Irchester, Knuston and Little Irchester Neighbourhood Plan 2011–2031

Strategic Environmental Assessment
and
Habitat Regulations Assessment

Draft Screening Report

Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
February 2017
CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

2.0 THE PLANNING CONTEXT

3.0 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA) SCREENING

4.0 HABITAT REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT (HRA) SCREENING

APPENDICES

1. SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY MAP FOR IRCHESTER
2. SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY MAP FOR LITTLE IRCHESTER

FIGURES

1. IRCHESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREA
2. APPLICATION OF THE SEA DIRECTIVE TO PLANS AND PROGRAMMES, FROM ‘A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DIRECTIVE’ (ODPM 2005)
3. LOCATION OF SPA IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREA

TABLES

1. LIST OF POLICIES IN THE DRAFT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
2. SCREENING ASSESSMENT PART 1 – SCREENING PROCESS
3. SCREENING ASSESSMENT PART 2 – LIKELIHOOD OF SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS
4. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UPPER NENE VALLEY GRAVEL PITS SPA
1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report (‘Screening Report’) has been prepared by the Irchester, Knuston and Little Irchester Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (‘the Steering Group’) on behalf of Irchester Parish Council. This Screening Report has been prepared in order to inform:

1. A determination under Paragraph 9 (1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) on whether or not a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required for the Irchester, Knuston and Little Irchester Neighbourhood Plan (‘the Neighbourhood Plan’); and

2. A determination 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) on whether or not a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) is required for the Plan.

1.2 This Screening Report has been prepared ahead of consultation with the consultation bodies to inform an initial determination regarding requirements for SEA and HRA. Once consultation responses have been received the Screening Report will be updated and a final determination reached.

Background

1.3 The Steering Group are preparing the Neighbourhood Plan on behalf of Irchester Parish Council in accordance with the provisions of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The Borough Council of Wellingborough (BCW), as the Local Planning Authority, designated the whole of the Parish of Irchester, covering the settlements of Irchester, Knuston and Little Irchester, as the Irchester Neighbourhood Area (see Figure 1) on 4 December 2012 for this purpose.

1.4 Irchester Parish Council published a Consultation Draft of the Neighbourhood Plan in September 2016 for consultation under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The Neighbourhood Plan covers the period from 2011 to 2031 in line with the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy plan period. It sets out specific policies and proposals for the use and development of land in the Plan Area over that plan period and is in general conformity with both national policies and strategic policies contained within the development plan for the Irchester Neighbourhood Plan Area.

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1 Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency for SEA and Natural England for HRA.
The Plan’s vision for the Parish of Irchester up to 2031 is that:

“The parish will remain an independent and distinctive rural community comprising the main village of Irchester and the hamlets of Knuston and Little Irchester.”

“The parish’s rich architectural and environmental heritage will be conserved and enhanced for the benefit of current villagers and for future generations.”

“We recognise the need for sustainable growth that will support the future of the community and its facilities.”

“Our open social structure and mixed community is sustained and reinforced with activities and facilities that enhance them, including the provision of affordable housing.”

“The adverse impact of road traffic on the community will be lessened. Transport and other links to neighbouring communities will be enhanced.”

“The overall aim is that residents will want to continue to live in the parish, and that others will wish they could.”
1.6 The Plan includes the following objectives:

- To meet the future housing needs of the parish.
- To conserve the special historic character of the village including the protection and enhancement of key heritage assets and important views.
- To protect and support the development of local facilities and services through S106 agreements.
- To promote improved transport facilities and connectivity through S106 agreements.

1.7 The Neighbourhood Plan includes 4 policies that will contribute towards the achievement of its objectives. Table 1 below briefly summarises these policies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>What does the policy provide for?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Settlement Boundary</td>
<td>Designating the settlement boundaries of Irchester and Little Irchester for the purpose of defining where open countryside and rural settlement policies apply. The entire settlement of Knuston is designated as within the open countryside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Heritage</td>
<td>The protection and enhancement of heritage assets, their settings and key views and vistas into and out of the settlement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Allocation of Land off Austin Close</td>
<td>Approximately 75 dwellings on a site subject to a range of criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Allocation of Land south of James Street</td>
<td>Approximately 75 dwellings on a site subject to a range of criteria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.0THE PLANNING CONTEXT

2.1 As required by Government policy the Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Development Plan. The Development Plan for Irchester currently comprises saved policies from the Borough of Wellingborough Local Plan (1999 plus alteration 2004)\(^2\) and the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS, July 2016)\(^3\).

2.2 Policy 29 of the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy identifies a housing requirement of 150 dwellings for the village of Irchester for the plan period (2011-2031) which has been adopted as the housing requirement for the Neighbourhood Plan. A Sustainability Appraisal\(^4\) and a Habitat Regulations Assessment\(^5\) of the JCS have been undertaken and have informed this Screening Report.

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\(^3\) North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (Adopted July 2016)

\(^4\) Sustainability Appraisal of the Submission North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (June 2015) and Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement (July, 2016)

\(^5\) North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Habitat Regulations Assessment (January 2015) and Addendum (June 2015)
2.3 In addition, the Steering Group have prepared a Sustainability Assessment to accompany this Screening Report. This assessment draws together the evidence base prepared on behalf of the Steering Group in developing the Neighbourhood Plan (e.g. reports on highways, heritage, archaeology, ecology, trees and landscape) and demonstrates that the site allocations chosen represent the most sustainable options for development in the Neighbourhood Area.

3.0 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA) SCREENING

3.1 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) require the Plan to be accompanied by either:

i. an environmental report prepared in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3) of regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004(a); or

ii. where it has been determined under regulation 9(1) of those Regulations that the plan proposal is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, accordingly, does not require an environmental assessment), a statement of reasons for the determination.

3.2 The Borough Council of Wellingborough has advised that it is the responsibility of Irchester Parish Council to prepare the environmental report or statement of reasons.

3.3 As outlined above this Screening Report has been prepared in order to inform a determination under Paragraph 9 (1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) on whether or not a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required for the Neighbourhood Plan. Paragraph 9 (2) of the Regulations requires the responsible authority (i.e. Irchester Parish Council), before making a determination under Paragraph (1), to:

(a) Take into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to the Regulations; and
(b) Consult the consultation bodies

3.4 This Screening Report has been prepared ahead of consultation with the consultation bodies to demonstrate how the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to the Regulations have been taken into account. It presents a draft determination that an SEA is not required for the reasons set out in this section. Once consultation responses have been received the draft determination will be reviewed and if necessary amended and SEA prepared.
Part 1 – Screening Process

3.5 The process for determining whether or not SEA is required is called ‘screening’. The criteria include specific considerations regarding the characteristics, the effects and the area likely to be effected by the plan. Detailed guidance on the SEA process can be found in the Government publication ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’ (‘The Practical Guide’) (ODPM 2005).

Figure 2. Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes, from ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’ (ODPM 2005)
3.6 Figure 2 is reproduced from The Practical Guide and illustrates the process for screening the Plan to ascertain whether a SEA is required. An assessment of the characteristics of the Neighbourhood Plan against this process is set out in Table 2.

Table 2. Screening Assessment Part 1 – Screening Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Y/N</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Is the Plan 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?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Yes. The Neighbourhood Plan is prepared by Irchester Parish Council as the ‘Responsible Authority’ under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. Subject to an examination and a subsequent referendum, it will be “made” by the Borough Council of Wellingborough as the Local Planning Authority. GO TO STAGE 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Is the Plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions?</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Neighbourhood plans are not required by legislation. The Localism Act allows these to be undertaken on a voluntary basis. However, once made by the Borough Council the Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the statutory Development Plan for the area. Strictly speaking, based on this guidance, the Neighbourhood Plan is not required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions and so would not require an SEA. However, this guidance was prepared prior to the creation of Neighbourhood Plans, and some Neighbourhood Plans have been found to require an SEA so it is reasonable to conclude that while the Neighbourhood Plan is not strictly required it is not justified to stop the screening exercise at this point. GO TO STAGE 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Is the Plan 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 (see Appendix 2) to the EIA Directive?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>The Neighbourhood Plan is prepared for town and country planning and land use purposes. Once made, it will form part of the statutory framework (the Development Plan) for the determination of planning applications. It will also be used to manage development of the type referred to in Annex II of the Directive. The directive is transferred into UK law by the The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 and the The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2015. These latter regulations amend the former and include in Schedule 2 a threshold of more than 150 dwellings or 5 hectares, above which a development is required to be screened as to whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required. The plan includes two site allocations totalling 150 dwellings, one of which is on a site of 5.14ha. GO TO STAGE 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment

**Draft Screening Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 4: Will the Plan, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive?</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Stage 4 is bypassed as the Neighbourhood Plan produced a Yes with regards to Stage 3 and therefore moves to Stage 5. The requirements for Habitats Regulation screening are dealt with in section 4 of this report.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5. Does the Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a Plan?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>The Neighbourhood Plan will assist in the determination of planning applications for the use of small areas at a local level. It is also in accordance with the Joint Core Strategy which sets its strategic priorities and housing requirement and as such can be described as a minor modification of an existing plan. <strong>GO TO STAGE 8</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6. Does the Plan set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Stage 6 is bypassed as the Neighbourhood Plan produced a Yes with regards to Stage 3 and therefore moved to Stage 5 from where answers lead to Stage 7 and 8. The Development Plan (see section 2 of this report) sets the overall framework for future development in Irchester. The Neighbourhood Plan will, however, allocate sites of a non-strategic nature and provide a local policy dimension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 7. Is the Plan’s sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget plan, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Stage 7 is bypassed as the Neighbourhood Plan produced a Yes with regards to Stage 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?</td>
<td>SEE PART 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7 The process followed above demonstrates that the Neighbourhood Plan is only required to have a SEA if it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. This is in accordance with the advice contained in The Practical Guide which explains that while land use and spatial plans should normally be subject to SEA, plans and programmes which determine the use of small areas at a local level or which are minor modifications to existing plans only require SEA if they are judged likely to have ‘significant’ environmental effects.

**Part 2 – Likelihood of Significant Environmental Effects**

3.8 The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (in Schedule 1) sets out specific criteria for determining the likely significance of the environmental effects of a plan. These are set out in Table 3 below together with a commentary on whether the Neighbourhood Plan would trigger the need for a full SEA.
### Table 3. Screening Assessment Part 2 – Likelihood of Significant Environmental Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
<td>The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a spatial vision for the Neighbourhood Area and provides a framework for proposals for development in the Parish of Irchester. However, it must be in conformity with the strategic policies of the Joint Core Strategy for North Northamptonshire and the Borough of Wellingborough Local Plan. As noted above, the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the saved policies of the Local Plan and the strategic policies of the adopted JCS; most notably its requirement for 150 homes to be provided in Irchester over the plan period. The SEA prepared for the JCS identifies a number of positive (including a number of significant positive effects) and negative effects, but does not identify any likely significant negative effects resulting from its policies. We can therefore infer from this assessment that the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have any significantly negative effects on the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy</strong></td>
<td>The Neighbourhood Plan should not significantly influence other plans and programmes on its own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development</strong></td>
<td>The plan promotes the development of 150 dwellings in Irchester which has been assessed as being able to sustainably accommodate this level of development in the Joint Core Strategy. The proposed allocations have been selected based on evidence prepared by relevant experts to ensure they are the most sustainable options for development (see Sustainability Assessment Report prepared as part of the evidence base for the Neighbourhood Plan).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme</strong></td>
<td>It is considered that there are no significant environmental problems likely to arise from the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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)</strong></td>
<td>Not relevant – No impacts likely.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects</td>
<td>The draft plan is likely to have short-term effects resulting from construction and longer-term effects relevant to changes in land use which are likely to include both positive and negative environmental effects. However, these are not likely to be significant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cumulative nature of the effects</td>
<td>There are not considered to be any cumulative effects arising from the Neighbourhood Plan. The level of development proposed has been planned for at a strategic level by the Joint Core Strategy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transboundary nature of the effects</td>
<td>There are not expected to be any significant trans-boundary effects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)</td>
<td>None identified.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)</td>
<td>The development proposed is relatively small in scale and is not considered to give rise to any significant impacts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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; and/or- intensive land-use.</td>
<td>The level of development proposed has been set by the Joint Core Strategy. Within this context, the value and vulnerability of the area has been assessed by the evidence base produced in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan (see Sustainability Assessment Report prepared as part of the evidence base for the Neighbourhood Plan) and the proposed allocations do not lie within areas considered to have special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, will not exceed environmental quality standards or limit values or give rise to intensive land-use.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Screening Outcome – Draft Determination

3.9 As a result of the assessment in section 3, it is concluded that it is unlikely that there will be any significant environmental effects arising from the Neighbourhood Plan. There is therefore no requirement for a full SEA to be undertaken.

3.10 The conclusion above represents the draft determination of Irchester Parish Council. This Screening Report has been prepared ahead of consultation with the consultation bodies, taking into account the criteria specified in Schedule 1 to the Regulations. Once consultation responses have been received the draft determination will be reviewed and if necessary amended and a SEA prepared.
4.0 HABITAT REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT (HRA) SCREENING

4.1 Detailed guidance on the HRA process can be found in draft Government guidance (‘Planning for the Protection of European Sites: Appropriate Assessment’ (2006)). The guidance makes it clear that the assessment should be undertaken at a level of detail that is appropriate and proportional to the level of detail provided within the Neighbourhood Plan itself.

4.2 Essentially there are four possible stages in the HRA process, as follows:

1. Screening: Determine whether the Plan, ‘in combination’ with other plans and projects, is likely to have a significant adverse impact on a European site.

2. Appropriate assessment: If there are likely to be significant effects it is necessary to assess the likely impact on the integrity of the European site of the Plan, ‘in combination’ with other projects or plans, with respect to the site’s structure, function and conservation objectives. Where there are adverse impacts, assess the potential mitigation of those impacts. Where there aren’t, then the plan can proceed as it is.

3. Assessment of alternatives solutions: Where the plan is assessed as having an adverse effect (or risk of this) on the integrity of a European site, examine alternative ways of achieving the plan objectives that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site.

4. Assessment where no alternative solutions remain and where adverse impacts remain: Assess compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest, it is deemed that the plan should proceed.

4.3 The first stage of the HRA (i.e. the screening process) determines whether the subsequent stage, known as Appropriate Assessment, is required. The essential screening question is: “Is the Plan, either alone or in combination with other relevant projects and plans, likely to result in a significant effect upon European sites?” The objective is to ‘screen out’ those policies that can, without any detailed appraisal, be said to be unlikely to result in significant adverse effects upon European sites.

3.11 This Screening Report has been prepared ahead of consultation with Natural England to assess whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to result in a significant effect upon European Sites. It presents a draft determination that a full HRA is not required for the reasons set out in this section. Once a consultation response has been received from Natural England, the draft determination will be reviewed and if necessary amended and an HRA prepared.

**European Sites Potentially Affected by the Neighbourhood Plan**

4.4 European Sites include Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). In
identifying European Sites, a 15km radius has been applied to the Neighbourhood Area. The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA is the only designated European Site within this 15km radius. The HRA screening assessment will therefore identify if the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan will have likely significant effects on the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA.

4.5 The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA comprises a chain of sites extending approximately 35km along the River Nene. Part of one of these SPA sites lies within the far north of the Neighbourhood Area. At its closest this site is approximately 1km from the village of Irchester and is located beyond the A45 dual carriageway from the bulk of the Neighbourhood Area. Several other sites in the chain of sites that make up the SPA are located within 15km of the Neighbourhood Area. The next closest lie approximately 2km west and 2km northeast of the village of Irchester. The location of the SPA with respect to the Neighbourhood Area is shown on the map in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Location of SPA in the Neighbourhood Plan Area](image)

4.6 European sites are designated for specific ‘qualifying interest features’. Table 4 (below) summarises the characteristics of the Upper Nene Gravel Pits SPA, including the qualifying interest features; the impacts that the SPA is vulnerable to; and the management aspirations (conservation objectives).
Table 4. Characteristics of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA

| Description | This chain of both active and exhausted sand and gravel pits extends for approximately 35 kilometres along the alluvial deposits of the River Nene floodplain from Clifford Hill on the southern outskirts of Northampton, downstream to Thorpe Waterville, north of Thrapston. They form an extensive series of shallow and deep open waters which occur in association with a wide range of marginal features, such as sparsely-vegetated islands, gravel bars and shorelines, and habitats including reedswamp, marsh, wet-ditches, rush pasture, rough grassland and scattered shrub. This range of habitat and the varied topography of the lagoons provide valuable resting and feeding conditions for major concentrations of wintering waterbirds, especially ducks and waders. Species such as golden plover (Pluvialis apricaria) and lapwing (Vanellus vanellus) also spend time feeding and roosting on surrounding agricultural land outside the SPA. |
| Qualifying species and assemblages | The site is designated due to its European ornithological importance, particularly as wintering habitat for wildfowl and wading birds:  
• 1% or more of the Great Britain populations of Bittern (Botaurus stellaris) and Golden plover (Pluvialis apricaria);  
• used regularly by 1% or more of the biogeographical populations of Gadwell (Anas strepera); and  
• used regularly by over 20,000 waterbirds in any season of various species including wigeon (Anas Penelope), crested grebe (Podiceps cristatus) and coot (Fulica atra). |
| Conservation objectives | The European Site conservation objectives for the SPA are to ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring:  
• The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features;  
• The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features;  
• The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely;  
• The population of each of the qualifying features; and  
• The distribution of the qualifying features within the site. |
| Vulnerabilities | The main vulnerabilities of the SPA identified in the North Northamptonshire HRA Screening Report (January 2015) are as follows:  
• Significant disturbance to wintering birds as a result of activities connected with ongoing urban development;  
• Increased disturbance to wintering birds by increasing numbers of visitors with dogs using the public rights of way. Demand for access and formal / informal recreational activities within the Nene Valley are increasing. In |
addition the area is used for recreational activities such as water sports and fishing;
- Habitat succession from short grassland to rank grassland, scrub / woodland due to lack of grazing;
- Invasive non-native species are present within the site such as water pennywort Hydrocotyle ranunculoides, Nuttall’s Pondweed Elodea nuttallii and New Zealand pigmyweed Crassula helmsii; and
- Maintenance of water quality and water quantity.

Neighbourhood Plan Draft Polices

4.7 As outlined in section 1, the Neighbourhood Plan includes 4 policies that will contribute towards the achievement of the plan’s objectives. These policies are outlined in Table 1 and the policies maps for Irchester and Little Irchester are included at Appendices 1 and 2.

4.8 **Policy 1** simply defines the settlement boundaries of Irchester and Little Irchester, as shown on the policies maps, for the purpose of defining where open countryside and rural settlement policies apply (i.e. JCS Policies 11 and 13). These policies allow for small scale infill development and the development of previously developed land within the settlement boundary, but restrict development outside it. The settlement boundaries have been set in accordance with the Borough Council of Wellingborough’s background paper entitled ‘Village Boundaries – The Plan for the Borough of Wellingborough: Background Paper (April 2016)’ and are drawn tightly around the built form of the settlements, including any sites with existing planning permission and the proposed site allocations in the Neighbourhood Plan. Through the production of the Neighbourhood Plan it has been identified that there are no large scale previously developed sites in the Neighbourhood Area that are likely to come forwards for residential development in the plan period and as such Policy 1 is unlikely to result in significant adverse effects on European Sites as it effectively restricts development to small scale sites within the settlement boundaries that will be determined in line with the adopted development plan.

4.9 **Policy 2** simply deals with requirements to protect, preserve and enhance the heritage assets in the village. It is therefore highly unlikely to result in significant adverse effects on the SPA.

4.10 **Policy 3** allocates 5.14ha of land off Austin Close for 75 dwellings and reconfigured public open space. The construction and provision of additional residential dwellings could feasibly result in adverse effects on the SPA. The likelihood that these effects could be significant is assessed further below.

4.11 **Policy 4** allocates 3.98ha of land south of James Street for 75 dwellings. The construction and provision of additional residential dwellings could feasibly result in adverse effects on the SPA. The likelihood that these effects could be significant is assessed further below.
Likelihood of significant effects

4.12 As discussed above, the two site allocations proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan for approximately 75 dwellings each could feasibly result in adverse effects on the SPA. In order to screen these policies out from requiring an Appropriate Assessment it is necessary to provide a fuller assessment of the likelihood that these two policies will result in significant adverse effects upon European sites. In providing this assessment it is important to consider the policy context in which the Neighbourhood Plan sits.

4.13 The Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the adopted North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS, July 2016), which is supported by a Habitat Regulations Assessment, and does not provide for any growth additional to that set out in JCS Policy 29. Any new development within the Neighbourhood Plan Area, either delivered through an allocation or as windfall, will engage JCS Policy 4 which requires contributions towards a combination of the following measures to mitigate impacts on the SPA:

i. Access and visitor management measures within the SPA;
ii. Improvement of existing greenspace and recreational routes;
iii. Provision of alternative natural greenspace and recreational routes;
iv. Monitoring of the impacts of new development on European designated sites to inform the necessary mitigation requirements and future refinement of any mitigation measures.

4.14 The mechanism for contributing to the above measures is set out in ‘The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document - Addendum to the SPA SPD: Mitigation Strategy’.

4.15 It is important to note that the need for this mitigation strategy, which accompanies the JCS, is due to the level of new residential development planned for in the JCS that is within 3km of the SPA. The ‘in-combination’ impacts of this proposed development are predicted to have an adverse effect on the SPA’s integrity, due to an increase in visitors that will in turn increase the level of disturbance to the wintering waterbirds, particularly through dog walking. Avoidance and mitigation measures are therefore necessary to ensure the ‘in-combination’ impacts of development do not result in significant effects on the SPA.

4.16 For residential developments which result in a net increase in the number of dwellings within 3km of the SPA it is proposed to avoid and mitigate likely significant effect on the SPA by making a financial contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) and/or other suitable mitigation. This would reduce the adverse impact of people visiting the SPA through specific measures and monitoring. The Neighbourhood Plan site allocations are both within 3km of the SPA and their
effect on the SPA would therefore be effectively mitigated through making a financial contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) and/or other suitable mitigation.

4.17 Natural England were consulted on the Consultation Draft of the Neighbourhood Plan in September 2016 and advised that the Neighbourhood Plan be revised to include a statement within Policy 3 and Policy 4 that each development will be required to make a financial contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) and/or other suitable mitigation. A statement to this effect will be included in the submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan.

**Screening Outcome – Draft Determination**

4.18 In conclusion, the proposed allocations conform with the policies of the JCS and do not propose any greater level of development than that required by JCS Policy 29. In this context, the impact of the proposed allocations on the SPA has already been assessed in the Habitat Regulations Assessment for the JCS and will be appropriately mitigated for by contributions to the SPA mitigation strategy. There is therefore no need for further Appropriate Assessment.
APPENDIX 1 – SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY MAP FOR IRCHESTER
APPENDIX 2 – SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY MAP FOR LITTLE IRCHETER