

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT SCREENING REPORT

Prepared on behalf of Gillingham Town Council

GILLINGHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
JANUARY 2016¹

CONTENTS

1	Introduction.....	1
	Legislative background	1
	Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan Area.....	1
	Focus and Scope of the Neighbourhood Plan	2
	the level of development needed	3
	Deciding on the scope of the plan.....	4
	Draft Neighbourhood Plan policies.....	4
2	The SEA Screening Process	7
	SEA Screening of the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan	7
	Potential Environmental Issues	8
	Landscape quality	8
	Biodiversity and geodiversity assets	9
	Heritage Assets	9
	Agricultural land value	9
	Minerals safeguarding zones	9
	Environmental threats	10
	Is the Neighbourhood Plan likely to have a significant effect on the environment?	10
	Findings	14
3	The HRA Screening Process.....	14
	Appendix 1: A diagram summarising the SEA screening process.	16

¹ Minor update made March 2016 to correct historic landfill locations on pg10

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to ensure that the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan has complied with the requirements set out in European legislation relating to the environment. It also provides evidence as to whether the plan “contributes to the achievement of sustainable development” as required to be tested under Schedule 4B section 8(2)b of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

There are three directives that are of particular relevance to neighbourhood plans:

- **Directive 2001/42/EC** on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (often referred to as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive). This seeks to provide a high level of protection of the environment by integrating environmental considerations into the process of preparing plans and programmes.
- **Directive 92/43/EEC** on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and **Directive 2009/147/EC** on the conservation of wild birds (often referred to as the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives respectively). These aim to protect and improve Europe’s most important habitats and species.

Other European directives, such as the Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC), Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC) or the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) may apply in particular circumstances.

Government guidance² summarises the position by saying that, in some limited circumstances, where a neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, it may require a strategic environmental assessment. Draft neighbourhood plan proposals should therefore be assessed to determine whether the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. A “screening” assessment is the process for doing this, and follows the requirements are set out in regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

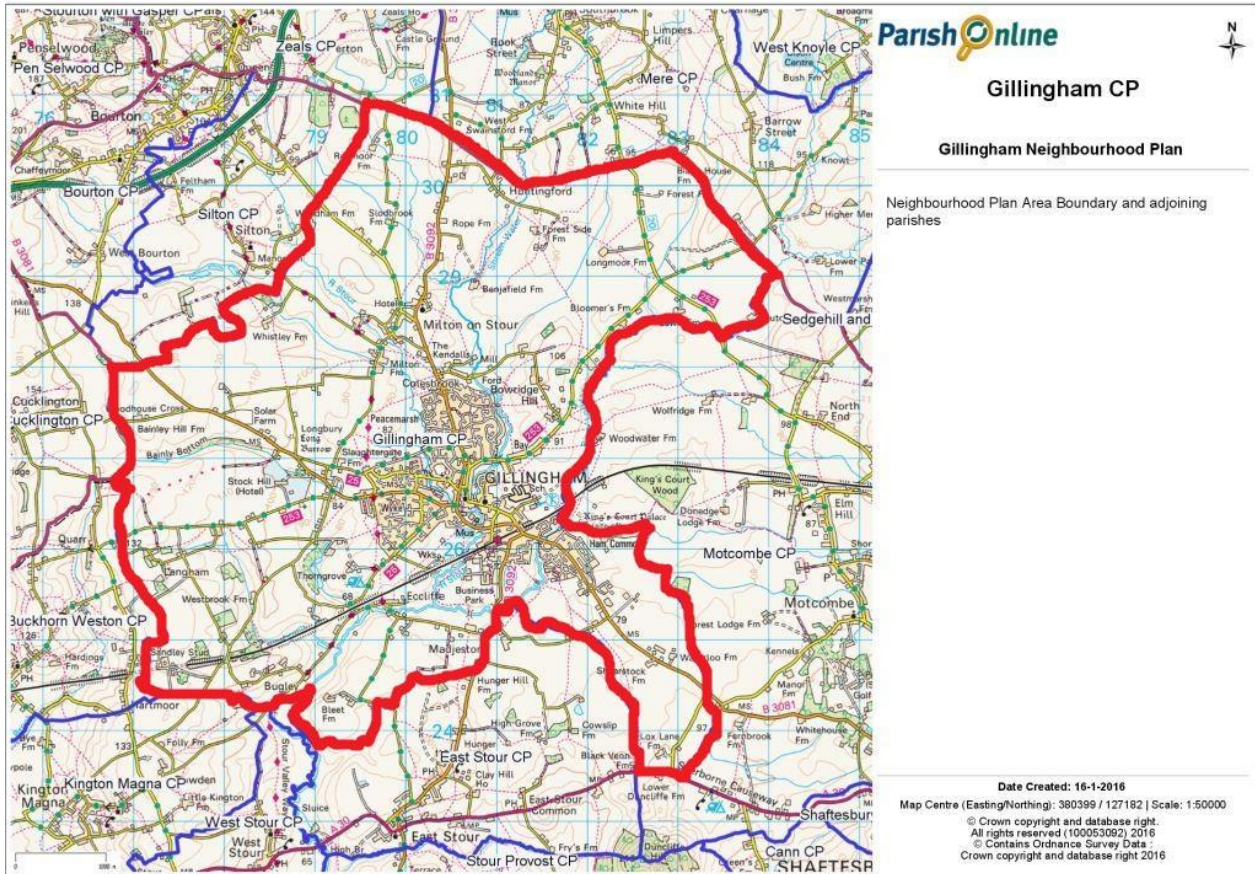
If likely significant environmental effects are identified, an environmental report must be prepared in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3) of regulation 12 of those Regulations.

GILLINGHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREA

The Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan area was designated by North Dorset District Council in August 2012. It follows the parish boundary, as shown in Figure 1.1.

² NPPG Paragraph: 027 Reference ID: 11-027-20150209

Figure 1.1: the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan area



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FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The vision for Gillingham was developed with the local community at a series of community events and consultations. It was refined as issues were explored, and used to provide the themes and related objectives for the plan.

OUR VISION IS THAT...

Gillingham will become a place which combines the best of town and country living and creates a healthy environment for working people, young families, those in retirement and older people.

Future development will consist of well-planned areas which enhance the natural environment and provide beautifully and imaginatively designed homes that are affordable for ordinary people, together with job opportunities within easy reach and good access to healthcare. The town will have strong cultural, recreational and shopping facilities at the centre of its communities, together with integrated and accessible transport systems. There will be generous green spaces (gardens, streets and open spaces) which will link to the wider natural environment, and provide opportunities for residents to grow their own food. Local people’s aspirations will be put at the heart of decision making, and through community ownership of land and a long-term stewardship of assets.

The themes and objectives for the plan were identified as:



THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT NEEDED

The Local Plan has set a housing target of at least 2,200 homes in and around Gillingham over the plan period to 2031. Some 37 homes were completed in the first four years, with a further 118 homes with planning consent (including a large site south of the meadows). Most of the remaining development (about 1,740 homes) will be in the strategic allocation to the south of the town. The other large site is the regeneration of the Station Road Area which could deliver about 200 new homes. A further 151 units are anticipated to come forward through infill development sites, including land at Bay,

which is estimated as having the potential to deliver around 54 new homes³. Together these sites would deliver in the region of 2,250 new homes.

Gillingham has the largest amount of available employment land in the District compared to the other market towns, with 15.68 hectares of land, equivalent to 39% of the total. The Local Plan refers to development of Brickfields Business Park, the mixed-use regeneration of the Station Road area (with a focus on comparison retail and office uses), and the improvement of town centres as the main focus for retail, leisure and other commercial activities. It also refers to the development of land on Kingsmead Business Park for a local centre and / or for a range of employment uses, and the development of land at Neal's Yard Remedies, Peacemarsh for high value business.

DECIDING ON THE SCOPE OF THE PLAN

The Local Plan (adopted 15 January 2016) provides sufficient development to meet the overall needs of the town. As such, the scope of the plan does **not** seek to allocate land for housing or employment, nor does it propose any changes to the settlement boundary. Instead it focuses more on the issues of local importance, in terms of local character and community infrastructure, as well as providing further guidance on the development that will take place.

DRAFT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN POLICIES

The Neighbourhood Plan (pre-submission draft) therefore is likely to include policies on the following subjects / areas:

HOUSING

Custom and self-build housing	To ensure that some custom and self-build plots are made available on the larger development sites
Flexible living accommodation	To encourage flexibility in designs so that buildings are readily adapt to the potential business needs of its future occupiers as well as their possible healthcare and social requirements
Residential uses in the Town Centre.	To encourage residential uses within the town centre, where they would add to the vitality of the town and not adversely affect an existing ground floor main town centre use

ECONOMY

Existing employment land	To encourage proposals to upgrade or redevelop existing employment sites where this will provide more jobs or support start-up businesses
Loss of employment land outside of the Town Centre	To highlight that some employment loss may be acceptable if it would bring about significant transport infrastructure improvements or education and training facilities

³ Data taken from 2015 Annual Monitoring Report https://www.dorsetforyou.com/media/210832/Annual-Monitoring-Report-2015/pdf/Annual_Monitoring_Report- Final_2015_1v0.pdf

Forestry and tourism / recreation projects	To encourage proposals that enhance the landscape and low-key recreational use of the countryside in keeping with the character of the area will be supported
RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRE USES	
Development in the Town Centre.	The policy reviews the town centre / shopping frontage boundaries, in light of changes since 2003 saved policies, and makes sure that the design of shop frontages and buildings fronting onto the main shopping / pedestrian routes adds visual interest to the streetscene
Station Road Mixed Use Area	The policy set out the overarching aims for the regeneration of this area (which in due course may be further detailed through a comprehensive masterplan)
Town centre uses outside of the Town Centre	To make sure that the neighbourhood centres at Lodbourne and Broad Robin, the Forge Garage Shop in Milton On Stour, the cluster of medical facilities and units at Peacemarsch and the new local centre planned to serve the southern extension to the town, continue to provide a focus and identity to the different parts of the town, as well convenient local facilities for nearby residents
TRANSPORT	
Station Road Transport Hub	To highlight the key requirements for such an hub, and the need to take a comprehensive approach to development in this area
Parking provision within and adjoining the Town Centre area	To encourage development that would rationalise and improve the overall car parking provision within and adjoining the town centre
Road designs in new development	To make sure that, when new development comes forward, it is designed to fit within the existing road hierarchy to enable ease of movement for vehicles and pedestrians
Key pedestrian and cycle links	To identify and safeguard the key footpaths and cycle path connections that will provide safe and attractive alternatives to and between the town centre and outlying areas of the town
COMMUNITY FACILITIES	
New and improved health and social care services	To support the provision of improved health and social care services, including a new doctor's surgery in the neighbourhood centre of the strategic southern extension
New and improved education and training facilities	To support the provision of improved or new education and training facilities to meet local needs, identifying the preferred location for any new sites being within or adjoining the town

	centre area, the education and leisure hub on Hardings Lane, the neighbourhood centres, or employments sites (particularly if the facilities relate to business skills training)
New and improved community, leisure and cultural venues	To support the provision of improved or new community, leisure and cultural venues to meet local needs, identifying the preferred location for any new sites being within or adjoining the town centre area, the education and leisure hub on Hardings Lane, or the neighbourhood centres
Safeguarding existing community facilities	To identify and retain those community facilities that are important to local residents, where possible
GREEN AND URBAN SPACES	
Formal sports provision	
Equipped play areas and informal recreation / amenity spaces	To set standards for future provision of public open space, and identify areas of search for the location of land that may be required
Allotments	
Accessible Natural Green Space	To safeguard areas of natural greenspace and, where practical, encourage greater public access
New cemetery provision at Stour Meadows	To safeguard land off Stour Meadows for use as a cemetery
Protecting Important Green Spaces	To protect existing areas of green space that have been identified as important, including those identified or safeguarded for their recreational use, and the important gaps that define distinct areas of settlement
DESIGN	
The pattern and shape of development	To embed the design guidance from the Gillingham Town Design Statement into the Neighbourhood Plan, and extend it to include Milton on Stour
Plots and buildings	
Hard and soft landscaping	
HERITAGE	
Heritage Enhancement Area	To support the heritage enhancement of this area, having due regard to the Heritage Enhancement Plan
Protection of locally important heritage assets	To identify locally important heritage assets to be protected in line with national and adopted Local Plan policies

2 THE SEA SCREENING PROCESS

Articles 2 and 3 of the SEA Directive provide the legislative framework for deciding whether a plan or programme requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment, which is summarised in diagrammatic form in Figure 2.1. The broad basis for the decision for development plans is whether significant environmental impacts are likely.

Before making a final decision, Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency will be consulted on this screening assessment. Their responses will be considered and any necessary changes made prior to the final decision being made on the screening, which will be made available to the public.

SEA SCREENING OF THE GILLINGHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The SEA screening process, which is summarised in the flowchart shown in Appendix 1, was followed and the decisions are recorded for each stage in the following table (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 – a summary of the SEA screening process for the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan, following the procedure outlined in Appendix 1.

Question in SEA screening flow chart	Response
1. Is the Plan subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by parliament or government? [Article 2(a)]	YES The Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan would be prepared by Gillingham Town Council and adopted by North Dorset District Council through a legislative procedure.
2. Is the plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? [Article 2(a)]	YES The Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan would be a Statutory document, prepared in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
3. Is the plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consents or projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? [Article 3.2(a)]	YES The Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan is a document prepared for town and country planning purposes, and may allocate land for future development which falls under Annex II of the EIA Directive as an urban development project.

4. Does the plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a plan subject to Article 3.2? [Article 3.3]	YES The Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan, when made, is part of the development plan for the area which is used to determine the use of small areas at a local level.
8. Is the Plan likely to have a significant effect on the environment? [Article 3.5]	NO Justification for this decision is given later in this chapter.

The significance of the effect of a Neighbourhood Plan on the environment does depend on the proposals within the plan, and the environmental sensitivity of the area.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

In appraising the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment, the environmental problems relevant to the plan area, together with the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

- > the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, or higher levels of protection
- > special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,
- > exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, and intensive land-use

all need to be taken into account. The following therefore provides an overview of the potential environmental issues relevant to Gillingham.

LANDSCAPE QUALITY

The Atkins report⁴ notes that the area is relatively unconstrained by landscape designations. The landscape character of this area ranges from clay vale primarily to the north and east, and limestone hills to the west, with the main river corridor running south of the town described as Valley Pasture. The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty lies more than 1km outside of the Neighbourhood Plan Area.

⁴ Assessing the growth potential of Gillingham, December 2009, report produced by Atkins for Dorset County Council and North Dorset District Council

BIODIVERSITY AND GEODIVERSITY ASSETS

The Atkins report⁵ notes that the area is relatively unconstrained by ecological designations. There are no nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest within or close to the Neighbourhood Plan Area.

There is a site of local nature conservation importance (SNCI) straddling the parish boundary with Silton at Whistley Coppice, and nearby (to the south-west) a locally importance geological site that lies primarily within the adjoining parish. There is also a cluster of locally important nature conservation sites around Bugley Bridge close to the parish boundary with Kington Magna. The closest site to the built up area is at Thorngrove, about 750m SW of the town's settlement boundary.

HERITAGE ASSETS

There are approximately 60 Listed buildings or structures, all of which are Grade II with the exception of the Church of St Mary, High Street, Gillingham (which is Grade I).

There are no registered historic parks or gardens in or close to the area, but land at Wyke Hall is a locally listed park or garden.

There are two scheduled monuments in the area, both of which are some 700m+ from the settlement boundary. These are:

- Gillingham Park boundary bank
- Longbury long barrow 600m north west of Slaughtergate

Just outside the Neighbourhood Plan Area in Motcombe parish, but closer to the town, is the scheduled monument of King's Court Palace moated site.

There are a significant number of non-scheduled monuments in the parish. Most of them are associated with the Medieval to Post Medieval settlement in the area, though some potentially date back much further such as the Bronze Age occupation, Chantry Fields.

AGRICULTURAL LAND VALUE

The farmland around Gillingham is Grade 3 (moderate) to Grade 4 (poor) quality.

MINERALS SAFEGUARDING ZONES

There are no mineral safeguarding areas close to the settlement boundary in the neighbourhood plan area.

⁵ Assessing the growth potential of Gillingham, December 2009, report produced by Atkins for Dorset County Council and North Dorset District Council

ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS

The River Lodden, the Shreen Water and the River Stour flow through the parish and land to either side is therefore prone to flood risk (flood zones 2 and 3).

There is a sewage treatment works to the south-west of the town. There are historic landfill sites at Wavering Lane, at Bowridge and at Silton Quarry (part of which is still authorised for waste disposal). There have been no major or significant pollution incidents recorded in the area in the last 10 years.

There are no Air Quality Management Areas in the area.






IS THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN LIKELY TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE ENVIRONMENT?

In order to determine whether the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, the likely environmental effects of the proposals in the draft plan have been assessed using a sustainability checklist. The sustainability checklist is based on the sustainability framework developed for the Sustainability Appraisal of the recently adopted North Dorset Local Plan. These sustainability objectives were developed to focus upon the relevant sustainability issues in North Dorset, by considering the environmental baseline, relevant plans and policies at local, national, and international scale, and environmental problems within the plan area. Given the limited potential environmental issues identified they are considered relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan Area, providing a useful way of assessing the possible sustainability implications of the draft Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan.

The sustainability objectives consider wider social and economic issues, in addition to the environmental considerations which are required through the SEA Directive. However the sustainability objectives that fall outside the environmental issues listed in Annex I(f) of the SEA Directive have been retained as they help show how the plan contributes to sustainable development (as required under Schedule 4B section 8(2)b of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990).

Figure 2.2: The assessment of likely environmental (or sustainability) impact of Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan against North Dorset Local Plan sustainability objectives.

Key:  adverse impact likely  significant adverse impact likely
 negligible impact likely  significant positive impact likely
 positive impact likely  significant positive impact likely

North Dorset Local Plan sustainability objectives	Impact	Justification			
Social progress that recognises the needs of everyone			The Neighbourhood Plan does not propose any significant changes to the Local Plan provision of housing. The inclusion of an important open gap on land South West of Bay may reduce the anticipated number of houses on this particular site, but this should not undermine the overall delivery of the housing target, as this was already over-reached.		
			Create balanced communities where housing, employment and community facilities are delivered to meet needs, improving access to essential services	The Neighbourhood Plan has examined the community infrastructure requirements in more detail than the Local Plan and seeks to make provision for these where practical, including areas of search to provide flexibility for their delivery.	
				Improve the health and wellbeing of the population through reducing poverty and encouraging healthy lifestyles	The Neighbourhood Plan focuses on recreational provision for the growing population, and supporting improved education and training facilities.
					Reduce barriers to individuals participating fully in their community promoting a strong, vibrant and inclusive way of life
					Improve quality of life through well designed inclusive developments

North Dorset Local Plan sustainability objectives		Impact	Justification
Effective protection of the environment	Reduce the impact of climate change, including flood risk and make best use of the opportunities that arise	☹️	The plan does not allocate land for housing. It promotes the use of the river corridors for recreation where practical. With the introduction of national technical housing standards there are limited opportunities to influence energy efficiency further.
	Protect and where opportunities arise, enhance habitats and biodiversity	☹️	There are few designated ecological sites in the area, and these are of local importance. The plan does identify areas for publically accessible natural greenspace which should be safeguarded.
	Improve the quality of the built environment, protecting the district's heritage assets and distinct townscape	😊😊	The design policies seek to achieve a high quality of design that is locally distinctive. The plan also identifies locally important buildings, and supports the implementation of the heritage enhancement plan for that part of the Conservation Area identified as at risk.
	Recognise the importance of the district's distinct rural landscapes beyond just the aesthetic value	☹️	There are no specific policies that will impact on this objective, and the relevant policies for this will be found within the Local Plan.
Prudent use of natural resources	Reduce impacts on the environment	☹️	There are no specific policies that will impact on this objective, and the relevant policies for this will be found within the Local Plan.
	Reduce pressure on the district's natural resources, reducing waste and promoting the wise use, reuse and recycling of land and resources	☹️	There are no specific policies that will impact on this objective, and the relevant policies for this will be found within the Local Plan.
	Promote energy and resource efficiency, encouraging clean energy production	☹️	With the introduction of national technical housing standards there are limited opportunities to influence energy efficiency further.

North Dorset Local Plan sustainability objectives	Impact	Justification	
Maintenance of sustainable levels of economic growth and employment	Improve the competitiveness of the district's economy through provision of the necessary infrastructure for a more sustainable economy	☹️	The plan policies resist the loss of employment land but recognise that this could be acceptable where the development would bring about significant transport infrastructure improvements
	Enable local needs to be met locally, encouraging more sustainable forms of travel	☺️	The plan seeks to ensure the provision of local facilities close to the population that those facilities serve, and improved public transport hub and pedestrian and cycle links to reduce the need to travel
	Encourage innovation, improve productivity, regenerate towns and villages creating a business environment in which new businesses start and existing businesses grow	☺️	The plan provides additional guidance on the regeneration of the Station Road mixed use area that will include employment and retail outlets, considering how this can link to the existing town centre area
	Improve skills and incomes of the lowest paid and provide satisfying work opportunities for all so that people can realise their full potential	☺️	The plan policies resist the loss of employment land but recognise that this could be acceptable where the development would bring about education and training facilities

The criteria for assessing the likely significance of effects are set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive, Schedule 1 of the Regulations and set out below. Based on the sustainability checklist (Figure 2.2):

<p>1. The characteristics of the plan, having regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the degree to which the plan 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 influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy; – the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development; 	<p>The Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan does not propose to allocate further housing or employment development or amend the settlement boundary defined in the Local Plan.</p> <p>It cannot contain policies or proposals in respect of development that is a county matter (mineral extraction and</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – environmental problems relevant to the plan; – 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>waste development), nationally significant infrastructure or development that falls within Annex 1 to Council Directive 85/337/EEC.</p>
<p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, 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>It is required to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and therefore the likelihood of significant effects on the environment is minimised.</p> <p>The area does not have any significant environmental designations. The main environmental issues relate primarily to the risk of flooding and potential impact on heritage assets. No potential adverse impacts were identified.</p> <p>The likely effects (including cumulative effects) of proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan are unlikely to be significant on the local environment. Any impact is likely to be local in its impact, within the parish.</p>

FINDINGS

The consideration of likely significant environmental effects has shown that there are unlikely to be significant adverse environmental effects resulting from the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan. In light of this, it is concluded (subject to consultation) that the SEA Directive does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Gillingham Neighbourhood Plan.

The assessment also provides evidence that the plan is likely to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, as required to be tested under Schedule 4B section 8(2)b of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

3 THE HRA SCREENING PROCESS

The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the assessment required for any plan or project to assess the potential implications for European wildlife sites.

The HRA looks at whether the implementation of the plan or project would harm the habitats or species for which European wildlife sites are designated. European wildlife sites are:

- Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

In addition to SPAs and SACs sites Ramsar sites are designated under the Ramsar Convention (Iran 1971 as amended by the Paris Protocol 1992). Although they are not covered by the Habitats regulations, as a matter of Government policy, Ramsar sites should be treated in the same way as European wildlife sites. European wildlife sites and Ramsar sites are collectively known as internationally designated wildlife sites.

European wildlife sites and therefore internationally designated wildlife sites, are offered the highest level of protection under European legislation. This legislation sets out a process to assess the potential implications of a plan for internationally designated sites. The first stage of this process is a “screening” exercise where the details of nearby internationally designated sites are assessed to see if there is the potential for the implementation of the Plan to have an impact on the site.

The closest European sites are Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC, approximately 5km from the area as the crow flies. There are no other sites within a 10km search area. Given the distance from any European site, and the lack of proposals for additional housing or employment development, advice is sought from Natural England as to whether the plan will require a separate Habitats Regulation Assessment.

APPENDIX 1: A DIAGRAM SUMMARISING THE SEA SCREENING PROCESS.

