

Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report to accompany Regulation 14
consultation

March 2019

Quality information

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Non-Technical Summary

What is strategic environmental assessment?

A strategic environmental assessment has been undertaken to inform the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan (WNP). 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 Wooler Neighbourhood Plan?

The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) presents a plan for the administrative area of Wooler Parish for the period to 2036. Prepared to be in conformity with the emerging Northumberland 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, housing, open space, recreation, accessibility and housing.

Purpose of the Environmental Report

The Environmental Report, which accompanies the current consultation on the WNP, is the second document to be produced as part of the SEA process. The first document was the SEA Scoping Report (December 2018), 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 WNP 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 WNP 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 WNP has been assessed;
- The appraisal of alternative approaches for the WNP;
- The likely significant environmental effects of the WNP;
- The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects as a result of the WNP; 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 Change - **Scoped in**
- Landscape and Historic Environment – **Scoped in**
- Land, soil and water resources – Water quality, Land and soil - **Scoped in**
- Land, soil and water resources – Waste and recycling - **Scoped out**
- Population and community – **Scoped in**
- Health and safety – **Scoped in**
- Transportation – **Scoped in**

Assessment of alternative approaches for the WNP

The Plan proposes to allocate four sites for housing development. There is one site allocated for employment land and one other site allocated for community/recreational use. These sites were appraised as part of a site selection process. A summary of the site performance and rationale for selection is provided below.

Common to each site is the fact that they are available and development is likely to come forward.

Site name	Rationale
Policy 4.1 (site 1) – Land at the former First School Burnhouse road	The site is near an existing residential area. It is a brownfield site which could easily have vehicle and pedestrian access incorporated within. It is within walking distance to local services such as local shops and cafes.
Policy 4.2 (Site 2) – Land South of the Martins	The site is greenfield adjacent to an existing residential area. There is potential to create access for vehicles and pedestrians. The site located slightly further out from Wooler's core, but it still has access to a range of services. The site will give opportunities for low density housing and is in walking distance to Glendale Community Middle and First school.
Policy 4.3 (Site 3) – Land on South Road known as Redpaths Fergusons Yard	The site is a large brownfield site that could involve slightly higher density development. There are opportunities to create new cycling and pedestrian routes through the site. The site is surrounded by biodiversity which could be enhanced through development.

Site name	Rationale
Policy 4.4 (Site 4) - Land at Burnhouse Road	The site is a greenfield site in close proximity to existing housing. There is the potential to cater to other housing types on this site. There is suitable access to main roads and the site is within walking distance from local services.
Policy 4.5 (Site 5) – Land East of Auction Mart	This land has been allocated for employment land. It is adjacent to an existing industrial area within Wooler. It has good access onto main roads such as the A697 and will help widen employment opportunities in Wooler.
Policy 4.6 School Farm Field, Weetwood Road	This site has been allocated for recreational land. It is currently used as a playing field. It is adjacent to the B6348 and a residential area lies to the west of it. It is in an accessible location for people in the east of Wooler to walk to.

Assessment of the current version of the WNP

The draft WNP 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.

This section summarises the overall effects of the Plan against each of the SEA Topics. It is important to differentiate between significant effects, which are predicted to lead to changes in the baseline position, and those effects that are broadly positive or negative, but are less likely to lead to substantial changes.

Table 5.1: Summary of overall effects for each SEA Topic.

<i>Biodiversity</i>	<i>Climate change</i>	<i>Landscape and Historic Environment</i>	<i>Land, Soil Water quality</i>	<i>Population and community</i>	<i>Health and wellbeing</i>	<i>Travel and transport</i>
Minor +ve	Neutral	Significant +ve	Mixed / Neutral	Significant +Ve	Significant +Ve	Minor +ve

The plan is predicted to have mostly positive effects.

Three significant positive effects are predicted overall, relating to Landscape and Historic Environment, Population and Community and health and wellbeing.

The effects upon Landscape and Historic Environment are predicted to be significantly positive as the Plan has a strong policy framework for locally important buildings and the conservation area.

The allocated sites could also lead to an improvement in the quality of the townscape as several of these are currently vacant, and the Plan policies seek to secure development that is complementary to Woolers townscape and character.

A key aim of the Plan is also to ensure that the character of the surrounding landscapes is protected and enhanced where possible.

The effects on population and community are predicted to be significant too, as the Plan should help to deliver different types of housing to meet the needs of the people of Wooler. In particular this includes reference to specialist housing.

The effects upon health and wellbeing are predicted to be significant due to the cumulative positive effects associated with affordable housing provision, protection and improvement of recreational opportunities and improvements to accessibility.

No significant negative effects have been predicted.

Mitigation

In order to enhance the positive effects and minimise any negative effects, a number of recommendations were made throughout the development of the Plan. The Wooler NP Steering Group will consider these recommendations when it finalises the report following Regulation 14 consultation.

Issue / opportunity	Recommendations
Minimising impacts upon important local habitats and ensuring net gain of biodiversity	Development at sites 1 and 3 should explicitly seek to retain and enhance habitats, and implement buffer zones / green infrastructure to minimise the potential for negative effects (and contribute to the environmental net gain principle). <i>However, it is acknowledged that other policies within the plan could secure such improvements in applied successfully.</i>
Site 3 contains areas at risk of flooding	It is recommended that Policy 4.3 be updated to include specific mitigation measures relating to flood risk on site. <i>However, it is acknowledged that other policies within the plan could secure such improvements in applied successfully.</i>
Haulage related employment development could occur in the plan area	Policy 11 could potentially be strengthened by including a requirement for any proposal to demonstrate that there would be no significant impacts on the local highway network in terms of capacity/ safety and that appropriate mitigation is delivered where necessary. Employment sites should also be encouraged to be fit for purpose by providing sufficient parking and turning circles.

Overall, the Plan has been positively prepared and does not generate any significant negative effects. As a result, the number of recommendations made through the SA process has been limited.

Whilst these three recommendations are considered to add clarity on certain issues, the effects of the Plan would not be significantly different should they be implemented (though the changes would certainly be beneficial).

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.

Three significant effects have been predicted in the SEA. Whilst three of these are 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
<p>A significant positive effect is predicted on cultural and natural heritage due to an improved protection for locally important buildings and the potential improvement of townscape through redevelopment on allocated sites.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Townscape character analysis. • Number of locally important buildings identified for protection.
<p>A significant positive effect is predicted for population and communities as the Plan will contribute towards meeting local housing needs in accessible locations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net housing completions per annum • Number of homes for older people • Affordable housing target achievement
<p>A significant positive effect is predicted on health and wellbeing due to cumulative effects of affordable housing, recreational facilities and accessibility.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of affordable homes delivered. • Achievement of open space and sport standards • Length of new cycle and pedestrian routes

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

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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 Wooler Neighbourhood Plan (WNP).

The WNP is currently being prepared as a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Localism Act 2012. The Neighbourhood Plan area, which includes the administrative area of Wooler Parish (Figure 1.1) in Northumberland, is being prepared in the context of the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

Key information relating to the WNP is presented in **Table 1.1**.

Table 1.1: Key facts relating to the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

Name of Qualifying Body	Wooler Parish Council
Title of Plan	Wooler Neighbourhood Plan (WNP)
Subject	Neighbourhood planning
Purpose	The Wooler 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 existing Berwick upon Tweed Borough Local Plan 1999, with due regard to the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.
Timescale	2018-2036
Area covered by the plan	The emerging WNP will be used to guide and shape development within the area covered by the administrative area of Wooler Parish.
Summary of content	The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan will set out a vision, strategy and range of policies for the Neighbourhood Plan area.
Plan contact point	Patsy Healey Email address: patsyhealey@btinternet.com

1.2 SEA explained

The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan was 'screened-in' by Northumberland County Council 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 WNP 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 WNP 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
	<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 WNP

2.1 Local Plan context for the WNP

Northumberland County Council was established as a unitary authority on 1 April 2009 following Local Government reorganisation. It replaced the former County Council and six District/Borough Councils of Alnwick, Berwick, Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale and Wansbeck.

The former Northumberland local planning authorities produced their own Development Plans to guide development in their areas. In this context the Neighbourhood Plan area is located in the area covered by the Berwick upon Tweed Borough Local Plan 1999. The various Development Plans were then brought together to form the 'Northumberland Consolidated Planning Policy Framework'.

Up until July 2017, Northumberland County Council was preparing a new to replace the Northumberland Consolidated Planning Framework. Following submission to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination, Northumberland County Council resolved to withdraw the Northumberland Local Plan: Core Strategy Pre-Submission Draft Plan and proposed modifications documents from submission on 5th July 2017. This was with a view to undertaking a full review of the housing and employment numbers and strategic land use allocations on which the emerging Core Strategy had been based.

In light of this, prior to July 2017, the WNP was prepared in the context both the existing Berwick upon Tweed Borough Local Plan 1999 and the emerging provisions of the Northumberland Core Strategy. Following withdrawal of the Northumberland Core Strategy, the plan has been prepared to be in conformity with the relevant elements of the Berwick upon Tweed Borough Local Plan 1999, with due regard to the emerging new Northumberland Local Plan⁴.

The preparation of the emerging Local Plan has now reached the 'Publication' stage, with consultation on the *Northumberland Local Plan Publication Draft (Regulation 19)* being undertaken from January 2019 to March 2019.

In relation to Wooler, the town has been designated in the emerging Local Plan as a "Service Centre". Service Centres are defined as "...having a number of key services for their communities and surrounding areas, but the range and number is generally more limited than the Main Towns, so the level of development directed towards them is also at a lower level". Policy STP1 subsequently highlights that Service Centres "...will accommodate employment, housing and services that maintains and strengthens their roles."⁵

In terms of housing delivery, the emerging Local Plan places a strong impetus on designated Neighbourhood Plan areas delivering housing through their Neighbourhood Plans. In this context Policy HOU 3 highlights that 170 homes should be delivered in Wooler Parish through the WNP between 2016 and 2036.

2.2 Vision for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

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

“ By 2036 Wooler, as the Gateway to the Northumberland National Park and an important service-centre to the surrounding area, will be a sustainable, vibrant and friendly place for all ages to live, work and play. It

⁴ NCC have advised that certain provisions of the Berwick upon Tweed Local Plan 1999 are no longer relevant, in particular NCC no longer supports the bypass proposals.

⁵ Policy STP1 of the Northumberland Local Plan- Publication Draft (Reg 19)

will be a place with a strong sense of community: a place which attracts visitors and welcomes new residents. To sustain shops and services, and to achieve a more even mix of young and old, Wooler will grow, ensuring that new development provides the right type and mix of housing to cater for all ages. Our town centre will continue to flourish, and Wooler will have more opportunities for business enterprise to start and to grow, with an emphasis on providing more employment opportunities, especially for younger people. All these aspirations are set within the context of respecting and making the most of our special landscapes, natural environment, townscape and distinct local heritage.



Vision / Mission Statement for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

To support the Neighbourhood Plan's mission statement, the WNP 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.⁶ These authorities were consulted on the scope of the WNP SEA in December 2018.

The purpose of scoping was to outline the key issues that the SEA should focus on 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.

The Scoping Report is attached as **Appendix B**, with a summary provided in the following section of this report.

The statutory consultees provided a response to the Scoping Report within the five week consultation period. Comments made on the Scoping Report, and how they have been considered and addressed, are presented in **Table 3.1** below.

⁶ 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

Consultee	Consultation Response	How the response was considered and addressed
Natural England	<p>It is noted that the River Tweed Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is listed within Table 3.1 Nature designations within Wooler, however there is no separate section referencing the SAC or detailing the reasons for designation. It would be worthwhile to include this information as part of the baseline .</p> <p>Section 3.5 lists the SEA objective to 'Achieve net gains in biodiversity through the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats and associated species' which is positive. Natural England would however welcome wording which clarifies whether the policies of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan will ensure that development has no harmful effects on biodiversity and that development resulting in biodiversity net gain are given priority.</p>	<p>The Scoping report has been updated to include reference to the River Tweed SAC.</p> <p>The biodiversity objective has been amended to take these recommendations into consideration. In particular, the following sub-questions have been added:</p> <p>Will it ensure there are no harmful effects on biodiversity?</p> <p>'Will it prioritise development with biodiversity net gain?',</p>
Historic England	<p>Baseline information should address the historic environment's significance, condition, sensitivity, capacity to accommodate change, and the likely effects of alternative solutions. This is likely to be much the same evidence needed for the plan itself. For Wooler Conservation Area, it should include the character appraisal found on the Northumberland County Council website. Wooler is not in the Northumberland Coast AONB so reference to the management plan is not relevant.</p>	<p>The Scoping Report has been updated to include reference to the Wooler Conservation Area Character Appraisal.</p>
Environment agency	No response	n/a

3.2 Key sustainability / environmental issues

Drawing on the review of the policy context and baseline information, it was possible 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 Directive⁷. 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

- There is likely to be continued reliance on the car to access services, jobs and facilities. However, there are no Air Quality Management Areas or air quality action plans within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Scoped out

3.2.2 Biodiversity

- Nationally designated nature conservation sites are present in the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- Till Riverbanks, Tweed Catchment Rivers and Humbleton Hill and the throws SSSI is within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
- The Neighbourhood Plan Area borders the Northumberland National Park.
- The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Area is in close proximity to priority habitats and species such as Otters, Upland Heathland, Lowland Heathland and Ancient Woodland

Scoped in

3.2.3 Climatic factors

- Mitigation of and adaptation to climate change are national and local priorities that the Plan should seek to contribute towards.
- There are areas within the Plan area at risk of fluvial flooding and surface water flooding.

Scoped in

3.2.4 Landscape and historic environment

- The distinctive surrounding landscape plays a significant role in the setting of Wooler.
- Wooler is characterised by the Igneous Foothills which are comprised of rounded smooth hills, cut by steep valleys and rocky outcrops.
- Wooler contains a large number of listed and non-listed heritage assets, which could be affected by policies and proposals within the Plan (either positively or negatively).
- Preserving the Wooler conservation area is an important objective;
- The high quality of local heritage assets and landscape provides opportunities for tourism, education and community involvement in their preservation.

Scoped in

⁷ 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]

3.2.5 Land, soil and water resources

- The majority of Wooler is grade 3 agricultural land but the areas in the plan that could potentially be allocated for development are largely within existing built up areas.
- There are no groundwater source protection zones or nitrate vulnerable zones in the Plan area.
- Local waste water treatment networks and drainage systems should be adequate to support modest additional growth.
- A range of kerbside waste and recycling services are provided by the Council.

Waste and recycling – Scoped out

Water quality and soil- Scoped in

3.2.6 Population and community

- The population of Wooler marginally increased between 2001 and 2011 (6.35%).
- Wooler has a lower proportion of residents within the 0-17, 16-24 and 25-44 age groups than the regional and national averages. Conversely the proportion of residents within the 45-65, 65-84 and 85+ groups is higher.
- With the number of elderly residents projected to increase, this may require provision of specialist housing.
- Wooler is broadly in an area of low levels of multiple deprivation, but to the south of Wooler levels are higher in small pockets.

Scoped in

3.2.7 Health and Wellbeing

- Wooler performs relatively well compared to the national average in terms of health indicators such as overcrowding and deaths for respiratory diseases.
- The percentage of those with a limiting lifelong illness or disability is higher than the national average for England.
- There is a higher amount of unpaid care required when compared to the national average.
- There are a range of parks, leisure and recreational facilities within the Neighbourhood Plan area.
- The proportion of people who consider themselves in good health is 37%, which is slightly lower than the average for England and Northumberland.

Scoped in

3.2.8 Transportation

- The plan area has lower private vehicle commuting to work figures than either the County or national average.
- The plan area has a higher percentage of people who walk to work.
- More people own a car in Wooler than the national average but lower than the County average. This may be due to the relatively rural location of Wooler and the demographic of an ageing population.
- Wooler is not frequently served by public transport. There are infrequent buses to Berwick, Alnwick and Newcastle, and the nearest train station is Berwick upon Tweed.

Whilst this has services to Newcastle, Edinburgh and London, it is approximately a 30min journey by car and longer by public transport.

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.

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.

The framework consists of a set of headline objectives and supporting questions, and 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.

Table 3.2: SEA Framework for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan

SEA Theme	SEA Objective	Supporting questions (Will the option/proposal help to...)
Biodiversity	Achieve net gains in biodiversity through the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats and associated species.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance designated wildlife sites and nearby habitats which may act as a ‘buffer’? • Support the conservation and enhancement of priority species and habitats (particularly otter, upland heathland, lowland heath, ancient woodland). • Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats? • Achieve a net gain in biodiversity? • Will it prioritise development that achieves a net gain in biodiversity? • Ensure current ecological networks are not compromised, and future improvements in habitat connectivity are not prejudiced? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of biodiversity, whilst managing the possible impacts of recreational pressure? • Contribute to improved resilience to climate change for species and habitats?

SEA Theme	SEA Objective	Supporting questions (Will the option/proposal help to..)
Climate Change	Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan area to the risks of flooding and other potential effects of climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that no development takes place in areas at higher risk of flooding, taking into account the likely effects of climate change? • Improve and extend green infrastructure networks in the plan area to support adaptation to the potential effects of climate change? • Ensure there is no increased risk of flooding (in the plan area or downstream) and if possible to contribute towards slower rates of surface water run-off and improved 'storage' of water. • 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, including enhancements to ecological networks?
Landscape and Historic Environment	Protect, maintain and enhance the historic environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect, conserve and enhance buildings, structures and features that contribute towards the historic fabric of the plan area? • Protect and enhance local diversity and distinctiveness? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic environment? • Protect and enhance the character of the Wooler Conservation Area?
	Protect and enhance the character and quality and appreciation of the landscape surrounding Wooler.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance key landscape features? • Protect important views? • Protect and enhance the Special Qualities of the Northumberland National Park? • Encourage access and enjoyment of the countryside?
Land, soil and water	Minimise the loss of the most valuable soils and agricultural land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise the loss of the most valuable soils as much as possible? • Help to remediate contaminated land?
	Protect water quality and contribute towards the achievement of Water framework Objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the pollution of water courses through the implementation of natural drainage systems? • Protect and contribute towards an improvement in water quality?

SEA Theme	SEA Objective	Supporting questions (Will the option/proposal help to..)
Population and community	Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures.	<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, particularly the elderly? • Provide quality and flexible homes that meet people's needs? • Provide housing in sustainable locations that allow easy access to a range of local services and facilities?
	Support and maintain a strong and sustainable local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the local economy and provide access to employment opportunities? • Support a more diverse range of employment opportunities for local residents, particularly in professional / technical occupations?
Health and Wellbeing	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote accessibility to a range of leisure, health and community facilities, for all age groups? • Align to the priority areas outlined in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment? • Provide and enhance the provision of community access to green infrastructure, in accordance with Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards? • Reduce noise pollution? • Promote the use of healthier modes of travel? • Improve access to the countryside for recreational use? • Prepare for an ageing population?
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the need to travel through sustainable patterns of land use and development? • Encourage modal shift to more sustainable forms of travel? • Enable sustainable transport infrastructure enhancements? • Facilitate working from home and remote working? • Improve road safety? • Reduce the impact on residents from the road network?

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 WNP has been informed by an assessment of alternative site options.

4.2 Overview of plan making / SEA work undertaken to date

Northumberland County Council formally designated the whole of Wooler Parish as a Neighbourhood Plan area on November 2015.

Since 2015 the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have gathered a range of evidence, and undertaken significant consultation with local communities and other key stakeholders to identify the issues and opportunities that need to be addressed in the Neighbourhood Plan.

AECOM worked alongside the Wooler Parish Council to identify and appraise any reasonable alternatives, to ensure that the SEA helped to inform the approaches and policies within the draft Plan. This involved particular consideration of the following issues:

- Housing growth and distribution; and
- Site Allocations.

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 WNP. The SEA Regulations⁸ 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 WNP's plan policies relating to housing and site allocations have been dealt with in the SEA.

4.3.1 Housing Strategy

Housing growth targets

Overall housing numbers (targets) are primarily the responsibility of the Planning Authority, NCC.

The draft Northumberland Local Plan in its 2019 iteration proposed a target of 170 homes for Wooler from 2016-2036. This equates to 8.5 dwellings per annum.

To verify the appropriateness of this target and to inform the Plan strategy, the Parish Council requested support from Locality (delivered by AECOM) to undertake a Housing Needs Assessment for Wooler (Published July 2018).

⁸ *Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*

This study concluded that there is a need to plan for 108 dwellings from the period 2017-2031 (7.7 dwellings per year). This is broadly comparable to the target set by Northumberland when the plan periods are standardised.

The housing need is indicative, and it should also be noted that changes to the Government methodology have since been implemented. However, it does provide an understanding of the local housing market and provides a direction for an appropriate housing strategy for Wooler.

In terms of the types of housing required, the HNA also revealed that there is a particular need for older people's accommodation; with 40 additional specialist dwellings required to support independent living.

With regards to meeting housing need, a total of 139 homes have already been granted permission in the Plan area. This surpasses the figure identified in the HNA of 108 dwellings. One may therefore argue that no further housing is required. However, the Parish Council is keen to continue meeting the challenge of housing delivery and as such seeks to allocate several housing sites that will help to meet and potentially exceed these needs. Furthermore, there is no certainty that all of these schemes will go ahead as planned.

The neighbourhood Plan must also be in general conformity with the emerging Northumberland Plan, which stipulates a requirement of 170 dwellings (although this is for the period between 2016-2036)

The Parish Council have worked alongside Northumberland Council in the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan and are keen to ensure that it supports the strategy for the County.

Having regard to the target of 170 dwellings, the 'residual housing need' is still relatively low when compared to the target in the draft Plan (170-139 committed dwellings = 31 dwellings).

The Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to set a housing target though, only to allocate sites to help achieve the strategy established within the emerging Local Plan for Northumberland. The housing allocations proposed are relatively small scale, totalling a minimum of 50 dwellings. Further housing development is also possible on a site that is allocated for a range of potential uses.

Distribution / choice of development locations

The Wooler NP has concentrated on the development potential of brownfield sites within the perimeter of the settlement. This is a reasonable strategy, as most of the development opportunities offer easy access to the town centre and local shops, services and transport (main roads).

The choice of specific locations has been influenced by an assessment of individual sites.

Are there any other reasonable alternatives?

Housing growth

One alternative would be not to allocate any sites, and to rely upon existing commitments, windfall development and any site allocations made through the Local Plan process.

However, a key objective of the Neighbourhood Plan is to influence the location and type of housing development that is secured in Wooler. Therefore, this approach has been discarded as unreasonable.

A second alternative would be to allocate additional sites to provide a wider range of choice and flexibility in meeting the housing needs of Wooler. It is considered that the proposed approach already provides a degree of flexibility, and that there is no evidence to justify substantially higher levels of housing growth. Therefore, this alternative is also considered to be unreasonable.

It is also important to note that the issue of housing growth levels across Northumberland is being dealt with through the Local Plan process (which is also subject to SEA).

Housing distribution

The scale of development involved in the site allocations is relatively small (50 dwellings and potential for additional dwellings should it be proposed on sites identified for multiple uses).

This therefore limits the range of strategic options to be tested.

One approach may be to allocate all homes on one large site / in one particular location (i.e. a cluster of sites) rather than allocating several sites in a dispersed manner.

A sole focus on the following areas were considered as potential strategies but ultimately it was concluded that each would be unreasonable during the time period of the Plan for the outline reasons set out below.

1. *South east of Wooler* (i.e. combination of sites 16 and 18) – Both sites are affected by the proposed Wooler Bypass outlined in saved Policy M22 of the Adopted Local Plan. Furthermore, development would be located on the periphery of the village on greenfield land.
2. *North east of Wooler (i.e. sites 25 and 26)* – Delivery of a minimum of 50 dwellings would require both sites to be allocated, effectively creating a substantial development in this part of the settlement only. Site 25 which is the larger site would be cut off from the settlement in the event of the Wooler Bypass being completed.
3. *North west of Wooler* (i.e. Sites 30a / 30b) – Development in this location would be partially affected by the line of the Wooler Bypass and there are access constraints. As a peripheral site access to local facilities would be broadly poor too.
4. *East of Wooler* – (i.e. a combination of one or more of sites 19, 20, 21, 21a, 22, 23, 24) – Sites 19, 20 and 21a are in current use and not available for development. Site 24 has already been granted planning permission. Of the remaining sites in this area, site 21 is affected by the proposed Wooler Bypass and there are constraints associated with site 23 that would need to be resolved before development could progress. Furthermore, site 22 is not currently available for development. Overall, a focus in growth in only this location is therefore considered to be unreasonable.

For each of these focused approaches, the emphasis would be on greenfield land development, which does not support a key objective of the Plan (i.e. to support brownfield regeneration).

The only strategic approach considered to be reasonable was a dispersed approach to development seeking to support brownfield land release as much as possible (but not exclusively). and have sites that support a range housing types and mix of tenure. Therefore, the reasonable alternatives were essentially the different site options that were put forward for consideration as part of the plan-making process. These are discussed below.

4.3.2 Site allocations

The Plan proposes to allocate four sites for housing development plus one 'employment site'. To inform the decision on which sites to allocate, the Group identified a range of sites that could potentially be allocated.

34 such sites were identified by the WNP Steering Group through a workshop exercise.

Following a process of short listing, 25 sites were identified as reasonable for further assessment.

These sites were assessed by AECOM (through a separate technical support package), with the findings supporting the Steering Group in their decision making in identifying which sites should be allocated and those which should be discarded.

The Site Selection package report can be found at on the Neighbourhood Planning Website for Wooler at <https://www.wooloneighbourhoodplan.org/reports-and-studies-for-wnp-annex-c.html> and includes a detailed discussion of the site sieving and appraisal process.

The site appraisal framework identified for the SEA overlaps considerably with the criteria within the site assessment package report. Therefore, information has been drawn from this report as much as possible to avoid unnecessary duplication. Where there has been a need to gather additional information to fill any gaps in the SEA site appraisal framework, this has been undertaken.

The result of this exercise is the production of a proforma for each of the reasonable site options, setting out the performance against the site appraisal criteria. These can be found in the site assessment document on the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan website with a full explanation of methods. The proformas have also been reproduced in Appendix A of this Environmental Report.

A summary of the findings for the sites is presented in **Table 4.1** below, along with a short discussion of how each site performs. Those sites that are proposed for allocation are shaded blue.

A green score reflects a stronger performance, suggesting that development of the site should not result in any adverse impacts on the environment and may bring about improvements.

Where environmental harm is possible but it can be avoidable or mitigated relatively easily, an amber score is given.

A red score reflects a more significant constraint that may be difficult to mitigate.

Table 4.1: Summary of site appraisal findings

Site name	Greenfield/brownfield	Near existing built up area	Suitable access	Allocated for a particular use	SSSI impact zone, AONB, flood zone	Land Scape	Agricultural Land	Heritage Assets	Proximity to Town/local centre/shop	Proximity Bus Stop	Proximity to Primary School	Proximity to Secondary school	Open space/recreation facilities	Proximity to GP Hospital pharmacy	Cycle route	Footpath	Key employment site	Tree preservation orders on site	Any loss of biodiversity	Public Rights of Way	Existing community value	Ground Contamination	Significant infrastructure crossing	Coalscene	Scale and nature of development
Site 1 - Former First School Site	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	?	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 2 - Land south of Burnhouse Rd	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 3 - Land on Burnhouse Rd, east of Highburn House	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
Site 4 - land north of Common Rd, above High Fair	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 5 - land south of Common Rd	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
Site 7 - Land south of Common Road	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	?	Green	Green
Site 7A - Land south of Ramseys Lane	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 8 - Field behind Horsdonside and the Youth Hostel	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 9 - Horsdon Farm field	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 11 – Land at Victoria Road	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 13 - Ferguson's Yard	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	?	?	Green	Green

Site name	Greenfield/brownfield	Near existing built up area	Suitable access	Allocated for a particular use	SSSI impact zone, AONB, flood zone	Land Landscape	Agricultural Land	Heritage Assets	Proximity to Town/local centre/shop	Proximity Bus Stop	Proximity to Primary School	Proximity to Secondary school	Open space/recreation facilities	Proximity to GP Hospital pharmacy	Cycle route	Footpath	Key employment site	Tree preservation orders on site	Any loss of biodiversity	Public Rights of Way	Existing community value	Ground Contamination	Significant infrastructure crossing	Coalscene	Scale and nature of development
Site 16 - Land on either side of A697, south of Bridgend and Riverside Parks.	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
Site 21 – Land at Brewery Farm	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Red
Site 22 - Land South of Weetwood Road	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
Site 25 - Land adjacent to Auction Mart fields	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	?	Green	Green
Site 26 - Mart Field	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 27 – Auction Mart	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	?	?	Green	Green
Site 30a - Land north of Fenton Grange	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 30b - Land north west of Old Vicarage	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red
Site 31a- Land north of Rycroft	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 32 - Land along Burnside Road towards Low Humbleton	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Site 33 - Land adjacent to The Crossing, Haugh Head	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

Site name	Greenfield/brownfield	Near existing built up area	Suitable access	Allocated for a particular use	SSSI impact zone, AONB, flood zone	Land Scape	Agricultural Land	Heritage Assets	Proximity to Town/local centre/shop	Proximity Bus Stop	Proximity to Primary School	Proximity to Secondary school	Open space/recreation facilities	Proximity to GP Hospital pharmacy	Cycle route	Footpath	Key employment site	Tree preservation orders on site	Any loss of biodiversity	Public Rights of Way	Existing community value	Ground Contamination	Significant infrastructure crossing	Coalscene	Scale and nature of development
Site 33a - Land north of Heather View (Haugh Head)	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

Outline reasons for selecting the preferred site options

This section presents a brief discussion as to why sites were selected for allocation or not. In compliance with the NPPF, two housing-focused public forum events demonstrated strong local support for the sustainable redevelopment of brownfield sites to meet the local housing need.

The availability of sites and likelihood of development taking place has also been considered when allocating the preferred options to ensure allocations are deliverable.

Table 4.2: Rationale for site selection.

Site Name.	Rationale
1. Former First School Site – allocated (site 1)	This is a derelict site that would benefit from redevelopment and would be suitable for housing. This is a key site within the built up area of Wooler Town and the owner (NCC) is actively looking to develop, in conjunction with Wooler Parish Council.
2. Land south of Burnhouse Rd – allocated (site 4)	Initially considered for community use and burial ground, however due to constraints with both of these, this infill site would be best used for limited housing (constraints with topography and access). Nearer in to the built up of Wooler Town than Site 3; opportunity for lower density housing
3. Land on Burnhouse Rd, east of Highburn House	Site constraints would require addressing, especially for a higher density of dwellings. More likely suitable for smaller density, perhaps self-build plots. The site has not been proposed for development as it is considered to be a longer term possibility.
4. Land north of Common Rd, above High Fair	There is a range of site constraints, including recommended consultation with Historic England. However, the site may be suitable for a limited number of dwellings, avoiding sensitive areas. This could be brought forward under Policy 5 of the neighbourhood plan.
5. Land south of Common Rd	There are significant constraints and further viability assessment would be required before development would be deemed appropriate.
7. Land south of Common Road	There is a key constraint regarding access to the site which would not be resolved without purchasing neighbouring property.
7a. Land south of Ramseys Lane	Constraints, including access, visual effects on townscape and impacts on daylight / sunlight of existing dwellings, would need to be considered and addressed through site and housing design. If this is possible, may be a suitable site for limited dwellings, but not considered suitable for allocation.
8. Field behind Horsdon-side and the Youth Hostel	Significant constraints within the site, including visual impact, access and habitat. Further viability assessment would also be required to determine if suitable for development.
9. Horsdon Farm field	There is no current active interest in the site, so it should be covered under Policy 5 of the neighbourhood plan.
11. Land at Victoria Road	Minor constraints to be addressed, yet these are unlikely to make the flatter part of this site unsuitable for allocation. Steeper part would be unsuitable. Appropriate location of developable area as infill site, but it is relatively small and could be covered by Policy 5 of the Neighbourhood Plan.
13. Ferguson’s Yard – allocated (site 3)	NCC and Wooler Parish Council seek to encourage a broader and flexible policy for this key site at the entrance to Wooler Town.

Site Name.	Rationale
16. Land on either side of A697	Constraints present which would need to be addressed. This is an outlying site and so it would be better developed for housing after Site 18 to north. It may be possible to also consider as employment or burial ground, however consideration necessary in regards to this being situated next to a key route / approach to Wooler.
18. Land N. of Coldmartin Croft	The SHLAA supports the development of this site and the WNPSG are in agreement. However, the site is considered a longer term aspiration given the need to address potential transport implications and constraints such as pylons across the site.
21. Land at Brewery Farm	Significant constraints present and would be unlikely to be suitable if Wooler bypass goes ahead, as per saved policy M22 of the Current Local Plan. Large pylons running through site could also present issues. Site not currently adjacent to the built up area.
22. Land South of Weetwood Road	Minor constraints present, including the requirement of a flood risk assessment before the development of this site. However, if these can be overcome, this site would be suitable for allocation. This site not pursued in the Plan as allocated for recreation and community purposes (Site 6)
23. Land South of Weetwood Rd	The SHLAA supports the development of this site. However, it is not considered suitable in the short term as not at present adjacent to the built up area
25. Land adjacent to Auction Mart fields	If the proposed bypass were to progress as per Policy M22 of the Current Local Plan, this site is likely to be separated from Wooler. Currently not adjacent to the built up area
26. Mart Field – allocated (site 5)	Some minor constraints present that would have to be addressed prior to development. Site currently in use by the neighbouring auction mart and so aspirational allocation is suitable (and supported by NCC). Allocated for employment uses in Wooler NP and in the emerging NCC Local Plan
27. Auction Mart	Other than questions over availability as the site is currently in use as an auction mart, the site appears suitable for development either for housing or industry, although further assessment may be required (such as contaminated land). This is considered more as a longer term aspiration.
30a. Land north of Fenton Grange	Site on outskirts of Wooler and development may be partially restricted by proposed Wooler bypass. However if access can be overcome, this site may be at least partially suitable for housing in the long term. In comparison to alternative locations, the site scores relatively poorly with regards to sustainability. Access to this stretch of the A697 restricted as the road is narrow and winding here.
30b. Land North West of Old Vicarage	Significant constraint relating to line of proposed bypass cutting through site, meaning this could only be an aspirational site. Not currently adjacent to the built up area. Access to this stretch of the A697 restricted as the road is narrow and winding here.
31a. Land north of Ryecroft	Constraints present with site, namely access, however if a solution can be found this site may be suitable for housing if developed sensitively (with the land to the south of the site set aside for habitat / flood management). This site is also divided from nearby houses by a very steep slope.
32. Land along Burnside Road towards Low Humbleton	Large site, with different constraints present to east (such as flooding) and west (such as public right of way) of Burnhouse Road which runs through the middle. May be suited to eco-houses or self-build plots, with design guides focussing on sensitivity of site in relation to National Park views. Could also be a suitable site for appropriate tourism development, such as yurts or teepees, due to site constraints and presence of public rights of way leading to National Park.
33. Land adjacent to The Crossing, Haugh Head	Constraints present here which could limit where development took place. Although external to Wooler, would be on edge of a small settlement which offers some (limited) public transport and employment services. Small number of dwellings suitable here, potentially self-build plots. On balance, performs poorly in respect of sustainability factors.

Site Name.	Rationale
33a. Land north of Heather View (Haugh Head)	Although external to Wooler, the site would offer an infill opportunity for Haugh Head, which has some facilities on offer. Access constraints could be addressed. Site likely to be suitable for a very small number of houses, potentially self-build plots.
17. Land south of the Martins – allocated site 2	This site was screened out of the site assessment initially . This is currently in use as a playing field, with Wooler FC holding a long-term lease on the land. As it would only be considered for development if NCC could relocate this recreational use to another site within Wooler. As the site has NCC owned site, has been in consideration for affordable housing in the past. Could help to open up land to the south and east primarily for housing in the longer term. Has potential to deliver in the medium to long term.

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

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the Regulation 14 version of the WNP.

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

Sustainable development policies

Policy 1: Supporting sustainable development

Policy 2: Sustainable development in Northumberland national park

Policy 3: Locally distinctive and high quality design

Development Allocations

Policy 4 Sites allocated for development

Policy 4.1 Land at former first school site off Butnhouse Road

Policy 4.2 Land south of The Martins

Policy 4.3 Land on South Road known as Redpath's/Ferguson's Yard

Policy 4.4 Land at Burnhouse Road

Policy 4.5 Land east of the Auction Mart

Policy 4.6 School Farm Field, Weetwood Road

Housing policies

Policy 5 Housing development in the Plan Area

Policy 6 New Housing Development – Design Principles

Policy 7 Community-led and affordable housing

Policy 8 Housing for older people

Policy 9 Housing development in outlying settlements

Policy 10 Housing Development in the Open Countryside

Local Economy

Policy 11 Existing employment sites

Policy 12 Business development

Policy 13 Retail development and upper floor uses in Wooler

Policy 14 Tourism facilities

Policy 15 Small- scale Overnight Tourist Accommodation

Policy 16 Broadband Provision in New Development

Landscape, Natural Environment, Townscape and Heritage

Policy 17 Renewable energy development

Policy 18 South Road, the Peth and the Gateways to Wooler Town

Policy 19 Landscaping, Hedgerows and trees

Policy 20 Wooler conservation area

Policy 21 Development on the south western edges of Wooler

Our Community

Policy 22 Local Green Spaces

Policy 23 Recreational land and facilities in Wooler

Policy 24 Community facilities

Policy 25 New community facilities

Accessibility

Policy 26 Footpaths and Cycleways

Policy 27 The Wooler railway line

5.3 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.⁹ 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.

5.4 SEA Objective 1: Biodiversity

Appraisal findings: site allocations

Regarding the five site allocations proposed through Policy 4 'Site Allocations for Development' within the Neighbourhood Plan, all five sites are located within SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZ) for residential, rural residential and rural non-residential development types. Therefore, development at these locations may require further consultation with Natural England to determine whether the proposals would lead to adverse impacts to these nationally designated sites. This is unlikely given the scale of each individual site, but perhaps the cumulative effects should be discussed.

Similarly, the River Tweed Special Area of Conservation (SAC) passes through the Neighbourhood Plan area, directly through the settlement boundary. Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) have been developed for each Natura 2000 sites in England as part of the Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 sites (IPENS). A 'Natura 2000' site is the combined term for sites designated as SACs, SPAs and Ramsar Sites. Although the IPENS project closed in 2015, the River Tweed SIP¹⁰ contains a variety of policies which extend until 2021 surrounding the prioritised issues for this European designated site, namely: water pollution, invasive species, physical modification and water abstraction. The site allocations in the Neighbourhood Plan therefore have the potential to indirectly impact upon the integrity of the River Tweed due to their proximity to this European protected site.

⁹ *Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*

¹⁰ Natural England (2014): 'River Tweed Site Improvement Plan (SIP)', [online] available to access via:

<<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5407765459632128?category=6280398447312896>> last accessed [05/03/19]

At the local level, Site 1 'Land at the Former First School Site off Burnhouse Road (see Policy 4.1) and Site 3 'Land on South Road known at Redpath's / Ferguson's Yard' (see Policy 4.3) are located adjacent to areas of Deciduous Woodland Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitat. Development at these locations should seek to retain and enhance habitats, and may require mitigation (such as buffer zones or green infrastructure provisions) to minimise the potential for negative effects and contribute to the environmental net gain principle as stated within the NPPF and the UK Government's 25-Year Environment Plan (discussed further within the appraisal findings below).

Appraisal findings: Draft Plan

There will be a need for potential effects on biodiversity linked to the proposed allocations in the Neighbourhood Plan to be avoided and mitigated. Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan sets out provisions which will 1) help limit potential effects from new development on features and areas of biodiversity interest in the Neighbourhood Plan area and 2) support the resilience of ecological networks.

In addition to the site allocations within the Neighbourhood Plan, Objective A and B within Policy 5 'Housing Development within the Plan Area' states that proposals will be supported if they are located on brownfield and infill sites within the built-up area of Wooler Town and/or on the built-up edge of the settlement. This will support the protection of the open spaces and natural features which contribute to local ecological networks within and surrounding the Neighbourhood Plan area. This is further supported through Objective B within Policy 6 'New Housing Development – Design Principles', affirming that all new housing proposals will need to ensure the retention of existing trees, hedgerows and natural features wherever possible, and incorporate them into the design of the scheme. These policies will also promote the ability of natural processes to safeguard and enhance soil and water resources in the Neighbourhood Plan area, indirectly benefiting the integrity of the River Tweed SAC.

Published in July 2018, paragraph 170 (d) within the revised NPPF¹¹ states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by '*minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks*', with paragraph 32 outlining that local plans and spatial development strategies should demonstrate how opportunities for net gains have been addressed. An environmental net gain principle for development is also embedded within the goals and policies of the UK Government's 25-Year Environment Plan¹², which was published in January 2018. Reflecting this, Policy 18 'Landscaping, Hedgerows and Trees' states that when the loss of trees as part of a development proposal is unavoidable, replacement trees at a ratio of two trees per each tree removed should be provided. Emphasis is given to ensuring the same species or an alternative native species is replanted. This is supported through the provisions of Policy 3 'Locally Distinctive and High Quality Design' (Objective F), which confirms that development will be supported providing the proposals can ensure a net-gain for biodiversity through retaining ecological features and making provisions for high-quality landscaping.

Ecological networks in the district are further supported by the policy provisions which safeguard open spaces. For example, Policy 22 'Local Green Spaces' designates six sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area for their recreational and amenity value, with proposals for development supported only if they are related to the enhancement or enjoyment of these spaces. Similarly, Objective G within Policy 6 'New Housing Development – Design Principles' states that all new housing proposals will be required to provide sufficient open space and children's play areas to meet the reasonable needs of future occupants of the dwellings. This is further supported through the provisions of Policy 23 'Recreational Land and Facilities' which seeks to safeguard existing areas used by the local community for recreational purposes. Notably, the protection of these spaces will bolster locally important areas of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats in Wooler against potential threats from development through maintaining natural features and providing connectivity corridors to surrounding areas of deciduous woodland.

¹¹ MHCLG (2018): 'Revised National Planning Policy Framework', [online] available to access via:

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/revised-national-planning-policy-framework>> [05/03/19]

¹² DEFRA (2018): 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment', [online] available to access via:

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>> last accessed [05/03/19]

Overall effects

Overall, the Neighbourhood Plan is considered likely to lead to **mixed** effects for the Biodiversity SEA objective, with the proposed allocations within SSSI IRZs and within proximity to the River Tweed SAC potentially having negative effects. However, the Neighbourhood Plan has the potential to have long term **positive effects** through conserving and enhancing the natural environment by applying the principle of environmental net-gain in the design of new developments.

5.5 SEA Objective 2: Climate change

Appraisal findings: site allocations

Housing and employment growth proposed through the WNP and facilitated through the Neighbourhood Plan allocations will lead to increases in the built footprint of the Neighbourhood Plan area and stimulate additional traffic flows. This will lead to some inevitable increases in greenhouse gas emissions originating from the parish. However, given the scale of growth proposed, and the likelihood of improvements to energy efficiency and the adoption of new technologies, this is not considered to lead to significant effects in relation to climate change mitigation. In addition, the allocations proposed through the WNP are located within and adjacent to the existing built-up area of Wooler, with good access to local services, facilities and employment in the town. This should help limit increases in greenhouse gas emissions from transport.

In terms of climate change adaptation, historically there have been incidents of flooding in Wooler. However, in terms of the WNP site allocations, the majority are located within Flood Zone 1, which comprises areas at a low risk of flooding. Site 3 (Policy 4.3 (Land on South Road known as Redpath's/ Ferguson's Yard)) is the exception, with the north of the site being located partly within Flood Zone 2, which is of medium risk of flooding. It is recognised that the effects of potential flood risk could be mitigated if systems, such as SuDS, are put in place to prevent flooding. To this effect, it is recommended that Policy 4.3 be updated to include such mitigation measures. However it is noted that provisions of the NPPF will help minimise risk, and the emerging Local Plan policy WAT3 (Flooding) requires that "*proposed development in areas at risk from flooding are made resistant and resilient, in terms of their layout, mix and/or building design, in accordance with national policy and the findings and recommendations of the Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment*".

Appraisal findings: Draft Plan

The WNP will support climate change mitigation through encouraging new renewable energy provision in the Neighbourhood Plan area. Proposals for renewable energy developments are supported through Policy 17 (Renewable Energy Development), with specific reference made to "*small-scale wind turbines, solar farms, district heating schemes and community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy*". It is however recognised through the WNP that while future energy needs are to be sustained, development should not adversely impact on the parish's key landscape assets. Policy 17 therefore requires that any proposed renewable energy projects be carefully assessed and managed. This underpins the higher-level policy provisions of the NPPF (2018) para. 151, and the emerging Northumberland Local Plan (2018) Policy REN1 (Renewable and Carbon Energy).

The issue of climate change adaptation is addressed in the WNP through the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure. Notably, policy 22 (Local Green Spaces) seeks to protect and enhance the network of green spaces present in the Neighbourhood Plan area. This is also supported through the design policies, including Policy 6 (New Housing Development – Design Principles) and Policy 1 (Landscaping, Hedgerows and Trees). In this respect protecting and enhancing the green infrastructure network will be a key means of helping the WNP area adapt to the effects of climate change, leading to long-term minor positive effects. This includes through helping to regulate extreme

temperatures, regulating surface water run-off and supporting the ability of biodiversity species to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Overall effects

In conclusion, whilst the above approaches will contribute **positively** towards supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation, these are not seen to be significant in the context of the SEA process. This is given the scale of proposals and the likelihood of inevitable effects on greenhouse gas emissions taking place from an increase in the built footprint of the Neighbourhood Plan area.

Whilst Site 3 (Policy 4.3 (Land on South Road known as Redpath's/ Ferguson's Yard)) is partially located within an area of flood risk, the significance of impacts will be limited by the provisions of the NPPF and the Local Plan.

5.6 SEA Objective 3: Landscape and Historic Environment

Appraisal findings: site allocations

The delivery of housing and employment land within Wooler has the potential to impact the historic environment, landscape character and the visual setting and amenity of the Neighbourhood Plan area if inappropriately located and designed.

Regarding landscape sensitivity, it is important to acknowledge that all the five site allocations proposed through Policy 4 'Sites Allocated for Development' are located outside of the boundaries of the Northumberland National Park. In this context, the WNP seeks to focus development on the allocated sites on the eastern edges of Wooler, and on infill and brownfield sites within and adjacent to the built-up area. Therefore, the proposed allocations within the Neighbourhood Plan are generally supportive of locating new development away from the most sensitive landscape areas.

Two of the five site allocations are located wholly on greenfield land. In this context, Policy 4.4 'Land at Burnhouse Road (Site 4) states that any planning application for development at this location must be accompanied by a landscaping gain and a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). Similarly, a LVIA has also been suggested as a requirement for any proposals on Land East of the Auction Mart (Site 5), as per the provisions of Policy 4.5. This will ensure that any potential landscape impacts associated with the development proposals at these locations are appropriately mitigated.

From a heritage perspective, none of the site allocations contain a listed building or a scheduled monument. Therefore, development at these locations is unlikely to directly impact upon the condition of nationally designated sites within the Neighbourhood Plan area. At the local level however, Site 3 'Land on South Road known as Redpath's / Ferguson's Yard' (see Policy 4.3) is located within the boundaries of the Wooler Conservation Area, with Site 1 'Land at the Former First School Site off Burnhouse Road' (see Policy 4.1) and Site 4 'Land at Burnhouse Road' (see Policy 4.4) located adjacent to its boundaries. Notably, Policy 4.3 is supportive of the reuse and regeneration of underutilised previously developed land within the Wooler Conservation Area providing that the proposal can demonstrate positive impacts to the character and appearance of the site.

Appraisal findings: Draft Plan

The allocations within the Neighbourhood Plan area seeks to deliver development in the most accessible locations of Wooler. Additionally, Objective A and B within Policy 5 'Housing Development within the Plan Area' states that proposals will be supported if they are located on brownfield and infill sites within the built-up area of Wooler Town and/or on the built-up edge of the settlement. This will support the limitation of negative effects on the open countryside.

In terms of protected landscapes, Policy 2 'Major Development in Northumberland National Park' will only support major development proposals in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. In this regard, Objective 'C' and 'D' within Policy 2 implies that

the applicant will be required to demonstrate how any potential impacts to the statutory duties of the national park (i.e. protect its special qualities and enhance public enjoyment) will be mitigated, and how positive contributions will be achieved through the proposals.

Objective A within Policy 6 'New Housing Development – Design Principles' states that all new housing proposals will be required to demonstrate how the development incorporates landscaping to soften the impact of the development on the wider landscape, particularly on the south western edge of Wooler. Furthermore, Policy 21 'Development on the Western and South-western Edges of Wooler Town' recognises the sensitivity of this area of the Parish, due to its proximity to the Northumberland National Park and the special landscapes of Horsdon Hill and Cheviot Street. Within these areas, Policy 21 confirms that small scale proposals for development will only be supported where they can be sensitively accommodated within the landscape (following a LVIA), with development not supported if the potential impacts cannot be adequately mitigated through design and landscaping. Objective B within Policy 3 'Locally Distinctive and High Quality Design' also assures that the height, form and external appearance of new developments will give full consideration to important views into and out of the town. Therefore, the provisions of these policies will protect the constrained areas of the Neighbourhood Plan area from high levels of inappropriate development.

Additionally, Policy 10 'Housing Development in the Open Countryside' confirms that isolated dwellings in the open countryside will only be supported if it meets key criteria including (amongst other considerations), if the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset, the development would reuse redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting, and if the design is of an exceptional quality which is sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area. Likewise, Policy 10 states that any proposed conversion should not include any significant alterations or extensions which would detract from the building's character and appearance, or to the wider landscape. Policy 12 'Business Development' is similar in this regard, affirming that any expansions of employment offer within the open countryside should not detract from the wider landscape character or negatively impact on natural features and heritage assets.

The Neighbourhood Plan area has a rich historic environment, recognised through the diversity of features and areas which are nationally and local designated for their cultural heritage interest. This is reflected by Neighbourhood Plan policies which have a strong focus on conserving and enhancing the significance of buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest, both designated and non-designated, and their settings. For example, Objective A within Policy 3 'Locally Distinctive and High Quality Design' affirms that development proposals will be supported providing that it would deliver a design which responds positively to local character and heritage through the use of locally distinctive materials and visually attractive design, with attention to local architectural detail. Objective C goes on to state that where relevant, proposals should make a positive contribution to the setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets within the Neighbourhood Plan area. This should ensure that values attributed to assets are fully understood and reflected in design proposals, whilst also positively enhancing features which contribute to the setting of designated heritage assets, as outlined within the latest (and regularly updated) guidance from Historic England.¹³

The Neighbourhood Plan also has a strong focus on enhancing the heritage value and special qualities of the Wooler Conservation Area, addressing some of the key issues within its associated character area appraisal. For example, Policy 18 'South Road, the Peth and the Gateways to Wooler Town' outlines that development proposals within this area should enhance local character and context, improving the appearance of the street scene (Objective A of the policy), and safeguard features which contribute to the special qualities of the conservation area, including the main tree groups. This is further supported through the provisions of Policy 19 'Landscaping, Hedgerows and Trees' and Policy 20 'Wooler Conservation Area'. Notably, Policy 20 provides a list of features which should be preserved and enhanced through development proposals within the conservation area, including (amongst other considerations) the key views across the Glendale Area, townscape elements such as landmark

¹³ Historic England (2017): 'Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2nd Edition)', [online] available to download via: <<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/>> last accessed [05/03/19]

buildings, the distinct character areas as defined with the appraisal and the setting of listed buildings within the town. Therefore, it is anticipated that these policies will have positive effects to locally valued and nationally protected heritage assets within the Neighbourhood Plan area.

Overall effects

Overall, Neighbourhood Plan policies take a proactive approach in conserving and enhancing the distinctive character and heritage interests of Wooler which will lead to long term **positive effects**. This is recognised through its focus on safeguarding protected sites (both designated and non-designated) and their settings, incorporating landscape features into the design and ensuring that development respects the character of the existing townscape and surrounding countryside. It is important to recognise that along with Local Plan policies, the objectives within the Northumberland National Park Management Plan and the positive management strategies located with the Wooler Conservation Area Appraisal provide additional layers of protection and opportunities for the historic environment and sensitive landscape within and surrounding Wooler.

Development at sites 1, 3 and 4 would be within or adjacent to the conservation area. However, these sites could be improved in terms of their contribution to the townscape. Therefore, negative effects on the setting of heritage assets, or the character of the conservation area are considered unlikely.

5.7 SEA Objective 4: Land, Soil and Water

Appraisal findings: site allocations

The Neighbourhood Plan will support the efficient use of land. In this context two of the Neighbourhood Plan allocations, including at the Land at the Former First School Site off Burnhouse Road (Site 1) and the Land on South Road known as Redpath's / Ferguson's Yard (Site 3) will take place on previously developed land. This will promote the efficient use of land through precluding the loss of productive agricultural land and facilitating the intensification of uses at these locations.

The remaining three site allocations taken forward through the Neighbourhood Plan will take place on greenfield land. In terms of the quality of agricultural land, it is not possible to confirm if development on these sites will result in a loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land, as recent detailed classification has not been undertaken. Based on the 1:250,000 series of ALC maps produced by Natural England and utilised for strategic purposes, the sites are located on land which is classified as Grade 3 'good to moderate'. However, there is no detailed information available as to whether the site is Grade 3a land (i.e. land classified as the best and most versatile) or Grade 3b (which is not).

Appraisal findings: Draft Plan

In addition to the site allocation policies, which support the reuse and intensification of land at some locations in the parish, Policy 11 (Existing Employment Sites), Policy 12 (Business Development) and Policy 13 (Retail Development and Upper Floor Uses in Wooler Town) also support the intensification of land uses. The efficient use of land will also be supported by Policy 5 (Housing Development in the Plan Area) which promotes housing development in the first instance on brownfield and infill sites within the built-up area of Wooler Town.

In relation to water resources, Policy 1 (Supporting Sustainable Development) seeks to ensure that where development is taken forward through a planning permission, the site will not be occupied until the capacity of Wooler Sewage Works has been upgraded to comply with a discharge consent for phosphorus of 2mg per litre. Recognising the existing capacity issues in the parish, this policy will help ensure that water quality will not be placed under further pressures by new development's impact on the sewerage network. Similarly, Policy 15 (Small-scale Overnight Tourist Accommodation) seeks to ensure that proposals for bunkhouses, chalets, touring caravan sites, yurts, static caravans and camping accommodation will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the development can be accommodated within the capacity of existing drainage and water supply infrastructure. Also relevant to water resources, Policy 3 (Locally Distinctive and High Quality Design) seeks to ensure that

measures have been incorporated within new development to promote water conservation. This will help limit water use, supporting the efficient use of water within new development areas.

Also relevant in relation to the Land, Soil and Water theme, Policy 2 (Major Development in the National Park) also seeks to support the protection of natural resources in the Northumberland National Park and facilitate the adequate restoration of land following the cessation of certain land uses. Policy 22 (Local Green Spaces) will also support land and soils resources through protecting six areas in the Neighbourhood Plan area as Local Green Space.

Overall effects

The plan is predicted to have **mixed / neutral** effects in relation to the Land, Soil and Water objective. This is given three of the sites have the potential to lead to the loss of greenfield land, with associated negative effects in relation to soils resources. However a number of positive effects will arise from the Neighbourhood Plan, including through the intensification of uses at some locations, and the protection and enhancement of water quality.

5.8 SEA Objective 6: Population and community

Appraisal findings: site allocations

The emerging Northumberland Local Plan has highlighted that 170 homes in the parish should be delivered between 2016 and 2036 to meet objectively assessed need. Four of the five allocations in the Neighbourhood Plan seek to deliver housing, either as part of a housing-led or mixed use scheme. These are anticipated to deliver at least 50 additional homes, with the likelihood of significantly more being delivered (depending on what level of housing is taken forward on the two mixed use sites at Land on South Road and Land at Burnhouse Road). Given there are already planning permissions for around 140 dwelling units in the parish, it is considered that these allocations will enable local housing needs to be met and exceeded locally. This reflects a key stated aim for the Neighbourhood Plan, which highlights that the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to deliver more homes than the Objectively Assessed Need of 170 units identified by Northumberland County Council for the parish over the period 2016-2036. Site 4.6 has been allocated for community and recreational use which will be providing some outdoor space for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan area.

Accessibility to services and facilities is a key influence on the quality of life of residents and community cohesion. In this respect the proposed allocations taken forward through the Neighbourhood Plan are in locations accessible to the key services and facilities present in the town. They are also in locations relatively accessible to key public transport links. This will support accessibility to key amenities within and outside of the town.

Appraisal findings: Draft Plan

The WNP sets out a range of provisions which will support the quality of life of the parish's residents.

As already discussed, the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to deliver additional housing over and above that required by Northumberland County Council. This is with a view to addressing "*the relative imbalance between younger and older people in the Parish and to support the expansion of local services and facilities*". Given this is anticipated to meet locally objectively assessed housing needs, it is assumed that this growth quantum will meet the housing needs arising locally.

The accompanying housing policies support the delivery of affordable housing for local needs. In this respect Policy 5 (Housing Development in the Plan Area) stipulates that 20% affordable housing will be sought on-site for schemes of 10 dwellings or more or in accordance with the most up to date evidence on affordable housing need. The policy also seeks to ensure that the type and size of new open market housing and affordable housing should reflect the identified local need for smaller homes of one, two and three bedrooms, including for bungalows. The meeting of local housing needs will also be supported by Policy 7 (Community-led and Affordable Housing) which promotes Community-led Housing Schemes in Wooler, and other schemes which deliver 100% affordable housing. In relation to

older people's housing, Policy 8 (Housing for Older People) seeks to promote the development of older people's housing in central and more accessible locations, with particular support for proposals for the provision of extra-care housing, later living schemes, residential extensions for older family members, sheltered housing and one and two-bedroom bungalows adapted for enhanced accessibility. In terms of rural housing, new single dwellings including self-build, custom-build and accommodation related to small-scale business and other farm diversification schemes are supported in Tile Sheds, Haugh Head, Turvelaws, Way to Wooler, Coldmartin, Towermartin, Westmartin and Gallowlaws through Policy 9 (Housing and Business Developments in Outlying Settlements), and in open countryside, single dwellings will be allowed where there is *"an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside"* through Policy 10 (*Housing Development in the Open Countryside*).

The economic vitality of the Neighbourhood Plan area will be supported by a number of the WNP policies. A key policy in this regard is Policy 12 (Business Development), which sets out provisions for supporting proposals for new-build and conversions to accommodate new business units, offices, enterprise hubs, live-work units, and, in the outlying settlements, the expansion of existing businesses, proposals for small scale employment and business use. It also supports the rural economy, through promoting the expansion of existing employment uses in rural areas including tourism, recreation and the diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. The policy also supports home-based employment activities. Further supported by Policy 16 (Broadband Provision in New Development), this will promote the diversification of the economy through seeking to support small businesses, including through encouraging the provision of live-work units and home working. The visitor economy of the parish will also be supported by Policy 14 (Tourism Facilities) which promotes the expansion of sustainable tourism provision in the Neighbourhood Plan area. Recognising their contribution to the local economy, Policy 11 (Existing Employment Sites) also seeks to support the vitality of the existing employment sites at Wooler Industrial Estate and the industrial land at Haugh Head (including the Glendale Business Park).

The WNP has a close recognition of the importance of local facilities and amenities for the quality of life of residents in the Neighbourhood Plan area. Two policies are key in this regard. Policy 24 (Community Facilities) sets out a range of provisions for enhancing the viability and/or the community value of existing community facilities and community assets in Wooler. Identifying six facilities of key community value, the policy seeks to ensure that their loss is precluded, unless alternative provision is provided. The policy also seeks to ensure that there is no complete loss of pubs or convenience stores in the parish. Complementing this policy, Policy 25 (New Community Facilities) supports new recreational, leisure, educational and community facilities where a series of provisions are met.

The quality of life of residents will also be supported by Policy 6 (New Housing Development – Design Principles), which seeks to implement high quality design which promotes the wellbeing of residents. This includes through a commitment to incorporate Building for Life standards within new development areas. This will be supported by the policies which promote local distinctiveness and a sense of place, discussed under the 'Landscape and Historic Environment' objective. In terms of other factors influencing the quality of life of residents, accessibility to services and facilities, which is a key influence on the quality of life of residents, has been discussed in more detail under the 'Transportation' objective below, and the health of residents has been discussed under the 'Health and Wellbeing' objective.

Overall effects

The plan is predicted to have **significant positive effects** overall in relation to the 'Population and Community' theme. This reflects the WNP's close focus on delivering housing for local needs, protecting and enhancing community facilities, supporting accessibility and promoting the quality of life of residents. It also has a close focus on promoting economic vitality in the Neighbourhood Plan area.

5.9 SEA Objective 7: Health and wellbeing

Appraisal findings: site allocations

All sites allocated through the WNP have good access to health, social and leisure facilities, which will likely lead to long term positive effects in terms of residents' overall quality of life. However, while the medical centre within the town contains two GP surgeries and other medical facilities, it is recognised through the WNP that facilities need to be maintained and improved to accommodate the anticipated growth of the town.

The WNP seeks to improve the community infrastructure offer where possible through the site allocation policies. In this context, Policy 4.1 (Land at the Former First School Site off Burnhouse Road (Site 1)) supports proposals for *"mixed use, community led, an extension to the cemetery, community and/or recreational facilities."*

A key contributor to health and wellbeing is the network of green spaces, green corridors, and the PRoW network. As such, site allocation policies (e.g. Policy 4.1) support proposals *"subject to compliance with policies in the Plan regarding design, development impact and amenity considerations"*. This includes Policy 26 (Footpaths and Cycleways) which requires that *"where development affects these important links [footpaths and cycleways], proposals must ensure that these links are either incorporated within the site or are replaced by a more attractive and convenient route."*

While sites 1 and 3 support the delivery of recreational facilities, it is recognised that Site 2 (Policy 4.2 (Land South of the Martins)) is an existing football pitch, and as such any new development will involve the loss of this provision. It is therefore required through the WNP that *"a replacement football pitch must be made available for use prior to any development taking place on site, either on the site allocated in the Plan, or elsewhere on an appropriate site in the Plan Area"*. This will ensure the recreational offer of the town is maintained. Policy 4.6 has been allocated for recreational facilities which will add to the towns recreational facility offer.

Appraisal findings: Draft Plan

Policies 1 - 3 of the WNP (Sustainable Development) are anticipated to lead to positive effects on health and wellbeing. Policy 1 (Supporting Sustainable Development) encourages development where it *"expands social, community, leisure, recreational, health and educational opportunities"*. Further to this, Policy 2 (Major Development in Northumberland National Park) seeks to preserve the Northumberland National Park, which provides a range of recreational activities and access to green space for the community. The valued features and setting of the National Park are likely to be further protected through Policy 3 (Locally Distinctive and High Quality Design), which recognises the importance of Wooler's landscape, historic environment and setting. This is also a focus of Policy 6 (New Housing Development – Design Principles) which requires proposals to demonstrate how it will *"ensure the retention of natural features"*, encouraging the delivery/retention of open spaces, trees, hedges, landscaping, cycle and pedestrian access. Delivering well designed places will likely lead to positive mental health benefits to the users of the area (residents and visitors alike) in the long-term.

Providing access to a high quality natural environment is further supported through Part V of the WNP (Landscape and Natural Environment, Townscape and Heritage) (Policies 18 – 20). This part of the WNP recognises that Wooler's landscape, natural environment, townscape and heritage are important assets for the town, valued by locals and visitors alike. Policies 18 – 19 require that new development preserve and where possible enhance the character and appearance of the town, with focus specifically placed on South Road, the Peth and the Gateways to Wooler Town (Policy 18), Landscaping, Hedgerows and Trees (Policy 19), and Wooler Conservation Area (Policy 20). This will contribute positively to the satisfaction of residents with their neighbourhood as a place to live, improving quality of life and providing a high-quality destination for visitors.

The designation of Local Green Spaces (LGS) (Policy 22) provides local protection to the natural environment, supporting the policies discussed above in maximising the value and benefits of

Wooler's natural environment. This is in accordance with the emerging Local Plan (Issues & Options Report 2018) which does not propose to designate any LGS in the Local Plan, but instead considers that, "given the need to show that any such designation is demonstrably special to a local community, the most appropriate mechanism for designating Local Green Space is through a neighbourhood plan." The designation of GS1 – GS6 through the WLP (Policy 22) will therefore support the health and wellbeing of residents by enhancing access to valued open space. This will likely facilitate improvements in levels of physical activity and enhance social interaction between residents.

Physical well-being will further be promoted through the WNP policies which support the recreational offer of the town. In this context, Policy 23 (Recreational Land and Facilities) seeks to protect the recreational areas which are highly valued by the community, maintaining their permanency "for as long as there is a need for [the] facility". Further to this, policies 26 and 27 recognise the importance of the pedestrian routes that link places in the town, and that link the town to the surrounding areas. Policy 26 (Footpaths and Cycleways) therefore states that "improvement or expansion of safe cycling and walking routes" will be sought after, which will support sustainable travel, leading to improvements in residents' physical and mental health.

In terms of the wider community infrastructure offer, Policy 24 (Assets of Community Value and Community Facilities) provides protection for six local facilities (including the Community Room and Bowling Club) registered as Assets of Community Value (ACV). Policy 25 (New Community Facilities) also supports the provision of new facilities. These policies will therefore support health and wellbeing through protecting and enhancing community offer.

Overall effects

Overall, the WNP is considered likely to lead to long term **significant positive effects** for the Health and Wellbeing SEA objective, including the provision of high quality, affordable homes, supporting the delivery of community facilities, and through protecting and enhancing green infrastructure provision in the parish.

5.10 SEA Objective 8: Transportation

Appraisal findings: Site Allocations

The WNP proposes four housing allocations, one employment allocation and one recreational and community allocation under Policy 4, with further details for each allocation set out in Policies 4.1 to 4.6. The proposed scale of housing development at Sites 1 and 2 under Policies 4.1 and 4.2 is not likely to have a significant impact on the capacity of the local road network in terms of traffic. While the precise scale of housing development is not known for Sites 3 and 4 under policies 4.3 and 4.4, given the size of the sites it is considered unlikely that they would be likely to deliver a significant number of dwellings. Taking this into account it is also considered unlikely that development would have a significant impact on the local road network due to increased traffic. All the housing allocations are within a reasonable walking distance to local services and facilities on the High Street as well as existing bus stops.

The allocation proposed under Policy 4.5 is for employment uses, in particular for class B1, B2 and B8. While the precise scale of development and use is not known at this stage, given the size of the site it is unlikely that development would have a significant impact on the local road network in terms of traffic. The site is situated in the north of the town and within walking distances to local services on the High Street and bus stops. The allocation proposed under Policy 4.6 is for recreational and community use. The site is situated to the east of the town and within walking distance of local services,

Overall, the site allocations are predicted to have a residual neutral effect in terms of transportation. While there is the potential for some minor positive effects given that the sites are within a reasonable walking distance to services/ facilities on the High Street and existing bus stops, this is unlikely to result in a significant residual effect.

Appraisal findings: Draft Plan

The sustainable development policies are not predicted have any significant effects on this SEA topic. While supporting the principle of sustainable development under Policy 1 could be positive for transportation this is uncertain at this stage and dependant on the subsequent detailed policies in the WNP as well as the implementation of development. Policy 2 relates to major development in the National Park and Policy 3 to design and as a result they are likely to have a residual neutral effect in terms of transportation.

In terms of the Housing policies, Policy 5 supports new housing development within the Neighbourhood Plan area subject to a number of criteria. In line with Policy 5 development would need to be well-related to the existing settlement and have good accessibility to the local facilities and services on the High Street, which has the potential for a minor positive effect on this SEA objective. It is assumed that this development would be small scale and therefore unlikely to have a significant impact on the local road network in terms of traffic.

Policy 6 relates to the design principles for new housing development and is likely have a minor positive effect in relation to this SEA objective, as it requires all new housing proposals to demonstrate how development will provide for safe cycle and pedestrian access, both within the development itself and where appropriate into the centre of Wooler. It also requires that development provides sufficient car parking spaces to meet the needs of occupiers, thereby limiting the impacts on highway safety arising from on-street parking. Furthermore, all new housing developments will need to demonstrate that the local highway can accommodate development and if not, that any necessary infrastructure improvements will be secured as part of planning permission and available to serve the development before it is first required.

While Policies 7 and 8 are likely to have a neutral effect on this SEA topic as they relate to affordable housing and housing for the elderly, Policy 8 supports the provision of older people's housing in central and accessible locations in Wooler.

Policies 9 and 10 support new dwellings in outlying settlements and in the open countryside that have poor accessibility to the town centre. While these policies could have a minor negative effect in relation to this SEA objective by supporting development in areas with poor accessibility to services/ facilities and therefore encouraging use of the provide vehicle, it is important to note that this is only likely to be in limited circumstances and for isolated dwellings. Policy 10 provides an opportunity for rural workers to live in close proximity to their employment and will help to reduce or avoid commuting.

In terms of the local economic policies, Policy 11 seeks to retain existing employment sites, although it is noted that porposals for haulage sites are supported in these areas. Haulage sites could have a negative effect by increasing the number of HGVs on the local road network. While no proposals for haulage might come forward, this policy could potentially be strenghtened by including a requirement for any proposal to demonstrate that there would be no significant impacts on the local highway network in terms of capacity/ safety and that appropriate mitigation is delivered where necessary.

Similar to housing Policies 9 and 10, local economy Policy 12 supports proposals for small scale employment in the outlying settlements and open countryside subject to a number of criteria. This includes an assertion that any proposal will not have a significant impact on highway safety. Development in these areas will have poor accessibility to services/ facilities but could also provide employment opportunities for residents in the outlying settlements and the open countryside. Overall, there is the potential for both minor negative and positive effects on this SEA topic.

Policy 13 supports change of use to residential or other cusiness or community uses on upper floors in Wooler Town. The change of use to residential could have impacts in terms of parking in the Town but if proposals are brought forward in line with Policy 6 then suffiicent parking will need to be provided. Development within the town is also likely to have good access to services/ facilities.

Policy 14 relates to tourism facilities and is unlikely to have a significant effect on this SEA topic. The policy requires any proposal to deliver small scale parking provision. Policy 15 supports small-scale proposals for tourism development and caravan parks but requires any proposals to demonstrate that they will have no significant impact on highway safety.

Policy 16 has the potential for a minor positive effect as it requires any proposals for new development to ensure that there is the ability for multiple providers to deliver fibre broadband. This will give the opportunity for new residents to work from home and reduce pressure on the local highway network.

Policy 17 related to small-scale proposals for new renewable energy and is not likely to have a significant effect on this SEA topic.

The landscape and natural environment, townscape and heritage policies (18 to 21) are not likely to have a significant effect on this SEA topic. .

Policies 22 to 25 relate to community life, including local green spaces, recreational and community facilities. The policies are not likely to have a significant effect on this SEA topic as they seek to protect important local green spaces, recreational and community facilities. Policy 25 supports proposals for new community facilities and infrastructure as long as they demonstrate that there will be no significant adverse impacts on highway safety. It is unlikely that any proposals coming forward would be of a scale to have significant negative effects on the capacity of the local highway network. Potential for a residual neutral effect on this SEA topic.

The WNP policies that deal with accessibility are all likely to have a major positive effect on this SEA topic. Policy 26 seeks the provision of or financial contributions to the provision of additional infrastructure associated with development to improve or expand cycling and walking routes. This will help to reduce reliance on the private vehicle. Policy 27 protects the disused Wooler Railway Line from development that would prevent its future use as a pedestrian route.

Overall effects

The plan is predicted to have a **minor positive effect** overall. This is given development is likely to be located in accessible locations, and support is provided for improved cycle and transport links. The magnitude of effects is however likely to be low and is unlikely to lead to significant effects on the baseline position (i.e. the dominant mode of travel is likely to remain the private vehicle).

5.11 Conclusions at this current stage

5.11.1 Summary of effects

This section summarises the overall effects of the Plan against each of the SEA Topics. It is important to differentiate between significant effects, which are predicted to lead to changes in the baseline position, and those effects that are broadly positive or negative, but are less likely to lead to substantial changes.

Table 5.1: Summary of overall effects for each SEA Topic.

<i>Biodiversity</i>	<i>Climate change</i>	<i>Landscape and Historic Environment</i>	<i>Land, Soil Water quality</i>	<i>Population and community</i>	<i>Health and wellbeing</i>	<i>Travel and transport</i>
Minor +ve	Neutral	Significant +ve	Mixed / neutral	Significant +Ve	Significant +Ve	Minor +ve

The plan is predicted to have mostly positive effects.

Three significant positive effects are predicted overall, relating to Landscape and Historic Environment , Population and Community and health and wellbeing.

The effects upon Landscape and Historic Environment are predicted to be significantly positive as the Plan has a strong policy framework for locally important buildings and the conservation area.

The allocated sites could also lead to an improvement in the quality of the townscape as several of these are currently vacant, and the Plan policies seek to secure development that is complementary to Woolers townscape and character.

A key aim of the Plan is also to ensure that the character of the surrounding landscapes is protected and enhanced where possible.

The effects on population and community are predicted to be significant too, as the Plan should help to deliver different types of housing to meet the needs of the people of Wooler. In particular this includes reference to specialist housing.

The effects upon health and wellbeing are predicted to be significant due to the cumulative positive effects associated with affordable housing provision, protection and improvement of recreational opportunities and improvements to accessibility.

No significant negative effects have been predicted.

5.12 Recommendations

In order to enhance the positive effects and minimise any negative effects, a number of recommendations were made throughout the SA process. These are listed in table 5.2 below. The Wooler NPSG will consider these recommendations when it finalises the report following Regulation 14 consultation.

Table 5.2: Mitigation and enhancement measures

Issue / opportunity	Recommendations
Minimising impacts upon important local habitats and ensuring net gain of biodiversity	Development at sites 1 and 3 should explicitly seek to retain and enhance habitats, and implement buffer zones / green infrastructure to minimise the potential for negative effects (and contribute to the environmental net gain principle). <i>However, it is acknowledged that other policies within the plan could secure such improvements in applied successfully.</i>
Site 3 contains areas at risk of flooding	It is recommended that Policy 4.3 be updated to include specific mitigation measures relating to flood risk on site. <i>However, it is acknowledged that other policies within the plan could secure such improvements in applied successfully.</i>
Haulage related employment development could occur in the plan area	Policy 11 could potentially be strengthened by including a requirement for any proposal to demonstrate that there would be no significant impacts on the local highway network in terms of capacity/ safety and that appropriate mitigation is delivered where necessary. Employment sites should also be encouraged to be fit for purpose by providing sufficient parking and turning circles.

Overall, the Plan has been positively prepared and does not generate any significant negative effects. As a result, the number of recommendations made through the SA process has been limited.

Whilst these three recommendations are considered to add clarity on certain issues, the effects of the Plan would not be significantly different should they be implemented (though the changes would certainly be beneficial).

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.

Threesignificant effects have been predicted in the SEA. Whilst three of these are 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 on cultural and natural heritage due to an improved protection for locally important buildings and the potential improvement of townscape through redevelopment on allocated sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Townscape character analysis. • Number of locally important buildings identified for protection.
A significant positive effect is predicted for population and communities as the Plan will contribute towards meeting local housing needs in accessible locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net housing completions per annum • Number of homes for older people • Affordable housing target achievement
A significant positive effect is predicted on health and wellbeing due to cumulative effects of affordable housing, recreational facilities and accessibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of affordable homes delivered. • Achievement of open space and sport standards • Length of new cycle and pedestrian routes

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

6. What are the next steps?

This Environmental Report accompanies the Regulation 14 version of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan for consultation.

Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, and the Environmental Report will be updated as necessary. The updated Environmental Report will then accompany the Neighbourhood Plan for submission to the Local Planning Authority, Northumberland County Council, for subsequent Independent Examination.

At Independent Examination, the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the existing Local Plan.

If Independent Examination is favourable, the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a referendum, organised by Northumberland County Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once made, the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the development plan for Wooler Parish.

Appendix A – Site Assessment Proformas

SEA theme	SEA Objective	Criteria for proformas
Biodiversity	Achieve net gains in biodiversity through the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats and associated species.	Tree preservation orders on site Any loss of biodiversity
Climate Change	Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan area to the risks of flooding and other potential effects of climate change	SSSI impact zone, AONB, flood zone Land Shape
Landscape and Historic Environment	Protect, maintain and enhance the historic environment.	Conservation area, listed building or scheduled monument
	Protect and enhance the character and quality and appreciation of the landscape surrounding Wooler.	Coalscene Scale and nature of development significant?
Land, soil and water	Minimise the loss of the most valuable soils and agricultural land.	Agricultural Land Greenfield/brownfield Ground Contamination
	Protect water quality and contribute towards the achievement of Water framework Objectives.	Ground Contamination

SEA theme	SEA Objective	Criteria for proformas
Population and community	Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Near existing built up area Secondary school Primary School Existing community value
	Support and maintain a strong and sustainable local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocated for a particular use Town/local centre/shop Key employment site Significant infrastructure crossing Scale and nature of development significant?
Health and Wellbeing	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open space/recreation facilities GP Hospital pharmacy Cycle route Footpath
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Near existing built up area Suitable access Bus Stop Cycle route Footpath PROA

Appendix B: Scoping Report

