

Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report to accompany
Regulation 14 consultation
on the Neighbourhood Plan

August 2017

Quality information

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Non-Technical Summary

What is strategic environmental assessment?

A strategic environmental assessment has been undertaken to inform the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan (HNP). This process is required by the SEA Regulations.

Neighbourhood Plan groups use SEA to assess Neighbourhood Plans against a set of sustainability / environmental objectives developed in consultation with interested parties. The purpose of the assessment is to avoid adverse environmental and socio-economic effects through the Neighbourhood Plan, and identify opportunities to improve the environmental quality of the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan and the quality of life of residents.

What is the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan?

The Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) presents a plan for the administrative area of Hednesford Parish for the period to 2028. Prepared to be in conformity with the Cannock Chase Local Plan, it sets out a vision and a range of policies for the Neighbourhood Plan area. These relate to a range of topics, including, but not limited to, town centre development, housing, open space and housing.

It is currently anticipated that the HNP will undergo a referendum in late 2017.

Purpose of the Environmental Report

The Environmental Report, which accompanies the current consultation on the HNP, is the second document to be produced as part of the SEA process. The first document was the SEA Scoping Report (September 2016), which includes information about the Neighbourhood Plan area's environment and community.

The purpose of the Environmental Report is to:

- Identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the HNP and alternatives; and
- Provide an opportunity for consultees to offer views on any aspect of the SEA process which has been carried out to date.

The Environmental Report contains:

- An outline of the contents and main objectives of the HNP and its relationship with other relevant policies, plans and programmes;
- Relevant aspects of the current and future state of the environment and key sustainability / environmental issues;
- The SEA Framework of objectives against which the HNP has been assessed;
- The appraisal of alternative approaches for the HNP;
- The likely significant environmental effects of the HNP;
- The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects as a result of the HNP; and
- Potential monitoring measures.

Scoping

The scoping stage involves the collection of information relating to:

- the state of the environment in the plan area; *and*
- relevant objectives and targets set out within plans, policies and programmes.

This information allowed for a range of key issues to be identified, and to establish what topics should be the focus of the SEA. The scoping process led to the following topics being scoped in or out of the SEA. These topics then formed the basis of an SEA Framework, which is the basis for appraising the Plan (and reasonable alternatives).

- Air Quality – **Scoped out**
- Biodiversity – **Scoped in**
- Climatic factors - **Scoped in**
- Landscape and historic environment – **Scoped in**
- Land, soil and water resources – **Scoped out**
- Population and community – **Scoped in**
- Health and safety – **Scoped in**
- Transportation – **Scoped in**

Assessment of alternative approaches for the HNP

Alternative sites for town centre development

A key objective of the Plan is to promote town centre redevelopment. The Town Council explored potential locations for town centre improvements, identifying areas of land between Market Street, Victoria Street and off Cardigan Place.

Given that one of the potential uses on these sites could be for housing and / or tourist accommodation, it is appropriate to explore whether there are alternative sites that such uses could be promoted.

Another key objective of the Plan is to make use of vacant / underused land adjoining the town centre. In this respect, the Town Council considers that there are no other potential development sites that could be promoted as alternatives in the town centre.

Alternative sites for housing delivery within the wider Plan area would not fulfil the objective of town centre redevelopment, and are therefore not considered to be reasonable alternatives.

Alternative sites for (specialist) housing

As part of the plan preparation, the need for specialist housing for the elderly was identified as an issue that ought to be tackled. Consequently, the Town Council explored potential sites that would be suitable locations for such development.

In exploring potential alternatives for such housing development, the focus was on identifying reasonable alternatives for the delivery of this type of housing, rather than the delivery of housing in general.

There are a number of sites in the Parish that the Town Council considered when exploring potential locations for specialist housing for elderly. These are outlined below.

- C31 McGhie Street – The Town Council consider this to be an unreasonable site option as it only has a site capacity of 12 dwellings.

- C176 Rawnsley Road – This site is part of the current green space network and adjoins the Hednesford Hills SSSI. The District Council has put this in a list of excluded sites in the 2016, SHLAA, and its potential capacity of 26 is not being counted towards the housing targets.

C63 – (427-433 and 437-445) Cannock Road – This site was identified as a potentially suitable site because it has good access to the range of services and facilities needed by the elderly, and is of sufficient size to accommodate a viable scheme.

Three sites (listed below) are in locations that do not have ideal access to facilities needed by the elderly. However, they do have good public transport access. Whilst the Town Council considered that these sites would be more suitable for a mix of housing (including provision for bungalows), it was seen as appropriate to consider these sites as reasonable alternatives, to test their performance against a range of environmental factors.

- C80 Keys Park
- C220(a) Oaklands Business Park
- C220 (b) Image Business Park

The four reasonable site options were appraised using the site appraisal criteria set out in the SEA Scoping Report. The findings are summarised below.

Summary of SA findings

The site assessment demonstrates that each of the site options performs broadly the same with regards to the majority of environmental assessment criteria. Each is unlikely to have an effect on climate change, heritage or landscape. However, accessibility varies between the sites, with C43 performing the most favourably compared to each of the alternatives regarding access to a GP and a food shop. This site is the only option that falls within the groundwater protection zone though, which would need consideration during construction activities.

Assessment of the current version of the HNP

The draft HNP has been appraised against each of the environmental objectives in the SEA Framework. In undertaking the appraisal, each of the policies in the Plan has been considered individually and collectively. A summary of the findings is presented below.

Biodiversity	Climate change mitigation	Climate change resilience	Built and natural environment	Ground and surface water	Housing	Health and wellbeing	Travel and transport
Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Significant positive	Neutral	Significant positive	Positive	Positive

The plan is predicted to have neutral effects with regards to biodiversity, climate change mitigation and resilience, and ground and surface water quality.

Positive effects are generated with regards to transport and travel, as the plan will lead to an improvement in car parking arrangements, as well as improving town centre pedestrian routes and access to open space. Protection of local green space, and improved access to open space should also be positive for health and wellbeing; though the effects on the baseline position would not be significant.

Significant positive effects are predicted in relation to housing provision, as a location for specialist housing is identified, as well as introducing policies that seek to tackle the demand for bungalows in the area.

There is also a **significant positive effect** predicted with regards to the built environment, as the Plan introduces greater recognition of the importance of local buildings, special character areas, and also seeks to support redevelopment of two town centre sites.

No negative effects have been predicted, which reflects the proactive nature of the draft Plan with regard to environmental factors.

Mitigation

No mitigation measures have been identified, which is not surprising given that there are no negative effects identified.

The Plan has been proactively prepared with regards to the protection of local greenspace, promotion of walking and cycling, and town centre redevelopment. No further enhancement measures have been identified through the SEA process.

Monitoring

There is a requirement to present measures that could be used to monitor the effects of the Plan identified through the SEA. It is particularly important to monitor effects that are predicted to be significant, whether this be positive or negative. Monitoring helps to track whether the effects turn-out as expected, and to identify any unexpected effects.

Two significant effects have been predicted in the SEA. Whilst these are both positive, it is still important to monitor whether the effects that occur in reality are as positive as expected. Potentially suitable indicators are identified below for each of the significant effects.

Significant effects	Monitoring measures
A significant positive effect is predicted relating to the provision of specialist housing, and for delivery of a greater number of bungalows on development sites.	% of bungalows secured in accordance with policies H1 and H2. Delivery of a retirement complex in accordance with H3/TC7.
There is also a significant positive effect predicted with regards to the built environment, as the Plan introduces greater recognition of the importance of local buildings, special character areas, and also seeks to support redevelopment of two town centre sites.	Loss of locally important buildings % of developments granted in line with policy. Progress on redevelopment of town centre sites

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

AECOM has been commissioned to undertake an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan (HNP).

The HNP is currently being prepared as a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Localism Act 2012. The Neighbourhood Plan area, which includes the administrative area of Hednesford Town Council (Figure 1.1), is being prepared in the context of the Cannock Chase Local Plan.

It is currently anticipated that the HNP will be submitted to Cannock Chase later in 2017.

Key information relating to the HNP is presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Key facts relating to the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan

Name of Qualifying Body	Hednesford Town Council
Title of Plan	Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan (HNP)
Subject	Neighbourhood planning
Purpose	The Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared as a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The plan will be in conformity with the Cannock Chase Core Strategy.
Timescale	To 2028
Area covered by the plan	The emerging HNP will be used to guide and shape development within the area covered by the administrative area of Hednesford Parish. (Refer to Figure 1.1)
Summary of content	The Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan will set out a vision, strategy and range of policies for the Neighbourhood Plan area.
Plan contact point	Peter Harrison, Town Council Manager Email address: peter.harrison@hednesford-tc.gov.uk

1.2 SEA explained

The HNP has been screened in as requiring an SEA.

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely significant effects of an emerging plan, and reasonable alternatives in terms of key environmental issues. The aim of SEA is to inform and influence the plan-making process with a view to avoiding or mitigating negative environmental effects and maximising positive effects. Through this approach, the SEA for the HNP seeks to maximise the emerging Neighbourhood Plan's contribution to sustainable development.

The SEA has been prepared in line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations) which transpose into national law the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive¹.

The SEA Regulations require that a report is published for consultation alongside the draft plan that 'identifies, describes and evaluates' the likely significant effects of implementing 'the plan, and reasonable alternatives'. The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.

In line with the SEA Regulations this Environmental Report must essentially answer four questions:

- What is the scope of the SEA?
- What has plan-making/SEA involved up to this point?
 - 'Reasonable alternatives' must have been appraised for the plan.
- What are the appraisal findings at this stage?
 - i.e. in relation to the draft plan.
- What happens next?

These questions are derived from Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations, which present 'the information to be provided within the report'. Table 1.2 presents the linkages between the regulatory requirements and the four SEA questions.

¹ Directive 2001/42/EC

1.3 Structure of this Environmental Report

This document is the Environmental Report for the HNP and hence needs to answer all four of the questions listed above with a view to providing the information required by the SEA Regulations.

Each of the four questions is answered in turn within this report, as follows:

Table 1.2: Questions that must be answered by the Environmental Report in order to meet regulatory² requirements

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... ³
What is the plan seeking to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes
What is the sustainability 'context'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
What's the scope of the SEA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
What are the key issues & objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key problems/issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e. provide a 'framework' for) assessment
What has plan-making/SEA involved up to this point?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (and thus an explanation of the 'reasonableness' of the approach) The likely significant effects associated with alternatives Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives appraisal/a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan.
What are the assessment findings at this stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan
What happens next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next steps for plan making/SEA process.

² Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

³ NB this column does not quote directly from Schedule II of the Regulations. Rather, it reflects a degree of interpretation.

2. Local Plan context and vision for the HNP

2.1 Local Plan context for the HNP

Due to the Neighbourhood Area's location within Cannock Chase, this Plan is being prepared in the context of planning policies and strategy for the district.⁴

The Cannock Chase Local Plan (Part 1) 2014 was adopted in June 2014. This contains the Core Strategy and the Rugeley Town Centre Area Action Plan. It sets out a framework for how future development across Cannock Chase will be planned and delivered in the period to 2028.

Neighbourhood plans will form part of the development plan for Cannock Chase, alongside, but not as a replacement for the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy states in Policy CP4 that "Increased opportunities are available for community and neighbourhood planning processes to be proposed by town and parish councils or 'neighbourhood forums' agreed by the Council as Local Planning Authority."

Neighbourhood plans are required to be in conformity with the Core Strategy and can develop policies and proposals to address local place-based issues. In this way it is intended for the Core Strategy to provide a clear overall strategic direction for development in Cannock Chase, whilst enabling finer detail to be determined through the neighbourhood planning process where appropriate.

The Core Strategy (Part 1 of the Local Plan, sets an overall housing target of 5300 homes for the district, with one strategic allocation at Pye Green for 900 homes. This development falls within the parish of Hednesford.

The Cannock Chase Local Plan Part 2 is currently under preparation and considers how land might be allocated to accommodate the residual number of homes required to meet the Core Strategy targets.

It is important that the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan is prepared in the context of the Local Plan, which means that it will not focus on the overall amount and location of housing development that will be planned for Hednesford.

There are also a number of development management policies that will apply to all locations in the district, so the HNP will focus on the issues that can be tackled through more detailed and locally specific policies.

⁴ Cannock Chase Council (June 2014) Cannock Chase Core Strategy
<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/wiltshirecorestrategy.htm>

2.2 Vision for the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan

The vision / mission statement for the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan, which was developed during earlier stages of plan development, is as follows:

“ Our Neighbourhood Plan gives the people of Hednesford a chance to have their say, shaping their community for the future. We’re proud of our heritage and want to ensure our town continues to thrive for generations to come.”

Vision / Mission Statement for the Hednesford
Neighbourhood Plan

To support the Neighbourhood Plan’s mission statement, the HNP sets out a number of Neighbourhood Plan policies. The latest iteration of these policies has been appraised in Chapter 5 of this Environmental Report.

3. The Scope of the SEA

3.1 SEA Scoping Report

The SEA Regulations require that: *“When deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies”*. In England, the consultation bodies are Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England.⁵ These authorities were consulted on the scope of the HNP SEA in September - October 2016.

The purpose of scoping was to outline the ‘scope’ of the SEA through setting out:

- A context review of the key environmental and sustainability objectives of national, regional and local plans and strategies relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan;
- Baseline data against which the Neighbourhood Plan can be assessed;
- The key sustainability / environmental issues for the Neighbourhood Plan; and
- An ‘SEA Framework’ of objectives against which the Neighbourhood Plan can be assessed.

Baseline information (including the context review and baseline data) is presented in **Appendix A**.

Only one of the statutory consultees (Natural England) provided a response to the Scoping Report within the five week consultation period. The comments made and how they have been considered and addressed, are presented in **Table 3.1** below.

⁵ In-line with Article 6(3), of the SEA Directive, these consultation bodies were selected because *‘by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programme.’*

Table 3.1: Consultation responses received on the SEA Scoping Report

Consultation response	How the response was considered and addressed
<p>Natural England</p> <p>Natural England welcome the sustainability themes scoped into the SEA process, the associated questions which have been formulated to aid the ongoing SEA process and the SEA Framework.</p> <p>We note that there may be a small number of site options, and welcome the suggested appraisal approach.</p>	<p>Comments welcomed. No response required.</p>

3.2 Key sustainability / environmental issues

Drawing on the review of the policy context and baseline information, the SEA Scoping Report was able to identify a range of sustainability / environmental issues that should be a particular focus of SEA. These issues are as follows, presented by eight environmental themes:

The selected environmental themes incorporate the 'SEA topics' suggested by Annex I(f) of the SEA Directive⁶. These were refined to reflect a broad understanding of the anticipated scope of plan effects (drawing from the screening opinion and local knowledge).

The scoping process allowed for some sustainability topics to be 'scoped out'; as it was considered the Plan is unlikely to have significant effects on certain factors.

3.2.1 Air quality

- The redevelopment of Hednesford Town Centre is a local priority.
- There is likely to be continued reliance on the car to access services, jobs and facilities.

Scoped OUT

3.2.2 Biodiversity

- Fluvia Internationally and nationally designated nature conservation sites are present in the Neighbourhood Area.
- Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI are within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- Habitats for numerous Protected Species are present in the Neighbourhood Area.
- There are Deciduous Woodlands, priority habitats present.
- The integrity of the Biodiversity Action Plan Habitats present in and around the Neighbourhood Area should be supported.
- Features of biodiversity value such as trees, hedgerows, waterways and meadows should be protected from the impacts of future development and where possible enhanced. Their integrity should also be supported through improved ecological connections in the area, including through the provision of green infrastructure enhancements.
- The Neighbourhood Plan Area has a rich geodiversity resource, which should be protected and enhanced.

Scoped IN

3.2.3 Climatic factors

- The Neighbourhood Plan Area falls entirely within Flood Zone 1, and so development is unlikely to be affected by fluvial flood risk.

Scoped OUT

⁶ The SEA Directive is 'of a procedural nature' (para 9 of the Directive preamble) and does not set out to prescribe particular issues that should and should not be a focus, beyond requiring a focus on '*the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors*' [our emphasis]

3.2.4 Landscape and historic environment

- The landscape is predominantly urban, though includes areas of locally important green space and Hednesford Hills. The parish is also surrounded by Cannock Chase AONB and other areas of sensitive landscape.
- Hednesford Parish contains four listed heritage assets, which could be affected by policies and proposals within the Plan (either positively or negatively).

Scoped IN

3.2.5 Land, soil and water resources

- The only agricultural land in the Plan area is within areas already permitted or allocated for development. No further agricultural land is likely to be affected by the Plan.
- Part of the Plan area falls within Groundwater Protection Zone 3.

Scoped OUT

3.2.6 Population and community

- The population of Hednesford Parish marginally increased between 2001 and 2011 (2.69%).
- Hednesford Parish's population has on the whole become younger between 2001 and 2011. This is in part due to a trend of inward migration of families. Future implications include the likely provision of school places and leisure and recreational activities. Conversely, the number of elderly residents is also projected to increase, which will require provision of specialist housing.
- There is a disparity in deprivation with a section to the north of the Plan area in the top 20% most deprived areas which includes poorer housing quality, lower levels of income (particularly for young people), employment and education. Other areas of the Plan area are relatively affluent.

Scoped IN

3.2.7 Health and Wellbeing

- 'Physical activity' and 'Emergency admissions' are highlighted as priority areas to target interventions towards.
- Hednesford has a prevalence of child obesity and a high number of emergency admissions within the population.
- There are a considerable number of parks, leisure and fitness facilities within the Neighbourhood Area, however these are not evenly distributed and vary in quality.

Scoped IN

3.2.8 Transportation

- Various road networks and junctions within Hednesford have been improved under the Hednesford Town Centre Regeneration Strategy.
- The Hednesford- Birmingham rail service is one of the fastest growing services in the west midlands in terms of passenger numbers. The line is due to be upgraded for electrification, though there will be a need for station upgrades.

- There are a significant number of bus services which serve the Plan area, offering connections to Cannock and Rugeley.
- Cycle routes within the Plan area are sparse and run parallel to the rail line. Mountain biking facilities are located in close proximity though.
- Both Hednesford and Cannock Chase have a higher proportion of car and van ownership and travel to work by car than the England and Wales average.

Scoped IN

3.3 SEA Framework

The SEA framework has been established through the identification of key issues and environmental objectives as part of the scoping exercise. This draws upon the baseline position and policy context that has been prepared for a range of SEA topics.

The framework consists of a set of headline objectives and ancillary questions, which has been used to appraise the environmental effects of the draft Plan (and any reasonable alternatives).

Table 3.2 below outlines the full SEA Framework, which focuses on those issues that have been identified as the most important to consider in the preparation of the Plan; but acknowledging the limited influence that the Plan can/will have in some areas.

These issues were then translated into an 'SEA Framework'. This SEA Framework provides a methodological framework for the appraisal of likely significant effects on the baseline.

Table 3.2: SEA Framework for the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan

SEA Objective	Supporting questions (Will the option/proposal help to...)
1. Protect and enhance the function and connectivity of biodiversity habitats and species.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support connections between habitats in the Plan area? • Support continued improvements to the designated sites in the Plan area? • Achieve a net gain in biodiversity? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity?
2. Contribute to climate change mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote high quality design? • Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport? • Reduce the need to travel?
3. Support the resilience of Hednesford to the potential effects of climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve green infrastructure networks in the plan area to support adaptation to the potential effects of climate change? • Sustainably manage surface water run-off, ensuring that the risk of flooding is not increased (either within the plan area or downstream) and where possible reduce flood risk? • Ensure the potential risks associated with climate change are considered through new development in the plan area? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the plan area to the effects of climate change?
4. Protect and enhance the distinctive character of the built and natural environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and better reveal the significance of buildings and features of architectural or historic value; including those of local interest? • Conserve and enhance the character of the town centre? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic environment? • Improve linkages between the town centre, residential areas and open space.

SEA Objective	Supporting questions (Will the option/proposal help to..)
<p>5. Protect ground and surface water quality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect groundwater quality in the GPZ? • Minimise water consumption? • Reduce surface water pollution through the use of SUDS?
<p>6. Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing which meets the needs of occupiers throughout their life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes? • Support enhancements to the current housing stock? • Meet the needs of all sectors of the community? • Provide quality and flexible homes that meet people's needs? • Include provision for bungalows and other housing types suitable for the elderly? • Provide housing in sustainable locations that allow easy access to a range of local services and facilities?
<p>7. Protect and improve the health and wellbeing of residents by enhancing the quality and accessibility of open space, facilities for recreation and transport links.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote accessibility to a range of leisure, health and community facilities, for all age groups? • Provide and enhance the provision of community access to green infrastructure, in accordance with Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards? • Improve access to the countryside for recreation?
<p>8. Reduce the need to travel and support modal shift to active and sustainable modes of travel such as walking, cycling and public transport.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote accessibility to the town centre? • Improve linkages between the town centre and other community facilities such as Hednesford Park and Tesco Retail Park? • Improve parking provision for commuters? • Reduce the need to travel to access services and facilities?

4. What has plan making / SEA involved to this point?

4.1 Introduction

In accordance with the SEA Regulations the Environmental Report must include...

- An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with; and
- The likely significant effects on the environment associated with alternatives / an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of alternatives appraised.

The 'narrative' of plan-making / SEA up to this point is told within this part of the Environmental Report. Specifically, this section explains how preparation of the current version of the HNP has been informed by an assessment of alternative sites for town centre redevelopment and for specialist housing delivery.

4.2 Overview of plan making / SEA work undertaken

The official launch of the draft plan was 4th July 2016 with an event attended by representatives of statutory consultees, local authorities, community groups and interested individuals.

At the same time a Facebook page and online video and survey went live attracting thousands of views.

Throughout the consultation period there was a permanent display of the plans in the Exhibition Space at Pye Green Community Centre. In addition events took place during July and August elsewhere in the town including a display at Tesco Superstore and a stall at the Hednesford Festival on 27 August. The launch of the draft plan was also well covered in the local Chase Chronicle newspaper. Meetings of local organisations such as Hednesford in Partnership and Heart of Hednesford were also used as vehicles to promote awareness of the draft plan.

The following sections discuss the evolution of the HNP in association with the SEA process.

4.3 Assessment of reasonable alternatives for the Neighbourhood Plan

A key element of the SEA process is the appraisal of 'reasonable alternatives' for the HNP. The SEA Regulations⁷ are not prescriptive as to what constitutes a reasonable alternative, stating only that the Environmental Report should present an appraisal of the '*plan and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan*'.

The following sections therefore describe how the SEA process to date has informed the development strategy for the Neighbourhood Plan area. Specifically, this chapter explains how the HNP's plan policies TC4, TC7/H3 have been shaped through considering alternative sites for the location of specialist housing and town centre redevelopment.

The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared in the conjunction with the provisions of the Cannock Chase Local Plan. As such it has been prepared in the context of the housing and employment targets in the Core Strategy (2014), and the emerging Local Plan Part 2; which is looking at potential site allocations and planning standards.

⁷ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

4.3.1 Alternative locations for town centre development

Policies TC4 identifies the areas of land between Market Street, Victoria Street and off Cardigan Place as important locations for re-development. Given that one of the potential uses on these sites could be for housing and / or tourist accommodation, it is appropriate to explore whether there are alternative sites that such uses could be promoted.

A key objective of policy TC4 is to make use of vacant / underused land adjoining the town centre. In this respect, the Town Council considers that there are no other potential development sites that could be promoted as alternatives in the town centre.

Alternative sites for housing delivery within the wider Plan area would not fulfil the objective of town centre redevelopment, and are therefore not considered to be reasonable alternatives.

4.3.2 Alternative locations for specialist housing

Policies TC7 / H3 involve the identification of a site for residential development suitable for the elderly. The policy specifically focuses on this kind of housing, as it is identified as a local issue. In exploring potential alternatives for such housing development, the focus is therefore on identifying reasonable alternatives for the delivery of this type of housing, rather than the delivery of housing *per se*.

The Cannock Chase Local Plan Part 2 will allocate sites to ensure that local housing needs / targets are met. As part of the plan preparation process the Council is looking at a range of site options for housing delivery more generally within the Hednesford Parish. It is not considered necessary to assess these site options in the context of the HNP, as this would lead to duplication, and does not focus on the issue of accommodation for the elderly.

There are a number of sites in the Parish that the Town Council considered when exploring potential locations for specialist housing for elderly. These are outlined below.

- C31 McGhie Street – The Town Council consider this to be an unreasonable site option as it only has a site capacity of 12.
- C176 Rawnsley Road – This site is part of the current green space network and adjoins the Hednesford Hills SSSI. The District Council has put this in a list of excluded sites in the 2016, SHLAA, and its potential capacity of 26 is not being counted towards the housing targets.

C63 – (427-433 and 437-445) Cannock Road – This site (as part of a larger site) was identified as a potentially suitable site because it has good access to the range of services and facilities needed by the elderly, and is of sufficient size to accommodate a viable scheme.

Three sites (listed below) are in locations that do not have ideal access to facilities needed by the elderly. However, they do have good public transport access. Whilst the Town Council considered that these sites would be more suitable for a mix of housing (including provision for bungalows), it was seen as appropriate to consider these sites as reasonable alternatives, to test their performance against a range of environmental factors.

- C80 Keys Park
- C220(a) Oaklands Business Park
- C220 (b) Image Business Park

The four reasonable site options were appraised using the site appraisal criteria set out in the SEA Scoping Report. The findings are summarised below, with more detail included within a site proforma for each site (see Appendix B).

SEA Objective	C80 Keys Park	C220(a) Oaklands Business Park	C220 (b) Image Business Park	C63 (427-433 and 437-445) Cannock Road
1. Biodiversity	Yellow	Grey	Grey	Grey
2. Climate change mitigation	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
3. Climate change resilience	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
4. A) <i>Heritage</i>	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
B) <i>Landscape</i>	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
5. Water quality.	Grey	Grey	Grey	Yellow
6. Housing	Green	Green	Green	Green
7. A) <i>Access to greenspace</i>	Green	Green	Green	Green
B) <i>Access to a GP surgery</i>	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green
8. A) <i>Proximity to food shop</i>	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green
B) <i>Proximity to primary school</i>	Grey	Red	Red	Green
C) <i>Proximity to bus/train</i>	Green	Green	Green	Green

Summary of SA findings

The site assessment demonstrates that each of the site options performs broadly the same with regards to the majority of criteria. Each is unlikely to have an effect on climate change, heritage or landscape. However, accessibility varies between the sites, with C43 performing the most favourably compared to each of the alternatives regarding access to a GP and a food shop. This site is the only option that falls within the groundwater protection zone though, which would need consideration during construction activities.

Outline reasons for selecting the preferred site option

The preferred site is identified at TC7. This is a good location for housing for the elderly as it is on the edge of the town centre with easy walking distance to health facilities, shopping, food and drink in the town centre, and public transport (bus and rail). The site is also large enough to accommodate a development likely to be viable for developers of this type of scheme (having regard to comparable sites/developments in other parts of the District and adjoining LPAs).

No other site in and around the town centre possess all these benefits. The other large SHLAA sites only have one main sustainability benefit which is access to bus services. The main town centre development site between Market Street and Victoria Street are considered to be more appropriate for mixed-uses which could include housing but also other town centre facilities, including potentially a site for a market (the NPPF supports the reintroduction of markets on suitable town centre sites). The other town centre site on Cardigan Place is too small for a specialist retirement scheme.

4.4 Current approach in the Neighbourhood Plan and the development of Neighbourhood Plan policies

The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate new housing or employment provision. Instead it seeks to shape the location of development in the Neighbourhood Plan area by identifying sites that are suitable for town centre redevelopment, specialist housing delivery and car parking enhancement. This is supported by the introduction of a range of Neighbourhood Plan policies which have been

designed to shape development in the Neighbourhood Plan area and protect features of special local importance.

To support the implementation of the vision for the Neighbourhood Plan, the current version of the HNP puts forward fifteen policies to guide development in the Neighbourhood Plan area. The policies, which were developed following extensive community consultation and evidence gathering, are as follows:

Table 4.1: Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan draft Policies

Town Centre

TC1	Market Street area of special local character
TC2	Appropriate ground floor level uses
TC3	Enhancement of Market Street through developer contributions
TC4	Town centre improvement proposals
TC5	Car park to the rear of the Co-Op
TC6	Station Car Park
TC7	Proposed residential accommodation for the elderly

Public rights of way

ROW1	Improvements to PROW
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Open Spaces

OS1	Open spaces
-----	-------------

Built environment

BE1	Locally important buildings
BE2	Area of special local character

Housing development

H1	Bungalows on major housing sites
H2	Bungalows on small housing sites
H3	Retirement developments

Industrial / business parks

EMP1	Redevelopment of employment areas
------	-----------------------------------

5. What are the appraisal findings at this current stage?

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the Regulation 14 version of the HNP.

5.2 Approach to the appraisal

The appraisal is structured under each of the SEA Objectives that are set out in the SEA Framework.

For each theme 'significant effects' of the current version of the plan on the baseline are predicted and evaluated. Account is taken of the criteria presented within Schedule 2 of the Regulations.⁸ So, for example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of effects as far as possible. These effect 'characteristics' are described within the assessment as appropriate.

Every effort is made to identify / evaluate effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the high level nature of the plan. The ability to predict effects accurately is also limited by understanding of the baseline and the nature of future planning applications. Because of the uncertainties involved, there is a need to exercise caution when identifying and evaluating significant effects and ensure all assumptions are explained. In many instances it is not possible to predict significant effects, but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) in more general terms.

5.3 SEA Objective 1: Biodiversity

The Plan area is within close proximity to Cannock Chase SAC and Hednesford Hills Local Nature Reserve. However, sites allocated for development in the Plan do not have a direct impact pathway to these designated sites, and the overall level of growth being proposed is no higher than what is in the emerging Cannock Chase Local Plan. Consequently, a neutral effect on biodiversity is predicted as a result of policies TC4 and TC7.

Policy ROW1 encourages improved access to Cannock Chase AONB, which in some locations overlap with areas of biodiversity value in the Plan area. This could increase recreational pressure on wildlife. However, any improvements to access would be likely to use appropriate routes, and would be planned by multiple responsible organisation(s). Improved access would therefore be predicted to have mostly neutral effects upon biodiversity.

Some positive effects could be generated by policy OS1, which states that open spaces that function as wildlife corridors will be maintained and enhanced.

Overall, the plan is predicted to have a **neutral effect** on biodiversity. Some potential effects (both positive and negative) are identified above, but these are small scale.

5.4 SEA Objective 2: Climate change mitigation

Several of the Plan policies promote improved access to services, and the use of sustainable modes of travel. In particular, Policy TC4 seeks to improve cycle and pedestrian links in the town centre, whilst Policy ROW1 ought to encourage greater levels of walking in the access of local green and open space. Whilst these are positive trends, it is unlikely that there would be a major effect in terms of a reduction in emissions associated with travel. Therefore, the effects are not predicted to be significant.

Whilst the Plan does seek to improve car parking provision, it is not thought likely that this would change patterns of travel to the detriment of climate change objectives. The number of new spaces

⁸ *Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*

created would not be substantial, and rather than encouraging significantly more car-based travel; it would help to better manage existing problems with parking.

None of the plan policies are considered likely to have an effect on climate change through the design of new buildings. Issues relating to the sustainability of design are not covered by national standards and Local Plan policies.

Overall, the Plan has a **neutral effect** with regards to climate change mitigation.

5.5 SEA Objective 3: Climate change resilience

The policies that allocate land for development (e.g. TC4, H3) would not lead to significant effects upon flood risk. None of these sites are at risk of flooding, nor would their development be likely to create flood risk issues downstream.

With regards to improved resilience to other effects of climate change (hotter summers for example), policy OS1 is the only policy that is realistically likely to have effects. Improvements to open space and rights of way could include the enhancement of green infrastructure links. Increased tree cover, and links between areas of open green space could help with resilience to heat by providing shade. The scale and nature of improvements likely to be achieved however are not great, and so effects are not predicted to be significant.

Overall, the Plan has a **neutral effect** with regards to climate change resilience

5.6 SEA Objective 4: Built and natural environment

A number of Plan policies provide locally specific context and protection to the character of the built and natural environment. Notably, policy BE1 is predicted to have a positive effect on the built environment by identifying a local list of buildings with special character that are afforded greater protection from extensions and alterations. The policy could perhaps also mention the setting of the buildings, so that other changes in the area are sympathetic in design.

Further protection should be achieved for built heritage through policy BE2 which establishes an area of special local character.

In addition to these built environment policies, policy OS1 will give greater protection for locally important open space, which will also contribute to the retention of local character.

With regards to enhancement, TC4 should help to encourage regeneration of town centre sites that are not currently contributing positively to the town centre character. This could lead to enhancements in the appearance and function of the built environment. Other aesthetic improvements are encouraged through TC5 and TC6, which should lead to more attractive car parking facilities – which could also help to reduce on street parking.

Overall, the Plan is predicted to have a **significant positive effect** on the built and natural environment as it strengthens the existing policy context, particularly with regards to locally important buildings and features.

5.7 SEA Objective 5: Ground and surface water quality

The plan does not allocate land in areas that fall within groundwater protection zones. It is therefore considered unlikely that there would be significant effects on ground or surface water quality.

Overall, the Plan has a **neutral effect** with regards to water quality.

5.8 SEA Objective 6: Housing

The Plan does not set a housing target, and will not seek to 'go beyond' the target set out in the Cannock Chase Local Plan. However, the Plan does identify several locations that may be suitable for residential development and will be encouraged as such (Policy TC4). The Plan also allocates a specific site for the delivery of residential development suitable for the elderly (Policy TC7 / Policy H3). These policies are predicted to have a positive effect in terms of providing specific housing needs in the Plan area.

Policies H1 and H2 should also lead to an increase in the provision of bungalows, which ought to be suitable for use by a range of community groups. These policies would further add to the positive effects discussed above, by providing an increased number of dwellings that are suitably designed and located in accessible locations.

Given that there is an identified need for such accommodation in the plan area, these policies provide a positive framework for tackling this issue, and ought to lead to improvements on the baseline position. It is not considered likely that such requirements would have adverse effects on housing delivery, as the policies are flexible with regards to viability.

Overall, the Plan is predicted to have a **significant positive effect** with regards to housing provision.

5.9 SEA Objective 7: Health and wellbeing

The town centre policies ought to contribute to a more attractive environment for residents to enjoy, which is beneficial for wellbeing. The improvement of pedestrian and cycle links should also help to encourage active travel and easier access to the countryside.

Other Plan policies also seek to improve access to open space (ROW1), and to protect important community greenspace (OS1), which can contribute to wellbeing.

The intention to support accommodation for the elderly should also have a positive effect on the health of this social group.

These factors are all positive, and will help to contribute to health and wellbeing. However, the effects are unlikely to be significant on the baseline position regarding health.

Overall the Plan is predicted to have a **positive effect** (not significant) with regards to health and wellbeing.

5.10 SEA Objective 8: Travel and transport

Town centre policy TC4 provides the opportunity to improve pedestrian links in the town centre, particularly if development can create an attractive route between Hednesford Park, Tesco and the town centre. This would benefit all users of the town centre.

Policy ROW1 also seeks to improve accessibility to surrounding areas of the countryside, though it is unclear whether this would improve access to the town centre too.

TC5 and TC6 would both lead to improvements in car parking facilities in the town centre. This could be perceived as promoting car travel. However, the car parking is primarily focused upon provision for commuters; which could encourage / enable the use of trains rather than longer distance car travel. Overall, the improvement of town centre parking for this purpose ought to be positive for transport, though the numbers of people involved would be relatively small scale.

The identification of land for potential residential development (TC4 and TC7), is within areas that have good access to existing services and facilities. The plan is therefore unlikely to contribute to congestion or accessibility issues.

Overall, have a **positive effect** (not significant) with regards to travel and transport.

5.11 Conclusions at this current stage

5.11.1 Potential significant effects

The plan is predicted to have neutral effects with regards to biodiversity, climate change mitigation and resilience, and ground and surface water quality.

Positive effects are generated with regards to transport and travel, as the plan will lead to an improvement in car parking arrangements, as well as improving town centre pedestrian routes and access to open space. Protection of local green space, and improved access to open space should also be positive for health and wellbeing; though the effects on the baseline position would not be significant.

Significant positive effects are predicted in relation to housing provision, as a location for specialist housing is identified, as well as introducing policies that seek to tackle the demand for bungalows in the area.

There is also a **significant positive effect** predicted with regards to the built environment, as the Plan introduces greater recognition of the importance of local buildings, special character areas, and also seeks to support redevelopment of two town centre sites.

No negative effects have been predicted, which reflects the proactive nature of the draft Plan with regard to environmental factors.

5.12 Recommendations at this current stage

No mitigation measures have been identified, which is not surprising given that there are no negative effects identified.

The Plan has been proactively prepared with regards to the protection of local greenspace, promotion of walking and cycling, and town centre redevelopment. No further enhancement measures have been identified through the SEA process.

5.13 Monitoring

There is a requirement to present measures that could be used to monitor the effects of the Plan identified through the SEA. It is particularly important to monitor effects that are predicted to be significant, whether this be positive or negative. Monitoring helps to track whether the effects turn-out as expected, and to identify any unexpected effects.

Two significant effects have been predicted in the SEA. Whilst these are both positive, it is still important to monitor whether the effects that occur in reality are as positive as expected. Potentially suitable indicators are identified below for each of the significant effects.

Significant effects	Monitoring measures
A significant positive effect is predicted relating to the provision of specialist housing, and for delivery of a greater number of bungalows on development sites.	% of bungalows secured in accordance with policies H1 and H2. Delivery of a retirement complex in accordance with H3/TC7.
There is also a significant positive effect predicted with regards to the built environment, as the Plan introduces greater recognition of the importance of local buildings, special character areas, and also seeks to support redevelopment of two town centre sites.	Loss of locally important buildings % of developments granted in line with policy. Progress on redevelopment of town centre sites

At this stage, the monitoring measures are not 'decided'; rather they are suggested as potentially suitable indicators.

6. What are the next steps?

Subsequent to the current consultation on the Regulation 14 version of the HNP, the draft plan will be updated to reflect comments received. This Environmental Report will be updated to reflect the changes made to the plan.

The HNP will then be submitted to the Local Planning Authority, Cannock Chase, for its consideration with the updated Environmental Report. Cannock Chase Council will consider whether the plan is suitable to go forward to Independent Examination in terms of the HNP meeting legal requirements and its compatibility with the Local Plan.

Subject to Cannock Chase Council's agreement, the HNP will then be subject to independent examination. The Examiner will consider whether the plan is appropriate having regard to national policy and whether it is in general conformity with the Cannock Chase Local Plan.

The Examiner will be able to recommend that the HNP is put forward for a referendum, or that it should be modified or that the proposal should be refused. Cannock Chase will then decide what should be done in light of the Examiner's report. Where the report recommends modifications to the plan, Cannock Chase Council will invite the HNP Steering Group to make modifications to the plan, which will be reflected in an updated Environmental Report. Where the Examiner's Report recommends that the proposal is to be refused, Cannock Chase will do so.

Where the examination is favourable, the HNP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Cannock Chase Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the plan, then it will be passed to Cannock Chase with a request it is 'made'. Once 'made', the HNP will become part of the Development Plan.

Appendix A - Scoping report

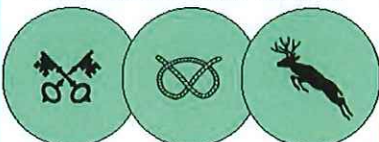
*Hednesford
Neighbourhood Plan:
Strategic Environmental
Assessment*

Scoping Report

September 2016

For Hednesford Town Council

Hednesford Town Council



Gateway to the Chase

Quality information

Document name	Prepared for	Prepared by	Date	Reviewed by
SEA Scoping Report for the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan	Hednesford Town Council	Matthew Stopforth Planning Consultant	21 st July, 2016	Ian McCluskey Senior Consultant

Revision history

Revision	Revision date	Details	Name	Position
1	4 th August 2016	Draft report for review	Ian McCluskey	Senior Consultant
2	18 th August 2016	Final Report for client review	Ian McCluskey	Senior Consultant
3	24 th August	Sign-off	Alex White	Associate Director
4	29 th October	Revised Report	Ian McCluskey	Senior Consultant

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Acronyms

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
AQMA	Air Quality Management Area
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
DPD	Development Plan Document
EU	European Union
GhG	Greenhouse gas emissions
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
LSOA	Lower Super Output Area
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
NEWP	Natural Environment White Paper
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NPPG	National Planning Policy Guidance
NVZ	Nitrate Vulnerable Zone
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SPZ	Groundwater Source Protection Zone
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SuDS	Sustainable drainage systems
UKCP	UK Climate Projections
WFD	Water Framework Directive

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan ('The Plan') is currently being prepared as a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Localism Act (2012). The Plan, which covers Hednesford Parish in Cannock Chase, is being prepared in the context of the Cannock Chase Core Strategy. It is anticipated that the Neighbourhood Plan will be submitted to the Council in early 2017.

The Lead Authority Cannock Chase Council has determined that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) needs to be undertaken for the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan. As a result, the Plan steering group has sought technical support, which is available through Locality (in collaboration with AECOM) to help qualifying Neighbourhood Groups to prepare a sound Neighbourhood Plan. Undertaking SEA is one of the support packages offered by Locality and delivered by AECOM.

This document is a scoping report, which represents outputs from the early stages of SEA that have been undertaken alongside the emerging Plan.

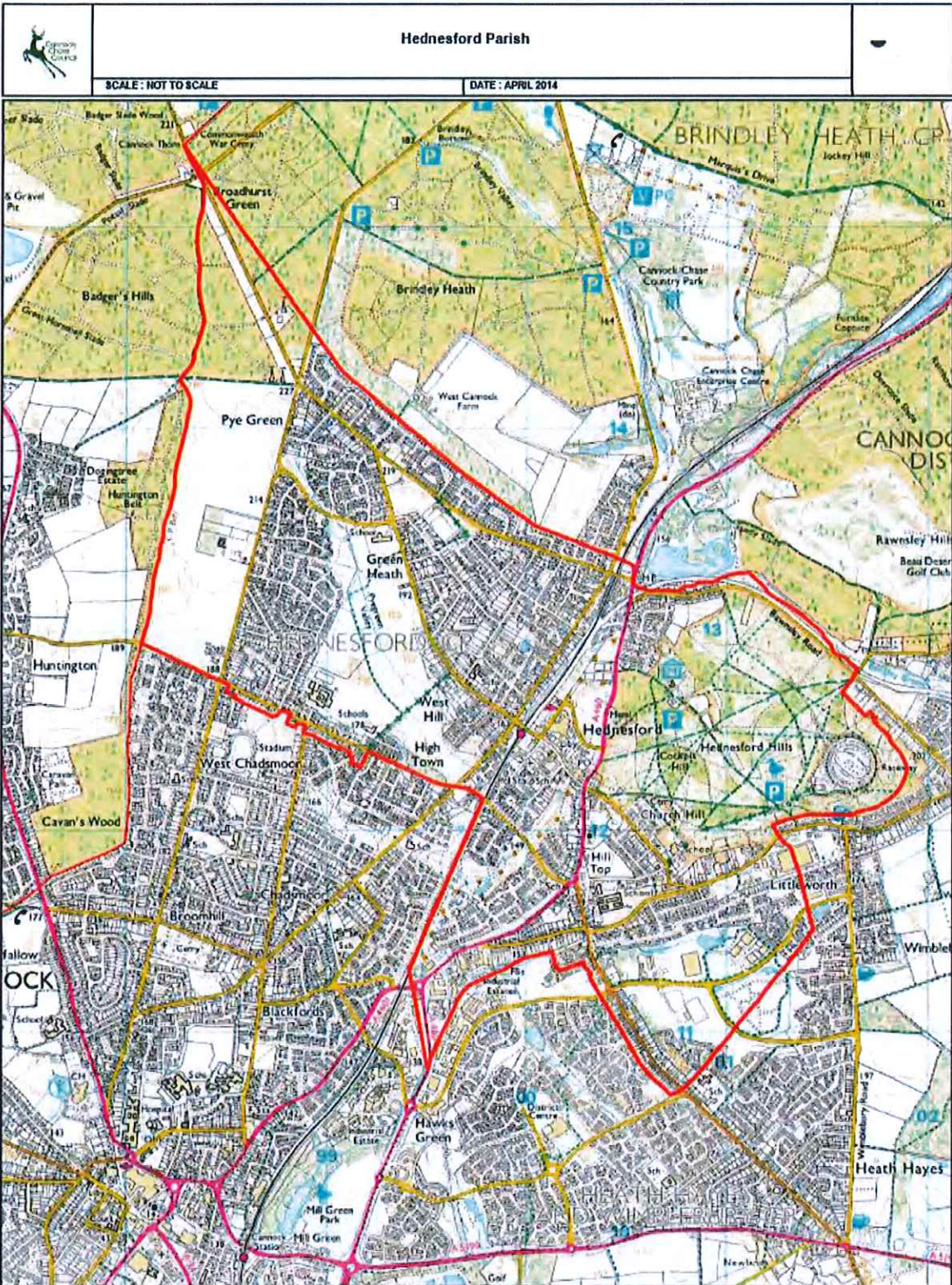
Key information relating to the Neighbourhood Plan is presented in Table 1.1.



Table 1.1: Key facts relating to the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan

Name of Responsible Authority	Cannock Chase Council
Title of Plan	Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan
Purpose	The Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared as a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The plan will be in conformity with the Cannock Chase Core Strategy.
Timescale	To 2028
Area covered by the plan	Hednesford Parish. (As shown in Figure 1.1)
Summary of content	The Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan will set out a vision, strategy and range of policies for the plan area.
Plan contact point	Peter Harrison, Town Council Manager Email address: peter.harrison@hednesford-tc.gov.uk

Figure 1.1: The Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan Area



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1.2 Relationship of the Hednesford Neighbourhood Plan with the Cannock Chase Local Plan

Due to the Neighbourhood Area's location within Cannock Chase, this Plan is being prepared in the context of Cannock Chase.¹

The Cannock Chase Local Plan (Part 1) 2014 was adopted in June 2014. This contains the Core Strategy and the Rugeley Town Centre Area Action Plan. It sets out a framework for how future development across Cannock Chase will be planned and delivered in the period to 2028.

Neighbourhood plans will form part of the development plan for Cannock Chase, alongside, but not as a replacement for the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy states in Policy CP4 that *"Increased opportunities are available for community and neighbourhood planning processes to be proposed by town and parish councils or 'neighbourhood forums' agreed by the Council as Local Planning Authority."*

Neighbourhood plans are required to be in conformity with the Core Strategy and can develop policies and proposals to address local place-based issues. In this way it is intended for the Core Strategy to provide a clear overall strategic direction for development in Cannock Chase, whilst enabling finer detail to be determined through the neighbourhood planning process where appropriate.

1.3 SEA Explained

The Plan has been screened in by Cannock Chase Council and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group as requiring a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the effects of an emerging plan, and potential alternatives in terms of key environmental issues. The aim of SEA is to inform and influence the plan-making process with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and recommending enhancements.

SEA is undertaken to address the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations) which transpose into national law the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive². The Plan has been determined to require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. To meet this requirement, the Plan is undergoing an SEA process which incorporates the requirements of the SEA Directive.

Two key procedural requirements of the SEA Directive are that:

- 1) A report (the 'Environmental Report') is published for consultation alongside the Draft Plan that presents an appraisal of the Draft Plan (i.e. discusses 'likely significant effects' that would result from plan implementation) and reasonable alternatives; and
- 2) When deciding on 'the scope and level of detail of the information' which must be included in the Environmental Report there is a consultation with nationally designated authorities concerned with environmental issues.

This 'Scoping Report' is concerned with (2) above. It presents a suggested scope for the SEA so that the nationally designated authorities (which, in England, are Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency) can provide timely comment.

¹ Cannock Chase Council (June 2014) Cannock Chase Core Strategy
<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/wiltshirecorestrategy.htm>

² Directive 2001/42/EC

1.4 SEA 'scoping' explained

Establishing the scope of the SEA presented in this report has involved the following steps:

- 1) Exploring the environmental context for the SEA, i.e. reviewing high level messages (e.g. from government departments and agencies in particular) with a view to gaining an understanding of broadly what the SEA needs to focus on.
- 2) Establishing the baseline for the SEA, i.e. the current and projected baseline in the area in the absence of the Plan, in order to help identify the plan's likely significant effects.
- 3) Identifying particular problems or opportunities ('issues') that should be a particular focus of the SEA (and those which should not)
- 4) Developing a SEA Framework comprising objectives and appraisal questions on the basis of these issues which can then be used to appraise the draft plan.

1.5 Structure of this report

The outcomes of the scoping exercise (introduced through steps 1–4 above) have been presented under a series of broad environmental themes, as follows:

- Air quality
- Biodiversity
- Climatic factors (including flood risk)
- Historic environment and landscape
- Land, soil and water resources
- Population and community
- Health and wellbeing
- Transportation

The selected environmental themes incorporate the 'SEA topics' suggested by Annex I(f) of the SEA Directive³. These were refined to reflect a broad understanding of the anticipated scope of plan effects (drawing from the screening opinion and local knowledge).

It is intended that presentation of the scoping information under these SEA topics will enable the reader to easily locate the information of greatest interest to them.

Each SEA topic is given a chapter in this report (Chapters 2 to 9) setting out the following:

- The policy context
- Baseline summary
- Key headline issues
- Scoping outcome

To demonstrate a clear trail of how the SEA objectives have been identified each SEA topic Chapter (which is scoped into the SEA) concludes with suggested objectives and supporting criteria for inclusion in the SA Framework.

Chapter 10 then sets out the proposed SEA Appraisal Framework, which draws upon the key issues identified within Chapters 2-9.

³ The SEA Directive is 'of a procedural nature' (para 9 of the Directive preamble) and does not set out to prescribe particular issues that should and should not be a focus, beyond requiring a focus on 'the environment, **including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors**' [our emphasis]

2 Air Quality

Focus of theme:

- Sources of air pollution
- Air quality hotspots

2.1 Policy context

Key messages from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) include:

- 'Planning policies should sustain compliance with and contribute towards EU limit values or national objectives for pollutants, taking into account the presence of Air Quality Management Areas and the cumulative impacts on air quality from individual sites in local areas. Planning decisions should ensure that any new development in Air Quality Management Areas is consistent with the local air quality action plan'.
- New and existing developments should be prevented from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of air pollution.

In terms of the local context, Cannock Chase Council is required to monitor air quality across the West Midlands, report regularly to Defra and take action where nationally set levels are likely to be exceeded. Monitoring is undertaken to assess levels of nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, ozone, benzene and particulates. Where exceedances exist, areas are declared as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and local authorities are required to produce an Action Plan to improve air quality in the area.

Noise pollution has been considered under the Health and Wellbeing theme (**Chapter 8**).

2.2 Baseline summary

Summary of current baseline

Air quality is generally good, with no significant issues. No locations in the Neighbourhood Area are at risk of exceedances of air pollutant levels, although the 2014 Air Quality Report stated that re-development of Hednesford town centre, which includes extra retail space and a supermarket, has the potential to alter traffic flows on local roads.

As a result of this, there was one site monitored (via diffusion tube) in 2015 near to residential premises/ traffic light junction on Rugeley Road, Hednesford. This was to monitor potential air quality implications of the Hednesford town centre improvements, and increased attraction for trade. The first full year's data convincingly shows that there is no likely exceedance of air quality objectives⁴.

⁴ Cannock Chase Council (2015) Draft Air Quality Updating and Screening Assessment [online] at https://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/usa_2015.pdf

Summary of future baseline

Whilst no significant air quality issues currently exist in the Neighbourhood Area, continued new housing and employment provision in the Neighbourhood Area has the potential to create adverse effects on air quality through increasing traffic flows and associated levels of pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide. Areas of particular sensitivity to increased traffic flows are likely to be around the new development in Hednesford. Any increases may however be offset in part by factors such as measures implemented through the Local Transport Plan to encourage modal shift from the private car and the improved fuel economy and efficiency of vehicles.

2.3 Key headline issues

- The redevelopment of Hednesford Town Centre is a local priority.
- There is likely to be continued reliance on the car to access services, jobs and facilities.

2.4 Scoping outcome

The Neighborhood Plan will not generate significantly more trips by car than would be the case in the absence of the Plan. The level of housing development is consistent with that set out in the Core Strategy, and no employment sites are being promoted through the Neighborhood Plan. Therefore, the potential to generate increased particulates and nitrogen dioxide from car travel is limited.

Combined with the absence of general or point specific air quality issues in the Plan area or adjoining parishes, air quality has been **SCOPED OUT** of this SEA. This means that the plan will not be assessed for its performance against air quality objectives (given that no issues or opportunities are expected to arise through the Hednesford Plan).

3 Biodiversity

Focus of theme:

- Nature conservation designations
- Habitats and species
- Geodiversity

3.1 Policy context

At the European level, the EU Biodiversity Strategy⁵ was adopted in May 2011 in order to deliver an established new Europe-wide target to *'halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020'*.

Key messages from the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) include:

- Contribute to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity by minimising impacts and achieving net gains in biodiversity wherever possible.
- Promote the 'preservation, restoration and recreation of priority habitats, ecological networks' and the 'protection and recovery of priority species'. Plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries.
- Set criteria based policies for the protection of internationally, nationally and locally designated sites, giving weight to their importance not just individually but as a part of a wider ecological network.
- Take account of the effects of climate change in the long term. Adopt proactive strategies to adaptation and manage risks through adaptation measures including green infrastructure (i.e. 'a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities').
- Plan positively planning for 'green infrastructure' as part of planning for 'ecological networks'.
- High quality open spaces should be protected or their loss mitigated, unless a lack of need is established.

The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP)⁶ sets out the importance of a healthy, functioning natural environment to sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal well-being. It was in part a response to the UK's failure to halt and reverse the decline in biodiversity by 2010 and it signalled a move away from the traditional approach of protecting biodiversity in nature reserves to adopting a landscape approach to protecting and enhancing biodiversity. The NEWP also aims to create a green economy in which economic growth and the health of our natural resources sustain each other and markets, business and Government better reflect the value of nature. It includes commitments to:

- Halt biodiversity loss, support functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks by 2020;

⁵ European Commission (2011) Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 [online] available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/pdf/2020/1_EN_ACT_part1_v7%5b1%5d.pdf

⁶ Defra (2012) The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (Natural Environment White Paper) [online] available at: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

- Establish a new voluntary approach to biodiversity offsetting to be tested in pilot areas;
- Enable partnerships of local authorities, local communities and landowners, the private sector and conservation organisations to establish new Nature Improvement Areas; and
- Address barriers to using green infrastructure to promote sustainable growth.

There is an Ecosystem Action Plan for Cannock Chase Heaths which is adjacent to the Neighbourhood Plan Area. Cannock Chase includes the largest surviving area of lowland heathland in Central England as well as extensive areas of native woodland, historic parkland, coniferous plantations, wetlands, mixed agriculture and mineral extraction sites. The Action Plan includes three priorities for the area:

- It is important to consider that part of this area is designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- When the development of an area will have a negative impact on semi-natural habitats, and no other solution is available, mitigation must ensure the creation of sites provides a real and positive contribution to the area.
- Urban developments must create new areas within existing sites that are of sufficient quality and of appropriate type to draw people away from current sensitive sites.

3.2 Baseline summary

Summary of current baseline

Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation

The Cannock Chase SAC designation includes the main areas of heathland within Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

A Cannock Chase SAC Partnership was formed of relevant authorities and evidence commissioned by this Partnership suggests that the planned level of growth within a 15 kilometre radius of the Cannock Chase SAC is likely to have a significant effect on the designated site. The greater part of this effect would arise from development within a 0-8km zone (as set out in Map 1) as it has been determined through research that this zone would contribute the most visitors to the SAC2.

The Cannock Chase SAC Partnership has developed and is implementing a developer contributions scheme to fund a package of access management measures to offset the impact of development identified within the Local Plan policies of the planning authorities within the 0-15km Zone of Influence.

Other types of development and windfall housing sites not included in the calculations within the aforementioned Cannock Chase Council's adopted 'Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Guidance to Mitigate the Impact of New Residential Development' have the potential to impact upon the SAC and these will need to be assessed and mitigation provided on an individual basis through discussions with Natural England and/or Cannock Chase Council as the relevant local authority.

On the basis of the mitigation arrangements, an adverse effect on the integrity of Cannock Chase SAC arising from the residential development set out in the adopted Cannock Chase Local Plan Part 1 has been ruled out within the Appropriate Assessment for this site.

Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths

The Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths has been nationally designated as part of the River Avon System Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The citation for the SSSI states:

"Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI is nationally important for its wet and dry lowland heath, fens (including habitats often referred to as mires and swamps) and oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) standing open water habitats, and for its populations of two nationally scarce vascular plant species: floating water-plantain Luronium natans (listed in Schedule 8 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended) and round-leaved wintergreen Pyrola rotundifolia (a regional rarity). According to a site condition assessment of the SSSI undertaken by Natural England in April 2009, the SSSI unit within the Neighbourhood Area (Upper Nadder) is 'Unfavourable- No change' due water pollution and invasive species".⁷

Local Nature Reserve

The Neighbourhood Plan Area includes the Hednesford Hills Common Local Nature Reserve. This large area of dry heath/acid grassland is an internationally and nationally important habitat. Hednesford Hills is characteristic of Cannock Chase heathland, sharing geology and soil type, with dry dwarf shrub heath, bilberry, cowberry and acid grassland species.

Landscape Biodiversity Areas

As highlighted in Figure 3.1, adjacent to the Neighbourhood Plan Area is the Cannock Chase Heaths Biodiversity Area.

Priority Habitats

The Neighbourhood Plan area contains Priority Habitat areas of deciduous woodland.

Protected Species

There are likely to be numerous protected species present in the Neighbourhood Area, including those that have European protection, species on the NERC Act (2006) Section 41, and those listed through the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

These include numerous species of bat, butterflies, moths, amphibians and birds; including prominent species such as the Common Dormouse, Greater Horseshoe Bat, Pipistrelle and Peregrine.

Summary of future baseline

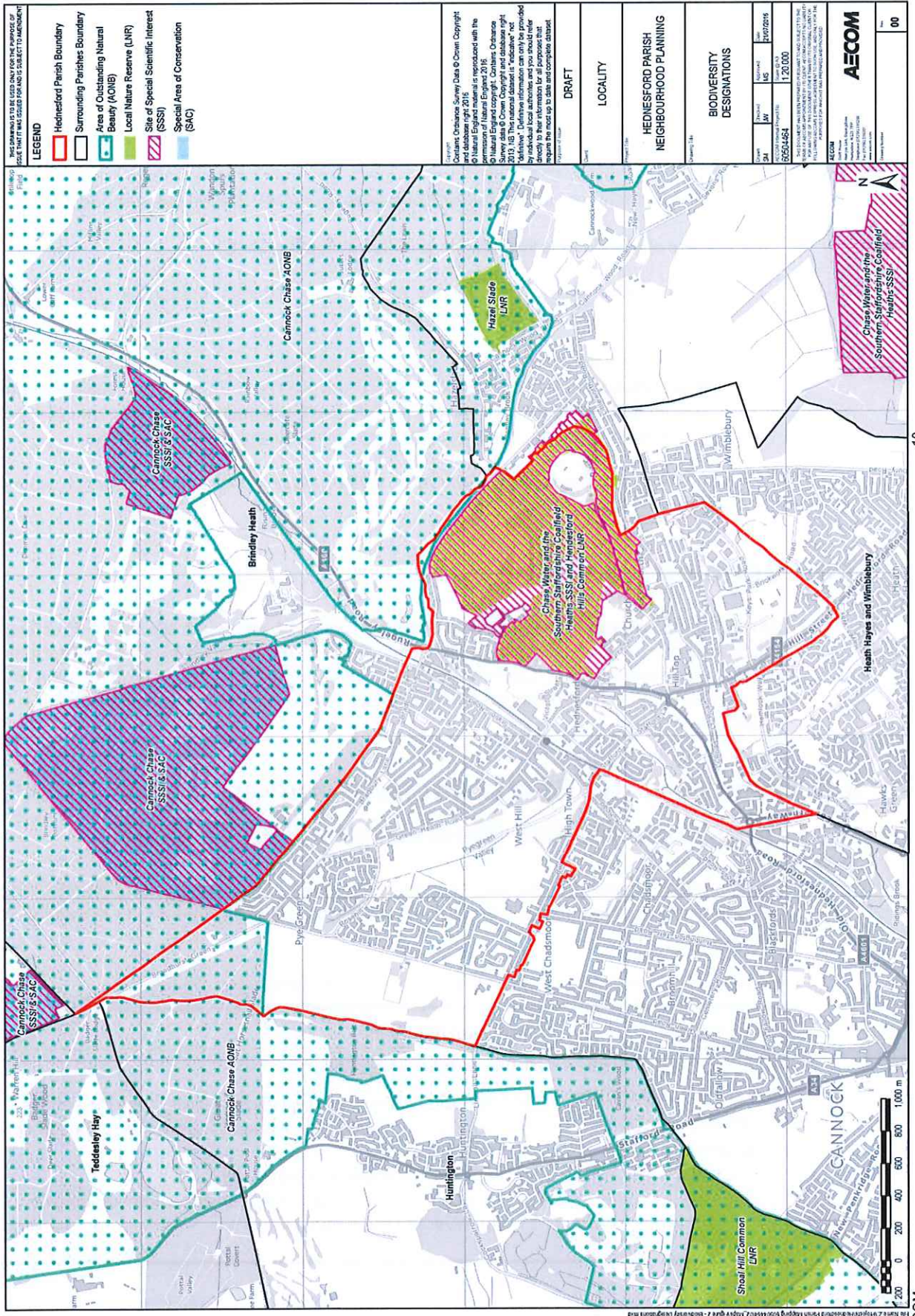
Habitats and species have the potential to come under increasing pressures from housing and employment land provision in the Neighbourhood Area. However, the SA and HRA accompanying the Cannock Chase Core Strategy demonstrate that significant effects on these assets are not likely to occur under the level of planned housing which includes strategic sites to the north west of the Plan area.

Climate change also has the potential to lead to changes in the distribution and abundance of species and changes to the composition and character of habitats.

Benefits for biodiversity have the potential to arise from the increasing integration of biodiversity considerations within forward planning and efforts to improve green infrastructure networks locally and sub-regionally.

⁷ SSSI citation http://www.sssi.naturalengland.org.uk/citation/citation_photo/2000693.pdf

Figure 3.1: Map of Hednesford Biodiversity Designations



3.3 Key headline issues

- Internationally and nationally designated nature conservation sites are present in the Neighbourhood Area.
- Chasewater and the Southern Staffordshire Coalfield Heaths SSSI is within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- Habitats for numerous Protected Species are present in the Neighbourhood Area.
- There are Deciduous Woodlands, priority habitats present.
- The integrity of the Biodiversity Action Plan Habitats present in and around the Neighbourhood Area should be supported.
- Features of biodiversity value such as trees, hedgerows, waterways and meadows should be protected from the impacts of future development and where possible enhanced. Their integrity should also be supported through improved ecological connections in the area, including through the provision of green infrastructure enhancements.
- The Neighbourhood Plan Area has a rich geodiversity resource, which should be protected and enhanced.

3.4 Scoping outcome

The SEA topic 'Biodiversity has been **SCOPED IN** to the SEA. Although significant effects are not anticipated due to proposed level of housing, there is potential for localised effects at sites identified for development. It will be important to ensure that species do not rely upon or make use of habitats outside of designated habitat areas. There may also be opportunities to enhance ecological networks.

3.5 What are the SEA objectives and appraisal questions for the Biodiversity SEA theme?

The SEA topic 'biodiversity' has been scoped in to the SEA. Table 3.1 presents the SEA objective and appraisal questions that will be used to assess the Neighbourhood Plan in relation to this theme.

Table 3.1: SEA Framework of objectives and assessment questions: Biodiversity

SEA objective	Supporting questions
Protect and enhance the function and connectivity of biodiversity habitats and species.	Will the option/proposal help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support connections between habitats in the Plan area? • Support continued improvements to the designated sites in the Plan area? • Achieve a net gain in biodiversity? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity?