



Basingstoke
and Deane

Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2029

**Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic
Environmental Assessment Report:
Adoption Statement**

October 2017

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1. This Statement

- 1.1 Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) involves a series of procedural steps which are designed to meet the requirements of the SEA Regulations¹. The final step in the process involves preparing a 'statement' at the time a Neighbourhood Plan is 'made'. This SA (inc. SEA) Adoption Statement addresses the requirement to prepare a post-adoption 'statement' under Part 4 of the SEA Regulations.
- 1.2 The SA (inc. SEA) Environmental Report Adoption Statement includes information on:
- how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Neighbourhood Plan;
 - how the SEA has been taken into account;
 - how the results of public consultation have been taken into account;
 - the reasons for choosing the made Neighbourhood Plan; and,
 - how any significant environmental effects of implementing the Neighbourhood Plan will be monitored.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan (Whitchurch NP) sets out the planning policy framework for Whitchurch Parish over the period 2014- 2029. The Whitchurch NP was prepared to be in general conformity with the adopted Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011-2029), and it sets out a vision, objectives and a range of policies for the Parish / Whitchurch neighbourhood area which follows the Parish boundaries. Policies relate to a range of topics, including housing, employment, infrastructure, transport and the natural environment.
- 2.2 The Vision for the Whitchurch NP is as follows:

"We love our town. We appreciate its setting in the Hampshire countryside, the variety of people who live here and the local facilities that support a self-contained community.

In the next 15 years, development of our town will take place at a steady pace, maintaining the variety of residents and respecting its existing architectural character. Developments will be of an appropriate size, and well-integrated with the town. They will be designed to minimise the impact of traffic, parking constraints and road noise that detract from our current enjoyment of the town.

Business and industry will be encouraged to develop in line with the growth in housing to provide local jobs, shopping and tourism opportunities. Infrastructure and services will be expanded in lockstep with housing growth. The river will be even more visibly the heart of the town, as we take

¹ The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

opportunities to improve access to it. The Town Centre will be cleaner, brighter, and more accessible to pedestrians, cyclists and car users.

In 15 years time, those of us living here today will be proud to say that Whitchurch has changed for the better.”

- 2.3 Following extensive work and community involvement on the Whitchurch NP by the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee (WNPSC), Whitchurch Town Council (WTC) submitted the Whitchurch NP (2014-2029) and supporting documents to Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (BDBC) in January 2017.
- 2.4 BDBC subsequently published the Whitchurch NP for formal public consultation for six weeks from 27 February 2017 (Regulation 16) and all representations received were forwarded to an independent examiner who was appointed by the Council, with the agreement of WTC, to examine the Plan.
- 2.5 In June 2017, the Examiner provided her Report to BDBC and WTC which concluded that, subject to a number of modifications, the Whitchurch NP meets the basic conditions and other statutory requirements. The Examiner also recommended that, subject to the modifications proposed, the Whitchurch NP should proceed to a referendum.
- 2.6 Following a positive outcome at the referendum, the Whitchurch NP was 'made' on 26 October 2017.
- 2.7 The stages of the Neighbourhood Plan and SA (inc SEA) processes are discussed below.

3. How environmental considerations have been integrated into the Neighbourhood Plan

- 3.1 The SA process has been undertaken in parallel with the development of the Whitchurch NP. This incorporated SEA, as required by the SEA Regulations. WTC commissioned consultants (AECOM) to undertake this work, and the SA (inc. SEA) was integral to and has informed the plan making process at each stage.
- 3.2 SA/SEA is used to assess neighbourhood plans against a set of sustainability objectives developed in consultation with interested parties. The purpose of the appraisal is to avoid adverse environmental and socio-economic effects and identify opportunities to improve the environmental quality of the neighbourhood planning area, and the quality of life of residents through the neighbourhood planning process.
- 3.3 SA/SEA is not an automatic requirement for neighbourhood plans. Rather, SEA is a requirement where an initial 'screening' assessment identifies the potential for the Plan to result in significant environmental effects.

4. How the SEA has been taken into account

Consultation on the Scope for the SA (inc. SEA)

- 4.1 In October 2014, BDBC determined that the Whitchurch NP required an SA (inc. SEA). This was informed by the views of the three statutory bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England).
- 4.2 An SA Scoping Report for the Whitchurch NP (which presented the proposed scope of the SA (inc. SEA)), was provided to the three statutory bodies for comment in April 2015. Comments were received from Historic England. The SA (inc. SEA) report reflects these comments.

Regulation 14 Consultation

- 4.3 During the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, the WNPSC undertook a 'Have your say – Vision consultation' (in March 2014) to identify residents' likes and dislikes about the parish and their aspirations for the future. This was followed by a 'Where do the houses go?' consultation in October 2014 to identify community preferences about how and where new homes should be delivered.
- 4.4 This culminated in the Regulation 14 consultation which was held from 20 November 2015 until 8 January 2016, which was accompanied by the SA (inc SEA) (as required by the SEA Regulations). The SA assessed the likely significant effects associated with the housing allocations and policies which made up the Plan with consideration of reasonable alternatives. As part of this, the SA appraised the effects of two broad options relating to the number and distribution of new homes. It also reviewed the potential site allocations, with consideration of their constraints and the potential effects that may arise with consideration to the objectives and decision-making questions developed during SA scoping and the baseline information.

Submission version of the Whitchurch NP

- 4.4 Following Regulation 14 consultation on the Whitchurch NP (and a further consultation that was undertaken in October – December 2016), the allocations and policies within the Neighbourhood Plan were revised to take into account the responses received.
- 4.5 An SA/SEA of the revised version of the Whitchurch NP was then undertaken and a 'Submission version of the SA Report (September 2016)' was prepared to accompany the Submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan. The purpose of this Report was to:
 - Identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the current Whitchurch NP and alternatives; and
 - Provide an opportunity for statutory consultees, interested parties and the public to offer views on any aspect of the SA process.

4.6 The Report contains:

- An outline of the contents and main objectives of the WNP and its relationship with other relevant policies, plans and programmes;
- Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and key sustainability issues;
- The SA Framework of objectives and appraisal questions against which the WNP has been assessed;
- The appraisal of alternative approaches for the WNP;
- The likely significant effects of the WNP in environmental terms;
- The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects as a result of the WNP; and
- The next steps for the WNP and accompanying SA process.

Independent Examination and Referendum

- 4.7 Following the submission of the Whitchurch NP to BDBC, the Neighbourhood Plan and accompanying SA/SEA Environmental Report underwent Regulation 16 consultation from February to April 2017.
- 4.8 Independent examination was subsequently undertaken, and the examiner's report was received in June 2017. Subject to a number of modifications being made, the independent examiner recommended that the Whitchurch NP would meet the Basic Conditions and did not breach and was otherwise compatible with EU obligations and with Convention Rights.
- 4.9 The recommended modifications to the Whitchurch NP were evaluated in relation to the findings of the SEA Environmental Report accompanying the submission version of the Whitchurch NP. It was considered that the proposed modifications would not affect the overall SA/SEA findings presented in the SA/SEA Environmental Report and would not have significant environmental effects.
- 4.10 The updated Whitchurch NP was subject to a referendum on 14 September 2017, organised by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council. To the question 'Do you want Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Whitchurch to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?', 92.7% of votes cast said yes.
- 4.11 Reflecting the favourable outcome of the referendum, the Whitchurch NP was subsequently 'made' on 26 October 2017.

5. How the results of public consultation have been taken into account

- 5.1 Each version of the SA/SEA has been subject to public consultation. Comments from the statutory bodies at all stages of the process were taken into account.

6. The reasons for choosing the made Neighbourhood Plan

- 6.1 The SA (inc. SEA) has considered reasonable alternatives and a clear audit trail has been provided of the preferred options taken forward within the Whitchurch NP. The assessment highlights that the Plan is likely to lead to some significant positive effects (in terms of the 'population and community' and 'health and wellbeing' sustainability objectives) and also some residual significant negative effects. To help address residual significant negative effects, the submission version of the Plan includes a number of policy interventions to help limit potential effects and achieve enhancements where possible.
- 6.2 A number of alternative approaches were considered in the SA (inc. SEA) in relation to the scale and form of new housing development to be taken forward through the Neighbourhood Plan with reference to Policy SS5 (Neighbourhood Planning) of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011-2029) which specifies that sites/ opportunities for at least 200 homes should be identified in and around the defined Settlement Policy Boundary of Whitchurch over the Plan period.
- 6.3 The development management policies in the Plan have also been incorporated into the SA/SEA report. The SA explains how the policies help to mitigate the environmental effects associated with the Plan.

7. How any significant environmental effects of implementing the Neighbourhood Plan will be monitored

- 7.1 The Whitchurch NP will be subject to an on-going programme of monitoring as part of the Councils' Authority Monitoring Reports (AMR). This will demonstrate the on-going suitability of the Plan's policies and enable any unforeseen effects arising from their implementation to be identified. Monitoring will also provide information as to whether the predicted effects of the SA/SEA were accurate.
- 7.2 Monitoring plays an important role in assessing the actual effects of any plans, including the Whitchurch NP. This can feed into more accurate future predictions of effects, and can also help identify where changes need to be made to promote more sustainable development within the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Planning Area.
- 7.3 The SA (inc. SEA) process has continually assessed and identified any predicted significant effects from the Plan with mitigation and/or enhancement measures being integrated at appropriate stages in the evolution of the Plan. This has ensured that BDBC and WTC are able to appropriately address these effects and monitor the potential for unforeseen adverse impacts.

8. Further information

- 8.1 The Whitchurch NP and SEA Adoption Statement can be viewed on the council's website at <http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/WNP>.

8.2 Additionally, hard copies of the documents are available to view at Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council Offices between the hours of 8:30am and 5:00pm on Mondays to Thursdays and 8:30am and 4.30pm on Fridays. They can also be viewed at Basingstoke Discovery Centre and Whitchurch Library during their normal opening times.