Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion
Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review
Pre-Regulation 14
November 2025
Prepared by Wealden District Council

1. Introduction

1.1 This screening report is designed to determine whether the draft Hailsham Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) (pre-regulation 14), including the Hailsham Design Guide and Code document requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC ("The SEA Directive")[1] and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (The "SEA Regulations")[2].

1.2 A neighbourhood plan may require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to comply with the SEA Directive where it is likely to have significant environmental effects. It is the Council's responsibility to determine whether the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects taking account of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, and in consultation with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England.

1.3 In order to determine whether a proposed neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment, it is 'screened' at an early stage once the plan remit and objectives have been formulated. This report assesses the draft Hailsham NDP Review (pre-regulation 14 stage) dated September 2025, received on 15 September 2025 and the Design Guide and Code document dated September 2025, received on 15 September 2025.

1.4 If, after the screening assessment and consultation with the statutory bodies, the responsible authority determines that the neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, then a full Environmental Assessment will be required. Conversely, if it is determined through screening and consultation with the statutory bodies that the neighbourhood plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects, then the neighbourhood planning group need not concern itself with the subsequent stages of the SEA process.

1.5 The Council advises neighbourhood plan groups to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal to assess the impact of the Neighbourhood Plan against social, environmental and economic factors. This is good practice and can provide evidence for how the neighbourhood plan meets the requirement to promote sustainable development.

[1] Directive - 2001/42 - EN - EUR-Lex

[2] The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

2. Overview of the Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan

2.1 The document being assessed here is the pre-regulation 14 version of the Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review and represents the first review and update of the Plan that was formally 'made' (adopted) by Wealden District Council in July 2021 and which forms part of the district's statutory development plan.

2.2 The Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) covers the entire area within the boundaries of the Town Council, setting out the community's aspirations for the area over the period to 2042. Within the eastern part of the NDP area lies the Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ramsar site and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are also areas of Priority Habitat Floodplain Grazing Marsh associated with the Pevensey Levels within the east of the NDP area. There are also small areas of Ancient Woodland within the west of the NDP area (namely Bolney's Wood and Tile Hurst Wood) with Abbot's Wood / Wilmington Wood ancient woodland / deciduous woodland (Priority Habitat) adjacent to the western boundary of the area. There are small pockets of Priority Deciduous woodland within the town as well.

2.3 In terms of designated heritage assets within the NDP area, the town centre is a Conservation Area and there are approximately 40 Grade II listed buildings/structures, 2 Grade II* listed buildings and the Grade I listed St Mary's Church within the Conservation Area. Other Listed Buildings are scattered throughout the Neighbourhood Plan Area.

2.4 The draft Hailsham NDP Review sets out a vision, objectives and policies for the plan area. The NDP **does not allocate land for development** or establish funding and delivery strategies for infrastructure**.** The vision of the draft Hailsham NDP is as follows:

"In 2042, Hailsham is a vibrant, attractive and sustainable town that harmoniously blends its rich heritage with modern amenities. Our community thrives on strong local connections, supported by robust infrastructure that ensures seamless mobility and access to essential services.

Hailsham is renowned for its green spaces and commitment to sustainability, with high quality parks, community food growing opportunities and eco-friendly initiatives that enhance our environment and quality of life. Our town centre is a bustling hub of independent shops, cafes, and cultural venues, offering a diverse and engaging experience for residents and visitors alike.

We prioritise the well-being of our community by providing comprehensive healthcare facilities, excellent educational institutions, and a variety of recreational opportunities. Our transport systems are efficient and well-maintained, ensuring easy access to all parts of the town, for all of our

residents and visitors. A range of housing choice and opportunity has been provided, meeting the diverse needs of the population.

Hailsham is a place where people of all ages feel safe, supported, and connected. We celebrate our unique character and work together to create a future that is inclusive, prosperous, and resilient".

2.5 The Plan's objectives are as follows:

Community

- To promote delivery of a range of community facilities and services that cater for all, including delivery of new healthcare, meeting the needs of residents and supporting community cohesion and social inclusion.

Town Centre

- To enhance the quality, attractiveness and overall experience of the town centre, making this a pedestrian friendly environment that offers a range of services and activities throughout the day.

Housing and Design

- To promote well-designed new homes that provide a mix of housing types and tenures to meet local needs, which are well-integrated within the fabric of the town, and deliver high standards of sustainability and energy efficiency.

Accessibility

- To enhance access for all, making it safer and easier for people of all ages to get around Hailsham, supporting sustainable, active and healthy travel choices.

Green Infrastructure

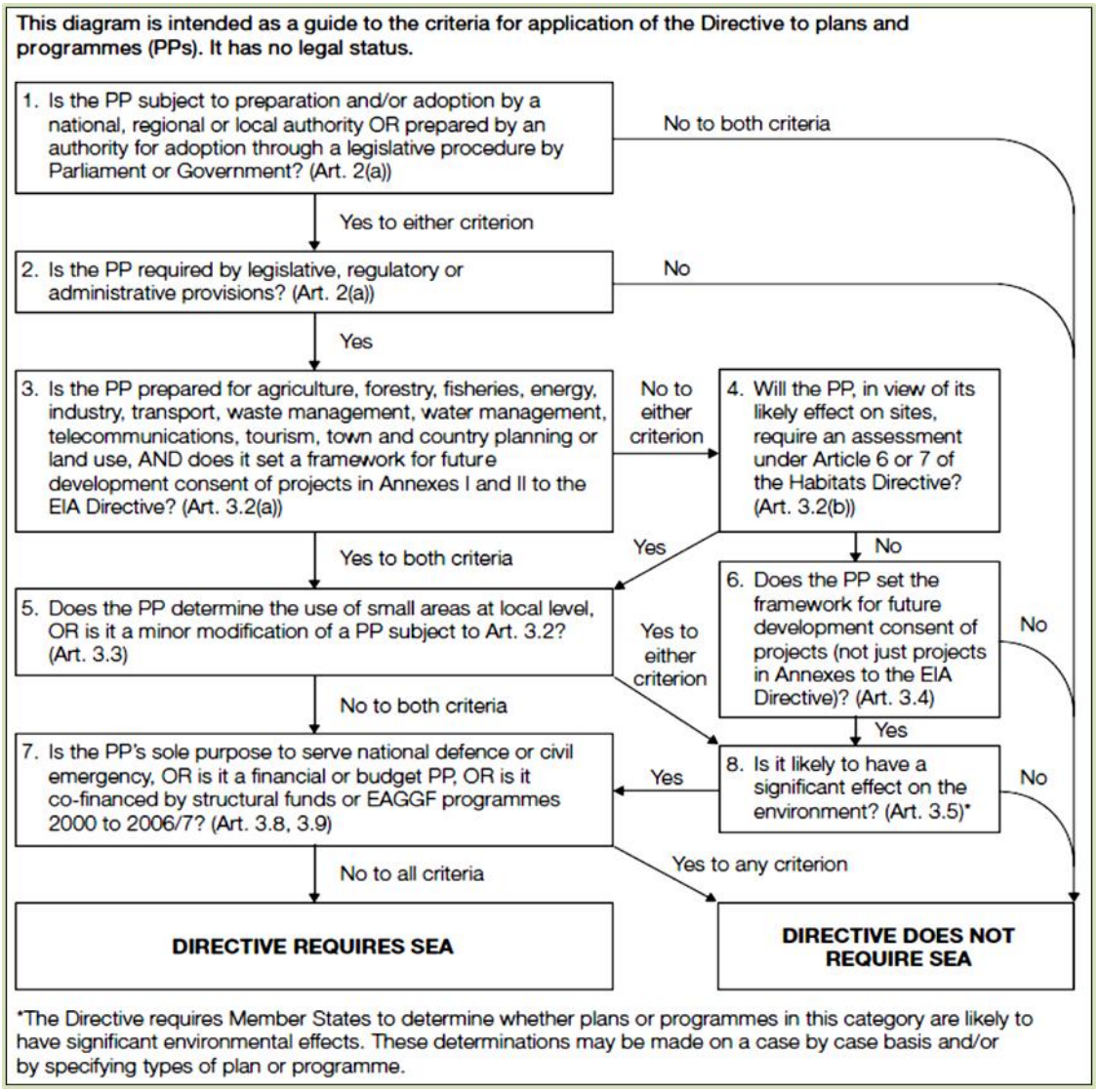
- To strengthen the quality of the green infrastructure network across Hailsham, enhancing wildlife and biodiversity, and providing accessible areas of natural and amenity green space close to home.

3. SEA Screening Assessment of the Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review

3.1 The screening assessment for the SEA is undertaken in two parts and will firstly assess whether the pre-regulation 14 draft Hailsham NDP Review requires an SEA as per the detailed guidance contained within 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' that is shown in Figure 1 that follows below[3]. The second element of the assessment will consider whether the Hailsham NDP and Design Code are likely, in their current form, to have a significant effect on the environment, using the criteria drawn from Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. Figure 1 below is a guide as to how the criteria for the application of the Directive should be assessed.

[3] See page 13 of 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' (2005) and Figure 2 – Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes for the original diagram

Figure 1: Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes



3.2 The process in Figure 1 has been undertaken in terms of the pre-regulation 14 draft Hailsham NDP Review, and the findings can be viewed in Table 1. This establishes whether this draft NDP would require an SEA. The questions in Table 1 are drawn from the diagram above which sets out how the SEA Directive should be applied.

Table 1: Establishing the need for the SEA

Stage	Yes/No	Reason
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**	The draft Hailsham NDP has been prepared by Hailsham Town Council under the provision of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism act 2011 and the associated Neighbourhood Plan Regulations 2012 as amended. Once the NDP is 'made', Wealden District Council will adopt it as part of its statutory development plan. Go to Stage 2
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	**Yes**	The draft Hailsham NDP is not a requirement and is optional under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning 1990 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011). However, once 'made' the Hailsham NDP would form part of the statutory development plan for Wealden District and will be used when making decisions on planning applications within the designated neighbourhood plan area. Therefore, it is considered necessary to establish whether there is a need for an SEA. Go to Stage 3
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	**Yes**	The draft Hailsham NDP is being prepared for both town and country planning and land use purposes and therefore meets the first part of this question. The draft Hailsham NDP contains a general framework for all future development consent, which could

Stage	Yes/No	Reason
framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art. 3.2(a))		include projects that would be listed in Annex II of the EIA Directive. Go to Stage 5
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2(b))	**Not applicable.**	
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**	The draft Hailsham NDP does not allocate land for a specific purpose, but does show preference for the type and form of development at a local level. Go to Stage 8
6. Does the PP 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 PP's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art. 3.8, 3.9)	**Not applicable**	
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	**No**	This question is considered within the screening assessment itself that follows in Table 2 below.

3.3 Table 2 below sets out the Council's assessment on the likely environmental effects of the draft Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review and Design Guide

and Code document, with reference to the criteria specified in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations[4].

Table 2: Determining the likely significance of effects

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
Characteristics of the Neighbourhood Plan (including Design Guide and Code), having regard to:		
(a) the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	The draft Hailsham NDP would, if 'made', form part of the statutory development plan for Wealden District Council and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, the neighbourhood plan must sit within a wider policy framework having regard to national planning policy while also being in general conformity with the strategic policies of the District's Development Plan. The draft NDP does not seek to allocate sites for development. It instead provides policies to help guide development by providing certain criteria in relation to design and housing, green and blue infrastructure, the town centre, transport and community use. No specific details are provided in relation to the scale, type and form of development (in terms of specific sites). However, design policies and a Design Guide and Code document	**No**

[4] See Schedule 1

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
	are provided to guide design across the neighbourhood area. In general terms, the framework of policies seeks to guide projects which are local in nature.	
(b) the degree to which the plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	The draft Hailsham NDP must have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and must be in general conformity with the strategic polices of the Council's Development Plan. The NDP may have a limited degree of influence over the formation of other documents and policies. However, the extent of impact is unlikely to be significant in this regard given the Plan's position within the policy hierarchy and its limited geographic scope.	**No**
(c) the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	The draft Hailsham NDP does not allocate sites for development. The criteria-based policies are designed to promote sustainable development in line with the requirement that all neighbourhood plans contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. In particular, policy HaHD3 (Sustainable Design and Construction) promotes the efficient use of energy and water, reducing energy consumption and making use of renewable energy. The Design Guide and Code document also promotes sustainable construction	**No**

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
	techniques and the use of sustainable drainage systems. Policy HaM1 (Active and healthy travel) requires applicants to incorporate a range of active travel criteria into their schemes, including integrated walking and cycling routes. Support is also given for improvements to the Cuckoo Trail in policy HaM2 (The Cuckoo Trail), public transport in policy HaM3 (Public transport) and for electric vehicle charging infrastructure in policy HaM5 (Electric vehicle charging points). The Design Guide and Code document encourages sustainable access and movement and promotes walking and cycling. It also provides detailed guidelines for cycle parking and storage. It will be advised for the NDP to be accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal.	
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan	The Pevensey Levels SAC, Ramsar site and SSSI extends into the eastern part of the NDP area. The Pevensey Levels are susceptible to changes in hydrology and water quality as a result of development which could harm the conservation objectives for which it is designated. However, the draft NDP does not allocate sites for development nor identify the scale and location of any development. The potential impacts	**No**

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
	of development on the designation of the Pevensey Levels will be considered at the allocation and/or planning application stage as appropriate. The draft NDP does however contain policy HaGI4 (The Pevensey Levels), which looks to specifically maintain, conserve and enhance the biodiversity, environment, character and landscape of the Pevensey Levels. The draft NDP also includes policies to help protect nature and biodiversity, provide green infrastructure and deliver sustainable drainage (SuDS). There are some policies that provide support for community and infrastructure uses subject to various criteria, but if such development were to come forward, it will be assessed in relation to any environmental issues as part of the planning application process. It is not possible to assess this now as there are no site-specific locations or details on scale/design available.	
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to	The draft NDP will not affect the implementation of environmental legislation. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening concludes that the pre-regulation 14 draft Hailsham NDP will not result in a 'likely significant effect' on any SACs, SPAs or Ramsar sites.	**No**

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
waste management or water protection).		
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:		
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	The draft Hailsham NDP plan period runs until 2042. The plan does not allocate sites for development but will set policies to help shape and guide development over that period and development that comes forward in the Neighbourhood Plan Area will be assessed as part of the normal planning application process against these policies. It is unlikely that there will be significant environmental effects as a result of the policies and criteria in themselves.	**No**
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects of the plan	The scope of the policies proposed within the draft Hailsham NDP are local in nature. There are some policies that provide support for certain types of development (i.e. town centre uses, community and infrastructure) subject to various criteria. However, the scale, location, type and form of development is not known and will therefore be assessed as part of the normal planning application process should development come forward. The policies and criteria in themselves will not result in a	**No**

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
	significant cumulative environmental effect. The Design Guide and Code document may result in cumulative effects, but these will be largely beneficial (e.g. the use of better-quality materials or local design features could cumulatively create a higher quality-built environment).	
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects	There are not expected to be any trans-boundary effects on other parishes, local authority areas or wider.	**No**
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	There are no significant risks to human health or the environment. Several policies seek to improve human health by ensuring adequate green space and play areas are incorporated into new development, encouraging active and healthy travel including improving the Cuckoo Trail, improving public transport and community facilities and encouraging allotment provision for major developments.	**No**
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The NDP covers Hailsham Parish which has an area of approx. 2,023 hectares (5,000 acres)[5]. The 2021 census shows a population of 23,114. The draft plan therefore covers a relatively small geographic area with a modest population. The plan is not allocating sites for development, and the effects of the plan are likely to be	**No**

[5] Parish Data and Statistics - Hailsham Town Council

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
	largely limited to the neighbourhood 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; and (iii)intensive land-use	**(i) Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;** <u>The Natural Environment</u> The draft Hailsham NDP contains policies to protect nature and biodiversity and a specific standalone policy related to the protection and enhancement of the Pevensey Levels SAC, Ramsar site and SSSI. The draft NDP also seeks to ensure sufficient green space is provided on new developments and that flood risk is minimised. Other policies at both the national and district level will also ensure no significant environmental issues. <u>Cultural Heritage</u> The majority of the town centre is designated as a Conservation Area and contains over 40 Listed Buildings. There are others scattered throughout the Neighbourhood Area. The potential exists for non-designated heritage assets to be present within the neighbourhood area, both in the form of buildings and archaeology. There are a number of Archaeological Interest Sites within the parish and the potential for further sites of archaeological interest. The NDP does not include stand-alone policies to protect heritage assets, as there is already legislative,	**No**

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
	national and local policy protection (including the statutory development plan of Wealden District Council). However, several of the Town Centre policies do contain requirements in relation to the Conservation Area and heritage assets. This includes policy HaTC2 (Town Centre design principles), which states that development should respond positively to heritage assets; policy HaTC3 (Safety by Design) which states that development should have regard to the setting and character of the Conservation Area and heritage assets within it and policy HaTC5 (Public realm, gateways and wayfinding), which states that proposals should contribute to the preservation or enhancement of the character of the Conservation Area, avoiding any adverse effects on the Conservation Area, heritage assets or their setting. **The Hailsham Design Guide and Code** <u>The Natural Environment</u> The Hailsham Design Guide and Code document does not provide guidance specifically on supporting biodiversity. However, it does provide guidance in relation to natural and amenity greenspace, food growing opportunities and water management (SuDS). Other policies at a national and district level will also ensure no significant environmental issues.	

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
	Cultural Heritage The Hailsham Design Guide and Code is a guidance document, with the aim of improving future design in the parish so that it respects the distinct character and qualities of the existing settlement as well as meeting the needs of local people. It contains a section on 'Heritage Assets' with a specific design code with associated criteria related to change and development within the Conservation Area. Ultimately, the Design Guide and Code does not propose any new development by itself and will only be considered design guidance to applicants/developers and as a material consideration within the planning application process. The Design Guide and Code will add detail/guidance to existing statutory development plan policies and national policy rather than override them. It will also only be used as relevant and on a 'case by case' basis. Whilst the Hailsham Design Guide and Code has the potential to impact design considerations, it is not considered that it would have a likely significant environmental effect on the parish's cultural heritage due to it only being design guidance and in consideration that legislation, the NPPF, Local Plan policies and indeed the emerging neighbourhood plan	

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
	policies would be in place (once adopted). It is also not possible to identify at this stage where or when development will occur, the type or scale of development, or which heritage assets may be affected, and any detailed assessment of impact will need to take place with the determination of a planning application. **(ii) Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values** The neighbourhood plan does not allocate sites for development. It is not expected that criteria-based policies in themselves will lead to an exceedance of environmental quality standards or limit values. Any development that does come forward will be considered through the normal planning application process. **(iii) Intensive land-use.** The Hailsham Design Guide and Code document does not look at density specifically in the parish, nor suggest a maximum dwellings per hectare (dph). It does provide examples of densities from other areas of the UK, seeking to provide examples for potential developers / applicants to follow in the NDP area when considering development proposals. Any development that does come forward will be considered through the normal planning application process.	

SEA Directive criteria	Wealden District Council assessment	Likely significant environmental effect?
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	The HRA screening assessment has not identified any likely significant environmental effects on any national, community or international protected sites. The Pevensey Levels SAC, Ramsar site and SSSI extends into the eastern part of the NDP area. However, the draft neighbourhood plan is not proposing sites for development and contains policies that seek to protect and enhance the Pevensey Levels as well as biodiversity and green infrastructure in general. The Hailsham NDP area contains no national landscape designations.	**No**
Conclusion	**The Hailsham NDP is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment and as such an SEA is not required.**	

4. SEA Screening Conclusion

4.1 As a result of the assessment at Section 3, it is considered by Wealden District Council that an SEA will not be required for the pre-regulation 14 Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review (including the Hailsham Design Guide and Code document).

4.2 This report was sent to the three statutory consultees (Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency) for comment in line with the SEA regulations. Historic England and the Environment Agency concur with the Council that the Hailsham NDP is unlikely to cause significant environmental effects and the preparation of an SEA is not required. Natural England did not have any specific comments on the draft neighbourhood plan and made reference to their standing advice. The consultees' responses are provided at Appendix 1.

4.3 This screening opinion is considered to be a 'snapshot in time' and if the scope and/or policies contained within the Hailsham NDP should change, then a new screening process will need to be undertaken to determine whether an SEA would be required at that time.

Appendix 1: Statutory Consultee Responses

From: [redacted]
To: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review Screening
Date: 20 October 2025 09:01:52
Attachments: image001.png
image002.png
image004.png
image005.png
image006.png
image007.png
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image009.png

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CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Planning Policy team,

Thank you for consulting the Environment Agency on the screening opinion for your emerging Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review.

The information provided confirms that there will no development coming forward as part of this plan. Having taken this into account, we do not consider there to be any significant environmental impacts associated with this plan, and therefore it is our view that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will **not be required**. However, should you determine that this Neighbourhood Plan does require SEA, we must be consulted on the scope to ensure our key environmental issues are addressed.

We hope you find these comments useful.

Kind regards

[redacted]

[redacted]
Planning Specialist, Sustainable Places Solent and South Downs
Environment Agency | Oving Road, Chichester, West Sussex, PO20 2AG

[redacted]

Please accept our thanks for your email in advance - each person sending one less 'thank you' email a day would save more than 16,400 tonnes of carbon a year!

To make this email more accessible for those with dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia, I've changed my email font to Arial, 12pt with 0.5pt spacing.

From: [redacted]
Sent: 16 October 2025 14:46
To: [redacted]
Subject: Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review Screening

You don't often get email from [redacted] Learn why this is important

Dear Statutory Consultee,

Please find attached the SEA Screening for the draft Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan Review for your consideration. We would welcome your comments at the earliest opportunity, within the 5 week consultation period (by 20th November 2025). I attach our Screening Opinion, the draft Neighbourhood Plan Review and Design Guide and Codes document. Please let us know if you have any queries or require any further information.

Kind regards,

[redacted]

[redacted] **| Planning Officer (Policy)**
Planning Policy, Wealden District Council
[redacted]
Council Offices | Vicarage Lane | Hailsham | East Sussex | BN27 2AX
[redacted]

http://www.wealden.gov.uk
@wealdendistrict @wealden @wealdendc

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Historic England

By email only to: [redacted]

Our ref: PL00800194
Your ref: Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan SEA

[redacted]

Date: 19/11/2025

Dear Sir or Madam

Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening Opinion

Thank you for inviting Historic England to comment on this consultation. 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. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, "Is it (the Neighbourhood Plan) likely to have a significant effect on the historic environment?". Our comments are based on the information supplied.

It is noted that the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for development.

Given the unlikely significant effects upon the historic environment/heritage assets, Historic England concurs with the Local Authority and hence considers that a Strategic Environmental Assessment will not be required.

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.

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 NP process and, potentially, object to specific proposals which may subsequently arise (either as a result of this consultation or in later versions of the plan) where we consider that these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Please do contact me, via email if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

[redacted]
Historic Places Adviser

Date: 18 November 2025
Our ref: 530584
Your ref: Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan

Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ
T 0300 060 3900

[redacted]
Wealden District Council

BY EMAIL ONLY
[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan - Review - SEA Screening Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 16 October 2025.

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 is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where they consider our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

Natural England does not have any specific comments on this draft neighbourhood plan.

However, we refer you to the attached annex which covers the issues and opportunities that should be considered when preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and to the following information.

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Further information on protected species and development 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 a Strategic Environmental Assessment. 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 Strategic Environmental Assessment 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 an Strategic Environmental Assessment is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

For any further consultations on your plan, please contact: [redacted]

Yours sincerely

[redacted]
Consultations Team

Annex 1 - Neighbourhood planning and the natural environment: information, issues and opportunities

Natural environment information sources

The Magic[1] website will provide you with much of the nationally held natural environment data for your plan area. The most relevant layers for you to consider are: **Agricultural Land Classification, Ancient Woodland, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Local Nature Reserves, National Parks (England), National Trails, Priority Habitat Inventory, public rights of way (on the Ordnance Survey base map)** and **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (including their impact risk zones)**. Local environmental record centres may hold a range of additional information on the natural environment. A list of local record centres is available from the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres .

Priority habitats are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found here[2]. Most of these will be mapped either as **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**, on the Magic website or as **Local Wildlife Sites**. Your local planning authority should be able to supply you with the locations of Local Wildlife Sites.

National Character Areas (NCAs) divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each character area is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. NCA profiles contain descriptions of the area and statements of environmental opportunity, which may be useful to inform proposals in your plan. NCA information can be found here[3].

There may also be a local **landscape character assessment** covering your area. This is a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It can help to inform, plan and manage change in the area. Your local planning authority should be able to help you access these if you can't find them online.

If your neighbourhood planning area is within or adjacent to a **National Park** or **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONB), the relevant National Park/AONB Management Plan for the area will set out useful information about the protected landscape. You can access the plans on from the relevant National Park Authority or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website.

General mapped information on **soil types** and **Agricultural Land Classification** is available (under 'landscape') on the Magic[4] website and also from the LandIS website[5], which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

Natural environment issues to consider

The National Planning Policy Framework[6] sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Planning Practice Guidance[7] sets out supporting guidance.

Your local planning authority should be able to provide you with further advice on the potential impacts of your plan or order on the natural environment and the need for any environmental assessments.

Landscape

Your plans or orders may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes. You may want to consider identifying distinctive local landscape features or characteristics such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls and think about how any new development proposals can respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness.

If you are proposing development within or close to a protected landscape (National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or other sensitive location, we recommend that you carry out a landscape assessment of the proposal. Landscape assessments can help you to choose the most appropriate sites for development and help to avoid or minimise impacts of development on the landscape through careful siting, design and landscaping.

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[1] http://magic.defra.gov.uk/
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england
[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making
[4] http://magic.defra.gov.uk/
[5] http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm
[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2
[7] http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/

Wildlife habitats

Some proposals can have adverse impacts on designated wildlife sites or other priority habitats (listed here[8]), such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Ancient woodland[9]. If there are likely to be any adverse impacts you'll need to think about how such impacts can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for.

Priority and protected species

You'll also want to consider whether any proposals might affect priority species (listed here [10]) or protected species. To help you do this, Natural England has produced advice here[11] to help understand the impact of particular developments on protected species.

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services for society. It is a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, a store for carbon and water, a reservoir of biodiversity and a buffer against pollution. If you are proposing development, you should seek to use areas of poorer quality agricultural land in preference to that of a higher quality in line with National Planning Policy Framework para 112. For more information, see Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land [12].

Improving your natural environment

Your plan or order can offer exciting opportunities to enhance your local environment and should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the National Planning Policy Framework. If you are setting out policies on new development or proposing sites for development, you should follow the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy and seek to ensure impacts on habitats are avoided or minimised before considering opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. You may wish to consider identifying what environmental features you want to be retained or enhanced or new features you would like to see created as part of any new development and how these could contribute to biodiversity net gain and wider environmental goals.

Opportunities for environmental enhancement might include:

- Restoring a neglected hedgerow.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.
- Think about how lighting can be best managed to reduce impacts on wildlife.
- Adding a green roof to new buildings.
- Providing a new footpath through the new development to link into existing rights of way.

Site allocations should be supported by a baseline assessment of biodiversity value. The statutory Biodiversity Metric may be used to understand the number of biodiversity units present on allocated sites. For small development allocations the Small Sites Metric may be used. This is a simplified version of the statutory Biodiversity Metric and is designed for use where certain criteria are met. Further information on biodiversity net gain including planning practice guidance can be found here

You may also want to consider enhancing your local area in other ways, for example by:

- Setting out in your plan how you would like to implement elements of a wider Green Infrastructure Strategy (if one exists) in your community.
- Assessing needs for accessible greenspace and setting out proposals to address any deficiencies or enhance provision. Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework sets out further information on green infrastructure standards and principles
- Identifying green areas of particular importance for special protection through Local Green Space designation (see Planning Practice Guidance[13]).
- Managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips in less used parts of parks or on verges, changing hedge cutting timings and frequency).

[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england
[9] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences
[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england
[11] https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals
[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-land-assess-proposals-for-development/guide-to-assessing-development-proposals-on-agricultural-land
[13] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space

- Planting additional street trees.
- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network, e.g. cutting back hedges, improving the surface, clearing litter or installing kissing gates) or extending the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition, or clearing away an eyesore).

Natural England's Environmental Benefits from Nature tool may be used to identify opportunities to enhance wider benefits from nature and to avoid and minimise any negative impacts. It is designed to work alongside the statutory Biodiversity Metric and is available as a beta test version.