

Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment
Screening Report

September 2016

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to determine whether or not the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) through a process known as SEA screening.

This report provides details of the proposed Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan and explains the legislative background to SEA screening, before providing an account of the SEA screening exercise for the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan.

This report meets the requirements of European Directive 2001/42/EC on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment and the Environmental Assessment of Plan and Programmes Regulations (2004).

2. LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND TO STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

European Directive 2001/42/EC on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment ('SEA Directive') introduces the need to undertake a strategic environmental assessment ('SEA') during the development of some plans and programmes. The main purpose of SEA, according to Article 1 of the SEA Directive, is:

“to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development”.

The SEA Directive is transcribed into UK law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which establishes the requirement to undertake a sustainability appraisal ('SA') for some documents used for planning purposes. The SA process incorporates the requirement for SEA, but typically has a broader scope and considers the social and economic issues in addition to the environmental effects.

The requirement to undertake an SA of supplementary planning documents (SPD) was removed by the Planning Act 2008. However, the need to establish whether the planning document requires an SEA, through the SEA Directive, remains.

Articles 2 and 3 of the SEA Directive explain which plans and programmes require SEA. The Government's Planning Practice Guidance suggests that an SPD will only require an SEA “in exceptional circumstances...if they are likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already have been assessed during the preparation of the Local Plan”.

The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 amends the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 to provide clarification on the SEA related documents which must be submitted alongside neighbourhood planning proposals. Regulation 2(4) of the amendment regulations 2015 adds to the list of documents that a neighbourhood planning group must submit to a local planning authority with a proposal for a neighbourhood plan, which is presented in regulation 6 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012. The additional document which must be submitted is either an environmental report, should an SEA be required, or a statement of reasons why an environmental assessment is not required.

3. THE ASKERSWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

THE EXTENT OF THE ASKERSWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREA

The Askerswell Neighbourhood plan area occupies the whole of the civil parish of Askerswell, covering an area of approximately 700 hectares (Figure 3.1) and a population of approximately 161 according to the 2013 mid-year estimates released by the Office for National Statistics.

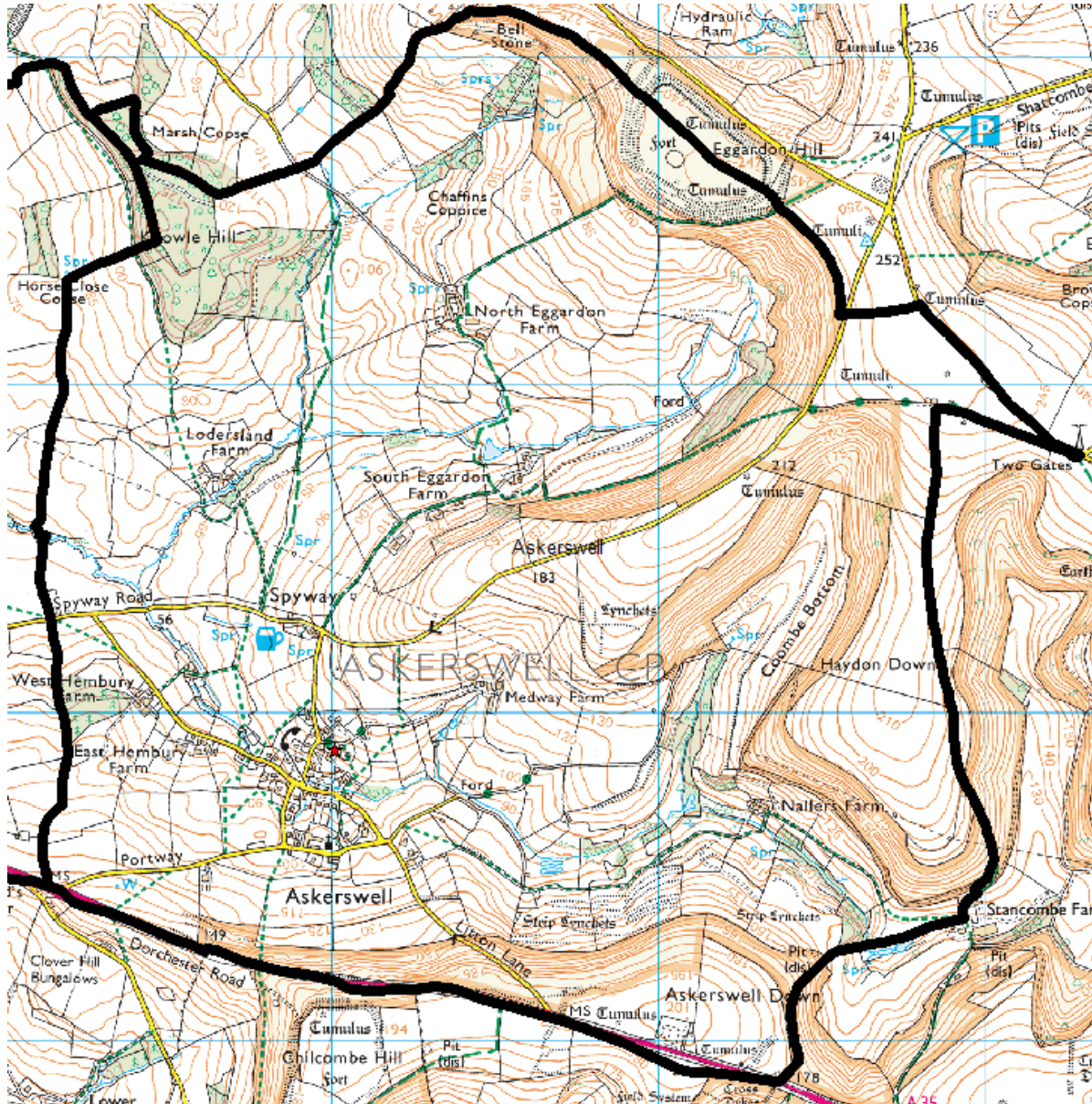
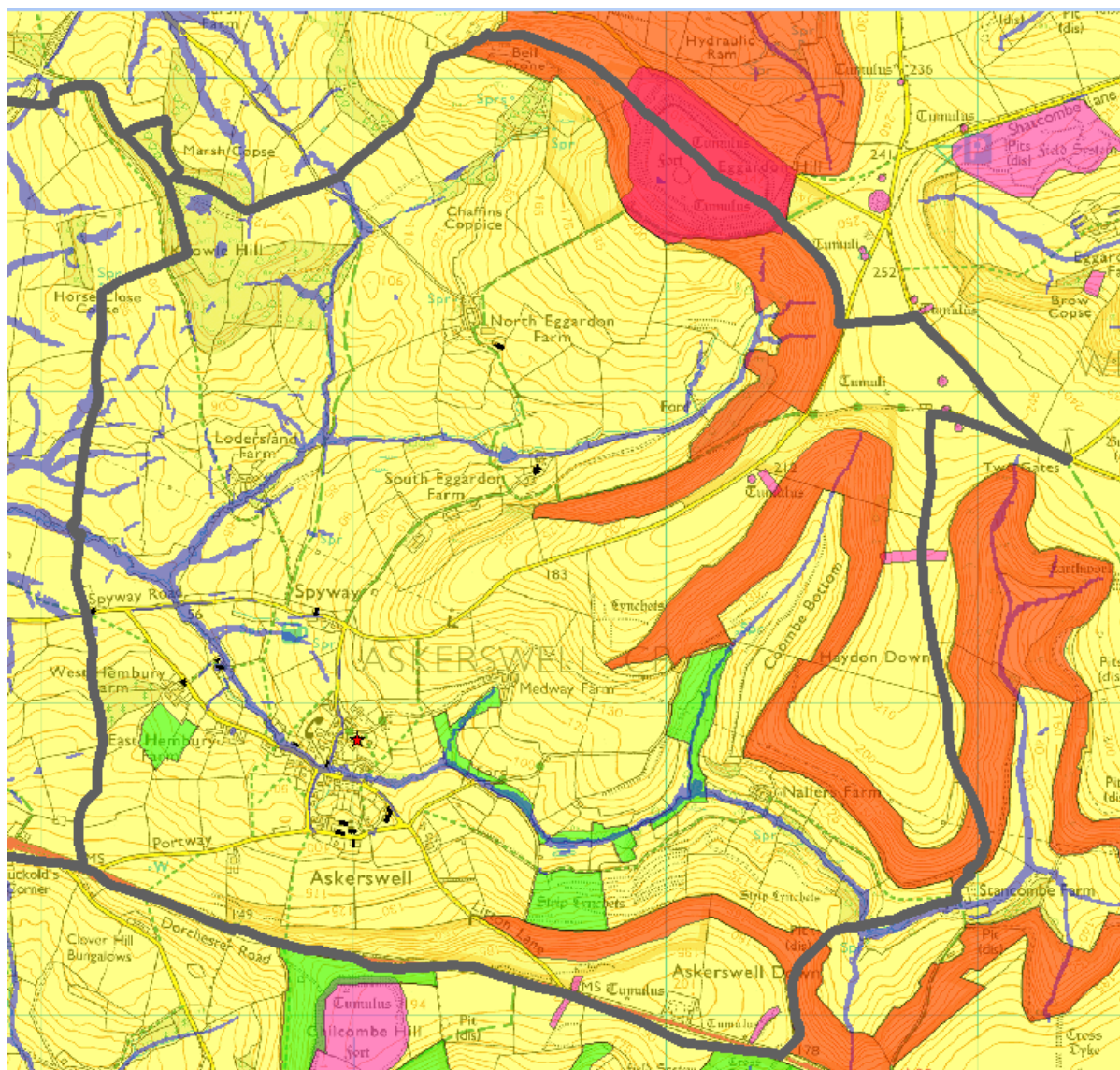


Figure 3.1: The extent of the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ASKERSWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREA

The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area and surrounding areas include a number of environmental designations, indicating the importance and sensitivity of the plan area from an environmental perspective (Figure 3.2).



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Key

Yellow =	AONB (all of plan area)	Pink/Red =	Scheduled Monument
Blue =	Flood zone (1 in 1000 year event)	Black =	Listed Buildings
Orange =	SSSI	Green =	SNCI

Figure 3.2: Environmental designations within the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area

The Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which is a landscape designation, occupies the entire Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan.

The wildlife designations within the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which are wildlife sites designated on a national level. The SSSI within the plan area include the Egardon Hill & Luccas Farm SSSI and Haydon and

Askerswell Downs SSSI both of which generally occupy the eastern section of the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area.

Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) are local wildlife designations, and generally occupy the southern section of the plan area (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: The Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) within the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area

Name of SNCI	Area	Description
West Hemsbury Farm	2.22ha	Semi-improved neutral grassland with a steep bank of calcicolous grass
Alder Moor	7.41ha	An area of varied habitats connected by the River Asker
Nallers Lane Meadow	4.32ha	A large hillside field , with steep lychet banks and more gentle slope

Scheduled Monuments are sites of heritage importance designated on a national level. The Scheduled Monuments within the plan area (Table 3.2) are generally located on the eastern section of the plan area.

Table 3.2: The Scheduled Monuments within the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area

Name of Scheduled Monuments	Area	Description
Large Hillfort to NE of plan area	21.4ha	Large multivallate hillfort containing two bowl barrows 855m north east of North Eggardon Farm
Barrows to E of plan area	0.2ha	Group of three round barrows West of Two Gates
Earthworks to E of plan area	0.3ha	Earthwork 80yds (70m) long NW of Coombe Bottom
Dyke to E of plan area	0.7ha	Dyke on Haydon Down
Barrow to E of plan area	0.06ha	Bowl barrow 700m east of South Eggardon Farm
Earthworks to S of plan area	0.9ha	Earthworks on Askerswell Down

The risk of surface water flooding in the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area is more prevalent in the areas surrounding the River Asker which runs through the settlement of Askerswell.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ASKERSWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan has the following draft objectives:

Housing: The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan aims to conserve the positive nature of our community but values limited new dwellings to underpin its continued vibrancy providing they are consistent with continued protection of our landscape.

Environment: The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect all of our countryside, which is fully within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (DAONB). The plan is committed to conservation of all wildlife in the neighbourhood area. In addition, it favours enhancing our historic and natural features. It envisages new-build dwellings should respect the scale of those already present and use traditional materials to harmonise with our current built environment.

Community: The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan prioritises ensuring our facilities are retained, enhanced and supported. The wide range of our activities testifies to the vibrancy of our community and their value to both us and others from the surrounding areas. We have an active cohort of volunteers who support our facilities and activities.

Business: The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan seeks to support our locally-based businesses, including farmers, small enterprises (including workshops and those working from home) plus those employed elsewhere often working from home. Key to this is community demand for improvements to communications and services (e.g. Broadband and mobile phone reception).

Business developments are supported providing they do not cause undue traffic problems, noise or other disturbance.

SCOPE OF THE ASKERSWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is at an early stage of development, with feedback from the community and other evidence currently being gathered to facilitate the development of the plan. Whilst specific details of the contents of the plan are not known at this stage, it is likely that the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan will provide a small amount of open market housing (perhaps in the region of 4 to 5 units). The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is also likely to introduce a defined development boundary, beyond which development will be restricted. The location and extent of the defined development boundary is not yet known.

The West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan already provides a policy framework which the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan must conform with. The purpose of the policy in the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is to build upon the policy in the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan to ensure that the objectives specific to the area (presented in the section above) are met.

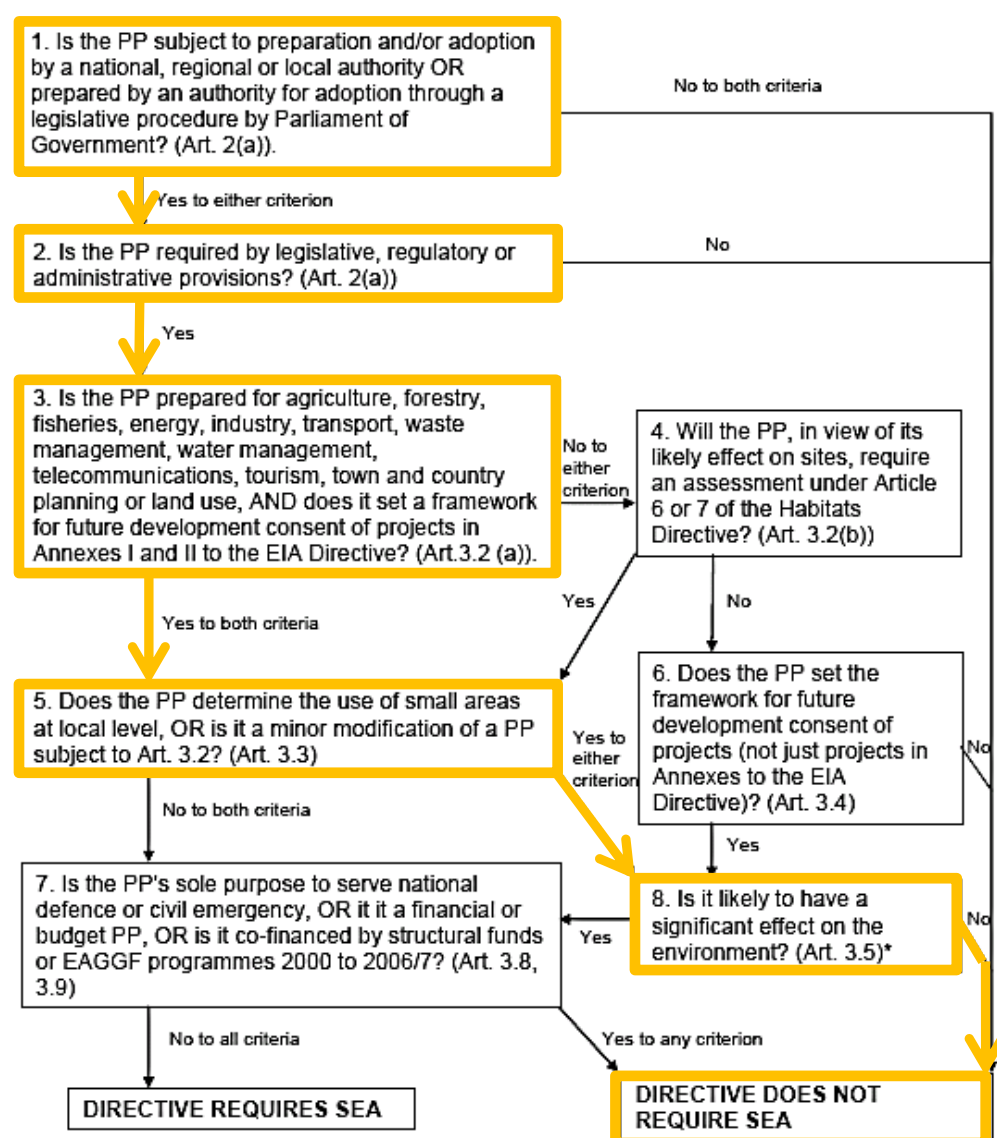
4. SEA SCREENING OF THE ASKERSWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

This Chapter provides an account of the SEA screening exercise for the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan.

Articles 2 and 3 of the SEA Directive provide the legislative framework for defining the types of plan and programme that require SEA.

The SEA screening process is summarised in diagrammatic form in the flowchart shown in Figure 4.1¹. The screening for the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is highlighted in orange and justification for the decisions made at each stage in the SEA screening process is given in Table 4.1.

Figure 4.1: A diagram summarising the SEA screening process with the SEA screening for the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan outlined in orange.



¹ Diagram taken from the Government guidance on the Strategic Environmental Assessment regulations titled 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive', published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2005

Table 4.1 – a summary of the justification made for the decisions during the SEA screening for the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan.

Question in SEA screening flow chart (Figure 4.1)	Response
1. Is the PP 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 of Government?	<u>YES</u> The intention is for the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan to be adopted by West Dorset District Council through a legislative procedure.
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions?	<u>YES</u> The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan would be a Statutory document, prepared in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 as amended.
3. Is the PP 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 consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive?	<u>YES</u> The Askerswell 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.
5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2?	<u>YES</u> The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan determines the use of small areas at a local level.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment (Article 3.5)?	<u>NO</u> Justification for this decision is given later in this chapter.

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

The final question in the SEA screening process presented in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 for the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan was question 8: Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?

In asking this question, the SEA Directive refers to Article 3.5, which states that the relevant criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive shall be taken into account when determining whether there are likely to be significant effects. Therefore, the criteria in Article 3.5 have been taken into consideration when determining whether the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan requires SEA, as presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: The assessment of the likely significance of effects of the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan (Taken from Annex II of the SEA Directive)

Criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive	Response	Is there a significant effect?
(1) Characteristics of the plan and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:		
a) 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 framework for development projects within the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area is set by the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan ('Local Plan'), which provides the overarching policy for the location, size and nature of development projects in this area. The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan builds upon this framework by providing further details of development projects within this area.	No
b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans or programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan will be adopted alongside its parent document, the Local Plan. The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan will expand upon the existing policies in the Local Plan, providing supplementary information on a local scale rather than influencing the Local Plan.	No
c) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	Any development which comes forward through the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to the environmental considerations of the Local Plan, the aim of which is to achieve sustainable development.	No
d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	The environmental problems within the Askerswell Neighbourhood plan area are not considered exclusive to the area, and are similar to those considered and addressed in the Local Plan parent document. The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan may include policies which provide additional environmental protection, to	No

	ensure that the environmental problems are avoided in future.	
e) 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).	The implementation of community legislation is unlikely to be significantly compromised by the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan.	No
(2) Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:		
a) The probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the effects.	It is anticipated that the plan period will be 10 years. Whilst some effects of the plan may be irreversible, it is not considered probable that the plan will have significant effect since the plan is only likely to bring forward in the region of 5 dwellings within the defined development boundary.	No
b) The cumulative nature of the effects.	The Loders Neighbourhood Plan area lies adjacent and to the west of the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area. The Loders Neighbourhood Plan passed examination by independent examiner in May 2016 and the public referendum stage in May 2016. The Loders Neighbourhood Plan was subsequently submitted to West Dorset District Council in June 2016 and will go before the council to be 'made' in the near future. Once 'made', the Loders Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the development plan for the Loders area. The Loders Neighbourhood Plan proposes a small amount of development, in the region of 10 new dwellings over a next 15 years, within a defined development boundary and contains policies to ensure environmental protection. It is therefore considered unlikely that the degree of development proposed through the Loders Neighbourhood Plan, when considered in combination with the proposals likely to come forward through the Askerswell Neighbourhood	No

	Plan, will introduce significant environmental effects.	
c) The transboundary nature of the effects.	The transboundary impacts, beyond the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area, are unlikely to be significant in light of the nature and scale of the proposals.	No
d) The risks to human health or the environment (e.g due to accidents).	The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to introduce significant risks to human health and the environment, for example due to accidents, in light of the nature and characteristics of the proposals. Furthermore, the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan must have regard to the relevant legislation pertaining to health and safety and the environment and this is considered adequate to address any potential issues in this instance.	No
e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).	The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area occupies approximately 700ha and a population of 161 people according to the 2013 mid year estimates produced by the Office for National Statistics. The spatial extent of the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area and the magnitude of the population affected are not considered significant for the purposes of SEA.	No
f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: i) Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage	The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area and adjacent areas contain a number of environmental designations, reflecting its special natural characteristics and rich cultural heritage. These include landscape designations, such as the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, wildlife designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and designations which reflect the cultural and heritage value of the area, such as Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments. The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan will conform with the Local Plan, which provides protection to these environmental characteristics to ensure that they are not vulnerable to significant impacts from development.	No
ii) Exceeded environmental quality	The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to result in the exceedance of environmental quality standards, such as those relating to air,	No

	standards or limit values	water and soil quality, due to the nature and scale of the development.	
iii)	Intensive land-use	The Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to bring forward development of an extent which would result in a significant intensification of land use. Furthermore, the presence of a development boundary is likely to concentrate development towards built up areas, reducing the potential for countryside areas to be changed to more intensive land use.	No
g)	The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	<p>The environmental designations within the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; • Site of Special Scientific Interest; • Site of Nature Conservation Interest; • Scheduled Monuments; and • Listed Buildings. <p>Policy ENV 1 of the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan forbids development which would cause unacceptable impacts upon the Dorset AONB. The entirety of the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area is designated as Dorset AONB. However, since the development which comes forward through the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan must be in conformity with the Local Plan, significant adverse impacts upon the Dorset AONB are not considered likely. Furthermore, the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is likely to propose only a small amount of infill development within a defined development boundary rather than bringing forward development in the open countryside. Therefore, the special qualities of the Dorset AONB are unlikely to be significantly compromised.</p> <p>Policy ENV 2 of the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan prevents development which would cause unacceptable impacts upon wildlife sites, including the Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Sites of Nature Conservation Interest wildlife designations within the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area. The development which comes forward through the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is likely to be of</p>	No

	<p>a small scale and focussed towards existing settlements rather than designated wildlife sites or undeveloped countryside habitats.</p> <p>Policy ENV 4 of the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan prevents development which would cause unacceptable impacts upon designated heritage assets, such as the Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments and their setting, in the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan area. The relatively small amount of development which is likely to come forward through the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan will be within a defined development boundary, focusing development towards the existing developed areas, rather than the Scheduled Monuments to the east of the plan area. Directing development toward the existing developed areas may cause development to occur in proximity to Listed Buildings. However, policy ENV4 will ensure that there are no significant effects upon these Listed Buildings and their setting.</p>	
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5. CONCLUSION

The SEA screening exercise explained in Chapter 4 concluded that the Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental impacts, largely due to the characteristics and local scale of the proposals, which comprises a small amount of development (4-5 dwellings) within a defined development boundary, and the protection already provided in the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan parent document.

Askerswell Neighbourhood Planning Group are seeking the views of the statutory consultees on the findings of this SEA screening in accordance with the SEA Directive.