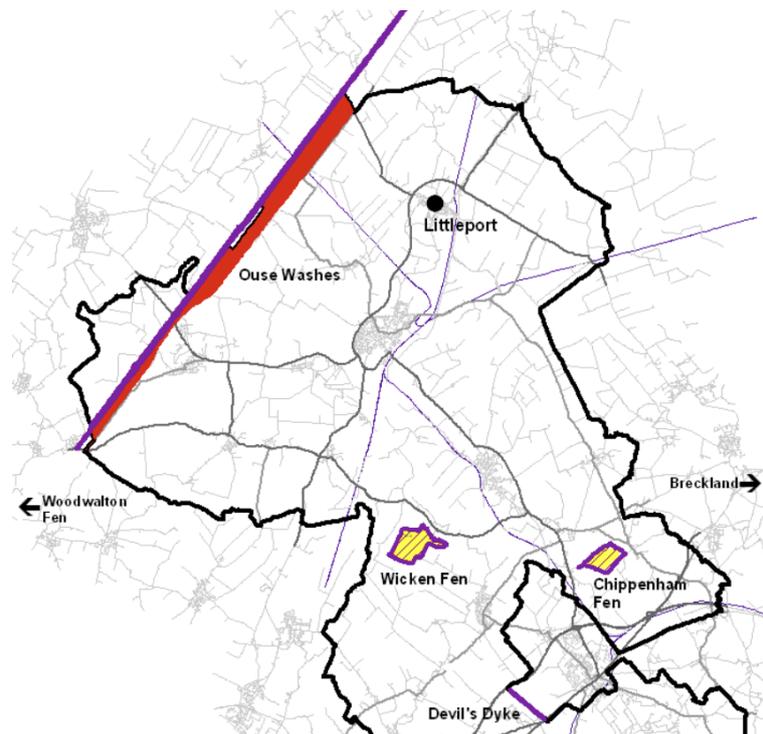


Mepal Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2031



HRA Screening Report September 2023



Mepal Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2031

HRA Screening Report September 2023

Submission of the Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with Regulation 15 of Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017



The Parish Council received professional planning support from NEIGHBOURHOOD-PLAN.CO.UK during the production of this Neighbourhood Plan.



NEIGHBOURHOOD-PLAN.CO.UK

For any general query relating to the Neighbourhood Plan contact:

Parish Clerk: Karen Peck

Telephone: 01353 741066

Email: clerk@mepalparish.org

Website Contact Form: <https://www.mepalparish.org/contact/#>

For consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan contact:

Email: mnhp@mepalparish.org

<https://www.mepalparish.org/mepal-neighbourhood-plan/>

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2031



Copyright Acknowledgements

Mapping

Contains OS data © Crown copyright 2023

© Crown copyright and database rights 2023, OS licence number AC0000829103

Mapping used in this document is either OS Open Data used under the Open Government Licence or is OS Licenced Data reproduced in accordance with the Parish Council's Public Sector Geospatial Agreement licence number AC0000829103 (formerly 100066033) issued by Ordnance Survey.

Aerial Photos

Contains OS data © Crown copyright 2023

Aerial photos are from Ordnance Survey and are used under the Open Government Licence.



Contents

Introduction	Page 6
The Development Plan	Page 20
Summary of Mepal Neighbourhood Plan Policies and Proposals	Page 21
Habitats Regulations Assessment	Page 22
Consultation and Conclusion	Page 25
Appendix One: Responses From Statutory Environmental Bodies	Page 27

Introduction

1. Mepal Parish Council have undertaken this Habitats Regulation Assessment Screening Report. It is the role of East Cambridgeshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to undertake a formal screening of the Neighbourhood Plan under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. This document has been produced to assist the LPA undertake the screening in collaboration with the three designated environmental bodies, namely the Environment Agency; Natural England; and Historic England.
2. This report has been prepared to accompany the Mepal Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Neighbourhood Plan) under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The relevant local planning authority (LPA) is East Cambridgeshire District Council.

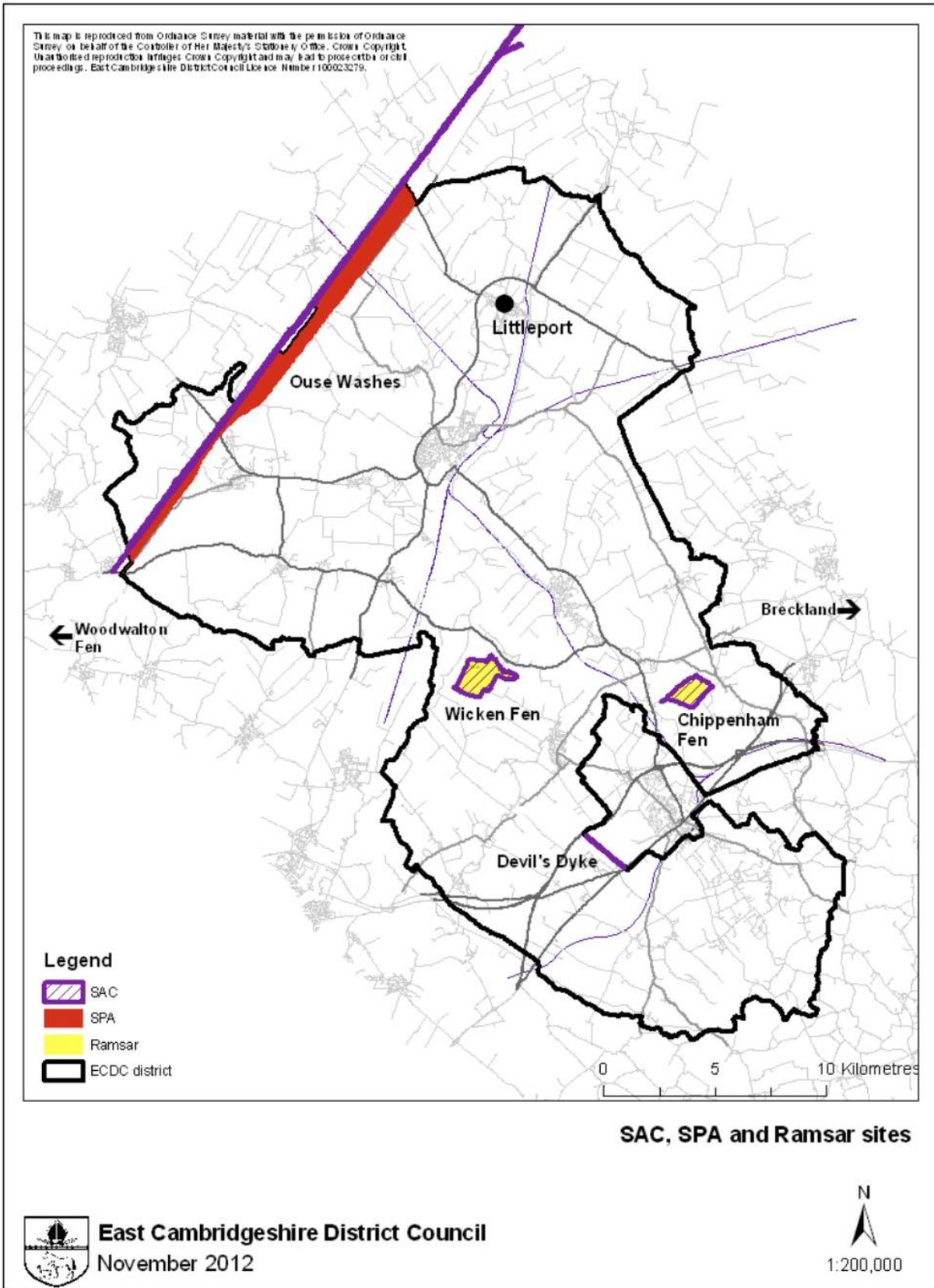
Screening

3. In producing the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan the Parish Council as the qualifying body needs to consider whether a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) in the form of an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 would be required. There is a need to assess the likelihood of proposals or policies within a Neighbourhood Plan having a significant effect on the 'National Sites Network' consisting of areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA's). Consideration of the internationally designated Ramsar sites is also necessary; many Ramsar sites are also SACs or SPAs.
4. If it is considered through a HRA that the proposals or policies in a Neighbourhood Plan are likely to have a significant effect on the 'National Sites Network'. Then an Appropriate Assessment (AA), under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), would need to be carried out to identify whether a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a habitats site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
5. The screening assessment to be undertaken by the LPA must determine whether significant effects on that site can be ruled out on the basis of objective information. If the conclusion is that the plan is likely to have a significant effect on a habitats site then an AA of the implications of the plan for the site, in view of the site's conservation objectives, must be undertaken. If the plan is determined to require an appropriate assessment, then it will normally also require a Strategic Environmental assessment (SEA) by default.
6. Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, regulation 106 identifies that for a Neighbourhood Plan submission under Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 is the trigger point for considering HRA and it is then for the competent authority (at that point the LPA) to then decide under Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 whether the land use plan (which specifically includes Neighbourhood Plans) will have a significant effect individually or cumulatively on a SAC, SPA or Ramsar site which forms part of the National Sites Network.
7. The Parish Council as the qualifying body are required to *"provide such information as the competent authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment under regulation 105 or to enable it to determine whether that assessment is required. However, as there is overlap between HRA and SEA it is not advisable to leave consideration of HRA until later in the process"*. This report provides the information to assist the LPA as competent authority to enable it to determine whether an AA under HRA is required. This report will be submitted to the LPA as part of the suite of documents under Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

8. The need for HRA in the form of a report or statement becomes necessary at the Regulation 17 stage which is the neighbourhood plan examination stage under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. This is when the District Council must submit to the Independent Examiner its HRA related views under Regulation 105 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. In statutory terms, consideration of HRA and the need for AA or not has to be done before the plan is brought into effect, which for a Neighbourhood Plan is defined in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as being the Referendum.

National Sites Network

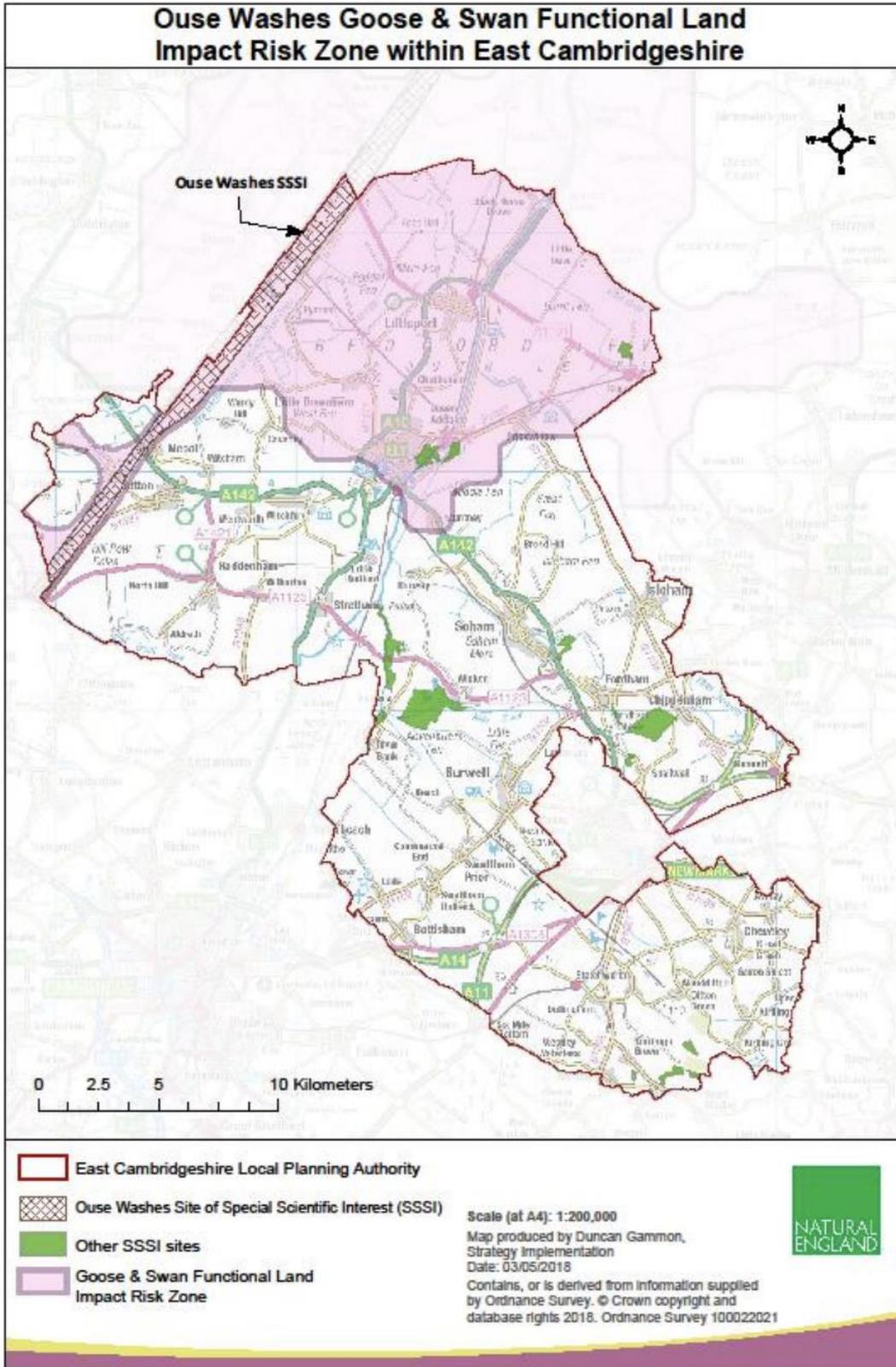
9. In the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan area lie the Ouse Washes SAC, the Ouse Washes SPA and the Ouse Washes Ramsar sites these are part of the 'National Sites Network'. The Ouse Washes SPA and Ramsar designations are contiguous and also cover the SAC area; the SAC covers a narrower corridor. The Ouse Washes is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
10. In the wider vicinity of the Neighbourhood Plan area the 'National Sites Network' of interest are the Orton Pit SAC (Peterborough); Nene Washes SAC; Portholme SAC (Huntingdon/Godmanchester); Upper Nene Valley SAC/Upper Nene Valley Ramsar (Rushden); Fenland SAC/Woodwalton Fen Ramsar; Fenland SAC/Chippenham Fen Ramsar; Fenland SAC/Wicken Fen Ramsar; Devils Dyke SAC; and Breckland SAC/Breckland SPA/Rex Graham Reserve SAC.
11. The closest site in the 'National Sites Network' but outside of the Neighbourhood Plan area is the Fenland SAC/Wicken Fen Ramsar lying approximately 15km to the south-east.
12. Internationally designated wildlife sites in the 'National Sites Network' are accorded the highest level of protection under UK legislation. The purpose of the screening assessment is to ascertain whether there is potential for implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan to have significant effect on any such site. Therefore, following the advice of Natural England on other Neighbourhood Plans we consider it appropriate to consider the potential effects of any proposed development on these important habitats.
13. The Figure below shows the relevant designated sites within East Cambridgeshire. Within a 15km radius of the Neighbourhood Area boundary are the Ouse Washes SAC, the Ouse Washes SPA and the Ouse Washes Ramsar sites and the Fenland SAC/Wicken Fen Ramsar site.
14. The Habitats Regulations Assessment of land use plans relates to Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar Sites. SPAs were sites first classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Directive on the conservation of wild birds (79/409/EEC), more commonly known as the Birds Directive. They were classified for rare and vulnerable birds, listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive, and for regularly occurring migratory species. These SPA sites are now designated under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 2010 (as amended).
15. SACs were previously classified in accordance with EC Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive). Article 3 of this Directive requires the establishment of a European network of important high-quality conservation sites that will make a significant contribution to conserving the 189 habitat types and 788 species identified in Annexes I and II of the Directive. These sites are now designated under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).



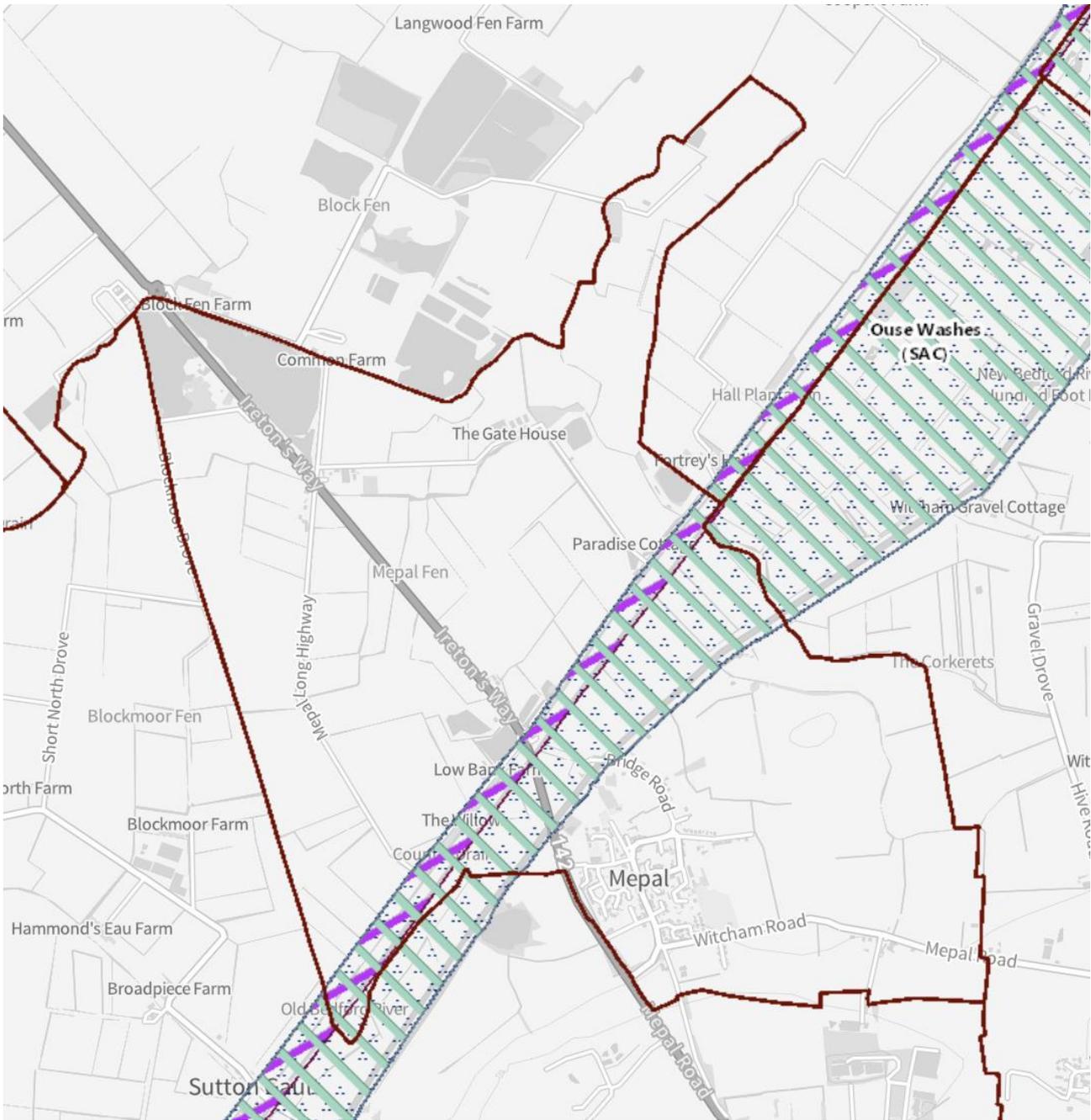
© East Cambridgeshire District Council

16. Ramsar Sites are designated under the International Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention, Iran 1971 and amended by the Paris Protocol 1992). Although Ramsar Sites are not protected in law by domestic UK legislation as a matter of policy government has decreed that unless otherwise specified procedures relating to SPAs and SACs will also apply to Ramsar Sites.

17. Natural England produced a map in May 2018 for the Examination into the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (subsequently not pursued further) titled ‘Natural England’s Ouse Washes ‘Goose and Swan Functional Land’ Impact Risk Zone (IRZ)’. The map produced by Natural England for the Council which was included in their joint statement of common ground to indicate the extent of this IRZ across the district is included below.



18. Although the scale of this map is not ideal, along the Mepal stretch it shows the IRZ not extending particularly any further than the Ouse Washes SSSI boundary. The SSSI boundary covers the entire area covered collectively by the SAC, SPA and Ramsar designations within the Parish of Mepal.



National Sites Network - Extract from Magic.gov.uk website © Defra



19. The Neighbourhood Plan area contains part of the Ouse Washes designated sites within its boundary as shown on the map above. However, the Neighbourhood Plan contains no proposals that are considered to have a direct or indirect impacts on these designated sites. In addition, no cumulative effects with other plans or programmes are likely as the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate land for new built development and so will not lead to issues in terms of increased recreational disturbance, water resources or water quality. The Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan and national policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. The Neighbourhood Plan does not promote growth in terms of housing or employment to any greater extent than already allowed for by Local Plan policies or national policy.
20. The Neighbourhood Plan looks to identify land as Local Green Space which includes land that provides recreational opportunities that can help to minimise recreational pressures on the Ouse Washes. In addition, the Neighbourhood Plan looks to secure the retention of existing formal recreational facilities at the Recreation Ground; this can also assist to minimise recreational pressures on the Ouse Washes.
21. The SPA/SAC/Ramsar sites within 15km of the Neighbourhood Area are shown on the map below and can be described as follows:

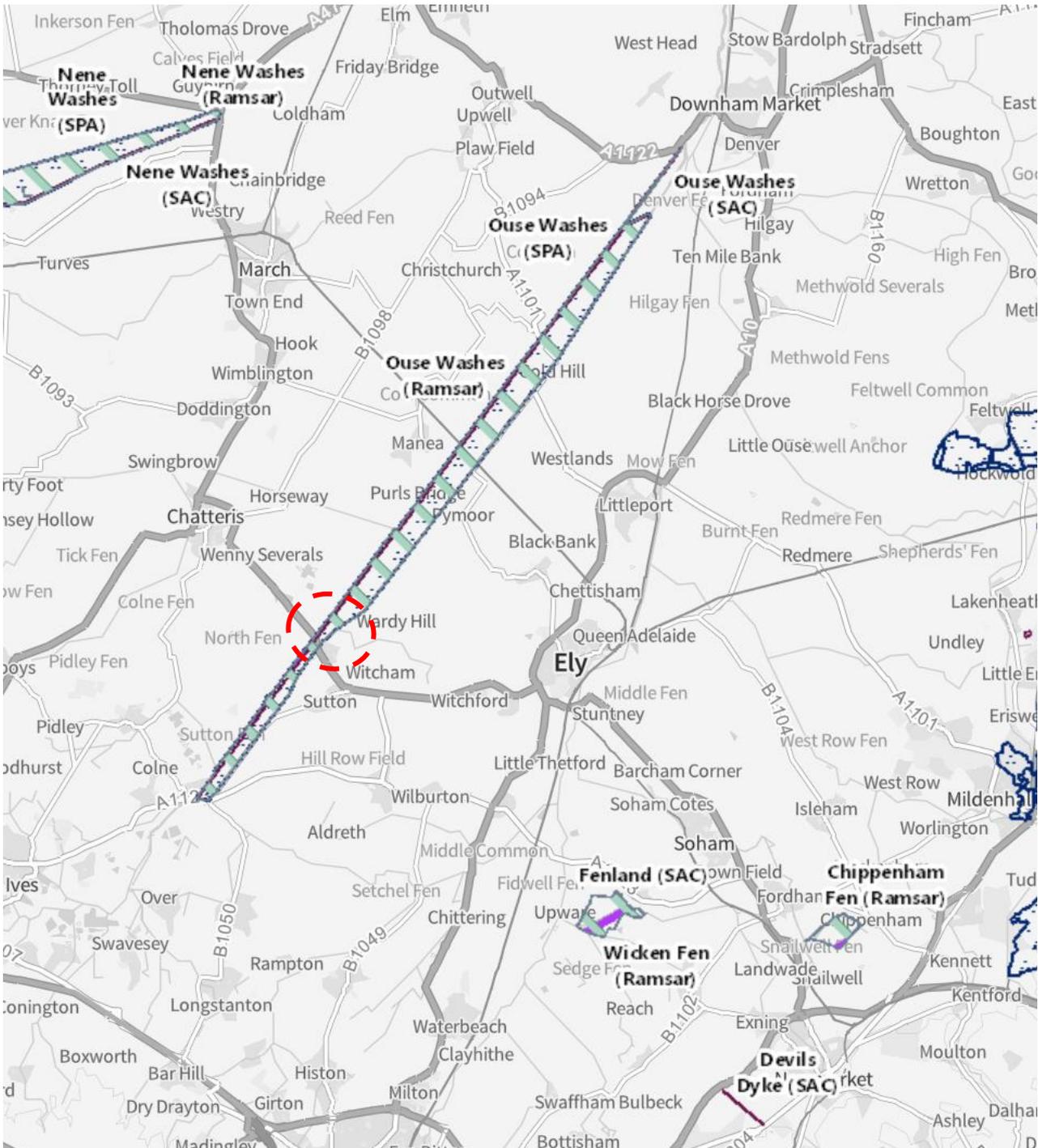
Fenland SAC (Incorporating Wicken Fen Ramsar)

This falls partly within East Cambridgeshire continuing to the west. The SAC and Ramsar site is made up of three component Sites of Special Scientific Interest, which are Woodwalton Fen SSSI, Chippenham Fen SSSI and Wicken Fen SSSI. The part of Fenland SAC within East Cambridgeshire is Chippenham Fen SSSI and Wicken Fen SSSI. Fenland SAC contains one of the most extensive examples of the tall herb-rich East Anglian fen-meadow. The individual sites within Fenland SAC each hold large areas of calcareous fens, with a long and well-documented history of regular management.

Ouse Washes SAC and Ouse Washes SPA (Incorporating Ouse Washes Ramsar)

This site falls partly within the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan area. The Ouse Washes covers 311.35 hectares and is one of the country's few remaining areas of extensive washland habitat. The Ouse Washes forms the largest area of washland, grazing pasture that floods in the winter, in the UK. The associated dykes and rivers hold a great variety of aquatic plants; the pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp. are particularly well represented. The associated aquatic fauna is similarly diverse and includes spined loach *Cobitis taenia*. The Counter Drain, with its clear water and abundant aquatic plants, is particularly important, and a healthy population of spined loach is known to occur. Invertebrate records indicate that the site holds relict fenland fauna, including the British Red Data Book species large darter dragonfly *Libellula fulva* and the rifle beetle *Oulimnius major*. The site also supports a diverse assemblage of nationally rare breeding waterfowl associated with seasonally-flooding wet grassland.

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report



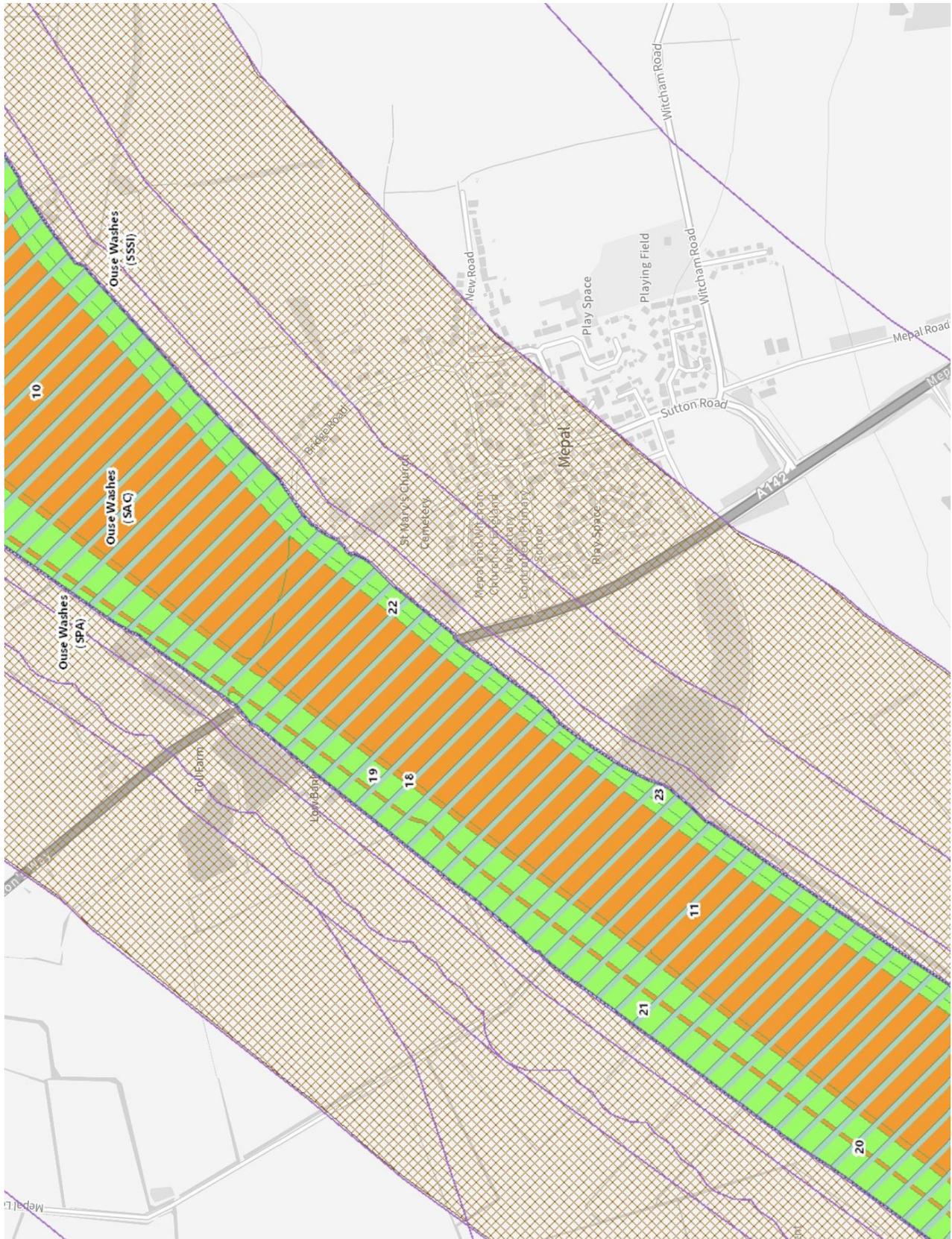
National Sites Network - Extract from Magic.gov.uk website © Defra

 Broad Area of Mepal Parish

- Parishes (GB)
- Ramsar Sites (England)
-  Special Areas of Conservation (England)
-  Special Protection Areas (England)

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

22. The data on Magic.gov.uk does not include impact zones for the SAC, SPA and Ramsar designations per se. However, it does illustrate impact zones for the SSSI which covers the entire area covered collectively by the SAC, SPA and Ramsar designations within the Parish of Mepal. These impact zones are illustrated on the maps below:



Extract from Magic.gov.uk website © Defra

— SSSI Impact Zones

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

SSSI Impact Risk Zones - to assess planning applications for likely impacts on SSSIs/SACs/SPAs & Ramsar sites (England)

1. DOES PLANNING PROPOSAL FALL INTO ONE OR MORE OF THE CATEGORIES BELOW? 2. IF YES, CHECK THE CORRESPONDING DESCRIPTION(S) BELOW. LPA SHOULD CONSULT NATURAL ENGLAND ON LIKELY RISKS FROM THE FOLLOWING:

All Planning Applications

ALL PLANNING APPLICATIONS - EXCEPT HOUSEHOLDER APPLICATIONS.

Infrastructure

Wind & Solar Energy

Minerals, Oil & Gas

Rural Non Residential

Residential

Rural Residential

Air Pollution

Combustion

Waste

Composting

Discharges

Water Supply

Notes 1



New housing developments will require an assessment of recreational pressure on relevant SSSIs and measures to mitigate adverse impacts e.g. alternative open space provision. For further advice contact Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service.

Notes 2

GUIDANCE - How to use the Impact Risk Zones

[/Metadata_for_magic/SSSI IRZ User Guidance MAGIC.pdf](#)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England) - points

No Features found

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)

No Features found

SSSI Impact Risk Zones - to assess planning applications for likely impacts on SSSIs/SACs/SPAs & Ramsar sites (England)

1. DOES PLANNING PROPOSAL FALL INTO ONE OR MORE OF THE CATEGORIES BELOW? 2. IF YES, CHECK THE CORRESPONDING DESCRIPTION(S) BELOW. LPA SHOULD CONSULT NATURAL ENGLAND ON LIKELY RISKS FROM THE FOLLOWING:

All Planning Applications

All planning applications (except householder) outside or extending outside existing settlements/urban areas affecting greenspace, farmland, semi natural habitats or landscape features such as trees, hedges, streams, rural buildings/structures.

Infrastructure

Pipelines and underground cables, pylons and overhead cables. Any transport proposal including road, rail and by water (excluding routine maintenance). Airports, helipads and other aviation proposals.

Wind & Solar Energy

Solar schemes with footprint > 0.5ha, all wind turbines.

Minerals, Oil & Gas

Planning applications for quarries, including: new proposals, Review of Minerals Permissions (ROMP), extensions, variations to conditions etc. Oil & gas exploration/extraction.

Rural Non Residential

Large non residential developments outside existing settlements/urban areas where net additional gross internal floorspace is > 1,000m² or footprint exceeds 0.2ha.

Residential

Residential development of 10 units or more.

Rural Residential

Any residential developments outside of existing settlements/urban areas with a total net gain in residential units.

Air Pollution



Any development that could cause AIR POLLUTION or DUST either in its construction or operation (incl: industrial/commercial processes, livestock & poultry units, slurry lagoons & digestate stores, manure stores).

Combustion

All general combustion processes. Incl: energy from waste incineration, other incineration, landfill gas generation plant, pyrolysis/gasification, anaerobic digestion, sewage treatment works, other incineration/ combustion.

Waste

Mechanical and biological waste treatment, inert landfill, non-hazardous landfill, hazardous landfill, household civic amenity recycling facilities construction, demolition and excavation waste, other waste management.

Composting

Any composting proposal. Incl: open windrow composting, in-vessel composting, anaerobic digestion, other waste management.

Discharges

Any discharge of water or liquid waste that is discharged to ground (ie to seep away) or to surface water, such as a beck or stream.

Water Supply

Large infrastructure such as warehousing / industry where net additional gross internal floorspace is > 1,000m² or any development needing its own water supply .

Notes 1

New housing developments will require an assessment of recreational pressure on relevant SSSIs and measures to mitigate adverse impacts e.g. alternative open space provision. For further advice contact Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service.

Notes 2

GUIDANCE - How to use the Impact Risk Zones

[/Metadata_for_magic/SSSI IRZ User Guidance MAGIC.pdf](#)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England) - points

No Features found

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)

No Features found

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

SSSI Impact Risk Zones - to assess planning applications for likely impacts on SSSIs/SACs/SPAs & Ramsar sites (England)

1. DOES PLANNING PROPOSAL FALL INTO ONE OR MORE OF 2. IF YES, CHECK THE CORRESPONDING DESCRIPTION(S) BELOW. LPA SHOULD CONSULT NATURAL ENGLAND ON LIKELY RISKS FROM THE FOLLOWING:

All Planning Applications

All planning applications (except householder) outside or extending outside existing settlements/urban areas affecting greenspace, farmland, semi natural habitats or landscape features such as trees, hedges, streams, rural buildings/structures.

Infrastructure

Pipelines and underground cables, pylons and overhead cables. Any transport proposal including road, rail and by water (excluding routine maintenance). Airports, helipads and other aviation proposals.

Wind & Solar Energy

Solar schemes with footprint > 0.5ha, all wind turbines.

Minerals, Oil & Gas

Planning applications for quarries, including: new proposals, Review of Minerals Permissions (ROMP), extensions, variations to conditions etc. Oil & gas exploration/extraction.

Rural Non Residential

Large non residential developments outside existing settlements/urban areas where net additional gross internal floorspace is > 1,000m² or footprint exceeds 0.2ha.

Residential

Residential development of 50 units or more.

Rural Residential

Any residential developments outside of existing settlements/urban areas with a total net gain in residential units.

Air Pollution

Any development that could cause AIR POLLUTION (incl: industrial/commercial processes, livestock & poultry units, slurry lagoons & digestate stores, manure stores).

Combustion

All general combustion processes. Incl: energy from waste incineration, other incineration, landfill gas generation plant, pyrolysis/gasification, anaerobic digestion, sewage treatment works, other incineration/ combustion.

Waste

Mechanical and biological waste treatment, inert landfill, non-hazardous landfill, hazardous landfill, household civic amenity recycling facilities construction, demolition and excavation waste, other waste management.

Composting

Any composting proposal. Incl: open windrow composting, in-vessel composting, anaerobic digestion, other waste management.

Discharges

Any discharge of water or liquid waste that is discharged to ground (ie to seep away) or to surface water, such as a beck or stream.

Water Supply

Large infrastructure such as warehousing / industry where net additional gross internal floorspace is > 1,000m² or any development needing its own water supply .

Notes 1

New housing developments will require an assessment of recreational pressure on relevant SSSIs and measures to mitigate adverse impacts e.g. alternative open space provision. For further advice contact Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service.

Notes 2

GUIDANCE - How to use the Impact Risk Zones

[/Metadata_for_magic/SSSI IRZ User Guidance MAGIC.pdf](#)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England) - points

No Features found

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)

No Features found



Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

SSSI Impact Risk Zones - to assess planning applications for likely impacts on SSSIs/SACs/SPAs & Ramsar sites (England)

1. DOES PLANNING PROPOSAL FALL INTO ONE OR MORE OF 2. IF YES, CHECK THE CORRESPONDING DESCRIPTION(S) BELOW. LPA SHOULD CONSULT NATURAL ENGLAND ON LIKELY RISKS FROM THE FOLLOWING:

All Planning Applications

All planning applications (except householder) outside or extending outside existing settlements/urban areas affecting greenspace, farmland, semi natural habitats or landscape features such as trees, hedges, streams, rural buildings/structures.

Infrastructure

Pipelines and underground cables, pylons and overhead cables. Any transport proposal including road, rail and by water (excluding routine maintenance). Airports, helipads and other aviation proposals.

Wind & Solar Energy

Solar schemes with footprint > 0.5ha, all wind turbines.

Minerals, Oil & Gas

Planning applications for quarries, including: new proposals, Review of Minerals Permissions (ROMP), extensions, variations to conditions etc. Oil & gas exploration/extraction.

Rural Non Residential

Large non residential developments outside existing settlements/urban areas where net additional gross internal floorspace is > 1,000m² or footprint exceeds 0.2ha.

Residential

Residential development of 50 units or more.

Rural Residential

Any residential developments outside of existing settlements/urban areas with a total net gain in residential units.

Air Pollution



Any industrial/agricultural development that could cause AIR POLLUTION (incl: industrial processes, livestock & poultry units with floorspace > 500m², slurry lagoons & digestate stores > 200m², manure stores > 250t).

Combustion

General combustion processes >20MW energy input. Incl: energy from waste incineration, other incineration, landfill gas generation plant, pyrolysis/gasification, anaerobic digestion, sewage treatment works, other incineration/ combustion.

Waste

Landfill. Incl: inert landfill, non-hazardous landfill, hazardous landfill.

Composting

Any composting proposal with more than 500 tonnes maximum annual operational throughput. Incl: open windrow composting, in-vessel composting, anaerobic digestion, other waste management.

Discharges

Any discharge of water or liquid waste of more than 2m³/day to ground (ie to seep away) or to surface water, such as a beck or stream.

Water Supply

Large infrastructure such as warehousing / industry where net additional gross internal floorspace is > 1,000m² or any development needing its own water supply .

Notes 1

New housing developments will require an assessment of recreational pressure on relevant SSSIs and measures to mitigate adverse impacts e.g. alternative open space provision. For further advice contact Natural England's Discretionary Advice Service.

Notes 2

GUIDANCE - How to use the Impact Risk Zones

[/Metadata for magic/SSSI IRZ User Guidance MAGIC.pdf](#)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England) - points

No Features found

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)

No Features found

24. The impact zones, using the labels that we have added only for ease of identification can be summarised as follows in relation to new housing, which is the most common land use:

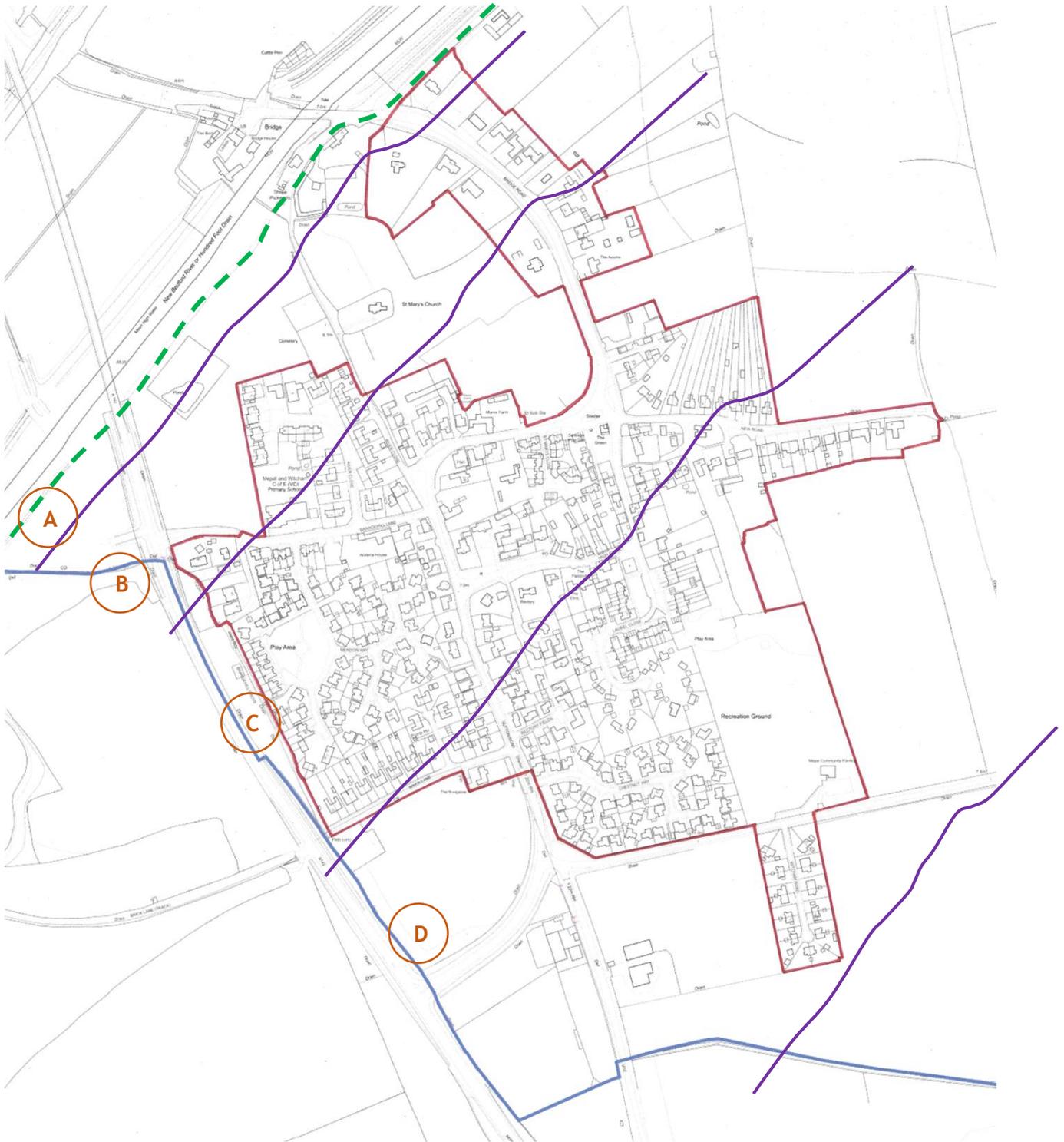
A - Any new housing

B - Residential development of 10 units or more in settlements or any new housing outside of settlements

C - Residential development of 50 units or more in settlements or any new housing outside of settlements

D - Residential development of 50 units or more in settlements or any new housing outside of settlements

25. The map below illustrates the approximate alignment of these impact zones overlaid on the settlement boundary in the Neighbourhood Plan:



Map - Settlement Boundary
© Crown Copyright

- Settlement Boundary
- Plan Area Boundary
- SSSI Impact Zones
- SSSI Boundary

The Neighbourhood Plan Context

26. The map shows that the existing built development around the Three Pickerels public house has been left out of the settlement boundary. The methodology for the settlement boundary has used the following exclusion criterion: 'Land within the designated 'National

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

Sites Network' consisting of areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Areas (SPA's); together with areas within the internationally designated Ramsar sites or are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).'

27. The overlay shows that the zone labelled A by us for identification where any housing development needs to be assessed for impact, within the settlement boundary covers part of the garden of 13 Bridge Road on the western side together with 40 Bridge Road and adjacent land which is plot 2 on the eastern side that obtained planning consent under 18/00909/OUT for 4 dwellings. 40 Bridge Road was plot 1 of that site which then obtained full planning permission under 19/00627/FUL. In this area within the settlement boundary there is no reasonable prospect of additional housing coming forward beyond that already permitted.
28. The zone labelled B by us for identification where housing development of 10 or more units needs to be assessed for impact, covers the area going from plot 3 that obtained planning consent under 18/00909/OUT for 4 dwellings and 34 Bridge Road that was plot 4 of that site which then obtained full planning permission under 19/01728/FUL; through to land adjacent 16 Bridge Road on the eastern side. On the western side it goes from 13 Bridge Road to land adjacent to 7 Bridge Road that has planning permission under 22/00189/FUL to erect a dwelling. In this area within the settlement boundary there are a number of sites that already have planning permission, beyond that which already has been granted there is likely only to be a reasonable prospect of one or two additional infill housing proposals that could theoretically come forward beyond that already permitted. This is significantly under the threshold of 10 dwellings for triggering impact assessment.
29. The remainder of the village is covered by zones labelled C and D by us for identification, where housing development of 50 or more units needs to be assessed for impact. Within the settlement boundary the green spaces are protected as Local Green Spaces where built development is unacceptable in principle. Elsewhere within the settlement boundary there is likely to be a reasonable prospect of some additional infill housing proposals that could theoretically come forward beyond that already permitted. However, this is individually and cumulatively likely to be significantly under the threshold of 50 dwellings for triggering impact assessment.

Designation of Mepal Parish as a Neighbourhood Planning Area

30. A formal [application](#)¹ was made by Mepal Parish Council as a 'relevant body' under Section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) for the designation of a neighbourhood area in order to develop a neighbourhood plan. The area of the Neighbourhood Plan is based upon the parish boundary, which was seen as appropriate as this area is recognised as the distinct community of Mepal. The request was that the Parish be recognised as a Neighbourhood Area for the purpose of producing a neighbourhood plan, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012.
31. The Parish was [designated](#)² a Neighbourhood Area on the 28 February 2022.
32. The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared by Mepal Parish Council, a qualifying body, (Section 38A (12) of the Planning and Compensation Act 2004) for the Neighbourhood Area covering the Parish of Mepal, as designated by East Cambridgeshire District Council. The name of the neighbourhood area is the 'Mepal Neighbourhood Area'. It does not relate to more than one neighbourhood area.

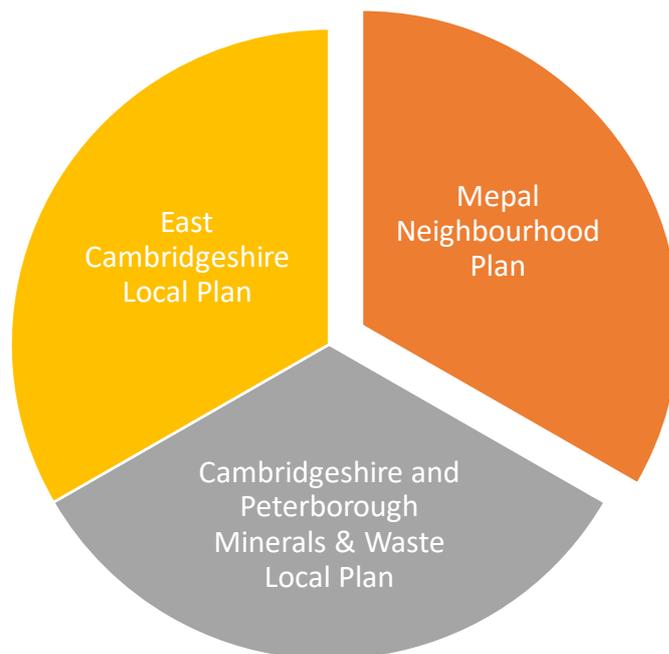
¹ <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/neighbourhood-planning>

² <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Mepal%20NA%20Map%20A4%20ptrt.pdf>

33. The policies described in the Neighbourhood Plan relate to the development and use of land in the designated Neighbourhood Area only. The document sets out the period of the Neighbourhood Plan which is from 2022 to 2036.

The Development Plan

34. The ‘Development Plan’ for Mepal is made up of 3 main components as follows:



35. The East Cambridgeshire Local Plan sets out the vision, objectives spatial strategy and policies for the future development of the district. It also identifies land and allocates sites for different types of development, such as housing and employment, to deliver the planned growth for the district to 2031.

36. The preparation of the Local Plan was informed through several stages of public consultation. The [Local Plan](#)³ was adopted by the Council on 21 April 2015, it covers the plan period up to 2031. In April 2020 the Council determined that it was necessary to review the Local Plan through what is known as a ‘Single Issue Review’ and addresses the housing requirement for the same plan period up to 2031.

37. Consultation on the Proposed Submission version of the ‘Single Issue Review’ of the Local Plan was carried out between 3 May and 13 June 2022. Two earlier consultations also took place on a draft document, during 2021. On 19 July 2022, the Council submitted its proposed [Single Issue Review Local Plan](#)⁴ to the Planning Inspectorate, so that an independent examination of the proposal can take place. The Examination of the Local Plan Review is underway and the hearing sessions were held in November 2022 and March 2023. As part of that Examination process the Local Plan Review has recently undertaken consultation on modifications during July and August 2023. Neither the existing East

³ <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/east-cambridgeshire-local-plan-2015>

⁴ <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/local-plan-review>

Cambridgeshire Local Plan nor the Single-Issue Review Local Plan allocate sites for development in Mepal.

Strategic policies for the purposes of neighbourhood planning

38. The system of neighbourhood planning allows Parish and Town Councils to produce neighbourhood plans to guide development at a local level. One of the requirements of such plans is that they should be in line with the 'strategic policies' of the adopted development plan for the local area.
39. East Cambridgeshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority defines which policies are to be considered 'strategic' with regard to the production of a neighbourhood plan. However, the Local Plan does not explicitly state which policies within the Local Plan are to be considered 'strategic' for the purposes of neighbourhood planning.

Summary of Mepal Neighbourhood Plan Policies and Proposals

40. A summary of the Policies and Proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan is as follows:

Sustainable Development

Policy 1 - Settlement Boundary (Update to Development Envelope)

This policy updates the settlement boundary to reflect the existing built footprint of the village including land with planning consent for housing, but it excludes existing built footprint that lies within the Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar/SSSI. It also defines land outside the settlement boundary as countryside.

Policy 2 - Community Assets

Looks to protect existing community assets and support the improvement or additional provision of community assets.

Policy 3 - Allotments

Sets out a policy framework to protect the existing allotments and for future expansion when required.

Policy 4 - Highway Impact

Requires development to incorporate sufficient refuse provision, car parking, cycle parking and electric vehicle charging. It also sets out a framework to look to resolve the access visibility issues at Mepal Community Pavilion.

Policy 5 - Climate Change Mitigation

Sets out a framework for installing renewable or low-carbon energy generation on existing premises and for proposals for small-scale or community-scale renewable energy generation that are community led.

Natural and Built Environment

Policy 6 - Non-Designated Heritage Assets

The Neighbourhood Plan identifies a number of locally important buildings and structures as non-designated heritage assets.

Policy 7 - Views and Vistas

This policy identifies a number of important views and vistas to be protected.

Policy 8 - Local Character

This policy includes an overall framework for development to reflect local character and it identifies particular areas for protection as: Important Undeveloped Sutton Road Village Gateway; Important Verdant Open Areas Which Contribute to the Character and Setting of the Village; and Area Sensitive to Change and Intensification.

Policy 9 - Boundary Treatment, Hedgerows, Trees and Public Realm

Looks to protect boundary treatments, landscaping, hedgerows or trees which make a positive contribution to the streetscene and/or the public realm or make an important contribution to biodiversity habitat.

Policy 10 - Local Green Spaces

The Neighbourhood Plan designates a number of sites across Mepal as Local Green Spaces. These Local Green Spaces provide opportunities for formal or informal recreation and/or are demonstrably special for other reasons such as beauty, historical significance, tranquillity or wildlife richness.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

41. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) as required under Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 require that Development Plans undergo an assessment to determine whether or not the Local Plan will have a significant effect on 'National Sites Network' or Ramsar sites.
42. In June 2018, East Cambridgeshire District Council published a Habitats Regulation Assessment report which accompanied the submitted Local Plan; although that Local Plan was not subsequently pursued further. The purpose of the HRA report in 2018 was to set out the method, findings and conclusions of the Habitats Regulation Assessment (Stage 1 Screening and Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment) of the submitted East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (at that time but not pursued further), which was carried out by East Cambridgeshire District Council, in consultation with Natural England.
43. The 2018 HRA identified that the potential likely significant effects as a result of the 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
 - Reduced water quality from pollution due to increased demand for waste-water treatment
44. Mepal is located in the western part of East Cambridgeshire district, the Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar and SSSI runs through the middle of the Parish. The 2018 HRA for the Local Plan identified that where there was close proximity of proposed site allocations to the Ouse Washes, there is potential for physical loss of habitat outside of the boundary of the Ouse Washes SAC used by migratory (wintering) birds for rest and grazing. However, Mepal had no Local Plan allocations and the Neighbourhood Plan does not propose any site allocations. Any likely windfall development within the settlement boundary will fall outside Natural England's Ouse Washes Functional Land IRZ and therefore can be screened

out. The likely level of windfall housing will be significantly under the thresholds identified for assessment under the relevant impact zones.

45. The 2018 HRA report concluded that, provided the recommendations are incorporated into the local plan, it was possible to conclude that the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan was compliant with the Habitats Regulations and would not result in likely significant effects on any of the Natura 2000 Sites (now known as National Sites Network) identified, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. Although that Local Plan was subsequently not pursued through to the final stages, the conclusions of the HRA remain pertinent as it provides an updated position relative to the 2015 Local Plan. Importantly the 2018 HRA complied with the judgement of the Court of Justice for the European Union (2018)⁵, which ruled that mitigation measures incorporated into a project can no longer be taken into account at the screening stage.
46. In June 2018 that HRA for the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (Post Submission) was undertaken. That report concluded: *“To conclude, provided the recommendations made in this Report are (where applicable) incorporated into the Local Plan, it is possible to conclude that the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan is compliant with the Habitats Regulations and will not result in likely significant effects on any of the Natura 2000 Sites identified, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.”* The HRA made 6 recommendations of which only 2 had general applicability across the district. These were adding an explanation as to how land beyond the site boundary of a European site may also provide important functional habitat for qualifying bird species; new residential development should deliver green infrastructure and open space in-line with the standards set out in Policy LP21 Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities and Annex A of the Local Plan.
47. In relation to the issue of a HRA the Habitats Regulation Assessment (Stage 1 Screening) of the East Cambridgeshire SIR Local Plan (Regulation 19) Main Report dated May 2022 concludes: *“Overall, therefore, it is the opinion of the Local Planning Authority that the SIR Local Plan, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is unlikely to have any significant effects on any of the applicable protected sites.”*
48. HRA looks at the impact that the Local Plan is likely to have on European Sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites). HRA is a two-stage process that starts with a screening stage. If significant impacts on European sites cannot be ruled out by the screening stage a more detailed Appropriate Assessment will be required. No Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken for the Single-Issue Review of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan has been undertaken.
49. A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in the form of an Appropriate Assessment may also be required to accompany the Neighbourhood Plan where the policies and proposals of the plan may give rise to significant effects on internationally designated wildlife sites. The process to establish whether a HRA is necessary starts with a screening exercise to determine whether any internationally designated sites might be exposed to likely significant effects as a result of implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan and therefore whether further stages of the HRA process are required. The screening decision produced by the LPA must have regard to the European Court of Justice Judgement in the case of People Over Wind & Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta.
50. The impact of that case can be summarised as *“In April 2018, in the case People Over Wind & Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta (“People over Wind”), the Court of Justice of the European Union clarified that it is not appropriate to take account of mitigation measures when screening plans and projects for their effects on European protected habitats under the Habitats Directive. In practice this means if a likely significant effect is identified at the*

⁵ People Over Wind & Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

screening stage of a habitats assessment, an 'Appropriate Assessment' of those effects must be undertaken."

51. The Government has made regulations through the Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018. These came into force on 28 December 2018 and now allow neighbourhood plans in areas where there could be likely significant effects on a European protected site to be subject to an 'Appropriate Assessment' to demonstrate how impacts will be mitigated, in the same way as would happen for a draft Local Plan or planning application.
52. The Neighbourhood Plan includes no site allocations for development which would in combination with other site allocations in the Development Plan result in a potentially cumulative effect on any 'National Sites Network' or Ramsar sites including those within the Neighbourhood Plan area, namely the Ouse Washes SAC, the Ouse Washes SPA and the Ouse Washes Ramsar sites. The Neighbourhood Plan is local in nature and scope, its policies are in conformity with National Planning Policy and the strategic policies of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan. As already highlighted any likely windfall development within the settlement boundary will fall outside Natural England's Ouse Washes Functional Land IRZ and therefore can be screened out in that context. The likely level of windfall housing will be significantly under the thresholds identified for assessment under the relevant impact zones. As such the level of windfall housing that might come forward over the Neighbourhood Plan period would not individually or cumulatively result in a potentially cumulative effect on any 'National Sites Network'.
53. The SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites are protected, conserved and enhanced by adopted planning policies in the Local Plan. The Local Plan and the emerging Single-Issue Review of the Local Plan has been subject to Sustainability Appraisal (meeting Strategic Environmental Assessment requirements) and appropriate assessment under the Habitat Regulations Assessment. The Neighbourhood Plan does not conflict with any policies in the Local Plan and will have limited additional effect.
54. The criteria for determining if an individual policy, or a combination of policies, would have a likely significant effect, and require assessment, are based on the characteristics of the relevant designated site and the objectives set by Natural England. The main factors to consider are:
 - Development on or adjacent to the designated site destroying part or all of the site, or changing the ecological functioning of the site (e.g. disrupting water flows or migration routes)
 - Increased public recreation, causing disturbance to birds, damage to vegetation, increased littering / flytipping or leading to management compromises (e.g. grazing being restricted).
 - Reduction in water levels or flow, from increased water demand in the district requiring greater water abstraction
 - Reduction of water quality, from increased discharges of sewage and surface water drainage, or from pollution incidents, either during, or after, construction
55. The Neighbourhood Plan is considered in itself to have only a limited impact on the Ouse Washes SAC, the Ouse Washes SPA and the Ouse Washes Ramsar sites and the Fenland SAC/Wicken Fen Ramsar site as the closest sites in the 'National Sites Network'. The Neighbourhood Plan does not envisage any scale of growth beyond that already committed and already being planned for in the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan. The policies will ensure that opportunities for additional unplanned growth is limited. As such the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to result in increases in public recreation, water demand, or discharges of sewage or surface water drainage. The Neighbourhood Plan intends to secure the retention of other open space and local green space across Mepal which can provide suitable opportunities for public recreation which will help to limit any need to

utilise the SAC and SPA/Ramsar area from both existing and new development. Impacts from the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan have been assessed separately and appropriate changes or mitigation has been put in place.

56. The other sites in the ‘National Sites Network’ are relatively distant from the Neighbourhood Plan Area, so impacts will be limited.

Consultation and Conclusion

57. As a result of the screening assessment set out in this report, based on the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, the Parish Council is of the view that the Neighbourhood Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any internationally designated sites either on its own or in combination with any other plans. Therefore, the Parish Council considers that an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
58. Consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents took place during the period from Wednesday 1 March 2023 to Wednesday 12 April 2023 and included a draft of this HRA Screening Report. Consultation was undertaken as set out in the Neighbourhood Plan Regulations and included consultation with the Environment Agency; Natural England; and Historic England as the three statutory environmental bodies. None of the three statutory environmental bodies made any specific comments on the Neighbourhood Plan or supporting documents. The statutory environmental bodies tend to rely upon providing general advice on Neighbourhood Plans rather than providing bespoke responses.
59. In order to be absolutely certain as to whether the three statutory environmental bodies had any specific views on the HRA Screening, East Cambridgeshire District Council suggested that we specifically re-ask the statutory environmental bodies to confirm if they have any comments or not on the HRA Screening Report which was done in June and July 2023. Copies of the consultation and the responses received are in Appendix 1.
60. Historic England did not specifically address the question of HRA although they confirmed that they considered that SEA was not required. The Environment Agency did not explicitly answer the question but did indicate that they did not consider there to be potential significant environmental effects arising from the Neighbourhood Plan.
61. Natural England indicated that: *“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.”*
62. The Parish Council has duly considered the responses of the three statutory environmental bodies and has given their views great weight in coming to its final view. Therefore, following consultation the Parish Council remains satisfied that the conclusion that the Neighbourhood Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any internationally designated sites either on its own or in combination with any other plans; thereby meaning that an Appropriate Assessment is not required remains valid.
63. Natural England explicitly confirmed that: *“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*

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

Coast, and is unlikely to impact upon the purposes for which these areas are designated or defined.”

64. This HRA Screening Report provides such information as the competent authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment under regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 to enable the LPA to determine whether AA under HRA is required.
65. East Cambridgeshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority will, following submission of the Neighbourhood Plan, have to determine under regulation 106 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, whether an Appropriate Assessment is or is not required. They will take into account consultation with the Environment Agency; Natural England; and Historic England as the three statutory environmental bodies.

Appendix One: Responses From Statutory Environmental Bodies

66. As indicated earlier in order to be absolutely certain as to whether the three statutory environmental bodies had any specific views on the SEA Screening, East Cambridgeshire District Council suggested that we specifically re-ask the statutory environmental bodies to confirm if they have any comments or not on the HRA Screening which was done in June and July 2023. Below are the responses received:

Historic England

From: James, Edward

Sent: Tuesday, June 27, 2023 11:37 AM

To: clerk@mepalparish.org

Cc: EastPlanningPolicy <eastplanningpolicy@HistoricEngland.org.uk>; McGivern, Ross

Subject: RE: Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - SEA and HRA Screening

Dear Karen,

Thank you for inviting Historic England to comment on this consultation again. Unfortunately we did not have capacity to respond in detail to the original consultation, owing to a period of parental leave. However, 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 further 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 Mepal 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

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

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.

If you have any queries about this consultation response, please contact eastplanningpolicy@historicengland.org.uk.

For future queries relating to your neighbourhood plan, please contact my colleague Ross McGivern (cc'd), who will be responsible for providing our advice on neighbourhood plans from the 1st July 2023 onwards.

Kind regards,

Edward



Historic England

Work with us to champion heritage and improve lives. Read our Future Strategy and get involved at historicengland.org.uk/strategy.

Follow us: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) Sign up to our [newsletter](#)

This e-mail (and any attachments) is confidential and may contain personal views which are not the views of Historic England unless specifically stated. If you have received it in error, please delete it from your system and notify the sender immediately. Do not use, copy or disclose the information in any way nor act in reliance on it. Any information sent to Historic England may become publicly available. We respect your privacy and the use of your information. Please read our full [privacy policy](#) for more information.

Environment Agency

From: "EastAnglia, Planning" <Planning.EastAnglia@environment-agency.gov.uk>

Date: 25 July 2023 at 11:06:11 BST

To: clerk@mepalparish.org

Subject: RE: Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - SEA and HRA Screening

Dear Karen

Thank you for consulting us on the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report for the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan.

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 Great Ouse.

On the basis that no additional growth is proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan, 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. [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) paragraph 161 sets this out.

Biodiversity

We note the Neighbourhood Plan area includes the Ouse Washes, designated as a SSSI, SAC, SPA and Ramsar site. As no growth is proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan, 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 protect designated sites.

Water Quality

We have identified that the Plan area boundary includes the Water Recycling Centre Mepal, which is currently operating close to or exceeding its permitted capacity. 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 hope this information is of assistance. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

Alison Craggs

Sustainable Places Advisor

East Anglia Area (West)

Environment Agency, Bromholme Lane, Brampton, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE28 4NE

Tel: [REDACTED]

Mob: [REDACTED]

Direct dial: [REDACTED]



Does Your Proposal Have Environmental Issues or Opportunities? Speak To Us Early!

If you're planning a new development, we want to work with you to make the process as smooth as possible. We offer a bespoke advice service where you will be assigned a project manager who be a single point of contact for you at the EA, giving you detailed specialist advice within guaranteed delivery dates. This early engagement can significantly reduce uncertainty and delays to your project. More information can be found on our website [here](#).

Natural England

Date: 28 July 2023
Our ref: 439571
Your ref: Mepal Neighbourhood Plan



Ms Karen Peck
Mepal Parish Council

Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

BY EMAIL ONLY
clerk@mepalparish.org

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Ms Peck

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - SEA & HRA Screening Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 26 June 2023.

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 sites¹, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.

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

¹ 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".

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.

Please send any new consultations, or further information on this consultation to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle
Consultations Team

Copy Email Sent to The Three Environmental Bodies

From: clerk@mepalparish.org <clerk@mepalparish.org>
Sent: Monday, June 26, 2023 3:09:46 PM (UTC+00:00) Dublin, Edinburgh, Lisbon, London
To: SM-NE-Consultations (NE) <consultations@naturalengland.org.uk>; Anglian Central, Planning_Liaison <planning.brampton@environment-agency.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@HistoricEngland.org.uk <[\[REDACTED\]@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@HistoricEngland.org.uk)>; eastplanningpolicy@HistoricEngland.org.uk <eastplanningpolicy@HistoricEngland.org.uk>
Subject: Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - SEA and HRA Screening

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - SEA and HRA Screening
The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

We consulted you back at the end of February 2023 on the draft of the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan under Regulation 14 of The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. Alongside the Neighbourhood Plan we also invited comments on the suite of supporting documents which included the draft of the SEA Screening Request and the draft of the HRA Screening Request. The consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents ran from Wednesday 1 March 2023 to Wednesday 12 April 2023.

In response to that consultation the Environment Agency customer services team provided acknowledgement (dated 7th March 2023) but no comments followed; both Natural England and Historic England indicated that they didn't have any specific comments (dated 13th March 2023 and 3rd March 2023 respectively). As none of the three statutory environmental bodies said anything on the SEA and HRA Screening documents, in order to be absolutely certain as to whether the three statutory environmental bodies had any specific views on the SEA Screening and HRA Screening; East Cambridgeshire District Council has suggested that we specifically re-ask the statutory environmental bodies to confirm if they have any comments or not on the SEA Screening and HRA Screening?

Attached is the draft of the SEA Screening that will in due course accompany the submission of the Neighbourhood Plan which is anticipated to take place in September 2023. This document forms our statement of reasons for a determination under regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 that the proposal is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and therefore that SEA is not required. Following submission then a determination statement will need to be produced by East Cambridgeshire District Council, as 'responsible authority', to meet the requirements of Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Also attached is the draft of the HRA Screening that will in due course accompany the submission of the Neighbourhood Plan which as indicated is anticipated to take place in September 2023. Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, regulation 106 identifies that for a Neighbourhood Plan submission under Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 is the trigger point for considering HRA and it is then for the competent authority (at that point ECDC) to then decide under Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 whether the land use plan (which specifically includes Neighbourhood Plans) will have a significant effect individually or cumulatively on a SAC, SPA or Ramsar site which forms part of the National Sites Network.

In the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan area lie the Ouse Washes SAC, the Ouse Washes SPA and the Ouse Washes Ramsar sites these are part of the 'National Sites Network'. The Ouse Washes SPA and Ramsar designations are contiguous and also cover the SAC area; the SAC covers a narrower corridor. The Ouse Washes is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Within both

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

documents is a summary of the policies and proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any sites for built development.

I would be grateful if you could reply within 5 weeks of the date of this email, even if this is simply to confirm that you have no response or comments to make.

Best wishes

Karen Peck

***Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
Mepal Parish Council***

Telephone:01353 741066

Email: clerk@mepalparish.org

I work part-time and will usually only be available, in the office, Monday and Tuesday between 9am-5pm. Therefore there may be a delay in my response.

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan - HRA Screening Report

This page is intentionally blank

Mepal Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2031

HRA Screening Report September 2023

The Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Mepal produced in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012



<https://www.mepalparish.org/mepal-neighbourhood-plan/>

NEIGHBOURHOOD-PLAN.CO.UK 

© Mepal Parish Council 2023