



EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Screening Report

Draft Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan

**Strategic Environmental Assessment & Habitats Regulation
Assessment**

February 2024

(Updated March 2024 with consultation responses)

On behalf of Soham Town Council in relation to the Draft Soham & Barway
Neighbourhood Plan

Date of assessment:	9 th February 2024
Date/ version of neighbourhood development plan to which Screening Report applies:	Soham Barway Neighbourhood Plan Pre-Submission Consultation Draft Version, November 2023

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Overview

Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) to which this Screening Report applies:

Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan

Version/ date of NDP to which this Screening Report applies:

Pre-Submission Consultation Draft Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan, November 2023

Neighbourhood area to which the NDP applies:

Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Area. This draft NDP applies to the entirety of the Neighbourhood Area.

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Acronyms

ALC	Agricultural Land Classification
CWS	County Wildlife Site
ECDC	East Cambridgeshire District Council
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EU	European Union
EUWA	European Union (Withdrawal) Act
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
IRZ	Impact Risk Zone
LPA	Local Planning Authority
NCA	National Character Area
NDP	Neighbourhood Development Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SBNP	Soham Barway Neighbourhood Plan
SIP	Site Improvement Plan
SIR	Single Issue Review
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

1. Introduction

- 1.1. To be 'made', a Neighbourhood Plan must meet certain Basic Conditions. These include that the making of the plan "*does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.*" One of these obligations relates to Directive 2001/42/EC 'on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment'.
- 1.2. This is often referred to as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. The SEA Directive seeks to provide a high level of protection of the environment by integrating environmental considerations into the process of preparing plans and programmes. The SEA Directive is transposed into English law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (the 'SEA Regulations') and it is these regulations that the plan will need to be compatible with.
- 1.3. The UK left the EU on 31st January 2020. Under the UK-EU Withdrawal Act (EUWA), a transition period ended on 31st December 2020, during which time all EU law continued to apply to the UK. During the transition period the UK needed to continue following domestic law that implements EU law, or directly applicable EU law that is given effect through the EUWA 2018. Beyond the transition period, the SEA Regulations will continue to apply as before unless and until new legislation is introduced.
- 1.4. A key stage in the neighbourhood planning process is determining whether SEA is required. The process for deciding whether SEA is necessary is referred to as 'screening'.
- 1.5. SEA is a process with specific documents that are consulted on and considered through the decision-making process. Failure to adhere to the process and generate the required documents may increase the risk of legal challenge to the adoption of that plan.
- 1.6. The SEA Regulations set out a series of sequential steps that must be undertaken as part of any SEA. Article 3(5) of Directive 2001/42/EC details the criteria for determining whether plans are likely to have significant environmental effects. These criteria are outlined in **Appendix 1**.
- 1.7. The (former) Department of the Environment produced a flow chart diagram¹ which sets out the process for screening a planning document to ascertain whether a full SEA is required. The flow chart diagram is provided in **Appendix 2**.
- 1.8. More recently, the national Planning Practice Guide reflects the SEA Regulations in a six-stage flowchart process for undertaking SEA for a Neighbourhood Plan (see **Appendix 3**).
- 1.9. These various pieces of law and guidance have been used to help prepare this report. **Section 6** provides firstly, a screening assessment of the Draft Soham Barway Neighbourhood Plan (November 2023), against the assessment criteria in **Appendix 1** to identify the significance of effects which may arise as a result of the plan's implementation.
- 1.10. Secondly, it applies the SEA Directive to the Draft Soham Barway Neighbourhood Plan, as per the flow chart in **Appendix 2**, to determine if a SEA is required.
- 1.11. To decide whether a SEA is required, East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) needs to consider the following sorts of issues:
 - How the policies in the NDP might affect the environment, community or economy;
 - Whether the policies are likely to adversely affect a "sensitive area", such as a European Site (Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar) or a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR) etc.;
 - Whether the policies propose a higher level of development than what is set out in the existing development plan and that has been assessed by the SEA or Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of that plan;
 - Whether the implementation of the policies is likely to lead to new development;

¹ Department of the Environment, A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2005)

- Whether the cumulative impact of the policies taken together may give rise to a significant effect.
- 1.12. Not every Neighbourhood Plan will need SEA. However, when a parish or town council submits a plan proposal to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) it is mandatory to provide, either:
- a statement of reasons as to why SEA was not required; or
 - if SEA is required, an Environmental Report (a key output of the SEA process).
- 1.13. As a rule of thumb, SEA is more likely to be necessary if both of the following two elements apply:
- a Neighbourhood Plan allocates sites for development (for example, for housing, employment etc.); **and**
 - the neighbourhood area contains sensitive environmental assets (a SSSI or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, for example) that may be affected by the policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.14. In light of these two considerations, it is very unlikely that a Neighbourhood Plan would require SEA if the plan were not allocating land for development (which isn't already allocated in the Local Plan or with consent). This is because allocating land for development is more likely to generate physical changes which lead to significant effects.
- 1.15. However, this Screening Report is not just about SEA. Another element of the Basic Conditions relates to Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, often referred to as the **Habitats Directive**. Under the Habitats Regulations which implement the Directive, an assessment referred to as 'an appropriate assessment' must be undertaken if the plan in question is likely to have a significant effect on a European protected wildlife site. This forms part of a wider assessment known as a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).
- 1.16. A decision by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) (*People Over Wind & Sweetman vs. Coillte Teoranta*) in April 2018 has had a significant impact on the HRA process for both Neighbourhood Plans and Local Plans. In short, the ECJ ruled that to determine whether it is necessary to carry out a full HRA of the implications of a plan, it is not appropriate to take account of mitigation measures at the screening stage. Rather, consideration of mitigation will need to occur at the full appropriate assessment stage.
- 1.17. Following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU), decisions by the ECJ are no longer legally binding but may continue to be relevant².
- 1.18. A consequence of the ECJ's decision is that mitigation measures set out in a plan cannot be used at the screening stage to conclude there will be 'no likely significant effects' on European Sites. Therefore, if a Neighbourhood Plan includes measures to counter the plan's effects on European Sites these should, in effect, be ignored at the screening stage.
- 1.19. Previously, plan-making in the UK has followed case law as set out in *Application of Hart District Council; vs. Secretary of the State for Communities and Local Government* in 2008, which concluded that: '*anything which encourages the proponents of plans and projects to incorporate mitigation measures at the earliest possible stage in the evolution of their plan or project is surely to be encouraged*'.
- 1.20. The Government has acknowledged that the ECJ's ruling has caused uncertainty in preparing Neighbourhood Plans and could result in more plans requiring a full SEA or HRA. In December 2018, The Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/16/section/6/enacted>

Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018³ came into force, amending the Basic Conditions and allowing affected NDPs and Orders to proceed.

- 1.21. For the avoidance of doubt, this screening report has been undertaken in accordance with the ECJ's ruling, insofar that the effects of any mitigation measures set out in the policies of the Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan (November 2023) have not been considered.
- 1.22. The SEA Directive requires that if an eligible plan or programme requires an appropriate assessment under the Habitats Directive, then that plan, or programme will also require a SEA. It is therefore advisable to check whether an assessment under the Habitats Regulations is required by undertaking HRA screening at the same time as screening for SEA. **That is what has been done in this document.**
- 1.23. Returning to the purpose of this document, there are three recommended steps in the initial screening process:
 1. Prepare a screening report (THIS DOCUMENT);
 2. Request a screening opinion from the consultation bodies in light of this report (COMPLETED MARCH 2024); and
 3. Considering their responses, determine whether the plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment (and therefore require SEA) (SEPARATE DECISION STATEMENT).
- 1.24. Whilst it is not prescribed, in most instances the LPA, which is ECDC in this case, will undertake SEA screening for a Neighbourhood Plan. This is because the LPA will ultimately be responsible for ensuring that the SEA requirements have been met prior to the Neighbourhood Plan being made. **It is confirmed that ECDC prepared this Screening Report.**
- 1.25. The Neighbourhood Plan should be screened as soon as there is sufficient information available to consider whether the proposed content of the plan or its likely intent (e.g., will it allocate development sites or not?) are likely to lead to significant effects to effectively inform the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.26. The purpose of this report, therefore, is to undertake a screening exercise to determine whether the Pre-Submission Draft Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan (November 2023) (subsequently referred to as the 'SBNP') requires a full SEA and / or HRA. The screening exercise will therefore support the SBNP in satisfying the Basic Conditions and can be submitted as part of the evidence base which will accompany the plan. Soham Town Council is the 'Qualifying Body' for the Soham Neighbourhood Area (which is coterminous with Soham parish boundary). Only Soham Town Council has the legal right to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the Soham Neighbourhood Area.
- 1.27. Please note that this screening report uses the term 'European Site' when referring collectively to SPAs, SACs, and Ramsar sites. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also expects candidate SACs, potential SPAs and Ramsar sites to be included within the assessment.
- 1.28. For the purposes of SEA, the statutory bodies are executive non-departmental public bodies with responsibilities for managing the environment on government's behalf, namely:
 - Environment Agency
 - Historic England
 - Natural England
- 1.29. The statutory bodies were requested to review and make representations during consultation on a draft version of the screening report in February to March 2024. Their responses are attached at **Appendix 4**.

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2018/1307/contents/made>

2. Strategic Planning Context

- 2.1. The Basic Conditions require a Neighbourhood Plan to be in *general conformity* with the strategic policies contained in the development plan (primarily, the Local Plan) for the area. Through its strategic policies, the Local Plan effectively defines the parameters within which a Neighbourhood Plan may operate.
- 2.2. Throughout their preparation, Local Plans are subject to SEA (generally incorporated through a Sustainability Appraisal (SA)) and HRA. Where a Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan, it is likely that many of the environmental effects of the plan will have already been considered through the Local Plan-making process.
- 2.3. National policy states that evidence should be proportionate and should not repeat policy assessment already undertaken. It is therefore relevant to consider the strategic policy context for the purpose of avoiding duplication and to identify environmental effects not already considered and addressed through the Local Plan-making process.

Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023)

- 2.4. The current East Cambridgeshire Local Plan is the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023), which defines strategic (and more locally specific) policies for the area. The Local Plan was adopted by the Council on 21 April 2015, with some small changes to it adopted by the Council on 19 October 2023. It is therefore referred to as the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023).
- 2.5. In April 2020 the Council determined that its Local Plan 2015 required revision, but only partially and only in respect of its strategic housing policy, GROWTH1, and some of its supporting text. The rest of the Local Plan was considered to not, at that time, to need updating.
- 2.6. At the time at which the SBNP is to be examined, the Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023) will remain the adopted Local Plan.
- 2.7. The Local Plan directs the majority of growth to the main settlements and market towns of Ely, Littleport and Soham. The Local Plan describes Soham as the second largest market town in the district and that it is likely to continue to grow over the next 20 years. It goes on to state that there are some opportunities for housing development on land within the built-up part of Soham, on 'infill' sites. It is estimated there could be capacity for perhaps 410 dwellings between 2013 and 2031. Soham has "*an attractive historic town centre, with a range of local and independent shops, and a vibrant and active local community*".
- 2.8. Barway is a small rural village, 4 miles north west of Soham. There are no significant facilities within the village, with residents travelling to nearby Ely or Soham to access services and facilities. The Local Plan states that there has been limited new growth in the village on small 'infill' sites and there are likely to be some further opportunities for infill development over the Local Plan period.
- 2.9. The Local Plan identifies 14 allocations to deliver an estimated 1,600 dwellings, 13ha of employment land and just over 1ha of retail/leisure in Soham. The Local Plan identifies two housing allocations in Barway, to deliver an estimated 10 dwellings. In addition, the Local Plan defines a Development Envelope within which growth is in principle, generally acceptable. During its preparation, the Local Plan was subject to both SA and HRA.

Withdrawn Local Plan 2018

- 2.10. It is also worth noting that, prior to the preparation of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023), ECDC had embarked on a full update of its Local Plan. In February 2018, ECDC submitted for examination the updated Local Plan along with a supporting evidence base. Examination of the Local Plan commenced in June 2018. However, in February 2019, ECDC withdrew the draft Local Plan, so it never reached the final adoption stage.

- 2.11. At the point of withdrawal, the draft Local Plan was at an advanced stage of its preparation and had been subject to a full SA incorporating SEA, and a full HRA. The withdrawn Local Plan proposed a similar growth strategy to the adopted Local Plan, focussing growth principally in the market towns, albeit with an increased role for large and medium villages in the rural area. Specifically, for Soham, the submitted (but subsequently withdrawn) Local Plan proposed 15 allocations for housing development within Soham, 3 mixed use allocations and 1 employment allocation.
- 2.12. The SA prepared for the submitted (but subsequently withdrawn) Local Plan incorporated the requirements of SEA. Throughout the stages of plan preparation, the SA influenced policy formulation and the allocation of development sites. A range of sites were appraised in Soham. The proposed sites and overall level of growth were considered to provide a sustainable approach to growth in Soham.
- 2.13. In June 2018, ECDC published a HRA report⁴ which accompanied the now withdrawn submitted Local Plan 2018. The purpose of the HRA report was to set out the method, findings and conclusions of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (Stage 1 Screening and Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment) of the submitted East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, which was carried out by ECDC, in consultation with Natural England. ECDC has retained the HRA (dated June 2018) as it provides evidence and guidance on issues relating to European Sites which the Council believes remains relevant to applicants, decision-makers and to the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. It remains published on the Council's website⁵.
- 2.14. The HRA complied with the recent judgement of the Court of Justice for the European Union of 12th April 2018, as described in section 1 of this report. Through the Local Plan examination, Natural England confirmed the HRA was legally compliant.
- 2.15. The following European sites were scoped into the HRA for consideration:
- Fenland SAC (including Wicken Fen, Woodwalton Fen and Chippenham Fen Ramsar)
 - Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar
 - Devil's Dyke SAC
 - Breckland SAC/SPA
- 2.16. The potential likely significant effects identified as a result of the submitted (but subsequently withdrawn) Local Plan 2018 were:
- Habitat damage and/or loss
 - Disturbance from urbanisation effects
 - Disturbance from increased recreational pressure
 - Reduced air quality as a result of increased vehicle journeys
 - Water quality changes from water consumption and abstraction
 - Reduced water quality from pollution due to increased demand for waste-water treatment
- 2.17. Soham is in the south of East Cambridgeshire district, approximately 3km from Wicken Fen SAC/Ramsar and 4km from Chippenham Fen SAC/Ramsar. The HRA identifies that due to the proximity of proposed site allocations (at Soham) to Wicken Fen and Chippendham, there is potential for disturbance from recreational pressure in-combination with other residential

⁴<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/HRA%20Appropriate%20Assessment%20Post%20Submission%20Local%20Plan%20-%20published%2015.6.18.pdf>

⁵<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/HRA%20Appropriate%20Assessment%20Post%20Submission%20Local%20Plan%20-%20published%2015.6.18.pdf>

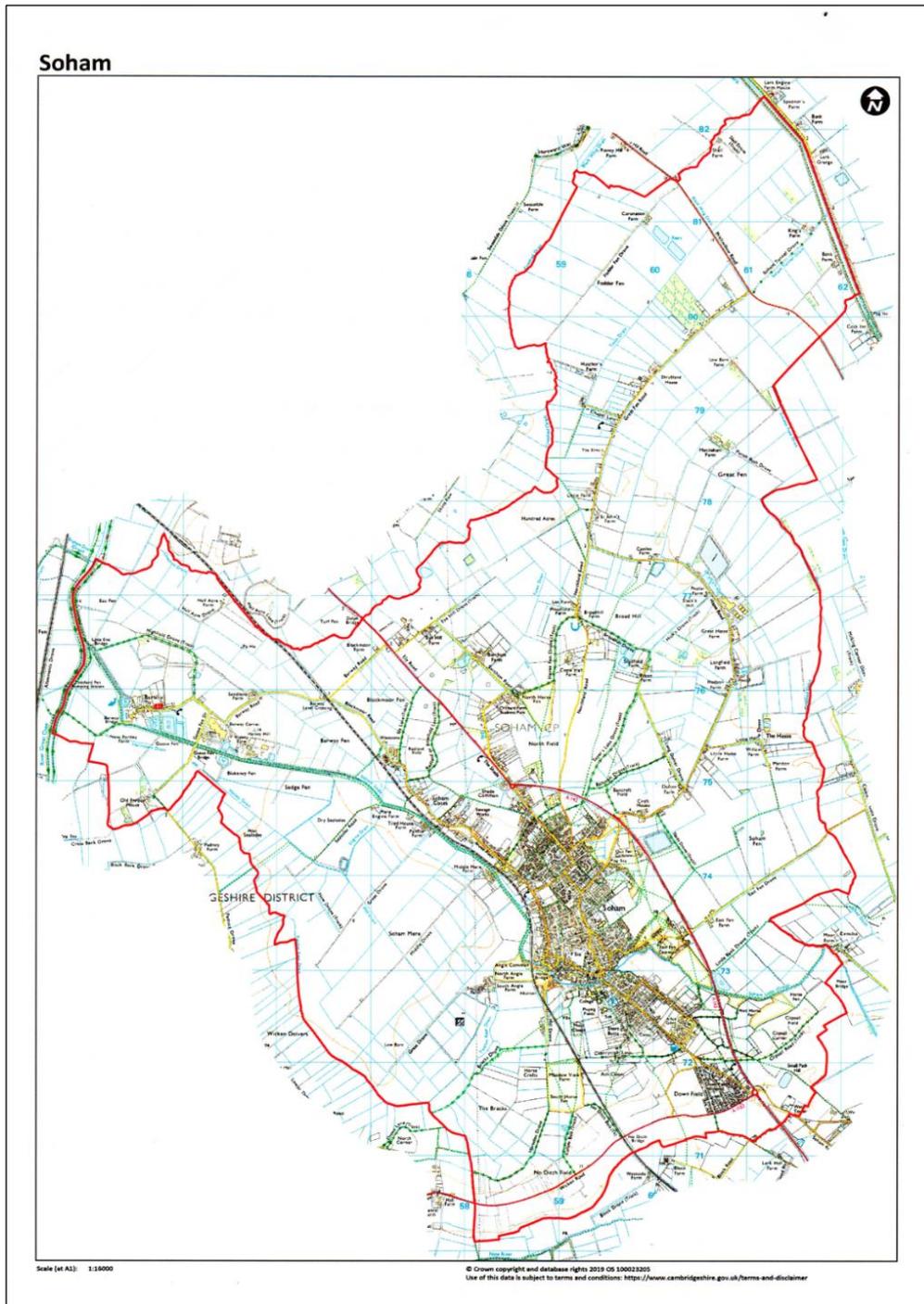
allocations and in-combination with housing development in the neighbouring districts of Forest Heath and South Cambridgeshire.

- 2.18. The HRA also identifies Soham has a Water Recycling Centre that connects to Soham Lode and that both Wicken Fen and Chippenham Fen are vulnerable to changes in water quality and quantity. Development could lead to potential effects on these key vulnerabilities in combination with other residential allocations.
- 2.19. However, the HRA report concluded that, provided certain recommendations were incorporated into the Local Plan, it is possible to conclude that the (now withdrawn) submitted East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 was compliant with the Habitats Regulations and will not result in likely significant effects on any of the European Sites identified, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

3. Summary of the Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan (November 2023 version)

- 3.1. The subject of this screening report is the *Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan Pre-Submission Consultation Version, November 2023* (SBNP), which was published by Soham Town Council for consultation in November and December 2023.
- 3.2. The SBNP has been prepared by Soham Town Council, the 'qualifying body' for the purposes of neighbourhood planning. The Soham Neighbourhood Area was formally designated by ECDC on 12th June 2019. The designated Neighbourhood Area is shown in **Map 1** below.

Map 1: Boundary of the designated Soham Neighbourhood Area



Source: ECDC

- 3.3. The purpose of this document is to screen the SBNP. The SBNP and supporting information are available to view and download from Soham Town Council's website⁶. Where necessary, please refer to the SBNP alongside this screening report.
- 3.4. The SBNP sets out separate visions for Soham and Barway. These are underpinned by 16 strategic objectives to address the key issues facing Soham and Barway. These are:
- Secure growth in line with strategic requirements focused in Soham's development envelope and protecting the countryside status and the views outside of this.
 - Ensure that Soham is resilient against the future impacts of Climate Change with particular attention to flooding issues and the moves toward greener living.
 - Ensure any additional housing provision meets the needs of local people within the NP Area, now and in the future.
 - Protect and enhance the unique green setting of Soham, including its Commons and open green spaces together with its green lanes and blue spaces taking particular care to improve biodiversity wherever possible.
 - Promote the town, its history, its Lode and its green connections to the 'Green Loop' and make it a focus for sustainable tourism.
 - Promote and protect from further development, the peace and tranquillity which encourages the wonderful wildlife which makes Barway very special to its residents.
 - Improve transport connections and accessibility around the town and parish for all users including those with disabilities. Encourage safe cycle routes both within and beyond the town.
 - Improve the provision and quality of off-street parking (and parking in residential developments) for motorised users (cars, buses etc) and non-motorised users (e.g. bikes) in the parish.
 - Ensure new development delivers high quality design, meets modern living requirements, National Space Standards, appropriate to identified housing needs and is designed to be low carbon.
 - Protect and enhance heritage assets in the town centre (conservation area, listed buildings) and protect the historic environment in Barway and all areas of the parish.
 - Support job retention and creation, maximising the community benefits of local employment by retention of existing employment sites and facilitating new developments on the edge of the town within the natural boundaries.
 - Address existing barriers faced by local young people in accessing Further Education, post 16 and beyond.
 - Fulfil the potential of the town centre in providing a revitalised and vibrant hub with a greater variety of shops, leisure, cultural and community activities.
 - Provide enhanced infrastructure, including sport, health and cultural facilities to support growth and meet the needs of local people, on a scale appropriate to serve neighbourhoods.

⁶ Available at: <https://www.soham-tc.gov.uk/the-council/neighbourhood-plan/>

- Promote and protect from further development, the peace and tranquillity which encourages the wonderful wildlife which makes Barway very special to its residents.
- Ensure that although Barway remains separate from Soham, its needs are not forgotten.

3.5. To deliver the vision and objectives, the SBNP proposes 25 policies, which are summarised in **Table 1** below. Note that the table provides a summary of the policies intent, not the actual policy wording.

Table 1: SBNP Policies

Policy	Summary
Policy SBNP1 – Spatial Strategy	This policy updates the Development Envelopes for Soham and Barway (defined in policy maps 2 and 3 within the SBNP). Land outside of the Development Envelopes of Soham and Barway is defined as countryside and will be strictly controlled.
Policy SBNP2 – Affordable Housing	This policy requires all new housing developments of more than 10 dwellings to make provision for 30% affordable housing.
Policy SBNP3 – Allocation of Affordable Housing	This policy sets out the requirements for priority allocation of affordable housing in Soham and Barway. The policy states that local people should be given first preference on 50% of all affordable rental and 50% of Low Cost Affordable Housing.
Policy SBNP4 - Housing Mix and Accessible Standards	The policy requires housing developments to contribute to meeting the existing and future identified housing needs of the parish and to provide a mix of housing types and sizes. The policy requires all homes to be built to the accessible and adaptable M4(2) standard and 10% to M4(3) standard.
Policy SBNP5 - Vibrant Town Centre	This policy seeks to support a vibrant town centre and updates the approach to the Town Centre in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan.
Policy SBNP6 – Economic Growth	This policy supports proposals for business startup space, grow on space, or a business hub within the development envelope. This policy sets out criteria for employment development proposals located outside of the development envelope.
Policy SBNP7 –Tourism and Leisure	This policy supports modest proposals for tourism, cultural and leisure facilities within or

Policy	Summary
	on the edge of Soham as long as certain criteria, as set out in the policy, can be met.
Policy SBNP8 – Local Services and Facilities	<p>This policy seeks to safeguard local services and facilities by resisting their loss.</p> <p>The policy also seeks to ensure that where Hot Food Takeaways are proposed they do not prejudice the vitality of the retail centre within which they are proposed by resulting in a concentration of Hot Food Takeaways.</p>
Policy SBNP9 - New and Upgraded Infrastructure and Community Facilities	This policy seeks to support the provision of new and upgraded community facilities.
Policy SBNP10 - Health, Wellbeing and Health Impact Assessments	This policy requires a Health Impact Assessment for proposals above 50 dwellings or that would result in the provision of buildings with a floorspace in excess of 5,000 square metres.
Policy SBNP11 - Soham's Commons	<p>This policy seeks to protect and, where opportunities arise, enhance the wildlife, landscape and recreational quality of Soham Commons.</p> <p>Where development is expected to increase the number of visitors to the Commons, proposals are expected to contribute to measure(s) to mitigate adverse impacts and seek opportunities to enhance the commons as a local asset.</p>
Policy SBNP12 - Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitats	<p>This policy requires development proposals to follow the mitigation hierarchy.</p> <p>The policy seeks to go beyond the national mandatory biodiversity net gain requirement of a minimum of 10% by requiring the minimum biodiversity net gain for all qualifying developments to be 20%.</p> <p>Proposals exempt from mandatory biodiversity net gain should seek to incorporate measures to enhance biodiversity proportionate to the scale of the proposal.</p>
Policy SBNP13 - Landscape Character	This policy requires all development proposals to be sensitive to the distinctive landscape and settlement character of the area. The policy defines key views in maps 5 and 6, which development proposals should respect and not adversely impact upon.
Policy SBNP14 - Local Green Spaces	This policy designates 14 sites as 'Local Green Space', as shown on maps 10 and 11.

Policy	Summary
Policy SBNP15 - Soham Conservation Area	This policy sets out criteria for development proposals within Soham Conservation Area.
Policy SBNP 16 - Non Designated Heritage Assets	This policy sets out criteria for development proposals that affect non designated heritage assets, as identified in the Neighbourhood Plan or by Cambridgeshire County Council's local heritage list.
Policy SBNP17 - High Quality Design	This policy seeks to ensure new development within the Neighbourhood Plan Area is of high quality and takes account of the principles, codes and guidance contained within the Soham Design Guidance and Codes 2022.
Policy SBNP18 – Sustainable Buildings Fit For a Net Zero Carbon Future	<p>The policy seeks to ensure that development proposals incorporate current best practice in energy conservation, including maximising the benefits of solar gain in site layouts and orientation of buildings, and measures which are designed to be integral to the building design and minimise any detrimental impact on the building or its surroundings.</p> <p>The policy requires all development proposals to be accompanied by a sustainability statement.</p>
Policy SBNP19 - Renewable Energy	This policy provides additional criteria to Policy ENV6 in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan to include safeguarding the best and most versatile agricultural land and safeguarding agricultural land used for food production.
Policy SBNP20 - Water Efficiency	<p>This policy requires development proposals to be designed to maximise water efficiency.</p> <p>All new residential developments must achieve as a minimum water efficiency equivalent to 110 litres per person per day.</p> <p>Proposals for non-residential development must be accompanied by a water conservation strategy.</p>
Policy SBNP21 - Flood Risk	<p>This policy requires proposals for major development to demonstrate, through a site-specific Surface Water Drainage Strategy, that the development is not at risk of flooding and will not increase flood risk on and off site.</p> <p>For smaller proposals, applicants will be expected to provide, through proportionate information, details of its surface water drainage proposals.</p>

Policy	Summary
Policy SBNP22 - Road Safety and Parking	<p>This policy sets out requirements in relation to road safety and car parking.</p> <p>Locations where on street parking causes issues are identified on map 13.</p> <p>Proposals likely to impact adversely on roads will be expected to mitigate their impact.</p>
Policy SBNP23 - Pedestrian and Cycle Priority Routes	The policy designates 7 priority walking and cycling routes in maps 14, 15 and 16.
Policy SBNP24 - Millennium Walks, Green Lanes and Public Rights of Way	This policy seeks to protect the existing network of footpaths and bridleways, as shown on map 17, and expects new development proposals to utilise opportunities to link into the wider footpath and bridleway network where applicable.
Policy SBNP25 – Connectivity and Permeability	This policy seeks to ensure new development proposals come forward that provide for good permeability within a development and good connectivity to the wider town and to other phases of development.

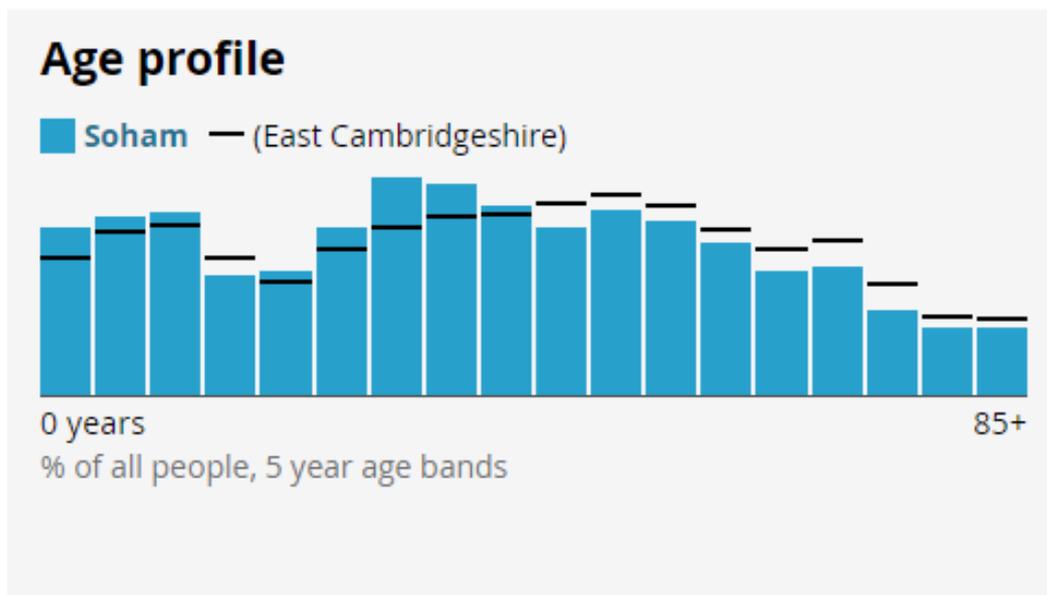
4. Summary of the Environmental Characteristics of the Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 4.1. To determine the likely significant effects of the SBNP on the environment, it is important to consider the characteristics of the area likely to be affected and the key areas of sensitivity. Enough information needs to be included in the screening report to allow the consultation bodies to take a view on the likely significant effects of implementing the plan.
- 4.2. The following paragraphs provide a high-level contextual overview of environmental issues and key areas of sensitivity in and around the Soham Neighbourhood Area. A range of sources of information have been used to gather this information, including Office for National Statistics, DEFRA Magic Maps, Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps for Planning, and the SBNP's own evidence base.

Population and human health

- 4.3. The total population of Soham parish at the time of the 2021 Census⁷ was 12,300 people, an increase of 13.26% from 2011. 50.8% of the total population were female and 49.2% were male, similar to the average for East Cambridgeshire as a whole and the England average.
- 4.4. The age profile for Soham parish from the 2021 Census reveals that there is a lower proportion of the parish population aged 50 and above than for East Cambridgeshire as a whole, and a higher proportion of the population aged between 0 to 14 years old and between 20 to 44 years old. This can be seen clearly in **Figure 2** below.

Figure 1: Age profile of Soham residents on 2021 Census Day



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

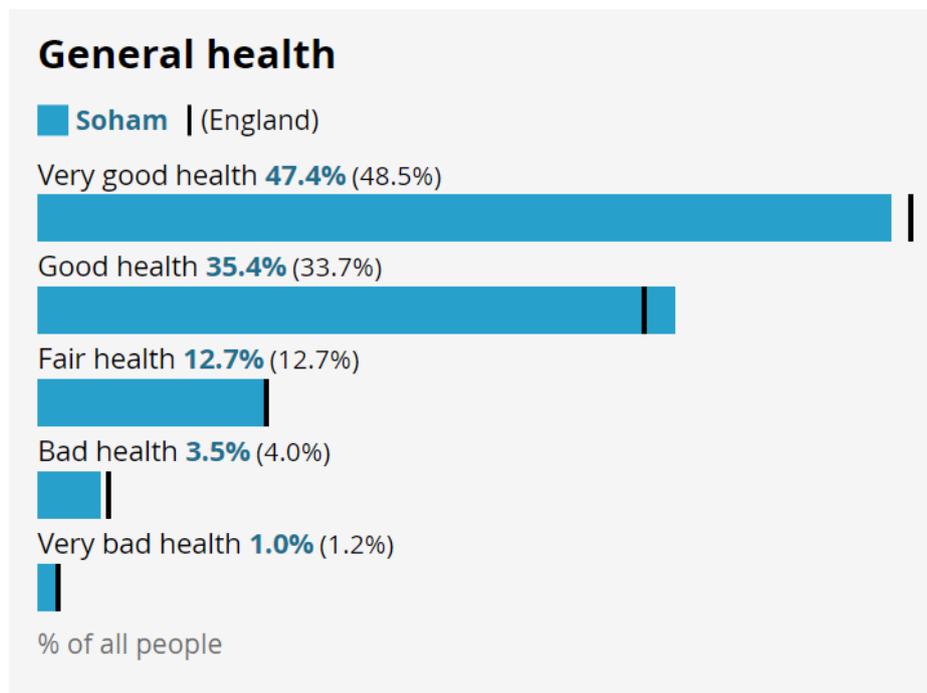
- 4.5. Life expectancy at birth in East Cambridgeshire is above the England average for both males and females⁸. 47.4% of the parish population described their health as 'very good' and 35.4% as 'good'. These figures are similar to those for East Cambridgeshire as a whole.

⁷ Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

⁸ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, access online at <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles>

4.6. 15.9% of the parish population were classed as disabled under the Equality Act. This figure is similar to the figure for East Cambridgeshire but below the England average of 17.3%.

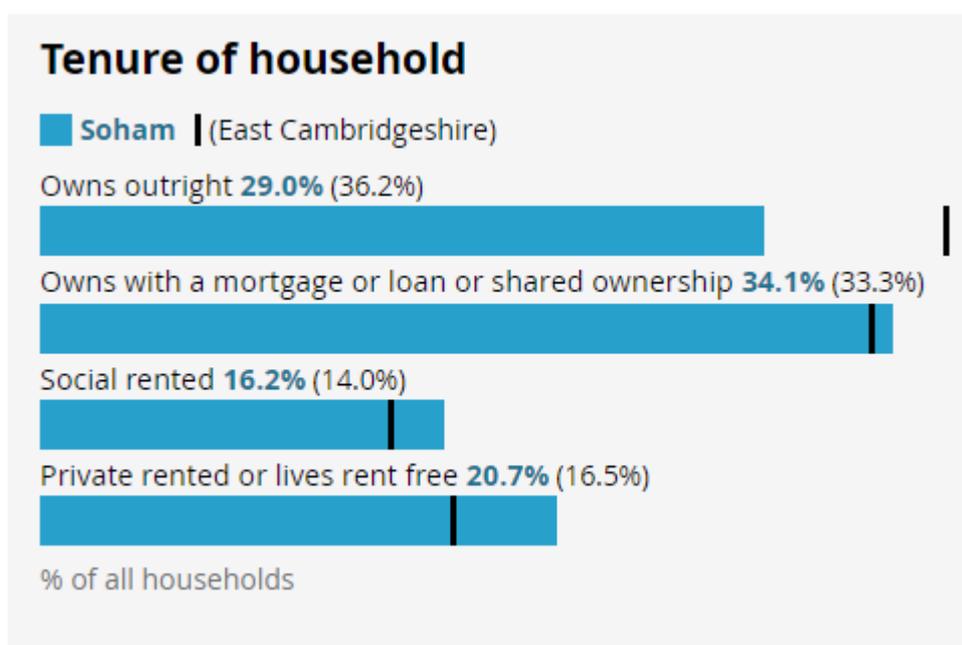
Figure 2: General Health of Soham residents on 2021 Census Day



Source: ONS

4.7. The 2021 Census recorded a total of 5,200 households (rounded to the nearest 100 households) within the parish of Soham. 29% of households were owned outright (below the East Cambridgeshire average), with a higher proportion of households either social rented or private rented, as shown in **Figure 3** below.

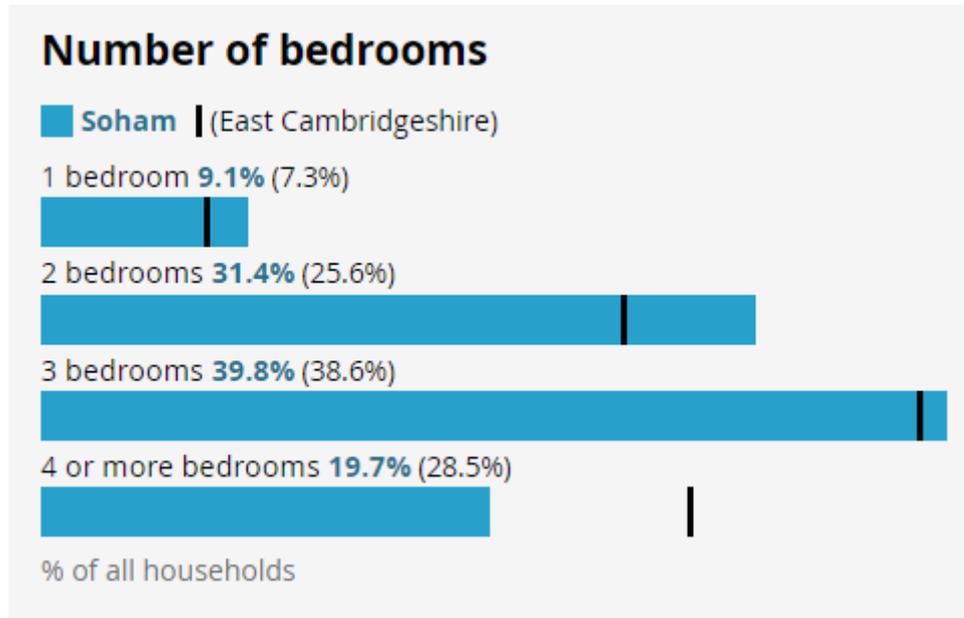
Figure 3 Tenure of households in Soham Parish on 2021 Census Day



Source: ONS

4.8. There are a higher proportion of 1,2 and 3 bedroom households within Soham parish compared to the East Cambridgeshire average. The proportion of 4 or more bedroom households is below the East Cambridgeshire average.

Figure 4 Number of bedrooms as a % of all households



Source: ONS

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

Internationally Designated Sites

4.9. There are no European Sites within the boundary of the Soham Neighbourhood Area. However, there are a number of European Sites within 30km⁹ of the boundary:

- Chippenham Fen SAC/Ramsar
- Wicken Fen SAC/Ramsar
- Rex Graham Reserve SAC
- Devils Dyke SAC
- Fenland SAC
- Breckland SAC, SPA
- Ouse Washes SAC, SPA

4.10. There are no proposed Ramsar sites, possible Special Areas of Conservation, or potential Special Protection Areas in proximity to the Soham Neighbourhood Area.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

4.11. There are no NNRs within the Soham Neighbourhood Area. Wicken Fen NNR and Chippenham Fen NNR are located nearby.

⁹ [Click here](#) to view European Sites within 30km of Soham Neighbourhood Area

- 4.12. Soham parish includes one SSSI: Soham Wet Horse Fen. This 33.80ha site consists of species rich lowland neutral grassland, which occurs infrequently in Cambridgeshire, and represents habitats which are rare in the country as a whole. The majority of the site has been assessed by Natural England¹⁰ as in unfavourable recovering condition and there are currently no recorded pressures for this site.
- 4.13. Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) are a GIS tool developed by Natural England to make a rapid initial assessment of the potential risks posed by development proposals to: SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites. The tool reflects Natural England's current understanding of SSSI sensitivities and pressures. The IRZ tool includes 'notes' that provide additional advice for development types that should be followed.
- 4.14. Several SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZ) for surrounding SSSIs, SACs and Ramsar sites extend across the Soham Neighbourhood Area¹¹. They include a note which states that new housing development will require an assessment of recreational pressure on relevant SSSIs and measures to mitigate adverse impacts, e.g., alternative open space provision.

Locally Designated Sites

- 4.15. There are no Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) within the Soham Neighbourhood Area. Isleham LNR is approximately 1.5km from the boundary of the Neighbourhood Area. The site is a disused railway with species rich chalk grassland and hedgerows.
- 4.16. There are 9 County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) located within the Soham Neighbourhood Area (or on or very close to the boundary):
- Broad Piece
 - East Fen Common and The Wash
 - Mere Side Grasslands
 - Moat Closes
 - Qua Fen Common
 - Soham Cemetery
 - North Horse Fen
 - River Lark and associated habitat
 - River Great Ouse
- 4.17. CWSs are defined areas, identified and selected locally for their nature conservation value based on important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species within a national, regional and importantly a local context. CWSs are areas of land important for their wildlife and can be found on public and private land. They vary in shape, size and may encompass a variety of different habitat types. The habitats and species present are often because of past management and many sites provide a refuge for rare or threatened plants and animals.

Ancient Woodland

- 4.18. There are no areas of ancient and semi natural woodland or ancient replanted woodland within or adjacent to Soham Neighbourhood Area.

¹⁰ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002294&SiteName=soham&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

¹¹ [Click here](#) to view SSSIs and IRZs in relation to the Soham Neighbourhood Area

- 4.19. The Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory¹² maps the oldest and most important trees in the UK. It is a live database where records are provided by members of the public and verified by the Woodland Trust. Within the Soham Neighbourhood Area, there are no ancient and veteran trees currently recorded on the database.

Priority Habitats

- 4.20. Priority Habitats are those which have been deemed to be of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity, being listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and with maintenance and restoration of these habitats being promoted through agri-environment schemes.
- 4.21. Areas of priority habitat within Soham Neighbourhood Area have been recorded and mapped by Natural England and include areas of deciduous woodland, traditional orchard, lowland fens, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows, and open mosaic habitat.

Landscape

National Character Areas (NCAs)

- 4.22. Soham Neighbourhood Area predominantly falls within the Fens NCA.¹³ This character area is notable for its large-scale, flat, open landscape with extensive vistas to level horizons. The character area profile states: "*With the exception of the Isle of Ely, ground levels rarely rise above the 10m contour, and typically vary by little more than one or two metres over many miles*". Highly productive peat soils support large-scale commercial agricultural activity. The dominant land use is cereals production. Rivers, drains and ditches are key features of the wetland landscape.
- 4.23. A small part of the southern tip of the Neighbourhood Area falls within the East Anglian Chalk NCA.¹⁴

Green Infrastructure

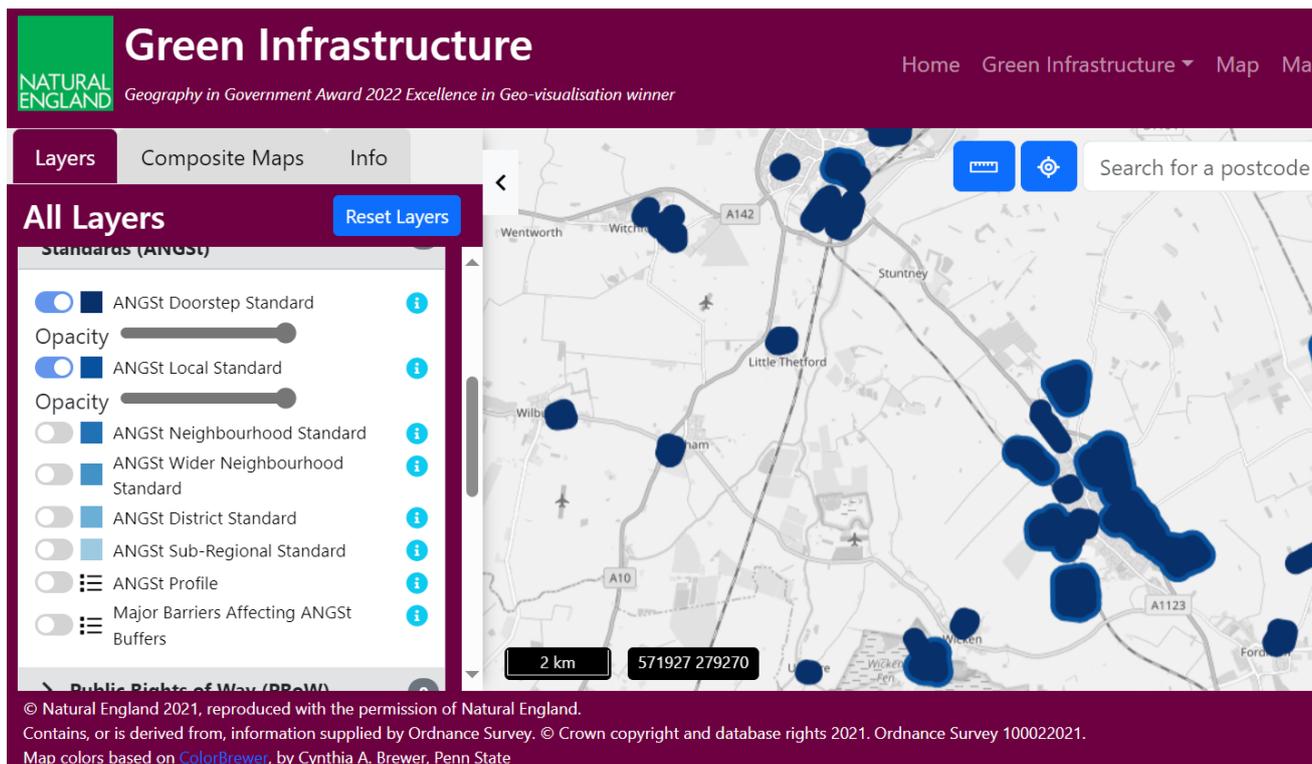
- 4.24. Natural England's Green Infrastructure Map is a useful source of evidence to help understand current green infrastructure provision. The mapping shows all residents in the settlement of Soham have access to a natural greenspace of at least 10ha within 1km. However, there are gaps in provision in terms of access to a smaller natural greenspace closer to home (ANGSt Doorstep standard and ANGSt Local Standard), as shown in **Figure 5** below.

¹² <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

¹³ [46. The Fens National Character Area Profile](#)

¹⁴ [87. East Anglian Chalk National Character Area Profile](#)

Figure 5: Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard buffers for Soham parish



Source: Natural England

Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage

- 4.25. There is one Conservation Area within the Soham Neighbourhood Area: Soham Conservation Area, which covers the historic core of the town¹⁵ and which represents an important concentration of historic features within the Neighbourhood Area. According to Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register 2023¹⁶, Soham Conservation Area is at risk. It is in poor condition, deteriorating significantly.
- 4.26. There are 49 listed buildings within the Soham Neighbourhood Area (1 Grade I, 4 Grade II* and 44 Grade II).¹⁷ They are mainly concentrated within Soham Town Centre. One of these listed buildings, Church of St Andrew, High Street, Soham, is listed at risk and in 'very bad' condition with '*immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric*'.¹⁸
- 4.27. There is one Scheduled Monument within the Soham Neighbourhood Area: Roman site near Old Fordey Farm, Barway.¹⁹
- 4.28. There are no Registered Parks and Gardens in the Soham Neighbourhood Area.
- 4.29. ECDC maintains a register of Buildings of Local Interest²⁰, published in 2017. Buildings of local interest have no statutory protection in legislation but are recognised in the NPPF as

¹⁵ [Map of Soham Conservation Area](#)

¹⁶ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/har-2023-registers/ee-har-register2023/>

¹⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

¹⁸ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/har-2023-registers/ee-har-register2023/>

¹⁹ [Click here](#) to view on DEFRA's Magic Map

²⁰ <https://www.eastcamps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Buildings%20of%20Local%20Interest%20Register%20AC%20Checked.pdf>

non-designated heritage assets. The buildings identified in 2017 within Soham parish are: The Grange, Pratt Street and Croft House, Hall Street. Cambridgeshire County Council is working with each of the five district councils to update their Local Heritage List.

Soil, Air and Water

- 4.30. There are four main soil types in the Soham Neighbourhood Area according to the national soil map²¹:
- Loamy and sandy soils with naturally high groundwater and a peaty surface
 - Freely draining lime-rich loamy soils
 - Fen peat soils
 - Lime-rich loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage
- 4.31. The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) classifies land into six grades (plus 'non-agricultural' and 'urban'), where Grades 1 to 3a are the 'best and most versatile' land and Grades 3b to 5 are of poorer quality. The ALC data does not distinguish between grades 3a and 3b (instead simply referring to Grade 3). More detailed assessment would be required to identify subgrades 3a and 3b. The best and most versatile agricultural land is to be found northern half of the parish, where land is either Grade 1, 2 or 3. There is no grade 4 or 5 agricultural land within the parish. Soham is classed as urban²².
- 4.32. Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) are designated because they are not likely to achieve national air quality objectives. At the time of preparing this report, there were no AQMAs within the Soham Neighbourhood Area. Indeed, there are no AQMAs within East Cambridgeshire district²³.
- 4.33. The Environment Agency has assessed water company areas and determined whether they are either in 'not serious or in 'serious' water stress.²⁴ Water stress applies both to the natural environment and to public water supplies. Both will be affected by climate change. The Soham Neighbourhood Area falls within the Anglian Water company area, which has been classified as seriously water stressed.
- 4.34. According to the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning,²⁵ the Soham Neighbourhood Area includes areas of fluvial flood risk (i.e. areas located in Flood Zones 2 and 3) as shown in **Figure 6** below. These areas of higher flood risk are associated with Soham Lode which runs through the parish.
- 4.35. The majority of the Neighbourhood Area is in Flood Zone 1. There are some parts of the Neighbourhood Area at risk of surface water flooding including areas within Soham and Barway. There are also some parts of the Neighbourhood Area at risk of flooding in the unlikely event of a dam or reservoir failure.
- 4.36. The Soham Water Recycling Centre (WRC) in Soham is currently not at capacity.²⁶ In November 2023, Anglian water completed works at the WRC to protect and improve water quality in local watercourses, including the Soham Lode. As the SBNP does not allocate any land or sites for development, the Environment Agency do not have any significant concerns with regards to potential impacts on water quality.

²¹ [Click here](#) to view on DEFRA's Magic Map

²² [Click here](#) to view a map of agricultural land in DEFRA's Magic Map

²³ <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/aqma/maps/>

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-stressed-areas-2021-classification>

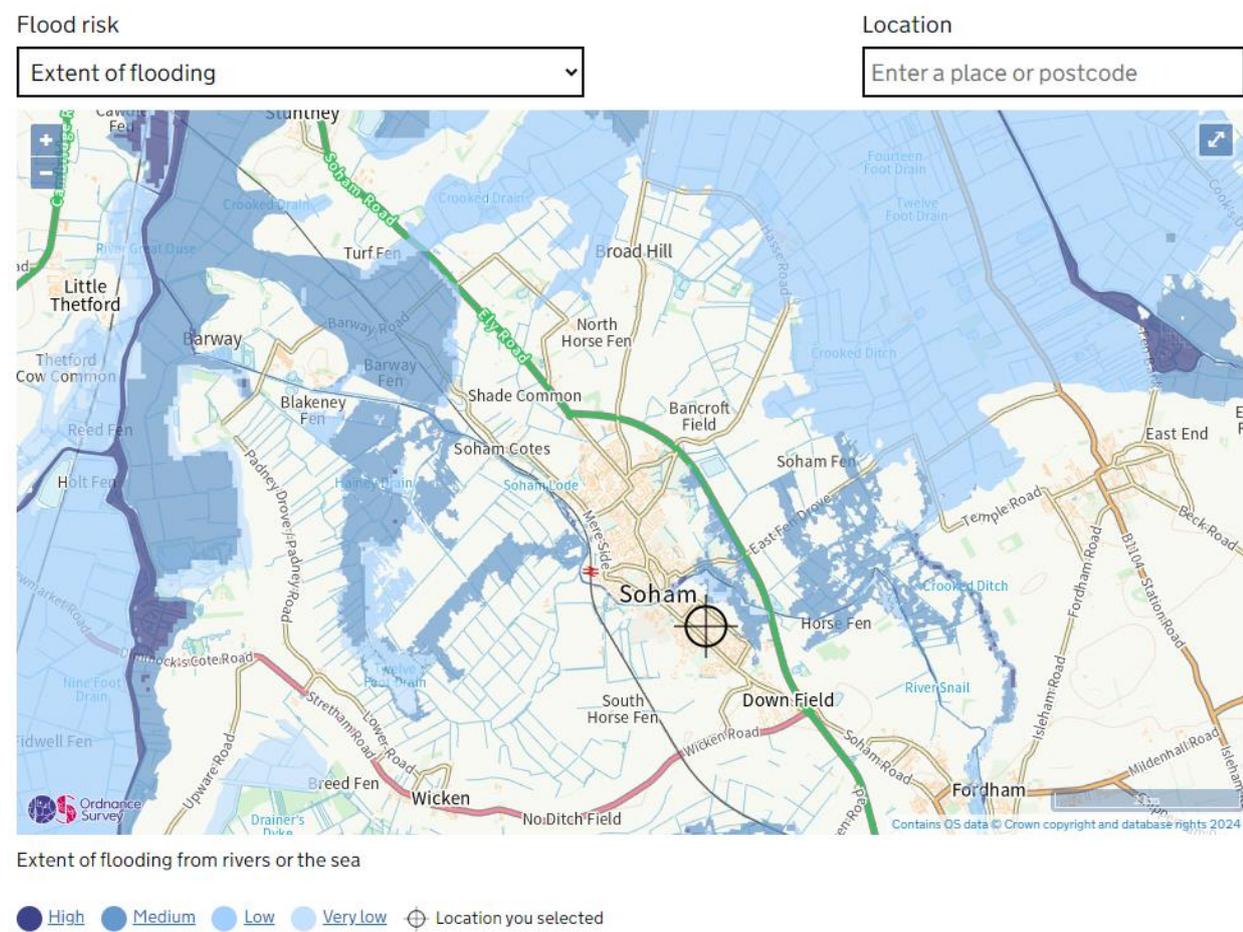
²⁵ <https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/>

²⁶ Letter from the Environment Agency in response to the pre-submission Regulation 14 consultation on the SBNP, dated 13 December 2023.

4.37. Source Protection Zones for groundwater sources such as wells, boreholes and springs used for public drinking water supply have been designated by the Environment Agency. These zones show the risk of contamination from any activities that might cause pollution in the area. Generally, the closer the activity, the greater the risk. Three main zones (inner, outer and total catchment) have been applied to groundwater sources with a fourth zone of special interest occasionally applied. An Inner zone (Zone 1) is defined as the 50 day travel time from any point below the water table to the source. This zone has a minimum radius of 50 metres.

4.38. The Soham Neighbourhood Areas does not fall within a SPZ.²⁷

Figure 6 Extent of flood risk from rivers in the Soham Neighbourhood Area



Source: Environment Agency

Climatic factors

4.39. The UK climate is changing. A report into the kinds of impacts that are likely to be felt in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough²⁸ found that the region is at high risk from a changing climate. Risks include: flooding, high summer temperatures, water shortages, and damage to the natural carbon stores in the deep peat of the Fens.

4.40. Greenhouse gas emissions in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are high. The Combined Authority estimate that emissions are 25% higher per person than the UK average.²⁹ In

²⁷ [Click here](#) to view on DEFRA's Magic Map

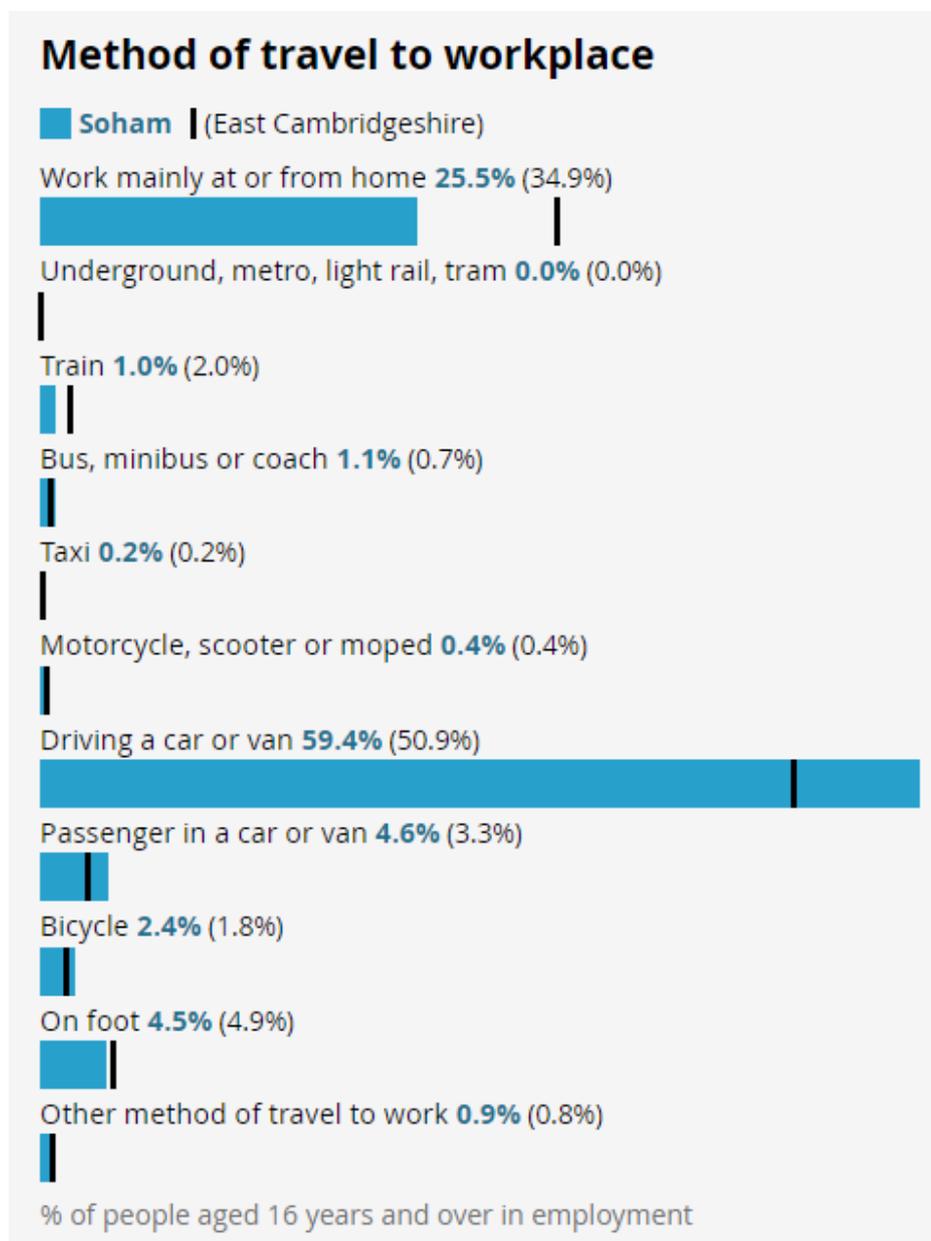
²⁸ CZ (2021), Aines, E.D., Simpson, C., Munro-Faure, A., Shuckburgh, E., Preliminary report on climate risk in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough region, 2020-2099, Cambridge Zero, University of Cambridge

²⁹ Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate (2021) Fairness, nature and communities: addressing climate change in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Autumn 2019, ECDC declared a climate emergency and is working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- 4.41. Car ownership is high in the Neighbourhood Area, with only 12.8% of all households recorded in the 2021 Census with no cars or vans in the household compared to an England average of 23.5%. This figure is reflective of the East Cambridgeshire average of 12%. This is reflected in the method of travel to workplace recorded through the Census (**Figure 7**), where 59.4% of all people aged 16 years and over in employment travelled to work by driving a car or van. This is above the England average of 44.5% and East Cambridgeshire average of 50.9%.

Figure 7 Method of travel to place of work in Soham Parish on 2021 Census Day (% of people aged 16 and over in employment)



Source: ONS

Materials assets

- 4.42. The SEA Directive does not define what is meant by 'material assets' and it can be interpreted in several ways. This screening report takes material assets to include a range of

social, physical and environmental infrastructure, such as schools, health facilities, roads, railways, bus services, wastewater treatment works, flood defences etc. Impacts on materials assets are likely to relate to several other SEA topics.

- 4.43. Provision of community services and facilities is generally good in Soham. The Neighbourhood Plan lists valued services and facilities in the table on page 36. Barway has no facilities listed (page 13 of the SBNP).

5. Development Opportunities within the Soham Neighbourhood Area

- 5.1. The following policies, taken from **Table 1** above, provide the main opportunities for new development within the Neighbourhood Area: Policy SBNP1 Spatial Strategy; Policy SBNP5 Vibrant Town Centre, Policy SBNP6 Economic Growth, Policy SBNP7 Tourism and Leisure and Policy SBNP9 New and Upgraded Infrastructure and Community Facilities. Each are taken in turn:
- 5.2. Draft Policy SBNP1 Spatial Strategy is a criteria-based policy which focuses new development within the Development Envelopes of Soham and Barway. The principle of a Development Envelope is already established through the Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). The extent of the Development Envelopment has been updated through the SBNP to take account of new housing development where these form part of the main built-up area of the settlement. It is not likely that a significantly different scale or type of development will occur as a consequence of Policy SBNP1 compared with the baseline of the existing development plan.
- 5.3. Draft Policy SBNP5 Vibrant Town Centre supports modest proposals for new town centre uses within and adjacent to Soham Town Centre boundary, and within the Station Quarter, which meets certain conditions outlined in the policy.
- 5.4. SBNP6 Economic Growth supports proposals for employment development for business startup space, grow on space, or a business hub within the development envelope. Proposals outside of the Development Envelope should meet the criteria as set out in the policy. Any proposals for new employment development would be subject to compliance with the Local Plan and other local development documents, as appropriate, which, of course, includes wider generic development plan policies relating to, for example, biodiversity and heritage.
- 5.5. Draft Policy SBNP7 Tourism and Leisure supports proposals for tourism, cultural and leisure facilities within or on the edge of Soham. As per draft Policy SBNP6, any proposals for new tourism, cultural and leisure facilities would be subject to compliance with the Local Plan and other local development documents, as appropriate.
- 5.6. Draft Policy SBNP9 New and Upgraded Infrastructure and Community Facilities supports proposals for new and upgraded community facilities within the Development Envelopes. As per draft Policy SBNP7, any proposals for new tourism, cultural and leisure facilities would be subject to compliance with the Local Plan and other local development documents, as appropriate.
- 5.7. In conclusion, the development opportunities provided by the proposed SBNP reflect, and do not significantly exceed (or decrease), those considered by the current 'made' policies in the adopted Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023) (or submitted but subsequently withdrawn Local Plan 2018). Therefore, over the plan period, the proposed SBNP is not expected to deliver additional growth of any form beyond that which is already identified in the current development plan and assessed, and found acceptable, via previous SEA / HRA assessments.

6. Determination of likely significant environment effects - SEA

6.1. Once data on environmental issues and sensitivities has been gathered, it is then possible to determine whether there would be any likely significant effects (positive or negative) on the environment. The 'responsible authority' in the case of SEA must determine whether a plan or programme, in this case the SBNP, is likely to have a significant environmental effect with reference to specified criteria. The following section sets out an assessment of the SBNP against these criteria, considering the area characteristics outlined in Section 4 above.

6.2. When the Plan is read as a whole, and tested against the SEA themes (as set out in Annex I (f) of the SEA Directive), the following conclusions are drawn:

Population and human health:

6.3. Overall, the SBNP is not likely to have a significant negative impact on population and human health, given the relatively small population that the plan applies to, and as no new sites are specifically allocated for development within the plan. Through its various policy measures, it is likely that the needs of the population, and standards of human health, will be maintained and potentially enhanced. For example, the protection and enhancement of community facilities and services via draft SBNP9 New and Upgraded Infrastructure and Community Facilities will provide opportunities for residents to partake in activities to support their physical and mental health and wellbeing. Draft policy SBNP10 Health, Wellbeing and Health Impact Assessments requires development proposals to include measures to help contribute to healthier communities and reduce health inequalities, including a requirement for Health Impact Assessments. However, these effects are not likely to be 'significant' for the purposes of SEA.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna:

6.4. Overall, the potential for significant negative impacts on biodiversity, flora and fauna to arise from the implementation of the plan are unlikely as the SBNP does not allocate new sites for development, and other opportunities for development are relatively limited and broadly aligned with the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023).

6.5. It is expected that the SBNP will help to protect and enhance biodiversity, flora and fauna in the Neighbourhood Area through the various policy measures it employs, particularly draft policies SBNP11 Soham's Commons and SBNP12 Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitats. Through the protection and enhancement of existing green spaces, via draft policies SBNP11 Soham's Commons and SBNP14 Local Green Spaces, the SBNP could have positive impact in reducing recreational pressure on SSSIs and CWSs within and in proximity of the Neighbourhood Area.

Landscape:

6.6. There are no nationally designated landscapes within the Neighbourhood Area. The SBNP does not allocate new sites for development and therefore, with the policies in the existing development plan and this proposed plan, it is considered unlikely that the SBNP would result in a significant impact on the local landscape. Draft policy SBNP14 designates areas of Local Green Space, which should contribute positively to the character and setting of the Neighbourhood Area. Draft policy SBNP13 Landscape Character seeks to protect the distinctive landscape and settlement character of the area and key views highly valued by the local community. Where potential impacts on Soham and Barway's distinctive landscape character are identified, Policy SBNP13 requires a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. These policy measures should help to avoid any significant adverse effects on landscape features.

Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage:

6.7. As highlighted in paragraphs 4.25 to 4.29 above, the Soham Neighbourhood Area has a rich heritage with many assets of national significance, which have been afforded statutory designations. The town of Soham has a Conservation Area which is classed as 'at risk' on

Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. There are also several buildings which do not satisfy the criteria for listing at a national level but are locally important.

- 6.8. The SBNP does not allocate any new land or sites for development. Whilst opportunities for infill and windfall exist within the Development Envelopes, considering the heritage related policies in the development plan, and this proposed plan (draft policies SBNP15 Soham Conservation Area, SBNP 16 Non Designated Heritage Assets and SBNP17 High Quality Design), it is considered unlikely that any future development that may come forward within the Neighbourhood Area would adversely impact on any heritage assets or their settings.

Soil, air or water:

- 6.9. There are currently no 'significant' air quality issues in the neighbourhood area. Most of the neighbourhood area falls within Flood Risk Zone 1. Therefore, fluvial flood risk is relatively low. There are some parts of the Neighbourhood Area at risk of surface water flooding including areas within Soham and Barway. There are also some parts of the Neighbourhood Area at risk of flooding in the unlikely event of a dam or reservoir failure. The SBNP does not include any specific site allocations for development and therefore is not anticipated to have any direct implications. Overall, it is unlikely that significant effects on soil, air or water would arise as a result of implementation of the SBNP.

Climate Factors:

- 6.10. Climatic factors involve the consideration of a plan or programme in relation to climate change. Climate change adaptation and mitigation are closely interrelated and are closely linked to other environmental issues.
- 6.11. Maintaining and enhancing local services and facilities through draft policy SBNP8 Protecting Local Services and Facilities and SBNP9 New and Upgraded Infrastructure and Community Facilities, may have a positive effect on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport by reducing the need to travel as well as length of journeys. Draft policy SBNP17 High Quality Design is supported by Design Guidance and Codes which cover environmental and energy efficiency matters, including building fabric, flood mitigation and energy efficient features. This is likely to have a positive effect on this SEA issue.
- 6.12. Overall, it is considered unlikely that implementing the policies in the SBNP would give rise to significant effects on climatic factors.

Material assets:

- 6.13. The SEA Directive does not define what is meant by 'material assets' and it can be interpreted in a number of ways. This screening report takes material assets to include a range of social, physical and environmental infrastructure, such as schools, health facilities, roads, railways, bus services, wastewater treatment works, flood defences, etc. Impacts on materials assets are likely to relate to several other SEA topics. It is considered unlikely that that implementation of the SBNP would have significant effects on material assets. Indeed, many of the policies seek to protect and where opportunities arise, enhance infrastructure, services and facilities.
- 6.14. Following review, and in conclusion, it is considered **unlikely** that implementation of the SBNP will result in significant environmental effects. The main reason for this conclusion is that the SBNP is not proposing any new additional site allocations or any other policies which are likely lead to new additional significant growth opportunities. In addition, implementation of all other policies or proposal within the draft SBNP is not considered likely to result in any significant environmental effects, especially when compared with the baseline position of the Neighbourhood Plan not proceeding.
- 6.15. **Figure 8** provides assessment of the SBNP to identify likely significant effects on the environment. The first column uses the SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004 (as set out in **Appendix 1**).

Figure 8: Assessment of the likely significant effects on the environment

The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to —	Assessment of the SBNP (November 2023)	Likely significant environmental effect
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	The SBNP would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and contribute to the framework for future development projects. However, the SBNP would only apply to a small geographical area (the Soham Neighbourhood Area) where a limited number of proposals are anticipated over the plan period; and, of those proposals, such proposals are already anticipated and tested via existing plans and programmes (such as the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023)). The SBNP does not seek to allocate land for residential or other forms of development.	None
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	The SBNP is required to be in general conformity with the strategic policies set out in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). The SBNP must also have regard to the NPPF and Practice Guidance. The SBNP would not influence other plans and programmes to a significant degree due to the locally specific nature of the policies contained within the plan. Once 'made' the SBNP will form part of the statutory development plan and will be used in conjunction with the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan to determine planning applications.	None
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	It is a Basic Condition that a Neighbourhood Plan must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The proposed SBNP includes several policies which promote environmental considerations and promote opportunities for sustainable development. However, the scale of development identified is not expected to exceed that which has been identified and assessed through the preparation of existing plans and programmes.	None
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	Baseline information relation to Soham and Barway parish was described in Section 4 above. There are no specific environmental problems relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan that have not been identified and assessed through the higher-level Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023), the withdrawn Local Plan 2018 and accompanying SA/SEA.	None
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and	The SBNP is not relevant to the implementation of Community legislation on the environment.	None

programmes linked to waste management or water protection).		
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to—	Assessment of the SBNP (November 2023)	Likely significant environmental effect
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;	<p>The effects of the implementation of the SBNP are expected to be minimal in terms of probability, duration and frequency. Any effects will be indirect due to the SBNP not allocating land for development.</p> <p>This has been tested through the SA/SEA of the Local Plan 2015 (as amended) and the withdrawn Local Plan 2018.</p> <p>As the draft SBNP does not allocate sites for housing or other forms of development, the effects of the implementation of the SBNP are uncertain to a certain extent, as they will depend on windfall sites that may come forward. However, such windfall sites are expected to be limited to small scale, infill development, and therefore the effects are not likely to be significant and are expected to be minimal. It is likely that some policies may result in positive effects by helping to preserve and enhance the environmental features within the Neighbourhood Area.</p>	None
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;	<p>The cumulative effects of development sites identified by the SBNP have been considered through the Local Plan process, namely the SA and HRA.</p> <p>The cumulative effects of implementing the SBNP, both between the policies within the SBNP and with other plans and programmes, are expected to be very limited in nature and scale, as the plan does not identify a quantum of growth, nor allocate specific land or sites for housing or other forms of development.</p>	None
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;	<p>The SBNP focuses on Soham and Barway parish only. The SBNP is not expected to give rise to any transboundary effects. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers transboundary effects on other EU Member States; therefore, they are not relevant to this Neighbourhood Plan.</p>	None
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);	<p>The SBNP is not expected to pose any risks to human health or the environment: the effects of policies within the SBNP may, if any, enhance these elements.</p>	None
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects	<p>The population of Soham parish at the time of the 2021 Census was 12,300 people. The Soham Neighbourhood</p>	None

<p>(geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);</p>	<p>Area is coterminous with Soham and Barway civil parish, which includes the town of Soham, village of Barway and surrounding countryside which is principally in agricultural use. The extent of any effects of the implementation of the SBNP are expected to be limited to the immediate local area, the extent of which is, therefore, spatially small and covering a small population.</p>	
<p>(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to—</p> <p>(i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;</p> <p>(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or</p> <p>(iii) intensive land-use; and</p>	<p>The scale of growth proposed by the SBNP reflects that proposed by the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). The effects of this growth upon the environment have therefore been assessed through the HRA and Sustainability Appraisal of the Local Plan, and other supporting evidence base documents.</p> <p>The key natural and cultural heritage characteristics of the Soham Neighbourhood Area are provided in Section 4 above. As highlighted in Section 6 above, it is considered unlikely that the SBNP would adversely impact the special natural characteristics or cultural heritage of the Neighbourhood Area. The draft SBNP is not expected to exceed environmental quality standards or lead to intensive land use.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>There are no protected areas or landscapes within the Neighbourhood Area of a national or international protection status, such as an Area of Outstanding National Beauty or National Park. Therefore, the SBNP is unlikely to result in any significant adverse effects.</p>	<p>None</p>

6.16. **Figure 9** applies the advice prepared by the (former) Department of Environment to ascertain whether a full SEA is required for a plan or programme. Please note that as the questions have been answered using the flow diagram, some of the questions may not be applicable because of previous answers: where this is the case, the response is stated as N/A ('not applicable').

Figure 9: Application of the SEA Directive to Draft Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan

Criteria	Response: Yes/ No/ Not applicable	Details
1. Is the NDP subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?	Yes	The preparation and adoption of the SBNP is allowed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. Whilst the SBNP has been prepared by Soham Town Council it will be adopted by ECDC as the local authority. GO TO STAGE 2
2. Is the NDP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions?	Yes	Whilst the production of a Neighbourhood Plan is not a requirement and is optional, it will, if made, form part of the Development Plan for the ECDC area. It is therefore important that this screening process considers the potential effects. GO TO STAGE 3
3. Is the NDP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive?	Yes – Town & Country Planning / land use; No - EIA Directive Annex I & II	The SBNP is being prepared for town and country planning and land use. It does not set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive. GO TO STAGE 4.
4. Will the NDP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive?	No	See Section 7. The SBNP will not require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? GO TO STAGE 6
5. Does the NDP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of an NDP subject to Art. 3.2?	N/A	
6. Does the NDP set the framework for future development consent of	Yes	Alongside the East Cambridgeshire District Local Plan, once 'made' the SBNP will set the

Criteria	Response: Yes/ No/ Not applicable	Details
projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)?		framework for development consents in the neighbourhood area. GO TO STAGE 8
7. Is the NDP's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7?	N/A	
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?	No	The extent to which implementation of the SBNP will result in likely significant environmental effects is assessed in Section 6 and Figure 8 of this screening report. The assessment identifies that no likely significant environmental effects are expected to arise through implementation of the SBNP. GO TO CONCLUSION
Conclusion: SEA not required		

7. Determination of likely significant effects on European Sites - HRA

- 7.1. HRA refers to the assessment of the potential effects of a development plan on one or more European Sites.
- 7.2. East Cambridgeshire's latest Habitats Regulations Assessment (June 2018) report³⁰ accompanied the submitted, but now withdrawn, Local Plan 2018. The purpose of the HRA report was to set out the method, findings and conclusions of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (Stage 1 Screening and Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment) of the now withdrawn East Cambridgeshire Local Plan. The HRA was carried out by ECDC, as the competent authority, in consultation with Natural England.
- 7.3. Despite the Local Plan 2018 having been withdrawn, this HRA continues to be considered relevant and appropriate in the context of this HRA screening assessment since it relies on more up to date evidence than the HRA which supported the Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023), such as evidence pertaining to European sites, the current context of recent growth, other authorities' plans and strategies, and the views of stakeholders such as the statutory environmental bodies.
- 7.4. The HRA complies with the judgement of the Court of Justice for the European Union of 12th April 2018. Through the Local Plan examination process, Natural England confirmed the HRA is legally compliant.
- 7.5. In May 2022, ECDC published a HRA Stage 1 Screening Report to accompany the East Cambridgeshire Single Issue Review (SIR) Local Plan³¹. Through the SIR, only policy GROWTH1 and some of the supporting text was amended. The HRA screened out this policy from further assessment because no new additional growth will arise as a consequence of the policy.
- 7.6. The following European Sites, within and outside East Cambridgeshire's administrative boundary, were scoped into the HRA (June 2018) for consideration:
- Fenland SAC (including Wicken Fen, Woodwalton Fen and Chippenham Fen Ramsar)
 - Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar
 - Devil's Dyke SAC
 - Breckland SAC/SPA
- 7.7. As discussed in paragraph 4.9 above, within Soham parish (and consequently the Soham Neighbourhood Area), there are no European Sites.
- 7.8. The HRA was prepared to assess the effects of the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018. The withdrawn Local Plan proposed higher growth levels than the current adopted Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). The potential likely significant effects on designated sites arising from the withdrawn Local Plan were:
- Habitat damage and/or loss
 - Disturbance from urbanisation effects
 - Disturbance from increased recreational pressure
 - Reduced air quality as a result of increased vehicle journeys
 - Water quality changes from water consumption and abstraction

³⁰ See

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/HRA%20Appropriate%20Assessment%20Post%20Submission%20Local%20Plan%20-%20published%2015.6.18.pdf>

³¹

https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/HRA%20Screening%20%20LP%20SIR%20May%202022%20-%20final_0.pdf

- Reduced water quality from pollution due to increased demand for waste-water treatment

7.9. The June 2018 HRA sets out in detail the attributes of the European Sites in **Appendix 2** of the report. A summary of the pressures and threats of the scoped in European sites is as follows:

Fenland SAC - Wicken Fen

7.10. The centre of Soham Neighbourhood Area is located approximately 6km as the crow flies from the centre of Wicken Fen. The HRA identified the following pressures and threats which could arise were the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 implemented:

- *Increased recreational pressure:* The site lies within the East Cambridgeshire area and Natural England have advised that the qualifying features of the site are under threat from increased visitor pressure. The screening assessment identified the potential for likely significant effects due to residential site allocations being within 8km of the site boundary of the Ramsar. These could be significant in-combination, i.e. total recreation pressure from multiple residential developments within and beyond the study area.
- *Water quality:* The features of this site are sensitive to water quality changes. Water quality is important for floodplain fen, which is dependent on an adequate supply of nutrients being maintained to support aquatic habitats and the range of species associated with them.
- *Water quantity:* The features of this site are water resource sensitive.

7.11. Whilst growth is a potential threat to the Fenland SAC Wicken Fen, the SBNP does not make site allocations and provides only limited opportunities for new development. This approach reflects the growth strategy of the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 (the subject of the HRA), and the current adopted Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). Therefore, likely significant effects on the integrity of the Wicken Fen SAC are not expected to arise from implementation of the SBNP.

Fenland SAC – Chippenham Fen

7.12. The centre of Soham Neighbourhood Area is located approximately 8km as the crow flies from the centre of Chippenham Fen. The HRA identified the following pressures and threats which could arise were the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 implemented:

- *Increased recreational pressure:* This European Site lies within the East Cambridgeshire area and Natural England have advised that the qualifying features of the site are under threat from increased visitor pressure. The screening assessment identified the potential for likely significant effects due to residential site allocations being within 8km of the site boundary of the Ramsar. These could be significant in-combination, i.e. total recreation pressure from multiple residential developments within and beyond the study area.
- *Urbanisation:* An employment allocation in Fordham is less than 400m from the site boundary of Chippenham Fen. The site's features are therefore potentially exposed to increased urbanisation pressure.
- *Water quality:* The features of this site are sensitive to water quality changes, particularly high nutrient water reaching the fen from a mixture of groundwater, rainwater and run-off.
- *Water quantity:* The features of this site are water resource sensitive, with concerns water does not seep into site compartments between ditches to the extent it once did.

7.13. Whilst growth is a potential threat to the Fenland SAC – Chippenham Fen, the SBNP does not make site allocations and provides only limited opportunities for new development. This approach reflects the growth strategy of the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 (the subject of the HRA), and the current adopted Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). Therefore, likely significant effects on the integrity of the Chippenham Fen SAC are not expected to arise from implementation of the SBNP.

Fenland SAC - Woodwalton Fen

7.14. The centre of Soham Neighbourhood Area is located approximately 37km as the crow flies from the centre of Woodwalton Fen.

7.15. Woodwalton Fen was screened in for consideration prior to Stage 1 Screening, however the screening assessment did not identify any potential impact pathways between this site and the proposals in the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018. On this basis, Woodwalton Fen was ruled out of further consideration in the HRA.

Ouse Washes

7.16. The centre of Soham Neighbourhood Area is located approximately 17km as the crow flies from the Ouse Washes.

7.17. The HRA identified the following pressures and threats which could arise were the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 implemented:

- *Physical damage/ loss of habitat:* Some site allocations within the Local Plan fall within the 'Goose and Swan Functional IRZ' for this site, recently prepared by Natural England. Land within this zone is considered to be potentially functionally linked to the Ouse Washes and therefore there is the potential for likely significant effects on the integrity of the European Site.
- *Increased recreational pressure:* This European Site lies within the East Cambridgeshire area and Natural England have advised that the qualifying features of the site are under threat from increased visitor pressure. The screening assessment identified the potential for likely significant effects due to residential site allocations in the Plan being within 8km of the site boundary of the SPA. These could be significant in-combination, i.e. total recreation pressure from multiple residential developments within and beyond the study area.
- *Water quality:* The features of this site are sensitive to water quality changes, particularly inappropriate levels of nutrients from diffuse pollution in combination with inappropriate water levels.
- *Water quantity:* The features of this site are water resource sensitive and are particularly vulnerable to increased flooding.

7.18. The HRA identifies that land beyond the boundary of the Ouse Washes may also provide important functional habitat for qualifying bird species. The HRA provides advice on development proposals on greenfield sites that fall within the Goose and Swan Functional Land IRZ to ensure there are no adverse effects on the qualifying species of the Ouse Washes. No part of the Soham Neighbourhood Area is located inside the Goose & Swan Functional Land IRZ.

7.19. Whilst growth is a potential threat to the Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar, the SBNP does not make any new site allocations and provides only limited opportunities for new development. This approach reflects the growth strategy of the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 (the subject of the HRA), and the current adopted Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). Therefore, likely significant effects on the integrity of the Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar are not expected to arise from implementation of the SBNP.

Devil's Dyke

7.20. The Devil's Dyke runs from Reach village and extends to Woodditton. The full extent of the Devil's Dyke is over 11km long, with varying SAC and SSSI designations. The centre of Soham Neighbourhood Area is approximately 13km away as the crow flies from the nearest part of Devil's Dyke.

7.21. The HRA provides the following summary of threats and pressures to Devil's Dyke SAC, relating to habitat damage or loss, and recreational pressure:

"This species rich calcareous grassland is vulnerable to vegetation succession by rank grasses and requires active management by grazing. It is also vulnerable to increased recreational pressure. Habitat degradation is occurring, particularly through trampling of vegetation and soil enrichment from dog excrement. Antisocial behaviour such as littering, fires and other activities is damaging vegetation. Dogs off leads also pose a risk to the continuance of the essential long term management of the site through livestock grazing. The site is also potentially at risk from atmospheric nitrogen deposition, although the site

improvement plan states this requires further investigation.“ (p16, Habitats Regulations Assessment 2018)

- 7.22. In addition, the HRA identifies that air pollution is a key issue for Devil's Dyke, since it lies within 200m of the A14 and A1304. Natural England's Site Improvement Plan (SIP) for Devil's Dyke states: “*nitrogen deposition exceeds the site-relevant critical load for ecosystem protection and hence there is a risk of harmful effects, but the sensitive features are currently considered to be in favourable condition on the site. This requires further investigation*”.
- 7.23. According to the SIP, Devil's Dyke SAC does not support any notified species that are sensitive to changes to water quality and/or quantity and does not list this impact as a priority pressure or threat.
- 7.24. In summary, potential pressures or threats to the Devil's Dyke SAC are:
- *Increased recreational pressure:* This European Site lies within the East Cambridgeshire area and Natural England have advised that the qualifying features of the site are under threat from increased visitor pressure. The screening assessment identified the potential for likely significant effects due to residential site allocations being within 8km of the site boundary of the SAC. These could be significant in-combination, i.e. total recreation pressure from multiple residential developments within and beyond the study area.
 - *Reduced air quality:* The interest features of the SAC are sensitive to atmospheric pollutants and Devil's Dyke lies within 200m of the A14 and A1304, which may be used by new residents of site allocations in the settlements of: Bottisham, Burrough Green/Burrough End, Dullingham, Swaffham Bulbeck, Swaffham Prior to access services and facilities in Newmarket. There is therefore potential for likely significant effects.
- 7.25. Whilst growth is a potential threat to the Devil's Dyke SAC, the SBNP does not make new site allocations and provides only limited opportunities for new development. This approach reflects the growth strategy of the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 (the subject of the HRA), and the current adopted Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). Therefore, likely significant effects on the integrity of the Devil's Dyke SAC are not expected to arise from implementation of the SBNP.

Breckland SAC/SPA

- 7.26. The centre of Soham Neighbourhood Area is located approximately 16km from the nearest part of Breckland SAC/SPA. The HRA identified the following potential pressures and threats which could arise were the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 implemented:
- *Physical damage/ loss of habitat* Site allocation KEN.M1 within the Local Plan falls within the IRZ for Breckland Farmland SSSI, a component of Breckland SPA. Land within this zone is considered to be potentially functionally linked to Breckland and therefore there is the potential for likely significant effects on the integrity of the European Site.
 - *Increased recreational pressure:* Whilst the site is outside of the East Cambridgeshire area, a mixed use site allocation at Kennett (KEN.M1) is approximately 2km from Breckland Farmland SSSI, a component of Breckland SPA and falls within the IRZ for this SSSI. The Breckland Farm SSSI has interest features that are potentially sensitive to increased recreational pressure. The screening assessment identified the potential for likely significant effects due to residential site allocations in the Plan being within 8km of the site boundary of the SPA. These could be significant in-combination, i.e. total recreation pressure from multiple residential developments within and beyond the study area.
 - *Urbanisation:* Whilst urbanisation is recognised in the SIP for Breckland SPA/SAC as a priority issue, there is no development proposed in the Local Plan within 400m of the site boundary. The Local Plan will therefore have no effect via this pathway.
- 7.27. Whilst growth is a potential threat to the Breckland SPA/SAC, the SBNP does not make new site allocations and provides only limited opportunities for new development. This approach reflects the growth strategy of the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 (the subject of the HRA), and the current adopted Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). Therefore, likely significant

effects on the integrity of the Breckland SPA/SAC are not expected to arise from implementation of the SBNP.

Potential for likely significant effects

- 7.28. The HRA prepared for the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 concluded that:
- ...after taking into account the above mitigation measures and consideration of other plans, that there will be no likely significant effects, alone or in combination, on the Ouse Washes SAC/SPA or Fenland SAC, resulting from water quality or quantity changes through the implementation of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan.*
- 7.29. Natural England confirmed the HRA followed accepted methodology, was in line with relevant legislation and guidance, and agreed with the conclusion of the HRA.
- 7.30. The SBNP's growth strategy reflects that of the now withdrawn Local Plan 2018 and the current adopted Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). The SBNP does not make new site allocations and provides only limited opportunities for new development. The effects arising from planned development on the integrity of European sites have been previously tested through the HRA of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan.

HRA Screening: Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan, November 2023

- 7.31. Having regard to the nature of the policies in the SBNP and vulnerabilities of European Sites, this HRA screening considers that the SBNP is **not likely to have a significant effect** on any European Site, either alone or in combination, with other plans and projects. However, it is expected that any windfall development which the SBNP supports and is within the plan boundary may be required to undertake an individual project-level HRA to determine impacts on European Sites.

8. Screening Outcome

- 8.1. The SBNP does not allocate any land or sites for housing or other form of development. The effects of any potential growth have been considered previously through the submitted but now withdrawn East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 and supporting evidence base, including the Sustainability Appraisal (which incorporated SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment, and the adopted East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 (as amended 2023). For the purposes of SEA screening, this evidence base is considered appropriate and relevant.
- 8.2. To take an alternative approach, such as preparing evidence bespoke to the SBNP would be disproportionate and result in unnecessary duplication. This would be contrary to national planning policy.
- 8.3. Several SBNP policies are particularly environmentally conscientious and address environmental issues positively by seeking to improve the quality of new development to reduce its impacts on the environment. However, for the purposes of SEA, these effects are not considered 'significant'.
- 8.4. Based on the findings of the screening assessment in section 6 and subject to consultation with Statutory Agencies, ECDC is of the view that the implementation of the SBNP will not result in likely significant environmental effects. **As such, a full SEA is not required for the Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan (November 2023).**
- 8.5. The assessment in section 7 also considers the effects of the SBNP in respect of European sites. The assessment determines that implementation of the SBNP is not expected to result in likely significant effects on European sites. **As such, a full HRA is not required for the Soham & Barway Neighbourhood Plan (November 2023).**
- 8.6. If the objectives, aims and/or policies covered by the SBNP should change significantly during the plan-making process, this screening process will be reviewed.

Appendix 1: SEA assessment criteria

Article 3, Scope

5. Member States shall determine whether plans or programmes referred to in paragraphs 3 and 4 are likely to have significant environmental effects either through case-by-case examination or by specifying types of plans and programmes or by combining both approaches. For this purpose Member States shall in all cases take into account relevant criteria set out in Annex II, in order to ensure that plans and programmes with likely significant effects on the environment are covered by this Directive.

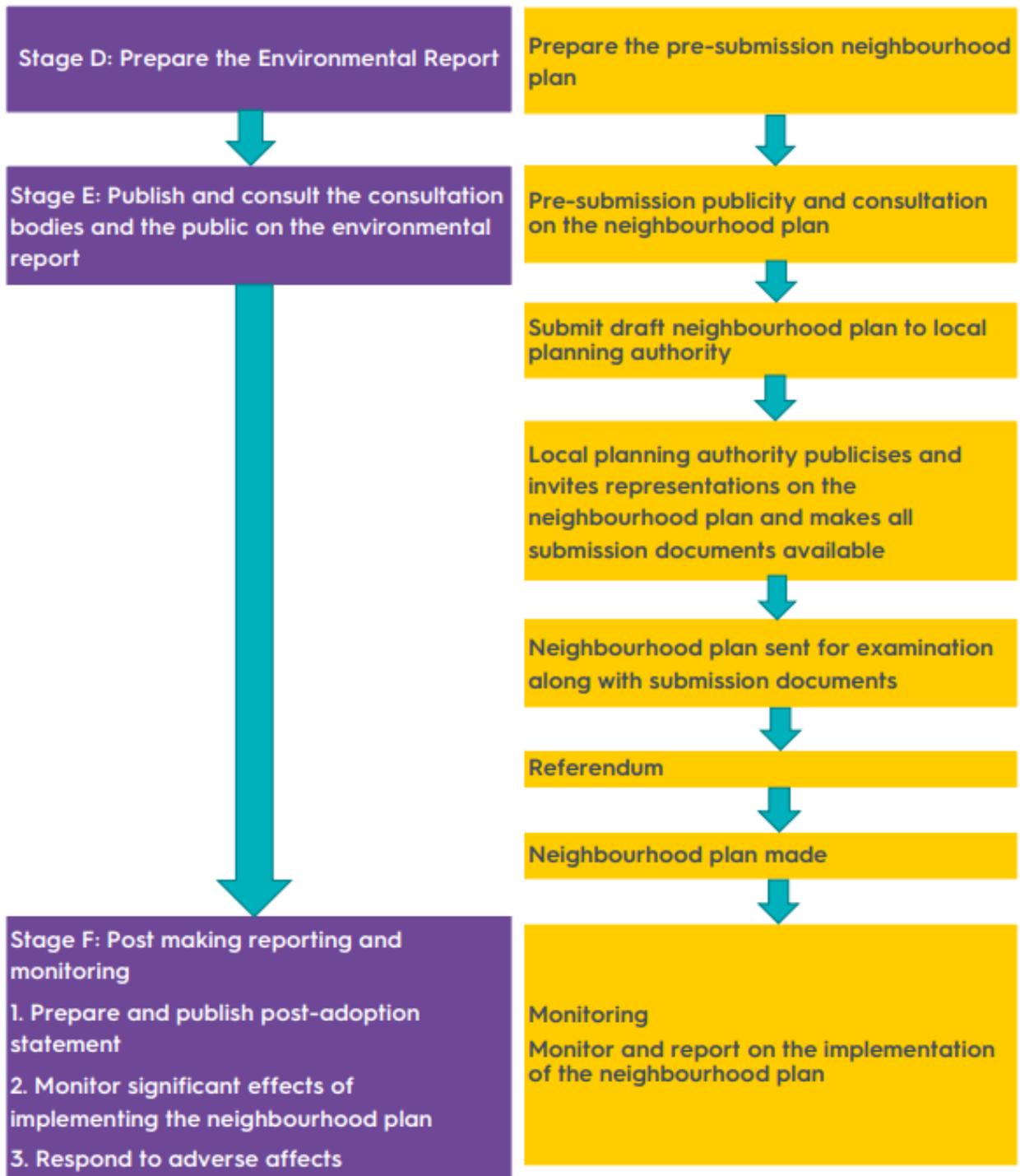
Annex II Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5)

1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to
 - the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;
 - the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;
 - the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;
 - environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme;
 - the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to
 - the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;
 - the cumulative nature of the effects;
 - the transboundary nature of the effects;
 - the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents);
 - the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
 - the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:
 - special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;
 - exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;
 - intensive land-use;
 - the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

Appendix 3: SEA process for Neighbourhood Planning

(source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal#Strategic-environmental-assessment-process>)





Appendix 4: Consultation with Statutory Agencies

Response by the Environment Agency (25 March 2024):

Flood Risk

Based on a review of environmental constraints for which we are a statutory consultee, we find that there are areas of fluvial flood risk and watercourses within the neighbourhood plan area. In particular, we note that the boundary does extend into areas of Flood Zones 2 and 3 of the designated main River Soham Lode.

On the basis that future development is steered away from the sensitive aspects of the environment highlighted, we do not consider there to be potential significant environmental effects relating to these environmental constraints. Nevertheless, we recommend the inclusion of relevant policies to cover the management of flood risk.

Allocation of any sites and any windfall development delivered through the Plan period should follow the sequential approach. Section 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (publishing.service.gov.uk) sets this out.

Water Quality

We have identified that the Plan area boundary includes the Water Recycling Centre Soham WRC. Providing the Plan does not allocate sites for growth development across the Plan period, we do not have any significant concerns. We would still expect to see consideration for any windfall developments captured in a relevant policy for Water Quality in the catchment of the Plan Area and serving WRC.

Informative

We encourage you to seek ways in which your neighbourhood plan can improve the local environment. For your information, together with Natural England, Historic England and Forestry Commission we have published joint guidance on neighbourhood planning, which sets out sources of environmental information and ideas on incorporating the environment into plans. This is available at [How to consider the environment in Neighbourhood plans - Locality Neighbourhood Planning](#).

We trust this advice is useful.

Response from Natural England, 22 March 2024

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that:

- significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and,
- significant effects on Habitats sites, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.

Habitats sites are those referred to in the National Planning Policy Framework (Annex 2 - glossary) as “any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites”.

The proposed neighbourhood plan is unlikely to significantly affect any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection areas (SPA), Ramsar wetland or sites in the process of becoming SACs or SPAs ('candidate SACs', 'possible SACs', 'potential SPAs') or a Ramsar wetland. The plan area is unlikely to have a significant effect on a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Heritage Coast, and is unlikely to impact upon the purposes for which these areas are designated or defined.

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 is contained within the Planning Practice Guidance. This identifies three triggers that may require the production of an SEA:

- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's standing advice on protected species.

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission standing advice.

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a SEA is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If a SEA is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

Response from Historic England, 15 March 2024

As the Government's adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process. Therefore we welcome this opportunity to review the Screening Report for this plan. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, “Is it (the Soham and Barway Neighbourhood Plan) likely to have a significant effect on

the historic environment?”. Our comments are based on the information supplied with the Screening Opinion.

The Screening Report indicates that the Council considers that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment. We note that the plan does not propose to allocate any sites for development.

On the basis of the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of ‘SEA’ Directive], Historic England concurs with the Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

The views of the other two statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for an SEA is made.

I should be pleased if you can send a copy of the determination as required by REG 11 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you with your correspondence. To avoid any doubt, this does not reflect our obligation to provide further advice on later stages of the SEA process and, potentially, object to specific proposals which may subsequently arise (either as a result of this consultation or in later versions of the plan) where we consider that, despite the SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its assessment. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), how the allocation, policy or proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.