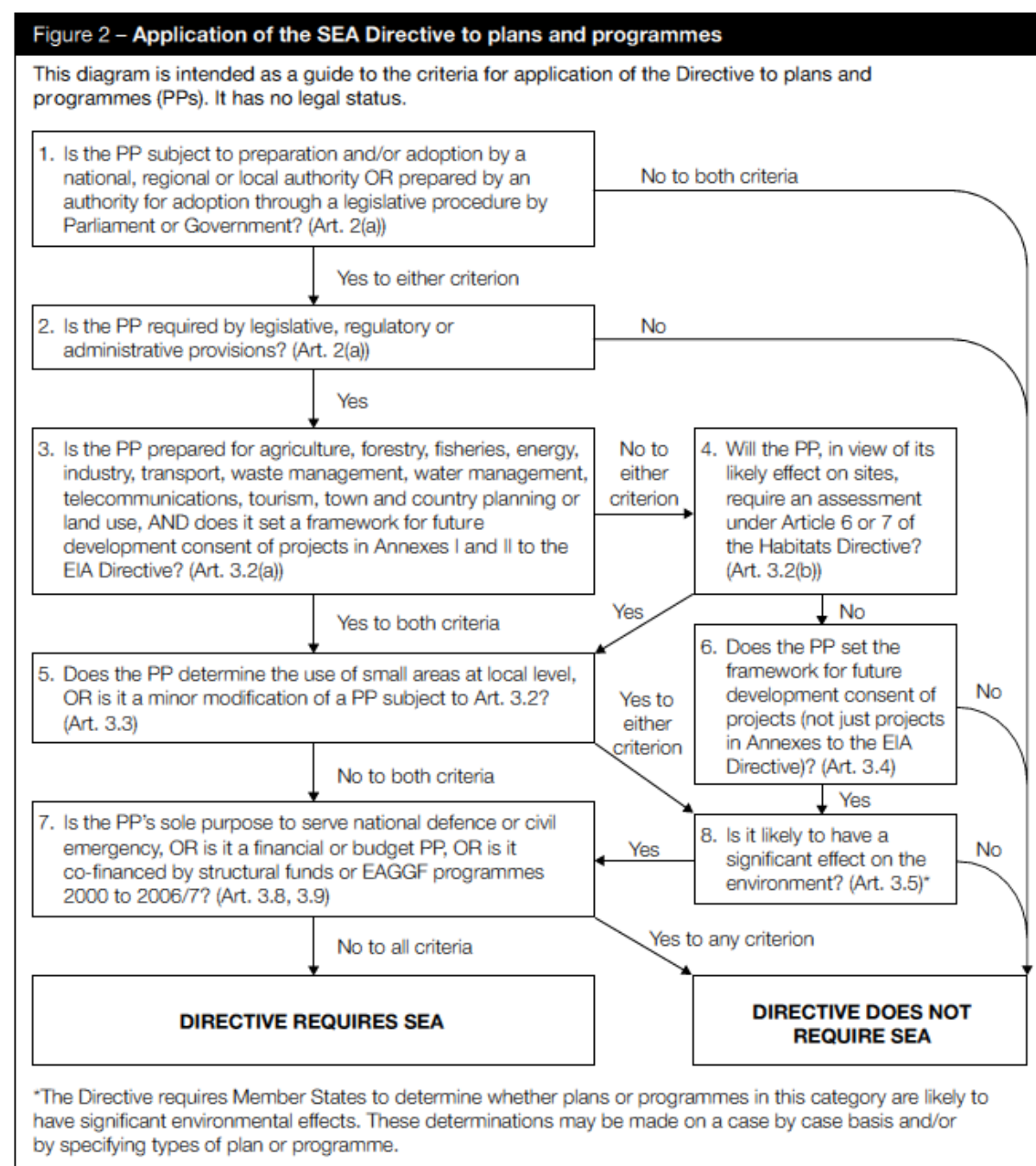
- 1.1 Meppershall Parish Council have requested a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening opinion of their Neighbourhood Plan (NP). Central Bedfordshire Council is legally required to determine whether the Meppershall NP will require SEA. However, if it is concluded that SEA is required, Meppershall Parish Council, supported by their Steering Group, are responsible for its production and it must form part of the material that is consulted on when the consultation stages are reached.
- 1.2 The Meppershall NP will cover the whole area within the administrative boundary of Meppershall parish. The purpose of the Meppershall NP is to establish planning policies for the development and use of land within the area.
- 1.3 This screening report is used to determine whether 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 However, plans which determine ‘the use of a small area at local level’ or which only propose ‘minor modification to a plan’ might be exempt if they are unlikely to have significant environmental effects. NPs containing land allocations for development that are not included in the local authority’s plan, are more likely to require SEA. NPs which do not contain allocations or reflect allocations already identified as part of a local authority plan are less likely to require SEA. The main determining factor as to whether SEA is required on a NP is if it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.
- 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.
- 1.8 Whether SEA is required or not, 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 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.

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:

<p>1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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) <p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 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 <p>Source: Annex II of SEA Directive 2001/42/EC</p>

3.4 The three statutory consultation bodies (Historic England, Environment Agency and Natural England) will be consulted to determine whether they agree with the findings and conclusions of this screening opinion, in establishing whether the Meppershall NP requires SEA and whether it may have a significant environmental effect. Following consultation with statutory consultees, a final Screening Determination Statement will be issued to Meppershall Parish Council and the statutory consultees.

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 An assessment of likely effects of the NP on sites that require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive has been undertaken as part of the SEA screening (see Part 1, Stage 4 above). It concludes that as the NP's effects are likely to be localised in their nature and are unlikely to result in significant effects on Nature 2000 sites that are located a considerable distance from the Parish boundary. **As such, Meppershall NP does not require an Appropriate Assessment to be undertaken.**

8. Annex I: HRA Screening

8.1 Whilst there are no European sites within the Meppershall NP area, it is recognised that distance in itself is not a definitive guide to the likelihood or severity of an impact as factors such as the prevailing wind direction, river flow direction, and groundwater flow direction will all have a bearing on the relative distance at which an impact can occur. This means that a plan directing development some distance away from a European site could still have effects on the site and, therefore, needs to be considered as part of the screening process.

8.2 Table below lists nine European sites that have been identified in the HRA undertaken by Central Bedfordshire Council in 2014 as those that might be affected by the development within Central Bedfordshire and therefore development in the Meppershall NP area. The location of these sites is shown in the map at 8.9.

8.3 **Table:** Natura 2000 sites within 50km of the Central Bedfordshire boundary

Natura 2000 Site	Designation	Distance from CBC boundary (km)	Distance from Meppershall boundary (km)
Chiltern Beechwoods	SAC	2	26.5
Eversden & Wimpole Woods	SAC	7.5	23.5
Chippenham Fen	RAMSAR	42	58.5
Wicken Fen	RAMSAR	35	51.5
Woodwalton Fen	RAMSAR	29.5	46.5
Ouse Washes	SPA / SAC / RAMSAR	43	60.5
Portholme	SAC	16	34
Fenland	SAC	29.5	46.5
Upper Nene Gravel Pits	SPA / RAMSAR	25	36.5

8.4 The screening assessment undertaken by Central Bedfordshire Council in 2014, was based on consideration of the qualifying interests; conservation objectives; condition status; key environmental conditions; and vulnerabilities for each of the sites identified the following specific threats to European sites in the vicinity of Central Bedfordshire:

- An increase in recreational pressure;
- An increase in air pollution;
- A decrease in water quality; and,
- Increased runoff leading to localised flooding.

- 8.5 The Central Bedfordshire Local Plan Habitats Regulation Assessment (2017) builds on the findings of the 2014 HRA and found that a number of the above sites might be at risk of being affected by the development and growth within Central Bedfordshire area, but when mitigation measures set out in the Local Plan's policies were taken into account it found that the planned growth is unlikely to have an effect on the above sites. The screening also concluded that in-combination effects are not likely due to mitigation provided and the location of development in neighbouring authorities. It was concluded that no Appropriate Assessment was required.
- 8.6 The Central Bedfordshire Local Plan HRA Screening can be found at the link below: <https://centralbedfordshire.app.box.com/s/bvmdew4l4xr9gu8frqiy4zdganuk6oaa/file/290881235556>
- 8.7 Based on the findings of the Local Plan's HRA, and the fact that Meppershall NP does not allocate any sites for the development, it is considered that the Plan alone and in-combination with other plans (identified in the Local Plan's HRA screening 2017) is unlikely to have significant impacts on the above Natura 2000 sites and therefore **the Plan does not require an Appropriate Assessment to be undertaken.**
- 8.8 **Screening Outcome:** This HRA screening process has considered the potential significant effects arising from the content of the Meppershall NP, both independently and in combination with other plans or strategies published to date, and concluded that the NP is highly unlikely to affect the European sites identified in this report. **As such, Meppershall NP does not require an Appropriate Assessment to be undertaken.**

