



An objective decision making tool for Neighbourhood Plans: Strategic Environmental Assessment

Neil Davidson,
Lepus Consulting Ltd
25th January 2017



Lepus Service Provision

- Lepus Consulting is a specialist environmental assessment practice.
- Based in Cheltenham, it has been formed to offer excellent value from a close-knit team of professional ecologists, landscape architects and environmental consultants.
- We work effectively and expertly to deliver excellent quality to a range of clients which include local planning authorities and private sector customers.
- Specific products include ecological impact assessment, landscape and visual impact assessment, habitats regulations assessment, habitat surveys, strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal.



This Presentation

- 1 What is SEA?
- 2 Why you should know about it
- 3 How to prepare SEA
- 4 Exploring significant environmental effects



What is SEA? 1 of 4

Strategic Environmental Assessment is enshrined in the European SEA Directive 2001/42/EC

The primary objective of this Directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment; and

to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development.



What is SEA? 2 of 4

The Directive seeks to ensure that an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.



What is SEA? 3 of 4

SEA is a tool for improving the strategic action, not a post-hoc snapshot.

SEA should promote participation of other stakeholders in the decision making progress

SEA should focus on key environmental/sustainability constraints, thresholds and limits at the appropriate plan-making level.



What is SEA? 4 of 4

SEA should help to identify the best option for the strategic action.

SEA should aim to minimise negative impacts, optimize positive ones, and compensate for the loss of valuable features and benefits.

SEA should ensure that strategic actions do not exceed limits beyond which irreversible damage from impacts may occur.



Why you should know about SEA

NPPG:

Where a neighbourhood plan could have significant environmental effects, it may fall within the scope of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and so require a SEA.

One of the basic conditions that will be tested by the independent examiner is whether the making of the neighbourhood plan is compatible with European Union obligations (including under the SEA Directive).



Screening advice in the NPPG

NPPG says:

To decide whether a draft neighbourhood plan might have significant environmental effects, its potential scope should be assessed at an early stage against the criteria set out in Schedule 1 to the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

We have adapted this requirement into a standardised screening report template to report any likely significant effects and explore the other criteria in Schedule 1.



Screening: determining significant effects 1 of 2

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING THE LIKELY SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to—
 - (a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;
 - (b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;
 - (c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;
 - (d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and
 - (e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).



Screening: determining significant effects 2 of 2

2. 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;
- (b) the cumulative nature of the effects;
- (c) the transboundary nature of the effects;
- (d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);
- (e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
- (f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to— (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use; and
- (g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.



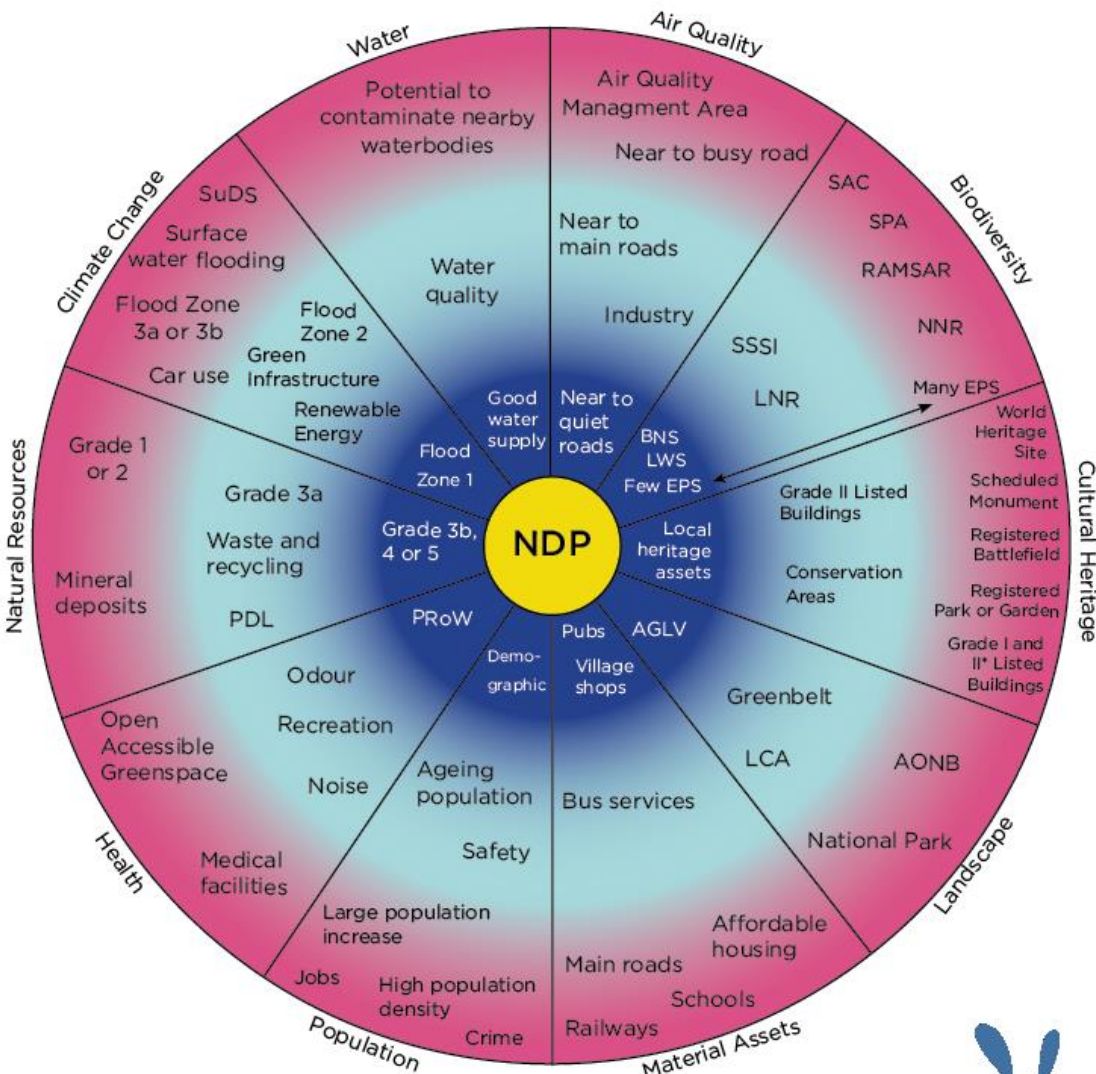
Topics listed in the Directive

- (a) biodiversity;
- (b) population;
- (c) human health;
- (d) fauna;
- (e) flora;
- (f) soil;
- (g) water;
- (h) air;
- (i) climatic factors;
- (j) material assets;
- (k) cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage;
- (l) landscape; and
- (m) the inter-relationship between the issues referred to in subparagraphs (a) to (l).



SEA Screening Wheel: Receptor Sensitivity

SEA Screening Wheel to gauge Receptors and Sensitivity



Legend

- High sensitivity
- Medium sensitivity
- Low sensitivity

Acronyms & Terminology

AGLV	Area of Greater Landscape Value
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BNS	Biological Notification Site
EPS	European Protected Species
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
NDP	Neighbourhood Development Plan
NNR	National Nature Reserve
PDL	Previously Developed Land
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SuDS	Sustainable Drainage Systems
RAMSAR	Wetlands of International Importance
WWT	Wastewater and Treatment Works





SEA screening

Consultation with statutory conservation bodies either directly or via the LPA.

- Natural England
- Historic England
- Environment Agency



SEA content

Requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment

- Scoping
- Reasonable Alternatives: Strategic Policies and Place Based Policies & Strategic Allocations
- Preferred Options
- Full Environmental (SEA) Report
- Publication and post-adoption



Consultation Procedures

SEA Screening. No statutory time period. Minimum 3 weeks but may take longer

SEA Scoping (5 weeks)

Consultation at each stage of the plan is encouraged

Main SEA Report to match the NDP public consultation period (6 weeks)

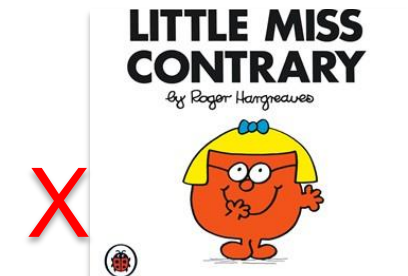
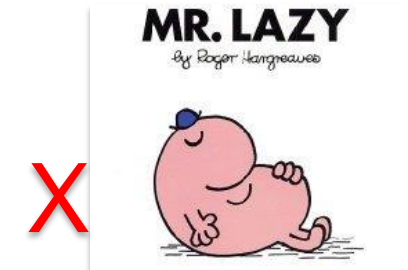
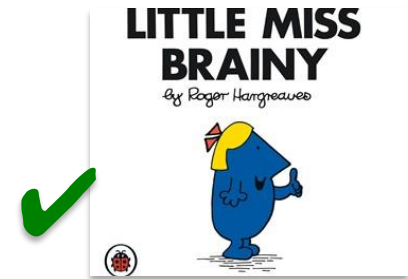


Questions and discussion



Scoping

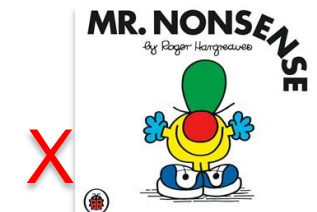
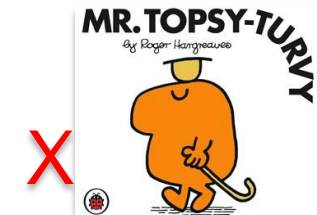
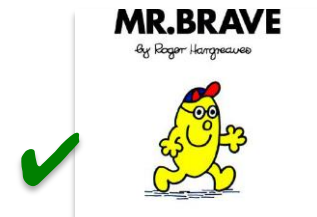
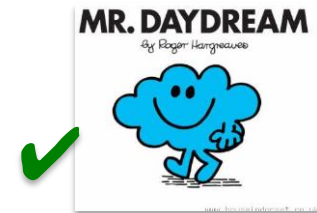
- identify relevant policies, plans, programmes, strategies and initiatives and sustainability objectives that will influence the plan
- collect relevant social, environmental and economic baseline information
- identify key sustainability issues that the DPD should address
- develop the SA framework (sustainability objectives)
- produce a scoping report and consult relevant authorities, the public and other key stakeholders





Assessment of alternatives

- Article 5(1) reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated.
- Strategic Approaches
- Spatial Policies
- Place Base Policies & Strategic Allocations
- Business as Usual Option

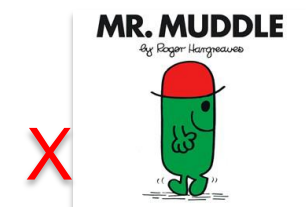
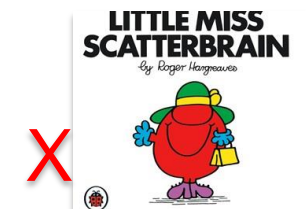
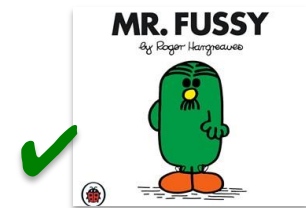




Assessment of preferred options

Preparation of the SA/SEA Report (Environmental Report)

- Assess entire plan
- Significant effects (negative and positive)
- Consider mitigation
- Cumulative Impacts Assessment
- Monitoring
- Non-technical summary
- Cross-reference with PAS checklist





Assessment methodology

High Level sift (Initial Assessment and Site Exclusion)

Significance Assessment	Description
++	Option would have a major positive effect on sustainability in its current form as it would resolve an existing issue or maximise opportunities. SIGNIFICANT
+	Option would have a minor positive effect on sustainability.
?	Effect of option on sustainability is uncertain.
0	Option would have a neutral effect on sustainability.
-	Option would have a minor adverse effect on sustainability.
--	The option would have a major adverse effect on sustainability as it would substantially exacerbate existing problems. Consider exclusion of option. SIGNIFICANT

Detailed Assessment Matrices (Detailed Site Specific Considerations)

Only used with likely significant adverse or uncertain effects having been identified.

			term	term	term					(probability)			required?	
1	Protect, enhance and manage sites, features and areas of archaeological, historical and cultural heritage importance.	Potential adverse impacts relate to (i) the damage or destruction of potential archaeological remains and (ii) loss of historic landscape archaeological feature, ridge and furrow. The Historic Environment Assessment (2008) suggests that historic features and/or potential archaeological remains are located on or near the proposed site. There is also ridge and furrow in this area which shows the medieval agricultural use of this area and adds to the historic landscape character. The loss of the ridge and furrow feature would be a significant adverse residual effect. It is suggested that ridge and furrow is of regional if not national significance.	--	-	-	single event	permanent	local to regional	high	low and medium	Major	adverse	Yes	The confidence that there is the presence of archaeological finds is low, but if features are on site they could be of significance. The loss of ridge and furrow constitutes a high impact adverse effect on the local area. Its loss is permanent and cannot be restored. The loss of ridge and furrow cannot be mitigated. Only avoidance will remove this identified impact. Regarding the archaeology, the site should be investigated to rule out any features.
2	Protect, enhance and manage the character and appearance of the landscape and townscape, maintaining and strengthening distinctiveness and its special qualities.	This site is located within an area of medium landscape sensitivity. The Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (2011) suggests development at this location would adversely impact on the strong rural character of the area and impact on its distinctiveness. However the retention and management of the mature hedgerows, as well as the extensive landscaping suggested will help with the effect on the landscape	+/-	+	+	ongoing	permanent	local	medium	medium	Minor	positive	No	There could be short term adverse impacts on the landscape due to the upheaval of building and development, although the retention of the mature hedgerows is likely to reduce this somewhat. Over the longer term the extensive landscaping will ensure the character of the landscape is protected.
3	Protect, enhance and manage biodiversity and geodiversity.	The retention and management of the mature hedgerows will help with the protection of current biodiversity	+/-	+	+	ongoing	permanent	local	low	low	Negligible	positive	No	Similarly to landscape the short term impacts of development are likely to be adverse, especially due to the greenfield nature of the site. Retaining the hedgerows will maintain a level of biodiversity which could be improved by landscaping. Further improvements to biodiversity could be implemented using design guidelines, SUDS and GI.
4	Reduce the risk of flooding.	No significant effects at this level of detail.									Neutral		No	
5	Minimise the district's contribution to climate change.	The improvements to Wildmoor Roundabout as well as the location outside of the main town centre means that there is likely to be less congestion, especially due to the reduction in HGV traffic in Stratford-upon-Avon town centre. Reduced congestion could lead to reduced emissions.	+	+/-	++	ongoing	permanent	international	medium	low	Major	positive	No	In the short term the policy is likely to reduce emissions through removing HGVs from the centre of town, keeping them on the larger arterial routes; reducing congestion and reducing emissions. In the medium term the improvements in congestion could encourage more car use. Whilst in the long term improvements in car and HGV technology will reduce the emissions they produce, and the focus on and use of sustainable methods of transport such as bus travel will be widespread.
6	Plan for the anticipated levels of climate change.	No significant effects at this level of detail.									Neutral		No	
7	Protect and conserve natural resources.	The proposed site is located on an area of Grade 3b agricultural land. Although this is not categorised as high quality agricultural land, the area is being used for arable farming. It is difficult to determine the local significance of the loss of this land.	-	+/-	+/-	ongoing	permanent	local	medium	low	Negligible	positive and negative	Yes	The loss of agricultural land to an employment site would be long term and irreversible. Grade 1 agricultural land is assessed as being the most productive, although depending on the local requirement for agricultural land the loss of lower grade land (such as 3a) could be more significant. The demand for agricultural land in the area should be investigated to ascertain the significance of the loss.
8	Reduce air, soil and water pollution.	No significant effects at this level of detail.									Neutral		No	
9	Reduce waste generation and disposal, and achieve the sustainable management of waste.	No significant effects at this level of detail.									Neutral		No	
10	Improve the efficiency of transport networks by increasing the proportion of travel by sustainable modes and by promoting policies which reduce the need to travel.	The site is located on the A46, which links Stratford-upon-Avon with the M40, which allows HGVs to circumnavigate the town centre. Within the proposal, improvements to Wildmoor Roundabout have been recommended, and there is a requirement for frequent bus services all of which reduce congestion.	++	+	++	ongoing	permanent but reversible	local and regional	high	medium	Major	positive	No	Short term improvement in congestion due to re-routing of HGVs which will have a major positive impact. In the medium term the effect is slightly less positive as there could be possible delays due to increase in traffic from development coupled with improvement works to Wildmoor Roundabout. In the long run the emphasis on more sustainable methods of transportation such as bus services will have become ingrained.
11	Reduce barriers for those living in rural areas.	Locating the employment area on the outskirts of Stratford-upon-Avon could improve access to employment opportunities to those living in smaller settlements.	+	+	+	ongoing	permanent but reversible	local	medium	medium	Moderate	positive	No	The location of the site on the outskirts of Stratford-upon-Avon will increase employment opportunities in the rural urban fringe area, coupled with improvements to bus services and highway maintenance the proposal will have a positive impact over the short medium and long term.
12	Protect the integrity of the district's countryside.	The proposed site is located to the south west of Stratford-upon-Avon, on a greenfield site. Developing at this location could disrupt the integrity of the districts countryside through its location on the urban rural fringe.	-	+/-	+/-	ongoing	permanent	local	medium	medium	Minor	positive and negative	Yes	The plan already includes a policy which protects the greenbelt from inappropriate development, which could help mitigate the proposal. Sensitive landscape design will also help mitigate intrusive landscape effects whilst at the same time contributing to green infrastructure assets.
13	Provide affordable, environmentally sound and good quality housing for all.	No significant effects at this level of detail.									Neutral		No	
14	Safeguard and improve community health, safety and well being.	No significant effects at this level of detail.									Neutral		No	
15	Develop a dynamic, diverse and knowledge-based economy that excels in innovation with higher value, lower impact activities.	Directly supports the creation of employment opportunities.	+	+	+	ongoing	permanent but reversible	local and regional	medium	medium	Moderate	positive	No	Support for job opportunities, and investment in employment areas directly feeds back into the local economy in the short term through the provision of jobs. If the money earned by employees stays within the locality, through local spending the policy could lead to a positive multiplier effect through boosting other local businesses.
Overall Effect		The policy of locating an employment site to the south of Alcester Road in Stratford-upon-Avon will have benefits for landscape, biodiversity, climate change emission levels, sustainable transportation, barriers and the local economy. The potential issues related to this policy concern damage to potential archaeological assets and ridge and furrow as well as to the landscape character of the area.												
Proposed Mitigation		The presence of ridge and furrow land on site constitutes a residual adverse effect and should be avoided where possible. Further investigations should be undertaken with regard to the archaeological features on site. Design considerations can help mitigate adverse effects on the landscape value of the area. Sensitive design may also help deliver green infrastructure benefits.												

Key														
The 'Duration' column is noted as:	Major negative effect	--	Magnitude of significance is illustrated as:	Adverse	Severe	Major	Moderate	Minor	Superior	Major	Moderate	Minor	Beneficial	
	Negative effect	-												
	Positive effect	+												
	Major positive effect	++												

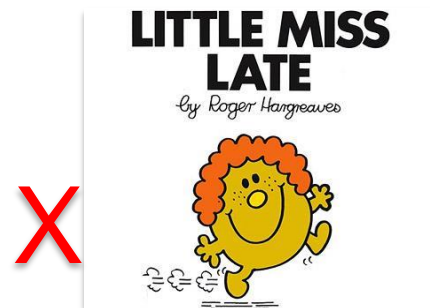
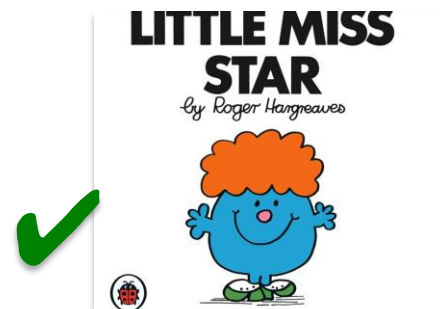


Publication

Addendum format?

Audit trail

Compliance check

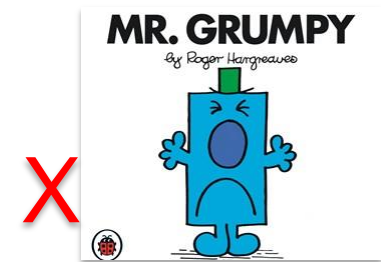
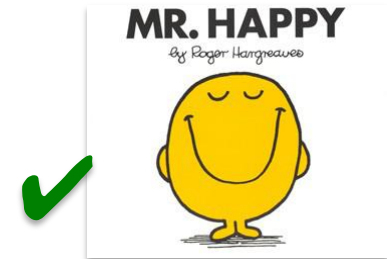




Post-Adoption and Monitoring

Post-Adoption Statement

Monitoring of predicted effects





HRA Screening

Screening is the process of identifying likely significant effects.

If your plan has significant environmental effects and cannot be readily avoided or mitigated without further evidence being required, appropriate assessment is likely.

We do not anticipate this will be the case.

Consult Natural England.

