

Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan Review

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) - Determination Statement

This determination statement has been produced to assist in complying with Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

The Regulations implement European Directive 2001/42/EC. This requires that the effect on the environment of certain plans and programmes should be assessed, including plans prepared for town and country planning or land use. An exception is made for plans that determine the use of a small area at a local level, if the responsible authority has determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.

This determination statement sets out the reasons why Dorset Council (the responsible authority) currently considers that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is not required with respect to the Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan Review.

Oneill Homer (planning consultants) has prepared a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report on behalf of Blandford Forum Town Council (the Qualifying Body). In August 2022, the statutory consultation bodies (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) were consulted, as required by the regulations, on the screening report. The Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership and the Dorset AONB Partnership were also consulted on the report.

All three statutory bodies responded to the consultation. The Environment Agency and Natural England both set out that they consider that, in terms of their strategic environmental interests, the proposed plan review is unlikely to result in any significant environmental effects.

Historic England, in its response, raise a number of points that it considers should be taken into account when deciding whether a full SEA of the plan review is required but it defers whether a full SEA of the plan review is required to Dorset Council. The Council has considered the points raised by Historic England and is satisfied that a full SEA is not required.

The Cranborne Chase AONB Partnership states that it does not agree with the statements that neither a SEA or an HRA of the plan review is required. Reference is made to the fact that the nitrates and phosphates issues in the River Stour and

Poole Harbour have changed significantly since the SEA/HRA for the initial Blandford + NP. However, as set out above, Natural England considers that the plan review is unlikely to result in any significant environmental effects. Furthermore, Natural England has not raised any specific concerns about the review in relation to nitrates or phosphates matters. Consequently, Dorset Council does not consider that a full SEA and HRA is required on these grounds.

In conclusion, having reviewed the SEA/HRA Screening Report, the consultation responses received in relation to it, and having taken into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to the regulations as required by Regulation 9(2)(a) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, Dorset Council considers that a SEA of the Blandford + Neighbourhood Plan Review is not required.

NOTE: This statement is based on the information provided. If the proposed content of the plan is revised and/or there is a material change in the environmental characteristics in the locality (e.g. the designation of any additional nature conservation or other environmental sites), then the comments contained in this statement would need to be reconsidered in order to take account of the changes.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) – Determination Statement

Schedule 2, paragraph 1 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 sets out the prescribed basic condition that the making of a neighbourhood plan is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site (as defined in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2012) or a European offshore marine site (as defined in the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 2007) (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects).

In its response to being consulted on the SEA/HRA Screening Report, Natural England state:

'I can confirm that Natural England agree with the assessment conclusions. The plans modifications are unlikely to have a significant effect on the environment and no further SEA/HRA assessment work is required.'

Given the findings of the SEA/HRA Screening Report, and Natural's England's response to the consultation on the report, Dorset Council considers that a HRA of the plan review is not required.

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April 2023