

Stevenage Borough Council

Station Connection Area Action Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Statement

The Purpose of this Statement

This screening statement has been prepared to determine whether the proposed Station Connection Area Action Plan (AAP) should be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive) and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations).

The purpose of the Station Connection AAP is to aid the effective implementation of policies in the Stevenage Borough Local Plan, adopted May 2019. Specifically, the AAP is being introduced to support:

- Policy TC4 – Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area

The AAP will be used as a material consideration in determining planning applications and will provide the basis for development to be taken forward, giving developers and stakeholders certainty as to detailed proposals for the area.

Strategic Environmental Assessment – Regulatory requirements

The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC. This was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations). Detailed guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication '[A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive](#)' (ODPM, 2005) and [Paragraph 11-008 of the Planning Practice Guidance](#) (PPG), which states that "a sustainability appraisal should be prepared for any of the documents that can form part of a local plan, including core strategies site allocation documents and area action plans".

Under the requirements of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004), certain types of plans that set the framework for the consent of future development projects, must be subject to an environmental assessment.

The objective of Strategic Environmental Assessment is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development.

The 2001 Directive has been updated a number of times, with the most recent Directive issued in April 2014. While Article numbers cited in the 2005 guidance have been updated/removed, the principle of determining whether a Plan or Programme will have likely significant effects on the environment remain the same. Therefore, this screening statement uses the only Government guidance available.

The Strategic Environmental Appraisal Process

The first stage of the process is for the Council to determine whether or not the AAP is likely to have significant effects on the environment. This screening process includes assessing the AAP against a set of criteria (as set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations). The results of this are set out in [Appendix 1](#) of this statement. The aim of this statement is therefore to provide sufficient information to demonstrate whether the AAP is likely to have significant environmental effects.

The Council also has to consult the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England on this screening statement. A final determination cannot be made until the three statutory consultation bodies have been consulted.

Where the Council determines that a SEA is not required, Regulation 9(3) of the SEA Regulations states that the Council must prepare a statement setting out the reasons for this determination. This statement is the draft statement produced by the Council.

Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment?

There is a statutory requirement to undertake a SA appraisal of AAPs. The Council has considered whether an SA might be required. The AAP does not create new policies and verifies existing requirements to help support policies in the Local Plan. The AAP is therefore unlikely to have significant environmental, social or economic effects beyond those of the Local Plan policies which were subject to a comprehensive SA process, incorporating SEA, as part of the Local Plan production requirements.

The Council is required to consider Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). HRA is the process used to determine whether a plan or project would have significant adverse effects on the integrity of internationally designated site of nature conservation importance, known as European sites. The need for a HRA is set out within the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010](#), which transposed EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC into UK law. A HRA Appropriate Assessment Screening Document was produced during Local Plan preparation and concluded that no policies in the Local Plan would have a likely significant effect of the closest SPA at the Lee Valley, nor its associated SSSI at Rye Meads.

Copies of the SA and HRA documents for the Local Plan are available here:

<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/149690/planning-policy/90175/>

Conclusion

On the basis of the screening process, the Council believes that the Station Connection AAP does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (or Sustainability Appraisal or Habitats Regulations Assessment). This is due to the lack of significant environmental, social or economic effects arising from its implementation above and beyond those of the Local Plan policies which have already been appropriately assessed.

Appendix 1

A Practical Guide to the SEA Directive, ODPM 2005

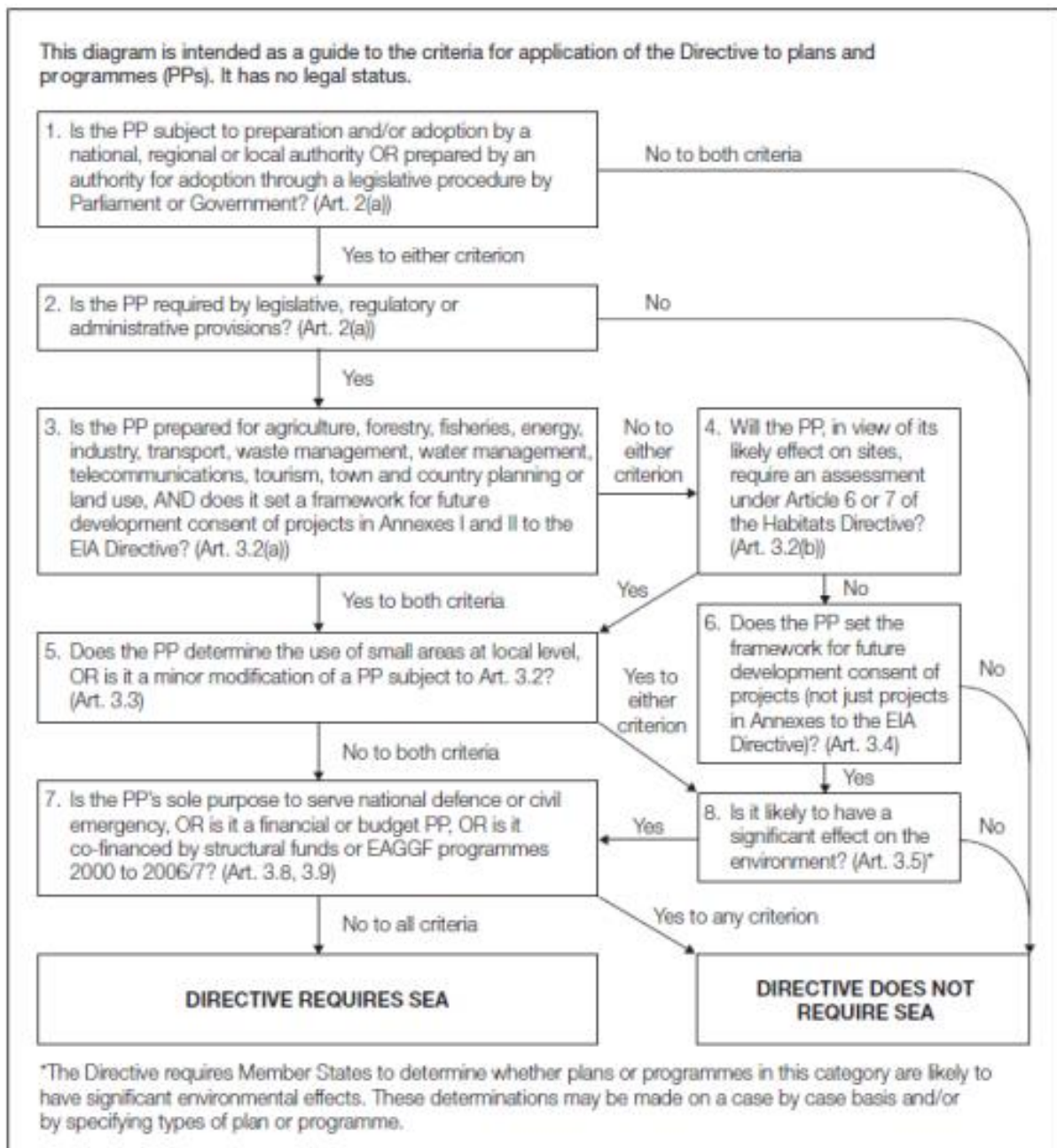


Table 1: Establishing whether these is a need for SEA

| Stage | Yes/No | Assessment |
|--|--|---|
| 1. Is the PP (plan or programme) 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)) | Yes to either criterion: proceed to question 2 | Yes, the AAP has been prepared by SBC to provide additional detail to policies contained in the adopted Local Plan (2019) |
| 2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a)) | Yes: proceed to question 3 | Yes, the AAP will become a material consideration upon adoption and is referred to in the adopted Local Plan (2019) |
| 3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a)) | Yes to both criterion: proceed to question 5 | The AAP is prepared for the purpose of Town and Country Planning, to supplement policies in the adopted Local Plan (2019). Yes, the AAP sets a framework for developments that may require EIA although this AAP does not create new policy. |
| 5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3) | Yes to first criterion: proceed to question 8 | The AAP supplements Local Plan policies relating to parking provision which can be a form of land use. |
| 8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5) | No | The AAP is not considered to have a significant effect on the environment. DIRECTIVE DOES NOT REQUIRE THE AAP TO UNDERGO SEA |

| SEA Directive Criteria (Schedule of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) | Potential effects of AAP |
|---|---|
| 1. Characteristic of the AAP having particular regard to: | |
| (a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources; | The AAP provides guidance on the requirement for development within the Town Centre boundary. |
| (b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy; | The AAP sits alongside the Local Plan (adopted 2019) which was subject to SA incorporating SEA. It will influence plans for the Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area in an urban locations due to the underbound nature of Stevenage Borough. |
| (c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development; | The AAP provides additional guidance for meeting the development objectives of the adopted Local Plan (2019). |
| (d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and | The SA (inc. SEA) of the Local Plan identified a number of benefits arising from the Station gateway Major Opportunity Area policy. The AAP helps support the implementation of these policies. |
| (e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection). | The AAP does not influence the implementation of community legislation on the environment. |
| 2. Characteristics of the effect and area likely to be affected having particular regard to: | |
| (a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects; | The AAP is not expected to give rise to any significant environmental effects. |
| (b) the cumulative nature of the effects; | There are no anticipated negative cumulative effects of the AAP. |
| (c) the trans-boundary nature of the effects; | The AAP is not expected to give rise to any significant cross-boundary environmental effects. |
| (d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents); | There are no anticipated negative effects of the AAP on human health. |
| (e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected) | The AAP is not expected to give rise to any significant effects on population or geographical area. |
| (f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to— (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use; | The AAP is not expected to affect any local natural characteristics or cultural heritage, and is not expected to lead to the exceedance of environmental standards or promote intensive land-use. |
| (g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status. | The AAP is not expected to have an effect on landscapes of national, community or international protection status. |

Appendix 2

Responses from Statutory Consultees

Debbie Coates

From: SM-NE-Consultations (NE) <consultations@naturalengland.org.uk>
Sent: 28 January 2021 08:46
To: Debbie Coates
Subject: [External] Stevenage Area Action Plan - SEA Screening Opinion
Attachments: SA screening opinion - NE.pdf
Categories: Important

Dear Ms Coates

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.

Natural England does not consider that this Area Action Plan – SEA screening opinion poses any likely risk or opportunity in relation to our statutory purpose, and so does not wish to comment on this consultation.

The lack of comment from Natural England should not be interpreted as a statement that there are no impacts on the natural environment. Other bodies and individuals may wish to make comments that might help the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to fully take account of any environmental risks and opportunities relating to this document.

If you disagree with our assessment of this proposal as low risk, or should the proposal be amended in a way which significantly affects its impact on the natural environment, then in accordance with Section 4 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, please consult Natural England again.

Yours faithfully

Dawn Kinrade
Consultations Team
Operations Delivery
Natural England
Hornbeam House, Electra Way
Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 6GJ

Enquiries line: 0300 060 8349
Email: consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

www.gov.uk/natural-england

During the current coronavirus situation, Natural England staff are working remotely and from some offices to provide our services and support our customers and stakeholders.

Although some offices and our Mail Hub are now open, please continue to send any documents by email or contact us by phone to let us know how we can help you.

See the latest news on the coronavirus at <http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> and Natural England's regularly updated operational update at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/operational-update-covid-19>.

Debbie Coates

From: Marsh, Andrew <Andrew.Marsh@HistoricEngland.org.uk>
Sent: 26 January 2021 12:02
To: Debbie Coates
Subject: [External] Re: Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan – Sustainability Appraisal (SA)/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion

Importance: High

Categories: Important

Dear Debbie

Re: Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan – Sustainability Appraisal (SA)/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the draft SEA Screening Statement for the Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan. 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. We have reviewed the draft SEA Screening Statement and agree with the Council's conclusion that Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required in this instance.

Summary

We hope that the above comments are of assistance, and are very happy to look at and comment on any future drafts if this would assist the Council. Finally, we'd like to stress that and we have not looked at the consultation document exhaustively, and that this opinion is based on the information provided by the Council in its consultation. To avoid any doubt, this does not affect our obligation to provide further advice and, potentially, object to specific proposals, which may subsequently arise where we consider that these would have an adverse effect upon the historic environment.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Andrew Marsh BSc MA MRTPI
Historic Environment Planning Adviser
Development Advice | East of England
Historic England
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Debbie Coates

From: HNL Sustainable Places <HNLsustainablePlaces@environment-agency.gov.uk>
Sent: 19 January 2021 14:36
To: Debbie Coates
Subject: [External] RE: SEA screening Opinion

Dear Debbie

Thank you for consulting us on the draft Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion for the Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan.

We are a statutory consultee in the SEA process and aim to reduce flood risk and protect and enhance the water environment. Based on our review of the draft screening statement, we agree with the environmental issues that have been included and do not have any further comments to make.

Kind regards

Hannah Malyon MSc
Planning Advisor, Hertfordshire and North London Sustainable Places
Environment Agency | Alchemy, Bessemer Road, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL7 1HE

HNL.SustainablePlaces@environment-agency.gov.uk

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Pronouns: she/her ([why is this here?](#))

Working days: Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm



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for people and wildlife**



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 will be a single point of contact for you at the EA, giving you detailed specialist advice. This early engagement can significantly reduce uncertainty and delays to your project. More information can be found on our website [here](#).

From: Debbie Coates [mailto:Debbie.Coates@stevenage.gov.uk]
Sent: 18 January 2021 11:00
To: HNL Sustainable Places
Subject: SEA screening Opinion

Dear all,