

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Holme Valley Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report
Non-Technical Summary

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Quality information

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Non-Technical Summary

1. Introduction

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Holme Valley Neighbourhood Plan (HVNP).

The HVNP is being prepared by Holme Valley Parish Council in the context of the Kirklees Local Plan (KLP), adopted in February 2019. Once the HVNP has been 'made' it will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, alongside the KLP.

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising the positives. SEA of the CNP is a legal requirement.¹

This report is the Non-technical Summary (NTS) of the SEA Report currently available for consultation alongside the draft HVNP.

Structure of the SEA Report/ this NTS

SEA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:

1) What has plan-making / SEA involved **up to this point**?

- Including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.

2) What are the SEA findings **at this stage**?

- i.e. in relation to the draft plan.

3) What happens **next**?

Each of these questions is answered in turn below. Firstly though there is a need to set the scene further by answering the question 'What's the scope of the SA?'

What's the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is reflected in a list of topics and objectives. Taken together, this list indicates the parameters of the SEA, providing a methodological 'framework' for assessment.

The SEA framework

SEA theme	Proposed objective(s)
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protect and enhance all biodiversity and geological features and support overall ecological connectivity.
Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.• Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan Area to the potential effects of climate change.
Historic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protect and enhance the rich historic environment within and surrounding the Neighbourhood Plan Area, including the many Listed Buildings and

¹ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an environmental report; or, B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations ('the SEA Regulations'). The HVNP was subject to screening in 2018, including through consultation, at which time it was determined that SEA is required.

SEA theme	Proposed objective(s)
	Conservation Areas, further designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings, and archaeological assets.
Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect and enhance the character and quality of landscapes, including the Peak District National Park, villages and urban environments within and surrounding the NPA.
Population and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing and ensuring an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures. Support continued low levels of deprivation and promote inclusive and self-contained communities.
Health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan Area.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote sustainable transport use and active travel opportunities and reduce the need to travel.

2. Plan-making/ SEA up to this point

Establishing reasonable alternatives

A key element of the SEA process is the appraisal of 'reasonable alternatives' for the Draft HVNP. The SEA Regulations² are not prescriptive as to what constitutes a reasonable alternative, stating only that the Environmental Report should present an appraisal of the 'plan and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan'. As in many cases, the HVNP Steering Group are limited in terms of potential alternatives that can be considered for the Draft HVNP, which must be in general conformity with and support the strategic development needs set out in the adopted KLP.

Significant effects against SEA objectives are most likely to arise through the consideration of alternatives for the level and location of growth to be delivered in the HVNP area, which is often one of the key issues for neighbourhood plans to address. In this context, the overall level, distribution and location of housing growth would be a logical approach for assessing an alternative approach to that set out in the Draft HVNP; however, as allocated housing sites have been examined and adopted through the Local Plan process, this is not considered necessary. The Local Plan development strategy meets the Objectively Assessed Housing Needs in full and there are no further realistic additional or alternative options (taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan) established through the SEA.

Current approach in the HVNP and the development of the Neighbourhood Plan policies

To support the implementation of the vision for the Draft HVNP, the current version of the Draft HVNP puts forward a number of policies to guide development in the area.

3. Appraisal findings at this stage

Chapter 5 of the Environmental Report presents an appraisal of the HVNP as a whole. Appraisal findings are presented as a series of narratives under the 'SEA framework' themes, the summaries of which are provided below.

² Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

Biodiversity

The Draft HVNP is anticipated to lead to **minor positive effects** overall and in the long-term with regards to biodiversity. The draft policies complement the existing planning policy framework in delivering benefits for biodiversity. Recommendations in relation to the Draft HVNP could include a commitment to 'biodiversity net gain' though it is recognised that this concept is given strategic weight already under the provisions of the NPPF (2019) and the Government's 25-year Environment Plan (2018).

Climate change

Overall, the implementation of the Draft HVNP is considered likely to lead to **minor long-term positive effects** in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The draft policies complement the existing planning policy framework in delivering measures that support emissions reductions and proactive strategies to adapt in response to climate change.

Historic environment

Overall, it is deemed that the Draft HVNP, in conjunction with the higher-level policy suite, provides sufficient policy mitigation to ensure that future development will not detract from the valued historic environment of the Plan area. Parish Council actions stemming from the Draft HVNP are likely to realise benefits for the historic environment in the long-term, and as a result, overall **minor positive effects** are anticipated. Whilst overall positive effects are anticipated, recommendations to enhance potential positive effects could include additional policy wording which seeks to enhance value and legibility in relation to the historic environment. This could include statements concerning the value of heritage to a sense of identity, place and wellbeing for both residents and visitors with consequent economic and retail advantages and with implications for local authorities, public utilities and private owners. Legibility improvements could include signage, waymarking, trails and heritage focal points.

Landscape

Overall, it is considered that the Draft HVNP, alongside the higher-level policy suite, provides a robust framework for the protection and enhancement of the local landscape. It is recognised that sensitive development requirements will maintain and potentially enhance the existing townscape character, and further protect landscape character by avoiding development where it may adversely impact upon the characteristic features of the plan area, Green Belt, and the wider landscape setting within and adjacent to the National Park. The policy framework seeks to strike a balance; providing strong design guidance to minimise risk without stifling new and creative design responses. In this respect, **minor long-term positive effects** are anticipated overall with regards to this SEA theme.

Population and community

The Draft HVNP seeks to address imbalances in the housing market, supporting high-quality design and good accessibility in new development. The Draft HVNP also seeks to maximise opportunities for place-based local economies, including by bolstering tourism relating to the rural landscape and towns and villages of the area. The Plan overall is anticipated to lead to **minor long-term positive effects** with regards to this SEA theme, by supporting inclusive communities and development that meets local needs.

Health and wellbeing

Overall, it is predicted that the Draft HVNP will lead to **minor long-term positive effects** regarding the Health & Wellbeing SEA theme, mostly through and emphasis on protecting valued community assets, identifying new spaces to be protected as designated Local Green Spaces, and supporting improvements to services and facilities for health and recreation.

Transportation

Overall, the Draft HVNP promotes the inclusion of sustainable transport considerations in any new development, as well as ensuring new developments are connected to each other and the existing

transport networks. Outside of the Local Plan development strategy for Holme Valley, brownfield sites are advocated for any further development, increasing possibilities to ensure developments are well connected to existing and new pedestrian and cycle routes where possible. This is alongside efforts to deliver benefits locally in terms of active travel and sustainable transport opportunities. As such, **long-term minor positive effects** are considered likely overall.

The policy framework is considered an overall positive contribution to this SEA objective, and recommendations are limited, but stronger policy to act on the introduction of electric vehicle infrastructure could enhance these positive effects.

Overall conclusions

The Draft HVNP performs well overall against all the SEA themes, and multiple potential benefits to the local community are identified.

The Draft HVNP aims to balance the requirements of local communities, biodiversity, access, and conservation whilst addressing the challenging prospects of future climate change. Whilst no further development sites are proposed through the Draft HVNP, it does seek to ensure that growth directed to the area by the KLP delivers a wide range of housing, targeted at addressing housing imbalances in terms of type, size and tenure.

Opportunities to improve accessibility and support pedestrian and cycle networks through future development are well considered, and ambitious actions are identified, including improvements to rail provisions in the Plan area.

The Draft HVNP aims to support future development in a way that integrates existing heritage, landscape and architecture, reinforcing the unique characteristics of the area. Further to this, the Draft HVNP supports opportunities for improving townscape and the tourism appeal of the plan area's highly valued environment, seeking to secure long-term local economies that can support thriving centres and high-quality service and facility provisions.

Four new Local Green Spaces are identified for protection, and will deliver benefits by retaining valued local spaces that contribute to health and wellbeing, recreational assets and townscape character.

Overall, recommendations are limited, which is unsurprising given the overall positive performance of the Draft HVNP with regards to the SEA themes, possible suggestions to strengthen the plan or maximise positive effects could however include:

- Dedicated policy commitments to the 'biodiversity net gain' principle.
- Additional policy wording which seeks to enhance value and legibility in relation to the historic environment. This could include statements concerning the value of heritage to a sense of identity, place and wellbeing for both residents and visitors with consequent economic and retail advantages and with implications for local authorities, public utilities and private owners. Legibility improvements could include signage, waymarking, trails and heritage focal points.
- In light of limited capacity to act on large scale transport infrastructure, policy wording in the Draft HVNP in support for installation of EV charging stations through future developments could bring significant benefits to the transportation, climate change and health and wellbeing themes. Whilst this would do little to curb traffic congestion, greater sustainability through reduced emissions, and health benefits from improved air quality in settlements could be realised through making EVs a more realistic option for plan area residents.

4. Next steps

Part 3 of the SEA Report answers – What happens next? – by discussing plan finalisation and monitoring.

Plan finalisation

This Environmental Report accompanies the Pre-Submission version of the Holme Valley Neighbourhood Plan for Regulation 14 consultation.

Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by Holme Valley Parish Council, and the Neighbourhood Plan and accompanying Environmental Report will be updated as necessary. The updated Environmental Report will then accompany the Neighbourhood Plan for submission to the Local Planning Authority, Kirklees Council, for subsequent Independent Examination.

At Independent Examination, the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the adopted Kirklees Local Planning Framework.

If the subsequent Independent Examination is favourable, the Holme Valley Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a referendum, organised by Kirklees Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once made, the Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the Development Plan for Kirklees, covering the defined Neighbourhood Plan area.

Monitoring

The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report. This refers to the monitoring of likely significant effects of the Neighbourhood Plan to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.

It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by Kirklees Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

The SEA has not identified any potential for significant negative effects that would require closer review or monitoring.

