

# Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment

## Pre-submission Stage Environmental Report, October 2016

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### Non-Technical Summary

This non-technical summary explains the scope and main findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan, at its pre-submission draft stage. The Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan sets out a vision for the Neighbourhood Plan Area (the parish), together with aims, policies and potential projects.

The assessment was undertaken to comply with the SEA Regulations, which are relevant to preparing a Neighbourhood Plan unless the need for such an assessment has been ruled out formally through what is known as a screening report. The assessment is subject to consultation with the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England, the public and any other interested parties. It considers the likely effects of the plan on the environment, and its evaluation includes an assessment of reasonable alternatives. It also considers appropriate mitigation and monitoring measures.

As part of the scoping process for the SEA, plans and programmes were reviewed and information collected on the environmental characteristics of the Neighbourhood Plan Area. The review included and appraisal of the National Planning Policy Framework and the adopted North Dorset Local Plan, together with key documents that informed the scope of the Local Plan's own sustainability appraisal. The scope of the assessment was influenced by feedback from the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England who were consulted in July / August 2015.

The key issues identified for further assessment were:

- Potential impact on sites of ecological interest that could be harmed by development, in particular sites designated for their wildlife value, important habitats such as the riverine environment and ancient woodland, and protected species.
- Potential impact on local landscape character and in particular views from key landmarks in the AONB (Hambledon Hill, Okeford Hill, Bulbarrow)
- Potential impact on the area's heritage assets, most notably the Conservation Area, Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments
- Potential harm as a result of re-using landfill sites which may give rise to contamination, or through new uses which could give rise to pollution.
- Potential loss of productive farmland.
- Potential flood risk to new or existing development as a result of siting within a flood risk area or increased run-off
- Potential climate change impacts through increased energy consumption, both in terms of the use of buildings and travel modes and patterns
- Potential impact on health and wellbeing, in terms of opportunities for housing, employment, education and training, healthcare, shopping and leisure activities

These issues formed the development of objectives used to form the basis of the assessment of the emerging plan.

The overall level and distribution of growth within the Neighbourhood Plan Area has been established through the recently adopted Local Plan, and as such the focus of the assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan has been on those aspects where the Neighbourhood Plan is departing from the Local Plan (which

has already been subject to its own sustainability appraisal). The main alternatives assessed were in relation to site options, most of which had previously been identified and assessed in part through the District Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. Following the advice of Natural England, additional ecological assessments were carried out to identify the potential presence of protected species on sites that would be included in the draft Plan, as this would not be readily identified through existing designations or the District Council's earlier appraisal of the sites.

No significant adverse impacts were identified in regard to the policies proposed for inclusion the draft Neighbourhood Plan, other than the potential cumulative impact in relation to the loss of productive farmland. The overall conclusion was that the policies should secure significant positive benefits particularly in terms of population and human health (most notably securing opportunities for further affordable housing, and the potential to accommodate new jobs, training and services and support the town centre) and material assets (securing improvements to key pedestrian and recreational routes and the retention and expansion of community facilities).

The assessment process helped identify the need to highlight and mitigate against potential adverse impacts through the need for further site investigation at planning stage, or design requirements (for example to reflect the sensitivity of the site in terms of its landscape character or to secure net biodiversity benefits) in relation to some of the site allocations. In some cases mitigation would be secured through other draft policies or the higher level Local Plan policies. Mitigation was particularly relevant in respect of integrating new development without undue harm to the local landscape character or biodiversity interests. Policy 41 (land adjoining the Bull Tavern) was identified as having a potential adverse impact on heritage assets, but the proposed development would help secure the long terms viability of the pub, which is a Listed building and considered to be a critical community facility. The assessment also showed that alternative options for development did not perform better in terms of their overall sustainability, and therefore there is no reason for these to be included in preference to the chosen options.

The main impacts of the Neighbourhood Plan are proposed to be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis primarily through the monitoring undertaken by the District Council in relation to the Local Plan, with data made available for the Neighbourhood Plan Area. In addition the Town Council will assist in the provision of information relating to the improvement of key pedestrian and cycle routes.

The full environmental report is being consulted on at the same time as the pre-submission draft or the Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan, and is available for viewing from the Sturminster Newton Town Council (Old Market Hill, Sturminster Newton, Dorset, DT10 1FH) and online at <http://www.sturminsternewtonplan.com/>. Comments on the report should be made in writing to: [team@sturquest.org.uk](mailto:team@sturquest.org.uk) or by post to the SturQuest Community Office, Old Market Hill, Sturminster Newton, Dorset, DT10 1FH, by 6th January 2017.