



**Screening Assessment of the Draft
Hixon Neighbourhood Plan**

Strategic Environmental Assessment & Habitats
Regulation Assessment

Stafford Borough Council

July 2015

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Hixon Parish Council has prepared a draft Neighbourhood Plan (NP) proposing new development that reflects the needs of the community. In preparing a draft Plan, Hixon Parish Council carried out a community consultation identifying key priorities for the Neighbourhood Plan to address and as a result a number of planning policies have been created. .
- 1.2. The Neighbourhood Plan is currently undergoing a pre-submission consultation which ends on the 21 August 2015. Following this consultation, the Parish Council will be preparing to submit the draft Neighbourhood Plan to the Borough Council to proceed to independent Examination and subsequent Referendum.
- 1.3. In order for Neighbourhood Plans to proceed to referendum, they must meet the Basic Conditions set out in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Act¹, which was inserted by the Localism Act 2011. The Borough Council needs to be satisfied that the Basic Conditions have been met. The Neighbourhood Plan must:
 - have regard to national policy
 - have special regard to listed buildings (where relevant)
 - have special regard to conservation areas (where relevant)
 - contribute to sustainable development
 - be in general conformity with strategic policies in the Local Plan
 - not breach EU obligations
- 1.4. In satisfying the basic conditions, Hixon Parish Council who is the responsible body for preparing the Neighbourhood Plan will be required to prepare a Basic Conditions Statement on submission to the Borough Council to demonstrate how the draft Plan meets the basic conditions set out above alongside the final Plan.

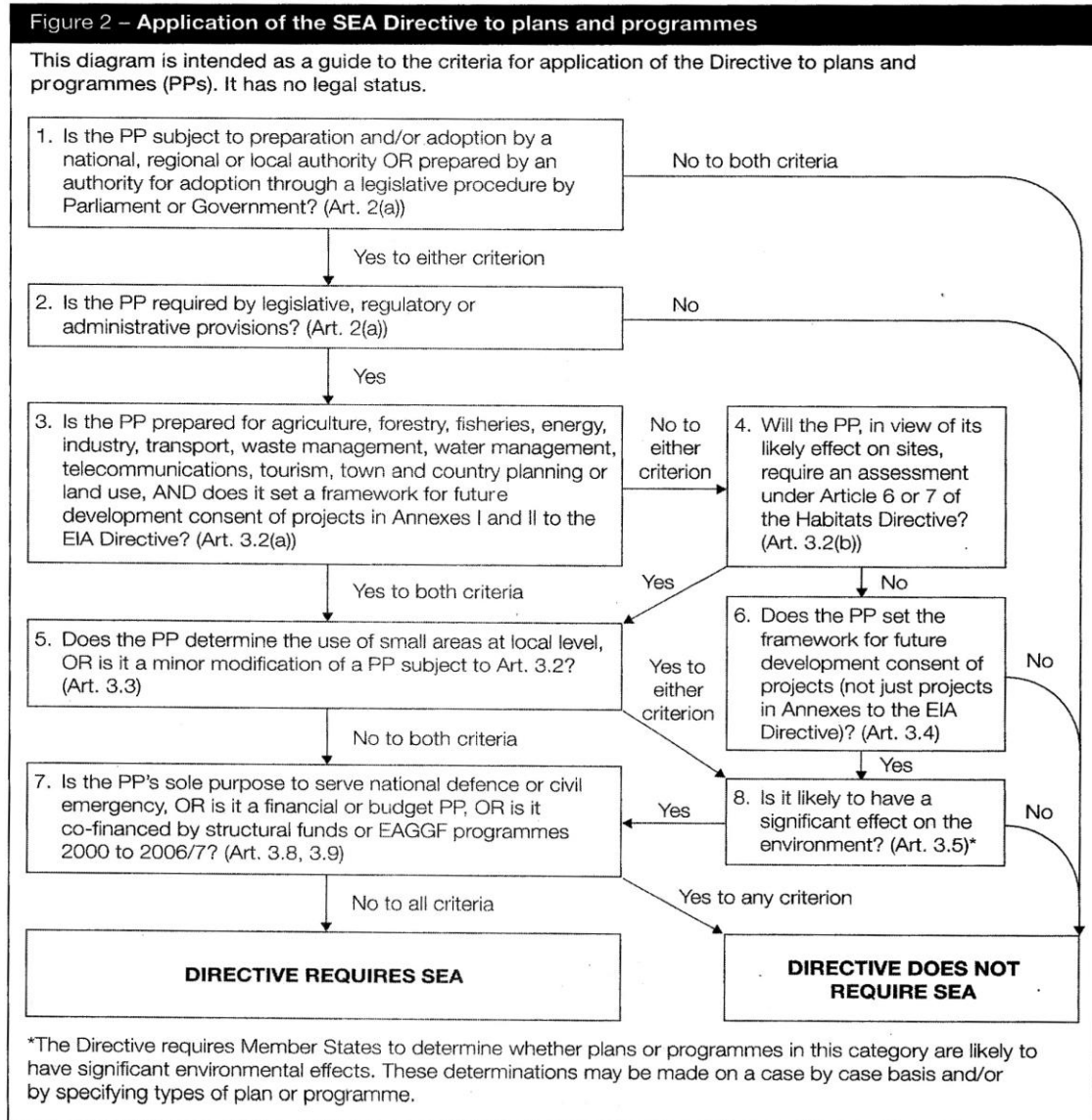
¹ Paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B.

2. Compatibility with EU obligations

- 2.1. To meet the basic conditions the draft Hixon Neighbourhood Plan must not breach EU obligations.
- 2.2. The Borough Council has prepared this screening assessment to determine whether the content of the draft Hixon Neighbourhood Plan requires a SEA in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004; and / or a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive and with Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended).
- 2.3. [The National Planning Practice Guidance](#) offers guidance on when a SEA may be required.
- 2.4. Neighbourhood Planning Regulations requires Neighbourhood Plans to submit either a statement of reasons; environmental report; or an explanation of why the plan is not subject to the requirements of the SEA Directive, to accompany a Neighbourhood Plan when it is submitted to a local planning authority.
- 2.5. Providing there are no significant changes to the proposals and the policies of the current draft Neighbourhood Plan, this screening assessment undertaken by Stafford Borough Council fulfils this requirement to accompany the final submission of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.6. In the context of neighbourhood planning, a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) is required where a Neighbourhood Plan is deemed likely to result in negative significant effects occurring on protected European Sites (Natura 2000 sites), as a result of the Plan's implementation.

3. SEA Screening

3.1. The diagram below illustrates the process for screening a planning document to ascertain whether a full SEA is required.



3.2. The questions below in Table 1 are drawn from the diagram above which sets out how the SEA Directive should be applied when considering a draft plan.

Table 1 SEA Screening Process

Stage	Yes or No	Reason
<p>1. Is the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) 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? (Art. 2(a))</p>	<p>Yes (go to question 2).</p>	<p>The preparation and adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) is regulated under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The draft NP is prepared by Hixon Parish Council (as the ‘relevant body’) and will be ‘made’ by Stafford Borough Council as the local planning authority.</p> <p>The preparation of NPs is subject to the following regulations: The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012.</p>
<p>2. Is the NP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))</p>	<p>No (go to question 3).</p>	<p>Whilst the NP is not a requirement and is optional under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act as amended by the Localism Act 2011, it will, if ‘made’, form part of the Development Plan. It is therefore important and necessary to answer the following questions to determine whether the policies of the draft NP are likely to have significant environmental effects and if further environmental assessments will be required under the EU Directive.</p>
<p>3. Is the NP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste 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? (Art. 3.2(a))</p>	<p>Yes (go to question 5).</p>	<p>The draft NP is being prepared for town and country planning and land use purposes.</p> <p>As such, the draft NP contains a framework for future development consent of development projects, which may fall under section 10 of the Annex II of the EIA Directive.</p>

4. Will the NP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2(b))		See HRA screening below.
5. Does the NP determine the use of small areas at local level OR is it a minor modification of a plan or programme subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)	Yes (go to question 8).	Yes. The Neighbourhood Plan includes a defined settlement boundary which supports the provision of new housing development. Some sites within the boundary have been permitted.
6. Does the NP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)		Not applicable.
7. Is the NP's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget plan or programme, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art. 3.8, 3.9)	No	Not applicable.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art 3.5)	No	The draft NP is unlikely to have any significant effect on the environment. Please see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 which provide a detailed assessment to support this conclusion.

3.3. To decide whether the Plan might have significant environmental effects (stage 8), its potential scope should be assessed against the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. The criteria from Schedule 1 of the Regulations are set out below.

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.

3.4. Appendix 1 and 2 apply the above criteria to measure any likely significance effects on the environment arising from the draft Hixon NP.

3.5. SEA Screening Outcome

3.6. As a result of the assessment above, it is considered unlikely that any significant environmental effects will occur from the implementation of the Hixon NP that were not considered and dealt with by the Sustainability Appraisal of the Plan for Stafford Borough (PFSB). As such the Hixon NP does not require a full SEA to be undertaken.

4. HRA Screening

4.1. The box below illustrates the stages of HRA related to assessing potential impacts from planning policy documents.

Stage 1 Screening

- Identify international sites in and around the plan/ strategy area
- Examine conservation objectives
- Identify potential effects on Natura 2000 sites
- Examine other plans and programmes that could contribute to 'in combination' effects
- If no effects are likely - report that there is no significant effect. If effects are judged likely or uncertainty exists - the precautionary principle applies, proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment

- Collate information on sites and evaluate impact in light of conservation objectives
- Consider how plan 'in combination' with other plans and programmes will interact when implemented (the Appropriate Assessment)
- Consider how the effect on integrity of sites could be avoided by changes to the plan and the consideration of alternatives
- Develop mitigation measures (including timescale and mechanisms)
- Report outcomes of AA and develop monitoring strategies. If effects remain, following the consideration of alternatives and development of mitigation measures, proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3 Assessment where no Alternatives and impacts remain

- Identify 'imperative reasons of overriding public interest' (IROPI)
- Identify/ develop potential compensatory measures

4.2. Stafford Borough Council has carried out Stage 1 Screening on the draft Hixon NP.

4.3. There are 6 European sites in Stafford Borough which may be affected by policies in the draft Hixon NP:

- Cope Mere RAMSAR
- Aqualate Mere RAMSAR
- Motte Meadows SAC
- Cannock Chase SAC
- Chartley Moss SAC
- Pasture fields Salt Marsh SAC

4.4. The PFSB was subject to a full Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) including appropriate assessment and identification of mitigation measures. Some of the possible effects identified in the HRA, which relate to the sites above include: water quality deterioration, eutrophication, air pollution, surface water run-off, nitrogen deposition, and increased visitor pressure.

- 4.5. In combination with the PFSB, the draft Hixon NP may affect Natura 2000 sites. Cannock Chase is designated as a Special Area of Conservation. Among the European Sites indicated above, Cannock Chase is situated within approximately 5000 metres of Hixon Settlement Boundary and also falls within the 15km radius of Cannock Chase.
- 4.6. The HRA identified impacts which could affect Cannock Chase Extension Canal SAC. These include an increase in recreational activity would be to the detriment of Luronium natans. Existing discharges of surface water run-off, principally from roads could cause some reduction in water quality.
- 4.7. In light of the HRA it is considered the draft Hixon NP does not propose anything which departs from the strategy set out in the PFSB. The PFSB contains a number of policies which aim to protect the SACs integrity and address water quality issues. These policies include Policy N5 Sites of European, National and Local Nature Conservation Importance, Policy N6 Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Policy N7 Cannock Chase AONB.
- 4.8. The HRA carried out on the PFSB concluded that implementation of the Plan would not result in likely significant or in combination effects. As a result the Council does not consider that implementation of the draft Hixon NP would result in likely significant or in combination effects on Natura 2000 sites.

4.9. HRA Stage 1 Screening Outcome

- 4.10. As a result of the assessment above, it is considered unlikely that any significant environmental effects will occur from the implementation of the draft Hixon NP that were not considered and dealt with by the Habitats Regulation Assessment carried out on the PFSB. As such the draft Hixon NP does not require a further HRA work to be undertaken.

5. Consultation

5.1. The National Planning Practice Guidance advises that the local planning authority should consult with the relevant statutory consultation bodies. These are Environment Agency, Natural England and English Heritage whose responsibilities cover the environmental considerations of the Regulations to ensure all key environmental issues have been considered.

5.2. This assessment has been circulated to the above agencies. After receiving a response from all the consultees, their response will be added to this assessment and can be found in Appendix 3.

Appendix 1: The Characteristics of the Neighbourhood Plan, having regard to:

	Likely significant environmental effect?	Stafford Borough Council Assessment
a) The degree to which the Neighbourhood Plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	No	<p>The NP sets out a vision and 8 objectives to help shape future development within Hixon. A number of planning policies have been formulated to help deliver the vision. These policies seek to deliver new housing, balanced with new open spaces, improve connectivity and accessibility within the village and increase local prosperity through local economic development. Policies also seek to protect Local Green Spaces considered valuable to the Parish.</p> <p>Approximately 244 new houses (market and affordable) are proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan (with 119 committed) within a defined settlement boundary.</p> <p>It is not considered that the policies and proposals in the NP will have a significant environmental effect.</p>
b) The degree to which the Neighbourhood Plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	Yes	<p>The draft NP is required to conform to national policy (NPPF) and strategic policies stipulated in the PFSB. The draft NP, if made, will form part of the Development Plan for Stafford Borough and will be used to determine planning applications within the Parish.</p>
c) The relevance of the Neighbourhood Plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	Yes	<p>The NP seeks to provide a balance of market, and affordable new housing within a defined settlement boundary to enable local people to stay in the village over the plan period and beyond.</p> <p>The plan encourages new employment uses within existing employment sites to suit the local demographic profile and skills base of Hixon.</p>

		It is considered the draft NP will have a positive effect on the environment as it seeks to provide a range of new uses that will help deliver local aspirations.
d) Environmental problems relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan.	No	<p>The draft NP area is located within a sensitive landscape which includes a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI); Pasturefields Salt Marsh and a Site of Biological Importance (SBI).</p> <p>Hixon Parish is also located within the 15km radius of a European designated site; Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation and several other Natura 2000 sites. The PFSB Policy N6 seeks to protect the integrity of Cannock Chase SAC.</p> <p>There are no Air Quality Management Areas in Stafford Borough which includes the Parish of Hixon.</p>
e) The relevance of the Plan for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	N	The NP is not proposing development specifically related to waste management or water management.

Appendix 2 Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard in particular to:

	Likely significant environmental effect?	Stafford Borough Council Assessment
a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	No	<p>There will no doubt be changes to the land use within Hixon. This will largely be concentrated within the settlement boundary. The proposed developments set out in the plan are expected to carry positive socio-economic benefits for the local community within Hixon. Such proposals for development will be subject to meeting the requirements of policies set out in the PFSB in particular SP7, N2, N4, N5, N6 and N7.</p> <p>It is considered unlikely that any detrimental environmental impacts will occur from the proposals and the policies contained in the NP.</p>
b) The cumulative nature of the effects of the Plan.	No	<p>New housing developments in Hixon could result to increased visitors to Cannock Chase. Such proposals will be required to ensure any impacts that affect the integrity of Cannock Chase to be mitigated as required in Policies N6 and N7 of the PFSB.</p> <p>The impacts of additional recreation arising from new housing developments in the zone of influence around Cannock Chase SAC are cumulative. Policy N6 and equivalent policies in local plans for other authorities that are part of the Cannock Chase SAC Partnership serve to avoid and mitigate these impacts.</p> <p>It is not expected any accumulative effects of the NP proposals and policies will lead to negative impacts, but result into positive impacts that will affect the Parish.</p>
c) The trans-boundary nature of the effects of the Plan.	No	<p>The impacts of additional recreation arising from new housing developments in the zone of influence around Cannock Chase SAC are</p>

		<p>trans-boundary. Policy N6 and equivalent policies in local plans for other authorities that are part of the Cannock Chase SAC Partnership serve to avoid and mitigate these impacts.</p> <p>There are not expected to be any significant trans-boundary effects as new development is designated within the settlement boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan Area.</p>
d) The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents).	No	<p>There are no significant effects to human health. The NP seeks to increase connectivity and accessibility through well designed and safe streets. New housing developments will help increase open space provision. These benefits are considered to help increase recreation and healthy lifestyles.</p>
e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected) by the Plan.	No	<p>The NP seeks to provide approximately 125 dwellings in Hixon. New housing developments will inevitably increase the current population of 1917 people living within the Parish.</p> <p>The proposed housing developments are expected to change the land use of agricultural land within the Parish. New housing provision will be developed within the defined settlement boundary and adjacent to existing residential areas and highway networks. Therefore the impacts from proposed developments are not considered to be detrimental.</p> <p>The impacts of additional recreation arising from new housing developments in the zone of influence around Cannock Chase SAC are both cumulative and trans- boundary. Policy N6 and equivalent policies in the local plans of other Cannock Chase SAC Partnership authorities serve to avoid and mitigate these impacts.</p>

<p>f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected by the Plan due to: (i) Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) Intensive land use and</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The NP includes sites of environmental and heritage importance. These are: a SSSI – Pasturefields Salt Marsh and a SBI. It is not expected that the NP will have an adverse effect on these sites. In any circumstance there are detailed policies that exist in the PFSB to protect these sites, as stated above.</p> <p>The Trent and Mersey Canal and towpath are designated a Conservation and fall within the NP area. The NP does not propose new development that will affect the Conservation area as new development is proposed within the settlement boundary. Policy N8 in the PFSB ensures development proposals are sympathetic to the landscape character and environment.</p> <p>Proposals and policies of the NP seek to provide new housing that will meet the local needs of the parish. It is not expected that this will result in the loss of locally important open space. Green space considered valuable to the Parish has been designated in the Neighbourhood Plan as Local Green Space to prevent these sites from development.</p>
<p>g) The effects of the Plan on areas or landscapes which have recognised national, community or international protection status.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Policy N4, N5 and N6 of the PFSB protect sites of European importance, the natural environment and green infrastructure. These policies seek the protection of the SBI and the SAC Cannock Chase, SSSI Pasturefields Salt Marsh. Policy N7 in the PFSB seeks the conservation and enhancement of Cannock Chase as an Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB).</p> <p>It is not expected that the NP policies and proposals will have an adverse effect on these areas.</p>

Appendix 3: Responses from Statutory Consultees.

Stafford Borough Council
Civic Centre
Riverside
Stafford
Staffordshire
ST16 3AQ

Our ref: UT/2006/000313/OT-
13/SB1-L01

Your ref:

Date: 21 August 2015

Dear Sir,

SCREENING ASSESSMENT OF THE DRAFT HIXON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Thank you for consulting us on this document which we received on 29 July 2015.

We concur with the findings of the EIA Screening Assessment that there should be no significant environmental effects as a result of this plan. We have no further comments to make.

Yours faithfully

Mr Martin Ross
Planning Specialist

Direct dial 01543 405047

Direct e-mail martin.ross@environment-agency.gov.uk

Date: 28 August 2015
Our ref: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Your ref: 15



Council

For the attention of

BY EMAIL ONLY

Customer Services
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T 0300 060 3900

Dear Michael

Planning consultation: Draft Hixon Neighbourhood Plan – SEA & HRA screening

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 25 August 2015 which was received by Natural England on the same day.

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.

Strategic Environmental Assessment – Screening

We welcome the production of this SEA Screening report. Natural England notes and concurs with the screening outcome i.e. that no SEA is required.

Further guidance on deciding whether the proposals are likely to have significant environmental effects and the requirements for consulting Natural England on SEA are set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance at:

<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal/does-a-neighbourhood-plan-require-a-sustainability-appraisal/>

Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening

Natural England notes the screening process applied to this Neighbourhood plan. We agree with the Council's conclusion of no likely significant effect upon the named European designated sites:

- Cop Mere SSSI (a component of the Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 Ramsar site)
- Aqualate Mere SSSI (a component of the Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 2 Ramsar Site)
- Motte Meadows SAC
- Cannock Chase SAC
- Chartley Moss SSSI (a component of the Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 Ramsar site and a component of the West Midlands Mosses SAC)
- Pasturefields Saltmarsh SAC

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact me on 0300 060 1640. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

Yours sincerely

Antony Muller
Lead Adviser – Sustainable Development and Wildlife Team – North Mercia Area



Historic England

Ms Raj Bains
Neighbourhood Planning Officer
Stafford Borough Council
Council House
Stafford
Staffordshire

Our ref: 1471

Your ref:

Telephone

0121

6256887 Fax

6 August 2015

Dear Ms Bains

**HIXON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
SCREENING OPINION & HRA SCREENING REPORT**

Thank you for your consultation received on the 23rd of July and the request for a Screening Opinion.

For the purposes of consultations on SEA Screening Opinions, Historic England confines its advice to the question, "Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?" in respect of our area of concern, cultural heritage. Our comments are based on the information supplied with the screening request.

On the basis of the information supplied, including that set out in the draft plan, 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 currently unlikely to be required.

The views of the other statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for a SEA is made. If a decision is made to undertake a SEA, please note that Historic England has published guidance on Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Historic Environment that is relevant to both local and neighbourhood planning and available at: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/strategic-environ-assessment-sustainability-appraisal-historic-environment/>.



Historic England, 8th Floor, The Axis, 10 Holliday Street, Birmingham B1 1TG

Telephone 0121 625 6870 HistoricEngland.org.uk

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Correspondence or information which you send us may therefore become publicly available.



As regards the HRA Screening Report Historic England does not wish to comment in detail and would defer to Natural England and other statutory consultees, however, we have no adverse comments to make on the report.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Boland', with a date '1.20' written below the signature.

Pete Boland
Historic Places Adviser
E-mail: peter.boland@HistoricEngland.org.uk



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