

# **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan**

## **Environmental Report**

October 2021



## Quality information

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## Table of Contents

Non-technical summary .....	i
1. Introduction .....	1
2. What is the plan seeking to achieve? .....	2
3. What is the scope of the SEA? .....	5
Part 1: What has plan-making/ SEA involved to this point? .....	6
4. Introduction (to Part 1) .....	7
5. Defining scenarios .....	8
6. Scenarios assessment.....	16
7. The preferred approach .....	20
Part 2: What are the SEA findings at this stage?.....	22
8. Introduction (to Part 2) .....	23
9. Assessment of the WNP .....	25
10. Conclusions and recommendations .....	32
Part 3: What are the next steps? .....	34
11. Plan finalisation .....	35
12. Monitoring .....	35
Appendices.....	36
Appendix I: Meeting the Regulations .....	37
Appendix II: The scope of the SEA.....	41

# Non-technical summary

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) 2021-2033

The Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) is currently being prepared as a Neighbourhood Development Plan under the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. The Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared in the context of the adopted East Herts District Plan (2018).

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 positive effects. Central to the SEA process is publication of an Environmental Report alongside the draft plan that presents certain required information. The aim is to inform the consultation and, in turn, plan finalisation.

Preparing the Environmental Report essentially involves answering three questions:

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**

## This Environmental Report NTS

This is the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the Environmental Report for the WNP, in which the three questions are answered in turn. Firstly, there is a need to set the scene further by answering: *What's the scope of the SEA?*

## What is the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is reflected in a list of topics and objectives, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological 'framework' for assessment. The SEA framework is presented below:

*Table A: The SEA framework*

SEA topic	SEA objective
Biodiversity	Protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity habitats and species; achieving a net environmental gain and stronger ecological networks.
Climate change (including flood risk)	Avoid and manage flood risk and support the resilience of the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan area to the potential effects of climate change.
Historic environment	Protect, enhance and manage the integrity, distinctive character and setting of heritage assets and the wider historic environment.

SEA topic	SEA objective
Health and wellbeing	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the WNP area.
Landscape	Protect, enhance and manage the distinctive character and appearance of landscapes.
Population and housing	Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing which meets the needs of occupants throughout their lives.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

## Plan making/SEA up to this point

An important element of the required SEA process involves assessing **reasonable alternatives** in time to inform development of the draft plan, and then publishing assessment findings in the Environmental Report.

As such, Part 1 of this report explains how work was undertaken to develop and assess a 'reasonable' range of alternative approaches to the allocation of land for housing, or **housing growth scenarios**.

The process of arriving at housing growth scenarios involved a process of considering the strategic context ('top down' factors), alongside understanding of the sites available and in contention for allocation ('bottom up' factors). The process is set out in Section 5, and summarised in a flow diagram.

Ultimately three housing growth scenarios were identified as reasonable and so warranting formal assessment under the SEA framework – see Table B.

**Table B: The reasonable housing growth scenarios**  
**N.B. figures are for the EHDC Local Plan period (2011-2033)**

<b>Supply</b>	<b>Scenario 1</b>	<b>Scenario 2</b>	<b>Scenario 3</b>
EHDP growth allocations for Watton-at-Stone	92	92	92
Site allocated in Policy WAS3, Walkern Rd. (S1)	60		60
Site allocated in Policy WAS4, Stevenage Rd. (S17/S18)		60	60
Brownfield site allocations in Policy WAS5: at Station Rd. former HCC Depot (15), at Great Innings car park (2) and at Perrywood Lane (2)	19	19	19
Completions since 2017 (2) + dwellings currently under construction (1).	3	3	3
<b>Total supply 2011-2033</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>142</b>
% difference from EHDC Local Plan Policy VILL1 Group 1 Villages requirement (92)	<b>-11%</b>	<b>-11%</b>	<b>+54%</b>

Table C presents the assessment. Presented subsequently is the Watton-at-Stone Community Steering Group's response to the assessment, i.e. reasons for supporting the preferred approach, which is **Scenario 3**.

#### **Assessment methodology:**

Within each row of Table C (i.e. for each of the topics that comprise the SEA framework) the columns to the right hand firstly rank the scenarios in order of preference and then, secondly, highlight instances of a predicted positive (**green**), minor positive (**light green**), minor negative (**amber**), or significant negative (**red**), effect on the baseline. Also, '=' is used to denote instances where the alternatives perform on a par (i.e. it not possible to differentiate between them). Where there is uncertainty this is denoted as '?

*Table C: Housing growth scenarios assessment*

Topic	Scenario 1 Walkern Rd. & Brownfield Sites	Scenario 2 Stevenage Rd. & Brownfield Sites	Scenario 3 Walkern Rd., Stevenage Rd. & Brownfield Sites
Biodiversity	=2 Neutral Equal second	1 Neutral First	=2 Neutral Equal second
Climate change (including flood risk)	=2? Amber Equal second with uncertainty	1 Neutral First	=2? Amber Equal second with uncertainty
Health and wellbeing	=2 Neutral Equal second	=2 Neutral Equal second	1 Light green Minor positive First
Historic environment	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference
Landscape	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference
Population & housing	=2 Red Significant negative Equal second	=2 Red Significant negative Equal second	1 Green Significant positive First
Transportation	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference

## Summary discussion

The assessment shows a mixed picture, with each of the scenarios associated with pros and cons. Scenario 3 is the best-performing with the most positives and no major negatives. Scenarios 1 and 2 perform similarly both scoring a significant negative with respect to population and housing. However, it does not automatically follow that Scenario 3 is best-performing overall, as the topics are not assumed to be of equal importance. It is for the decision-maker (also consultees), not this assessment, to assign weight to the various pros and cons and then arrive at a conclusion on which scenario is best-performing overall.

The plan-makers responded to the growth scenarios assessment is as follows:

“The preferred approach is to take forward Scenario 3 as the basis for the WNP”. This approach is considered to broadly align with the findings of the assessment, which finds Scenario 3 to perform well in terms of the majority of key sustainability issues, both in absolute terms and relative terms.

Whilst no significant negative effects are predicted for Scenario 3 it is recognised that the location of the footbridge across the River Beane in a Flood Zone 3b location is a potential constraint. However, it may be possible to address the risk by incorporating appropriate mitigation measures in the design of the bridge (e.g. height of bridge and type of support/ foundation structure).

With regards to Scenarios 1 and 2, the assessment highlights a major significant negative, namely the fact that these would fail to meet the minimum housing requirement set by East Herts District Council in the EHDP. Additionally, due to the lower growth proposed, scenarios 1 and 2 are less likely to engender as many community benefits as scenario 3.

The process of defining and assessing growth scenarios serves to highlight that there are no easy choices, in respect of planning for growth at Watton-at-Stone. Nonetheless there is a need to make a choice and the Steering Group views Scenario 3 as best representing sustainable development on balance. Importantly, the preferred approach will deliver benefits to the Neighbourhood Area and meet the requirements set out in the Local Plan.

## Assessment findings at this stage

Part 2 of the Environmental Report presents an assessment of the WNP as a whole, as it stands at the current time (pre-submission plan).

Assessment findings are presented as a series of narratives under the SEA framework. The assessment reaches the following overall conclusions:

Overall, the Plan appraisal has served to highlight the potential for both positive and negative effects of significance.

Significant positive effects are anticipated in relation to the population and housing SEA theme as a result of the growth strategy which will meet and exceed strategic growth targets set in EHDP helping to improve choice and potentially affordability in the market and generating community benefits. The additional growth also serves to provide a buffer to better secure housing delivery.

No significant negative effects are predicted but minor negative effects are highlighted in relation to landscape. This relates to the spatial strategy which focuses the bulk of development within the Green Belt, areas that are currently open fields. The development proposed at the Walkern Road and Stevenage Road sites will inevitably alter the existing landscape character.

Minor negative effects are also anticipated pertaining to the historic environment SEA theme primarily due to the potential effects on an Area of Archaeological Significance at the Walkern Road and Stevenage Road sites. Whilst policy mitigation is provided to a certain extent, an archaeological survey and further consultation with Historic England are recommended as the Plan progresses.

The growth strategy is also considered likely to increase traffic and congestion within the Plan area to some degree and this has minor negative implications for transportation.

Uncertain minor negative effects are forecast in relation to the climate change (adaptation) SEA theme due to the provision of a foot/cycle bridge across the River Beane; in a functional flood plain (Flood Zone 3b). This is potentially amenable to mitigation through appropriate design and safety measures but would need further discussion/ agreement with the Environment Agency.

Minor positive effects are expected in relation to health and wellbeing, predominantly reflecting the potential for connected and resilient development and the allocation of Local Green Space, recreation facilities and walkways and cycle routes. Broadly neutral effects are concluded in relation to biodiversity with no significant deviation from the baseline anticipated.

## Next steps

This Environmental Report is published alongside the pre-submission version of the WNP. Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Neighbourhood Plan Committee, when finalising the plan for submission.

The 'submission' version of the plan will then be submitted to EHDC (alongside an Environmental Report Update, if necessary). The plan and supporting evidence will be then published for further consultation, and then submitted for examination.

If the outcome of the Independent Examination is favourable, the WNP will then be subject to a referendum, and the plan will be 'made' if more than 50% of those who vote are in support. Once made, the WNP will become part of the Development Plan for East Herts District.

# 1. Introduction

## Background

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan ('WNP') 2021–2033.
- 1.2 The WNP is being prepared in the context of the adopted East Hertfordshire District Plan (EHDP). Once 'made', the WNP will form part of the East Herts Development Plan.
- 1.3 The WNP will be used to guide and shape development within the Plan area.
- 1.4 SEA is a required process for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to minimising negative effects and maximising positive effects.<sup>1</sup>

## SEA explained

- 1.5 It is a requirement that the SEA process is undertaken in-line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 1.6 In-line with the Regulations, a report (known as the Environmental Report) must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan that "*identifies, describes and evaluates*" the likely significant effects of implementing "*the plan, and reasonable alternatives*".<sup>2</sup> The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.7 More specifically, the Report must answer the following three questions:
  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?

## This Environmental Report

- 1.8 This report is the Environmental Report for the WNP. It is published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the Plan, under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).
- 1.9 This report answers questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn, to provide the required information.<sup>3</sup> Each question is answered within a discrete 'part' of the report.
- 1.10 However, before answering Q1, two further introductory sections are presented to further set the scene.

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<sup>1</sup> 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. The WNP was subject to screening, on the basis of which it was determined that there *is* a requirement for SEA (i.e. the plan was 'screened-in').

<sup>2</sup> Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See **Appendix A** for further explanation of the report structure including its regulatory basis.

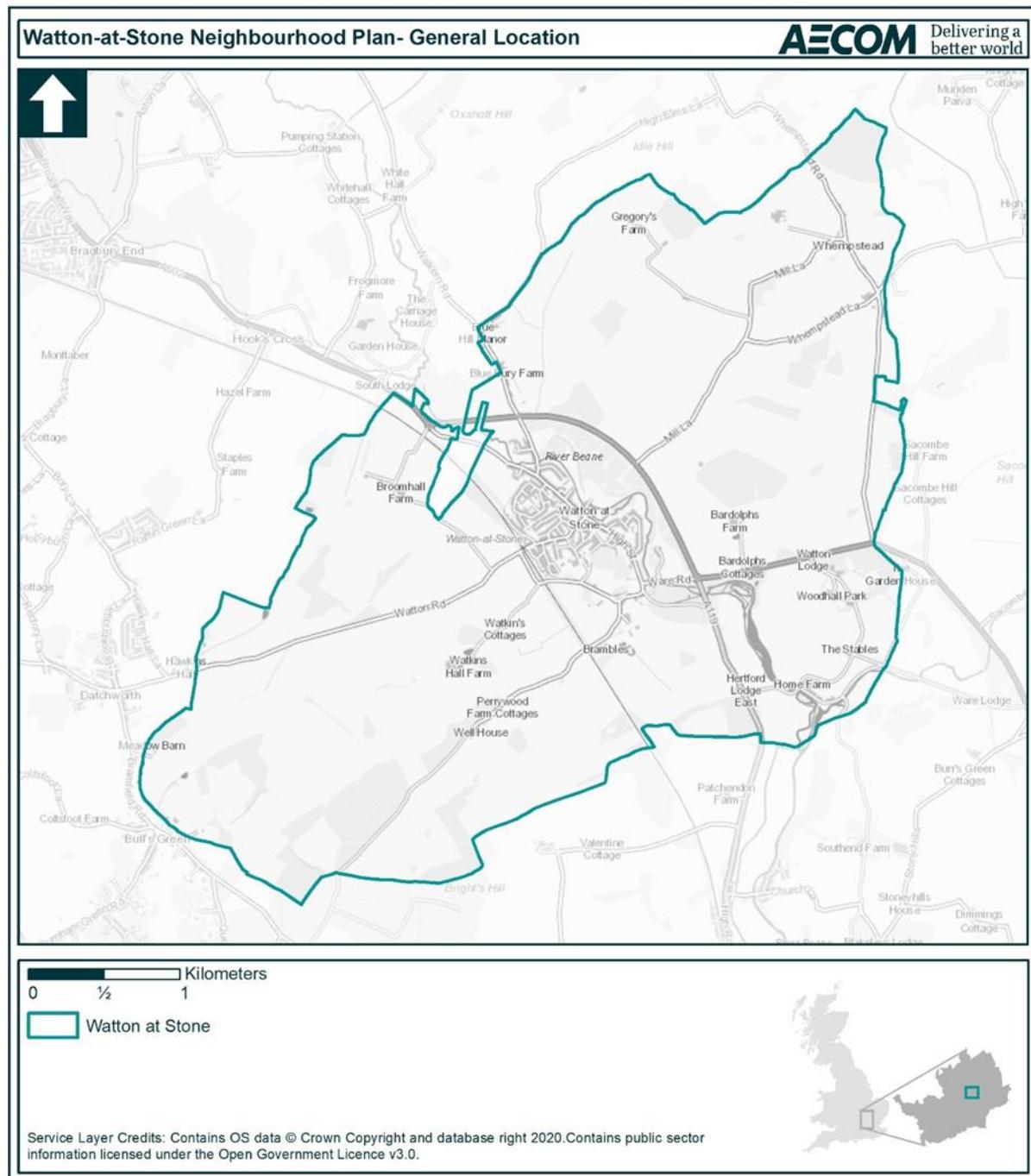
## 2. What is the plan seeking to achieve?

### Introduction

2.1 This section considers the context provided by the applicable Local Plan which is the East Herts District Plan (EHD) before setting out the established WNP vision and objectives.

2.2 Figure 2.1 shows the plan area.

*Figure 2.1: The WNP area*



## The EHDP

2.3 The settlement hierarchy set out in the adopted EHDP identifies Watton-at-Stone as a group 1 village. Group 1 villages are described as '*the most sustainable villages in the District. Development for housing, employment, leisure, recreation and community facilities will be permitted in Group 1 villages.*' Growth in these areas is described as '*helping sustain existing shops, services and facilities, deliver affordable housing, provide local job opportunities and deliver community benefits.*' Paragraph 10.3.3 adds that '*Group 1 Villages will need to accommodate at least a 10% increase in housing stock (based on the 2011 Census) over the 16-year period between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2033*' In the case of Watton-at-Stone this equates to 92 new dwellings.

2.4 EHDP Policy VILL1 also states that Group 1 villages inset from the Green Belt such as Watton-at-Stone are 'encouraged to consider accommodating development in their Neighbourhood Plans' and 'where such proposals would involve changes to Green Belt boundaries, the District Council will consider making such amendments either through the next review of the District Plan or through a separate Site Allocations Development Plan Document'. The policy goes on to say '*these villages will be encouraged to consider whether it is appropriate, through the formulation of a Neighbourhood Plan, to accommodate additional development especially where it contributes to wider sustainability objectives and the delivery of community benefits. Where such proposals would involve changes to Green Belt boundaries, the District Council will consider making these amendments either through the next Review of the District Plan or through a separate Site Allocations Development Plan Document if necessary.*'

2.5 EHDP Policy GBRI1 'Green Belt' states that Watton-at-Stone '*will be encouraged to consider whether it is appropriate through the formulation of a Neighbourhood Plan to accommodate additional development especially where it contributes to wider sustainability objectives and the delivery of community benefits. Where such proposals would involve changes to Green Belt boundaries, the District Council will consider making these amendments either through the next Review of the District Plan or through a separate Site Allocations Development Plan Document if necessary.*'

## The WNP objectives

2.6 The WNP is being prepared by Watton-at-Stone Community Steering Group (WCSG) and will cover the period 2021 to 2033.

2.7 The following vision has been established:

"Watton at Stone will continue to be a thriving village hub, with a strong and diverse community. It will be well served by green spaces, local amenities, good physical and digital infrastructure, and will support local enterprise. The parish will protect all aspects of its heritage, including the character of its dwellings, its natural environment and rural setting. At the same time, the village will welcome new residents and accept thoughtful, well designed, sustainable development, in line with the needs of existing and future residents and balanced by appropriate additional infrastructure and amenities for the expanded community."

2.8 A series of 17 objectives have also been established to guide plan preparation, with a view to achieving the vision. The objectives cover five key themes:

1. Housing development strategy
2. Sustainable transport
3. Sustainable community services and facilities
4. Protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environments
5. Support for business

# 3. What is the scope of the SEA?

## Introduction

3.1 The aim here is to introduce the reader to the scope of the SEA, i.e. the sustainability themes and objectives that should be a focus of the SEA. Supplementary information is presented in Appendix B.

## Consultation

3.2 The SEA Regulations require that “*when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies*”. In England, the consultation bodies are the Environment Agency, Historic England, and Natural England. As such, these authorities were consulted over the period August to September 2021, and the responses received are detailed in Appendix B.

## The SEA framework

3.3 Table 3.1 presents a list of topics and objectives that together form the back-bone of the SEA scope. Together they comprise a ‘framework’ under which to undertake assessment.

*Table 3.1 The SEA framework*

SEA topic	SEA objective
Biodiversity	Protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity habitats and species; achieving a net environmental gain and stronger ecological networks.
Climate change (including flood risk)	Avoid and manage flood risk and support the resilience of the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan area to the potential effects of climate change.
Historic environment	Protect, enhance and manage the integrity, distinctive character and setting of heritage assets and the wider historic environment.
Health and wellbeing	Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the WNP area.
Landscape	Protect, enhance and manage the distinctive character and appearance of landscapes.
Population and housing	Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing which meets the needs of occupants throughout their lives.
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

## **Part 1: What has plan-making/ SEA involved to this point?**

# 4. Introduction (to Part 1)

## Overview

- 4.1 Work on the WNP has been underway for some while, with several informal consultation events having been held including an Open Day in April 2016 followed by 6 weeks of active consultation. A further consultation took place in November 2016 on the emerging themes and policies for the WNP. A final consultation took place in January 2020 in the form of a public exhibition. This attracted 270 visitors and 145 questionnaires were completed. The results of the consultations are available on the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood Plan [website](#).
- 4.2 This is important context; however, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work to date. Rather, the aim is to explain work undertaken to develop and appraise **reasonable alternatives** in summer 2021.
- 4.3 More specifically, this part of the report presents information on the consideration given to reasonable alternative approaches to addressing a particular issue that is of central importance to the plan, namely the allocation of land for housing, or **housing growth scenarios**.

## Why focus on housing growth scenarios?

- 4.4 The decision was taken to develop and assess reasonable alternatives ('scenarios') in relation to the matter of housing growth in light of the Plan objectives (see para 2.8), and because there is the likelihood of being able to differentiate between the merits of alternatives/scenarios in respect of 'significant effects'. National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that SEA should focus on matters likely to give rise to significant effects.

## Who's responsibility?

- 4.5 It is important to be clear that:
  - **Defining scenarios** - is ultimately the responsibility of the plan-maker, although the SEA consultant (AECOM) is well placed to advise.
  - **Assessing scenarios** - is the responsibility of the SEA consultant.
  - **Selecting a preferred scenario** - is the responsibility of the plan-maker.

## Structure of this part of the report

- 4.6 This part of the report is structured as follows:
  - **Chapter 5** - explains the process of defining scenarios;
  - **Chapter 6** - presents the outcomes of assessing scenarios;
  - **Chapter 7** - explains reasons for supporting the preferred approach.

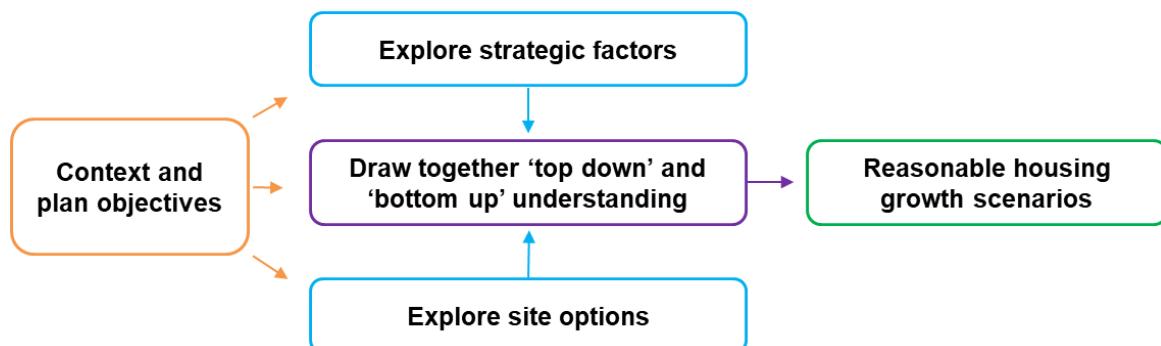
# 5. Defining scenarios

## Introduction

5.1 The aim here is to explain a process that led to the definition of a reasonable range of housing growth scenarios for assessment, and thereby present “an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with”.<sup>4</sup>

5.2 Specifically, there is a need to: **1)** explain strategic factors with a bearing on defining scenarios; **2)** discuss work completed to examine site options (i.e. sites potentially in contention for allocation); and then **3)** explain how the ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ understanding generated through steps (1) and (2) were married together in order to arrive at reasonable housing growth scenarios.

*Figure 5.1: Defining scenarios*



## Strategic factors

5.3 The aim of this section is to explore the strategic factors with a bearing on the establishment of reasonable housing growth scenarios. Specifically, this section of the report explores:

- Quantum – how many new homes must the WNP provide for?
- Broad distribution – broadly where is more/less suited to allocation?

## Quantum

5.4 As discussed in Section 2, the EHDP identifies a need for the WNP to provide for 92 homes over the 16-year period between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2033.

5.5 The EHDP makes it clear that requirement is a minimum figure, and is generally supportive of considering higher growth options.<sup>5</sup> It also states (paragraph 14.4.3) that there is currently a significant unmet need for affordable housing in the District. Affordable housing need can be one reason for seeking to provide

<sup>4</sup> Schedule 2(8) of the SEA Regulations.

<sup>5</sup> Paragraph 10.3.4, which deals with Group 1 Villages including Watton-at-stone, requires “at least” 10% increase in housing stock (10% equates to 92 units for Watton-at-Stone), adding that village development boundaries in Group 1 Villages (such as watton-at-Stone) located in the rural area beyond the Green Belt may need to be amended through Neighbourhood Plans in order to accommodate this growth.

for higher growth (recognising that affordable housing primarily comes forward as a proportion of market housing).<sup>6</sup>

5.6 It is good practice to provide for a 'supply buffer' on top of the requirement; for example, the plan might aim for a 10% buffer over-and-above 92 homes outstanding requirement figure, which would suggest a need to identify a total supply of circa 101 homes.

## Broad distribution

5.7 There are several broad spatial considerations influencing housing growth scenarios in the Parish. The village is physically contained by the bypass to the north east, the railway line to the west and Church Lane to the south. Through the centre of this area runs the High Street which contains numerous heritage assets, key buildings and amenities. Running parallel to the High Street is the River Beane which is a chalk stream of significant ecological importance. The Beane also creates the setting for extensive open woodland, public green areas and fluvial flood zone. The Watton-at-Stone Conservation Area (CA) covers a substantial part of the village, extending from Watton Green along the High Street including land on either side and from Walkern Road at the northern end to where the old road to Hertford joins the A119.

5.8 Watton at Stone is constricted by the Green Belt with the existing settlement boundary drawn tightly around the village. The majority of land within the settlement is now developed with only small parcels of brownfield left, and the proposed revisions to the Green Belt in the EHDP will only bring in relatively small parcels within the boundary of the built-up area. Therefore, additional land needs to be released from the Green Belt and included within the settlement.

5.9 The mechanism to achieve this is provided by the EHDP policy GBR1 (Green Belt) which states that villages such as Watton-at-Stone '*will be encouraged to consider whether it is appropriate through the formulation of a neighbourhood plan to accommodate additional development especially where it contributes to the wider sustainability objectives and the delivery of community benefits. Where such proposals would involve changes to Green Belt boundaries, the District Council will consider making these amendments either through the next Review of the District Plan or through a separate Site Allocations Development Plan Document if necessary*'. Para 4.3.2 of the EHDP states that in '*East Herts there is a combination of factors that exist locally that together constitute the exceptional circumstances that require the Council to amend its Green Belt boundaries. This includes the high level of housing need, including affordable homes, exacerbated by a significant backlog of unmet need, and the lack of suitable alternative locations to the north of the District*'.

## Site options

5.10 Having discussed strategic, 'top-down' factors with a bearing on establishing housing growth scenarios (i.e. alternative packages of site allocations to provide for the outstanding housing requirement) the next step is to consider the sites options that are in contention for allocation.

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<sup>6</sup> This point is well understood in the context of Local Plans, with paragraph [024](#) of the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on housing needs assessment explaining: "*An increase in the total housing figures included in the plan may need to be considered where it could help deliver the required number of affordable homes.*"

5.11 A key starting point is the Site Options Assessment (SOA, 2018), which examines sites, classifying the suitability of each for development on a three point (red-amber-green) scale. The assessment considers all the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA)<sup>7</sup> sites assessed as being suitable, viable and achievable for development. The SOA also includes sites identified by Watton at Stone Parish Council (WSPC) as part of the November 2016 WNP consultation event.

5.12 The EHDC had indicated that the WNP should consider whether it wishes to release Green Belt sites for development (as also indicated for two of the rejected sites in the SLAA). Therefore, the SOA includes those sites in the assessment, considering them in the context of the five purposes of the Green Belt. These are defined in the NPPF as;

- Purpose 1: to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- Purpose 2: to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- Purpose 3: to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- Purpose 4: to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and,
- Purpose 5: to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

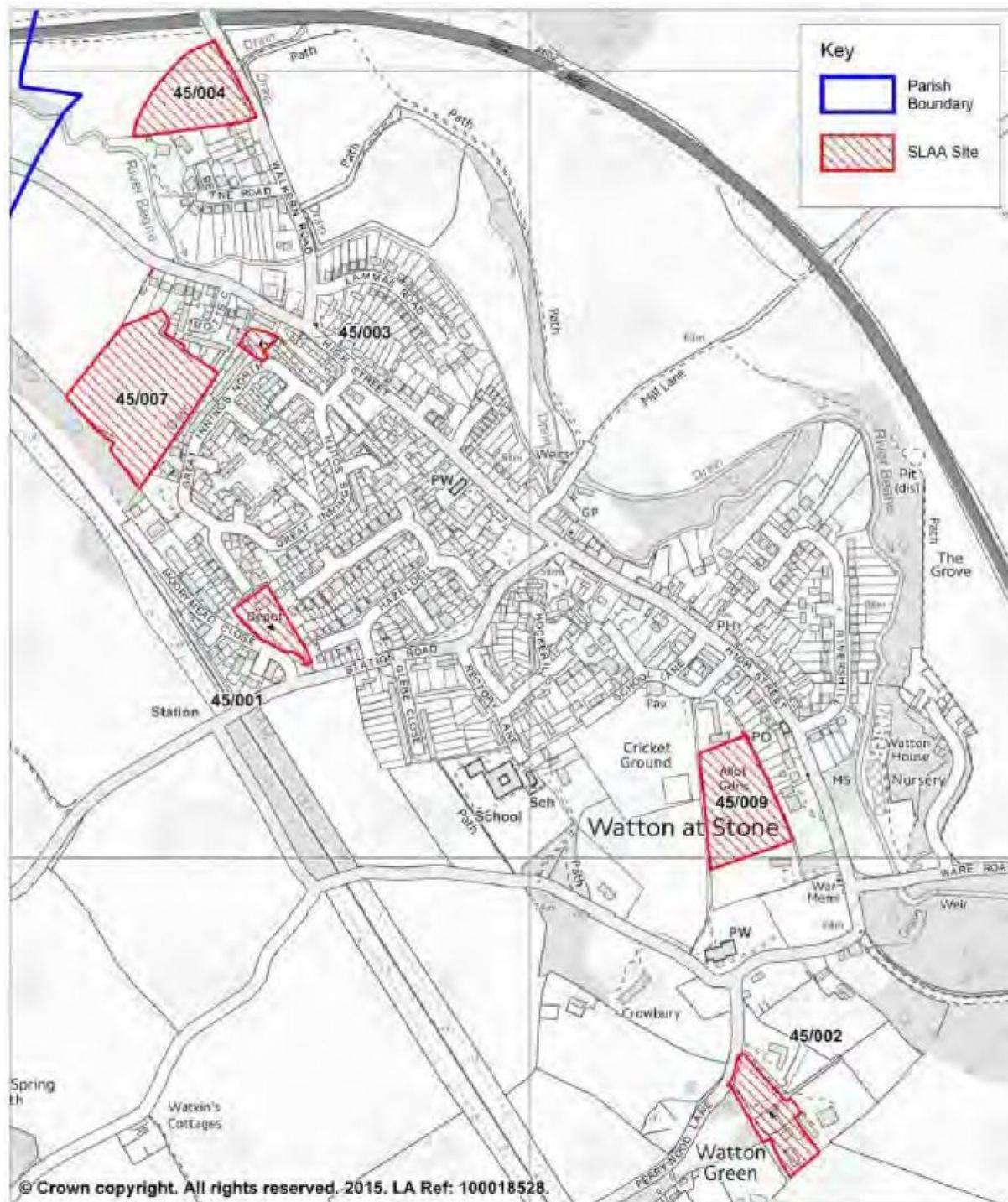
5.13 Of the 6 SLAA sites (within the WNP area) assessed, only one; The Station Rd. depot (SLAA ref. 45/001), was deemed suitable available and achievable and another 2; Land north of 25 Walkern Rd. (SLAA ref. 45/004) and land north of Great Innings Rd.(SLAA ref. 45/007) were considered well related to existing settlement but only suitable for allocation through Green Belt release in the WNP. The SLAA sites are shown in Figure 5.2.

5.14 The WSPC 2016 consultation produced 21 sites. Some of these were duplicate sites already assessed in the SLAA. One site (SOA S15; the former HCC depot site mentioned above) was assessed in the SLAA and deemed suitable for allocation.

5.15 Normally the SOA would not reassess sites rejected in the SLAA but in this instance, the SLAA and EHDC have confirmed that two of these rejected sites (SLAA site 45/004 land north of 25 Walkern Road and SLAA site 45/007 land north of Great Innings North) could potentially be looked at again through the NP. Two other sites rejected in the SLAA because of the Green Belt issue were also included in the assessment for the sake of completeness.

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<sup>7</sup> East Herts District Plan Strategic Land Availability Assessment ( 2017) available at [https://cdn-eastherts.onwebcurl.com/s3fs-public/2019-09/Strategic%20Land%20Availability%20Assessment%20\(SLAA\).pdf](https://cdn-eastherts.onwebcurl.com/s3fs-public/2019-09/Strategic%20Land%20Availability%20Assessment%20(SLAA).pdf)

**Figure 5-2 Map of the Watton-at-Stone Sites in the 2017 SLAA**

5.16 In total the SOA assessed 21 sites (SLAA sites plus WSPC sites, omitting duplicate sites and sites with extant planning permission). The assessment concluded that the former depot site was suitable, available and achievable (RAG rated Green). A further site (S21 former Doctor's site at Great Innings Rd.) was under the threshold for assessment but also rated Green (0.075 ha). Nine of the sites were not considered appropriate for allocation, primarily due to lack of certainty regarding their availability. Four sites were not considered to require allocation within the NP as they are already afforded protection for their purpose as they are designated open spaces within the EHDP. Five sites were assessed as potentially being appropriate for allocation or at least further consideration by WSPC. Two of these were considered suitable for allocation but with significant constraints around flooding; two were identified by the SLAA as being suitable for allocation with a policy change around the Green Belt; and one other is considered suitable for allocation, again with a policy change regarding the Green Belt. In total, these three sites (NP sites S1, S17 and S18), if all were allocated following a policy change, would have the potential to provide up to 270 new homes in the village – the majority of these would be on the Green Belt sites. The assessment noted that S17 and S18, but particularly the latter, would also need to be carefully considered as the landscape and visual impact of development on either of these sites at the northern approach to the village could be significant.

5.17 In conclusion, the following sites are progressed for further discussion:

- The Former HDC depot site (SOA ref. S15, SLAA ref. 45/001). This is a 0.5 ha brownfield site rated Green in the SOA and accepted in the SLAA as having potential for development. The site can potentially accommodate 15 dwellings based on a density of 30 dwellings per hectare (dph).
- Former Doctor's site, Great Innings North (SOA S21, SLAA 45/003); a 0.075 ha brownfield site assessed as being suitable for residential development in the SOA (Green rated). The site has capacity to accommodate up to 2 dwellings.
- Site West of Walkern Rd. (SOA ref. S1, SLAA ref. 45/004). The SOA concluded the site (2.3 ha) could potentially be removed from the Green Belt and that residential use of the site could be appropriate as it does not pose a significant risk to 4 of the 5 Green Belt purposes (purposes 1, 2, 3 or 4). However, the SOA states that some parts of the site are more appropriate than others. The site was assessed to accommodate up to 57 dwellings based on a density of 25. The WNP allocates the site for 60 dwellings based on a density of 30dph.
- Site at Stevenage Rd. East (SOA S17, part of SLAA 45/007). The SOA found that this 3.2 ha site could potentially be removed from the Green Belt considering it appropriate for residential as it does not pose a significant risk to purposes 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the Green Belt. The SOA added that some parts of the site were more appropriate than others, adding it may also be that this site should only be considered in conjunction with S18 to help create a more defensible edge. The SLAA 45/007 covers part of the southern WSPC site and assessed to accommodate up to 55 dwellings (on 2.2 ha). The WNP allocates the site for 60 units based on a density of 30dph.
- Site at Stevenage Rd. West (SOA S18). The SOA noted this 5.25 ha site could potentially be removed from the Green Belt and considered appropriate for residential use as it does not pose a significant risk to purposes 1, 2, 3 or 4 of

greenbelt. The SOA added that some parts of the site were more appropriate than others and that it may also be that this site should only be considered in conjunction with S17 to help create a more defensible edge. The site has a capacity of up to 131 if all of it is developed.

5.18 It is interesting to note that the 2013 Green Belt Review had an option suggesting that sites north and north-west of Watton at Stone could be released in order to strengthen the boundary – this included NP Site S17, S18 and the southern part of S19 (south of the River Beane). It recommended these sites could be released, using the strong continuous boundaries provided by the railway line to the west, the River Beane and the A602 to the north and east as permanent, defensible Green Belt boundaries.

*Figure 5.2: Sites Assessed in the SOA for allocation*



*Sites not to scale.*

## The reasonable scenarios

5.19 To recap, the outstanding requirement, having accounted for completions and commitments since the start of the plan period, is at least 92 homes.

5.20 On the basis of the discussion above, other than the two small brownfield sites combined would deliver around 17 units, there are effectively 2 sites (S1 and the combined S17/S18), all within the Green Belt, with the potential to deliver supply that counts towards this requirement where the decision to support this supply is relatively non-contentious (given the flexibility offered by the EHDP policies pertaining to Green Belt boundaries).

5.21 In terms of dwelling capacities; The SOA Site S1 (West of Walkern Rd) is estimated to deliver up to 60 dwellings. The site is being promoted by the landowner and considered available. SOA Sites S17 (Stevenage Rd East) and S18 are owned by the same land owner. Site S17, on its own, would require a new road as it does not have suitable access being its isolated from the high street and Great Innings Road by existing development. SOA site S18 would potentially deliver 131 units if the site is developed in its entirety. However, a substantial part of the site is outside the NP boundary and the SOA notes that this is a prominent site on the northern approach to the village, and therefore sensitive in terms of landscape and visual amenity but some development could be appropriate at the eastern end of the site closest to existing dwellings. The site is partially within a Flood Zone 2 (north eastern boundary along High Street). Access to the site can be provided via the High Street. Taking the landscape sensitivity issue into consideration the WNP proposes to develop only the part of the combined S17/S18 site, an area that is below 65m contour level in order to minimise potential impacts on the landscape. The remaining area of the site (above the 65m contour) is designated as Local Green space LGS7. This approach would yield around 60 dwellings.

5.22 In conclusion, on the basis of the discussion above (i.e. all of Section 5, read as a whole), there are two reasonable housing growth scenarios for assessment:

- **Scenario 1** – Allocate the brownfield sites (up to 19 units) plus Green Belt site S1 at Walkern Road (60 units). When considered with completions since 2017 and dwellings currently under construction, this scenario would deliver around 82 dwellings in total.
- **Scenario 2** – Allocate the brownfield sites (up to 19 units) plus Green Belt site S17/S18 at Stevenage Road (60 units) to deliver around 82 new dwellings in total (including completions and dwellings under construction).
- **Scenario 3** – Allocate the brownfield sites (up to 19 units), and the two Green Belt sites S1 (60 units at Walkern Road) plus site S17/18 (60 units Stevenage Road) to yield up to 142 new homes (including completions and homes under construction).

# 6. Scenarios assessment

## Introduction

6.1 The aim of this section is to present assessment findings in relation to the three housing growth scenarios introduced above, and set out in Table 6.1.

*Table 6.1: The reasonable housing growth scenarios*

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
<b>Supply</b>			
Additional housing at brownfield sites:	19	19	19
Completions since 2017+ units under construction	3	3	3
Allocation of Site S1 (Green Belt)	60		60
Allocation of Site S17/18 (Green Belt)		60	60
<b>Total supply 2021-2035</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>142</b>
% difference from EHDP Policy VILL1 requirement of 92 dwellings	-11%	-11%	54%

## Assessment findings

6.2 Table 6.2 presents assessment findings in relation to the three scenarios.

6.3 With regards to methodology within each row (i.e. for each of the topics that comprise the SEA framework) of Table 6.1 the columns to the right hand side seek to both **categorise** the performance of each scenario in terms of 'significant effects' on the baseline (using red, amber and light green and dark green)<sup>8</sup> and also **rank** the alternatives in order of performance. Also, '=' is used to denote instances where the alternatives perform on a par (i.e. it not possible to differentiate between them). The appraisal matrix is followed by a discussion, setting out reasons for the appraisal conclusions reached, with reference to available evidence.

<sup>8</sup> Red indicates a significant negative effect; amber a negative effect that is of limited or uncertain significance; light green a positive effect that is of limited or uncertain significance; and dark green a significant positive effect. No colour is assigned where effects are considered to be neutral or uncertain.

Table 6.2: Housing growth scenarios assessment

Topic	Scenario 1 Walkern Rd. & Brownfield Sites	Scenario 2 Stevenage Rd. & Brownfield Sites	Scenario 3 Walkern Rd., Stevenage Rd. & Brownfield Sites
Biodiversity	=2 Neutral Equal second	1 Neutral First	=2 Neutral Equal second
Climate change (including flood risk)	=2? Amber Equal second with uncertainty	1 Neutral First	=2? Amber Equal second with uncertainty
Health and wellbeing	=2 Neutral Equal second	=2 Neutral Equal second	1 Light green Minor positive First
Historic environment	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference
Landscape	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference
Population & housing	=2 Red Significant negative Equal second	=2 Red Significant negative Equal second	1 Green Significant positive First
Transportation	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference	= Amber no preference

## Discussion

The assessment shows a mixed picture, with each of the scenarios associated with pros and cons. Scenario 3 is the best-performing with the most positives and no major negatives. Scenarios 1 and 2 perform similarly, both scoring a significant negative with respect to population and housing as they fail to meet EHDP minimum housing requirement for the parish. However, it is for the decision-maker (also consultees), not this assessment, to assign weight to the various pros and cons and then arrive at a conclusion on which scenario is best-performing overall.

## Biodiversity

There are fairly limited sensitivities associated with the sites across the growth scenarios. There are no designated biodiversity sites in the vicinity of the greenfield sites (WAS3 Walkern Rd and WAS4 Stevenage Rd.). Similarly, no environmental constraints are identified in the SOA for either of these sites. The Walkern Rd. site is bounded by the River Beane at the western boundary of the site. Polluted run-off from the development can potentially have adverse effects on water quality in the river though this is to some extent mitigated by the existing green buffer and the WNP policies which require the incorporation of SuDS. Further protection is offered in Policy WAS3 which seeks to ensure that development here does not produce polluting runoff flow into the river. Scenario 2 which involves developing the smaller brownfield sites and the Stevenage Road site is slightly less sensitive as it does not involve development in the vicinity of the Beane. **In conclusion, Scenario 2 is judged to be preferable**, although this is somewhat marginal. With regards to significant effects, it is not possible to conclude that any of the scenarios would result in significant effects. Therefore, the overall conclusion is that biodiversity concerns are fairly limited.

## Climate change

The WNP has limited scope for significant effects on climate change mitigation. Therefore, this section is primarily concerned with climate change adaptation, specifically flood risk. Whilst the majority of the NP area is at low risk of flooding (Flood Zone 1), there are areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 along the River Beane. This issue affects the Walkern Road site (Scenarios 1 and 3) which overlaps an area of Flood Zone 2 along its south-western boundary close to the River Beane and development should be avoided in these areas. The proposed development includes a pedestrian/ cycle bridge over the river Beane which falls within a Flood Zone 3b; a functional flood plain, whilst appropriate mitigation may be possible (in agreement with the EA) there remains a degree of uncertainty and therefore potentially minor negative effects remain at this stage. **In conclusion Scenario 2 which does not involve development on the Walkern Road site performs best** with respect to climate change adaptation.

## Health and wellbeing

Scenario 3 performs best with respect to generating community benefits including, recreations / sports facilities (football pitches, a key objective of the Plan). The Stevenage Road site allocated in policy WAS4 includes the provision of additional football provision on land in the same ownership on Mill Lane. Similarly, the Walkern Road site includes the provision of pedestrian/ cycle bridge over the River Beane which is likely to encourage walking/ cycling around the village and improve pedestrian access through the site to the train station. Scenario 3 which provides the highest growth will generate greater S106/CIL funds which could help provide the enhanced community facilities in policy WAS12 such as enhanced youth facilities, football/ recreational areas and accessible GP services. Scenario 1 and 2 involve substantially less development and therefore likely to engender fewer community benefits. **In conclusion Scenario 3 is judged to be preferable** as it has the most potential to deliver important community benefits.

## Historic environment

There are limited sensitivities associated with the sites that are a variable across the growth scenarios. There are no listed buildings within the Walkern Rd and Stevenage Rd sites. The majority of heritage assets within the NP area lie further south of these sites. Similarly, the two Brownfield sites allocated for smaller scale development in policy WAS5 (Brownfield Sites) are not anticipated to engender adverse effects on the historic environment. Policy WAS21 which offers protection to the character of the Watton-at-Stone Conservation Area would apply to all 3 scenarios.

There remains a degree of uncertainty with respect to archaeology as part of the Stevenage Road and Walkern Road sites (allocated for housing in WAS3 and WAS4) as the sites are within an Area of Archaeological Significance. An archaeological survey would be advisable prior to development of the site. Although a degree of protection is offered under the WNP's policy WAS23 (Archaeology) there remains a degree of uncertainty at this stage as to whether appropriate mitigation is possible on these sites. This uncertainty applies to all three scenarios as they all involve one or both sites. Therefore, **all three scenarios are rated minor negative with respect to heritage.**

## Landscape

The Neighbourhood Plan area is located within the Woodhall Park and Watton-at-Stone Slopes Local Character Areas (LCA). Around 60% of the area is Green Belt. All three scenarios would be subject to the Watton-at-Stone Design Code and policies WAS17 (Local green spaces) and WAS18 (Protected views) which offer a degree of protection to the landscape and townscape character of the NP area. However, the two larger greenbelt sites proposed (Walkern Road and Stevenage Road) are both within the Green Belt and currently comprise open fields. Therefore, developing either of these sites will inevitably change the landscape character at the northern boundary of the NP area. The Stevenage Road site is likely to produce slightly more pronounced effects on the landscape as part of the site is on rising ground, but potential effects are mitigated in the WNP by allocating development only on the lower lying part of the site (below 65m contour). **Overall, all three scenarios can potentially produce minor negative effects on the landscape** as the spatial strategy proposes development within the Green Belt, significantly altering the landscape at the northern boundary of the village.

## Population and housing

The primary consideration is meeting the housing need in Watton-at-Stone. On this basis, there is a clear preference for Scenario 3 which would meet and exceed the housing requirement figure set in the EHDP. This larger growth will also serve to provide a buffer to housing delivery in the parish and facilitate the delivery of more affordable housing. A further consideration is the delivery of community benefits through the development proposed. Scenario 3 is likely to generate the most community benefits including football pitches, a wetland meadow, circular walk around the village, out-of-hours school buildings and additional community hall carparking (Policy WAS26). These community benefits represent the community's 'wish-list' as established through the consultations carried throughout Plan making process. **In conclusion, Scenario 3 leads to a prediction of significant positive effects.** Scenarios 1 and 2 both perform negatively as they would fail to meet the minimum housing requirement in Watton-at-Stone and deliver less community benefits.

## Transport

Minimising the need to travel, supporting modal shift away from the private car and supporting safe walking/cycling are the key issues under this SEA theme. With regards to safe vehicular access and traffic considerations, none of the sites are known to be associated with major issues. The WNP policy WAS9 which supports the provision of sustainable transport within new developments including high quality bus services and community transport would apply to all three scenarios. Policy WAS10 identifies new pedestrian/ cycle routes to improve connectivity/ walkability through the village. The policy states that proposals facilitating the delivery of these links would be favourably considered adding that implementation can also be funded through S106 or funding mechanisms. In this context Scenario 3 is again likely to be favourable as the larger growth will generate more developer contributions enabling the delivery of such infrastructure. The Walkern Road site housing allocation in policy WAS3 also contributes positively to this theme as it includes the provision of a pedestrian/ cycle bridge over the River Beane to connect with the pedestrian access to the railway station provided through the site. The bridge will also form part of a wider circular walk around the village. Having said that, that the additional housing will inevitably lead to increased vehicular traffic within the NP area and whilst scenario 3 is likely to produce more traffic due to higher growth, it potentially compensates for that by enabling the delivery of more sustainable transport infrastructure. **In conclusion, all three scenarios are deemed to produce minor negative effects on transport.**

# 7. The preferred approach

## Introduction

7.1 The aim of this section is to present the plan-makers reasons for supporting the preferred approach, in light of the scenarios assessment presented above.

## Reasons for supporting the preferred approach

7.2 The plan-makers responded to the assessment as follows:

“The preferred approach is to take forward Scenario 3 as the basis for the WNP. This approach is considered to broadly align with the findings of the assessment, which finds Scenario 3 to perform well in terms of the majority of key sustainability issues, both in absolute terms and relative terms.

7.3 Whilst no significant negative effects are predicted for Scenario 3 it is recognised that the location of the footbridge across the River Beane in a Flood Zone 3b location is a potential constraint. However, it may be possible to address the risk by incorporating appropriate mitigation measures in the design of the bridge (e.g. height of bridge and type of support structure).

With regards to Scenario 1 and 2, the assessment highlights a major significant negative, namely the fact that these would fail to meet the minimum housing requirement set by East Herts District Council in the EHDP. Additionally, due to the lower growth proposed, scenarios 1 and 2 are less likely to engender as many community benefits as scenario 3.

The process of defining and assessing growth scenarios serves to highlight that there are no easy choices, in respect of planning for growth at Watton-at-Stone.

Nonetheless there is a need to make a choice, and the Committee views Scenario 3 as best representing sustainable development on balance. Importantly, the preferred approach will deliver benefits to the Neighbourhood Area and meet the requirements set out in the Local Plan."

## **Part 2: What are the SEA findings at this stage?**

## 8. Introduction (to Part 2)

- 8.1 The aim of this section is to present an assessment of the current 'pre-submission' version of the WNP.
- 8.2 The WNP puts forward 26 policies to guide development in the Neighbourhood Plan area. These are set out in Table 8.1 below.

*Table 8.1 WNP policies*

Policy no.	Title
<b>WAS1</b>	Sustainable Housing
<b>WAS2</b>	Amendment to Village Development Boundary/ Green Belt Bouary
<b>WAS3</b>	Housing Site Allocation Walkern Road
<b>WAS4</b>	Housing Site Allocation Stevenage Road
<b>WAS5</b>	Brownfield Sites
<b>WAS6</b>	Design Code
<b>WAS7</b>	Housing Mix
<b>WAS8</b>	Rural Affordable Housing
<b>WAS9</b>	Sustainable Transport Provision
<b>WAS10</b>	Proposed New Footpath/Cycle Connections
<b>WAS11</b>	Valued Community Facilities
<b>WAS12</b>	Enhanced Community Facilities
<b>WAS13</b>	Maintaining and Improving Health Services
<b>WAS14</b>	School Site
<b>WAS15</b>	Sports Facilities
<b>WAS16</b>	Protected Recreational Open Space
<b>WAS17</b>	Local Green Space
<b>WAS18</b>	Protected Views
<b>WAS19</b>	Wildlife Sites and Habitat Enhancements
<b>WAS20</b>	Green Corridors and the River Beane
<b>WAS21</b>	Watton-at-Stone Conservation Area and Heritage Assets
<b>WAS22</b>	Non-designated Buildings and Structures
<b>WAS23</b>	Archaeology
<b>WAS24</b>	Preserving Local Employment Opportunities
<b>WAS25</b>	Encouraging Home Working
<b>WAS26</b>	Spending Priorities

## Methodology

- 8.3 The assessment identifies and evaluates 'likely significant effects' on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability objectives identified through scoping (see Table 3.1) as a methodological framework.
- 8.4 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the strategic nature of the policies under consideration and understanding of the baseline (now and in the future under a 'no plan' scenario) that is inevitably limited. Given uncertainties there is a need to make assumptions, e.g. in relation to plan implementation and aspects of the baseline that might be impacted. Assumptions are made cautiously and explained within the text (with the aim of striking a balance between comprehensiveness and conciseness). In many instances, given reasonable assumptions, it is not possible to predict 'significant effects', but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) of the draft plan in more general terms.
- 8.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. So, for example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of effects as far as possible. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e. the potential for the WNP to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes and projects. These effect 'characteristics' are described within the assessment as appropriate.

# 9. Assessment of the WNP

## Introduction

9.1 The assessment is presented below under nine topic headings, reflecting the established assessment framework (see Section 3). A final section (Chapter 10) then presents overall conclusions.

## Biodiversity

9.2 There are no international, European or national protected sites for biodiversity located within the Neighbourhood Plan area. However, there are a number of UK BAP Priority Habitats. These include: Deciduous Woodland, Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh, Wood-pasture and Parkland and Traditional Orchards, all of which, contribute to the green infrastructure networks extending throughout the village and wider area. These and other significant habitats in Watton-at-Stone are given protection through Policy WAS19 (wildlife sites and habitat enhancements). Policy WAS17 (Local Green Space); designates 6 green open space areas as Local Green Space which help reduce habitat loss and fragmentation by maintaining their functional contribution as ecological links with many Local Green Spaces identified for their local significance and richness of wildlife. The Meadow (School Lane), the Churchyard at St Andrew and St Mary's, Church Baulk, Great Rolls Mead, Rush Meads and Malting House Field will be afforded protection through the LGS designation (Policy WAS17); contributing positively towards the WNP's objective to "maintain and enhance nature conservation, wildlife, and biodiversity."

9.3 In terms of housing allocations, as mentioned above there are no designated biodiversity sites in the vicinity of the greenfield sites (WAS3 Walkern Rd and WAS4 Stevenage Rd.). These sites comprise fields with some shrubs and trees at their boundaries. There are no environmental constraints noted in the SOA. The Walkern Rd. site is bound by the River Beane at the western boundary of the site. Polluted run-off from the development can potentially have adverse effects on water quality in the river though this is to some extent mitigated by the existing green buffer and the WNP policies which require the incorporation of SuDS. Policy WAS3 seeks to ensure that development here does not produce polluting runoff flow into the river.

9.4 The East Herts Wildlife Sites Inventory lists several wildlife sites in the NP such as Foxdell, Watton Green and Watton-at-Stone churchyard. It is important that these are protected from the impacts of new development. The WNP designates some of these areas LGS (e.g. Watton Green and the Churchyard) which should protect the established habitats here. Additionally, there are numerous Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) in the NP area and its vicinity, including the area between the railway line and the A602. These are offered some protection under Policy WAS19 (Wildlife sites and Habitat Enhancements) which requires development to conserve and enhance biodiversity and seek to deliver biodiversity net gain (minimum of 10%). This can be onsite or offsite but must be within the NP area. The policy also requires that the River Beane is protected from any harmful impacts resulting from development. Proposals to create natural areas and wildlife habitats or to expand/ enhance existing ones is also supported under WAS19. The policy identifies the area between the Beane and the High Street/

Stevenage Road as a location where proposals for new natures area to enhance biodiversity may be funded from S106 contributions.

- 9.5 Green infrastructure networks (GI) and the River Beane corridor are also offered protection under policy WAS20 (Green Corridors and the River Beane). The policy states that the green corridors in the parish will be protected from the impacts of harmful development and will be managed/ enhanced. The policy seeks to protect the River Beane Corridor requiring any development in its vicinity to include a buffer (at least 10m) from the top of the bank and refusing permission to any development likely to adversely impact ecological value of the river.
- 9.6 Overall, whilst minor negative effects are considered likely in implementation of the proposed spatial strategy, the policy mitigation provided seeks to reduce the extent of these effects, particularly through the protection of LWSs, the River Beane corridor and the existing green infrastructure network. The promotion of enhanced green infrastructure links is also considered likely to benefit biodiversity. As a result, no significant deviations from the baseline are anticipated, and **broadly neutral effects** are concluded overall.

## Climate change (including Flood risk)

- 9.7 In terms of climate change adaptation, the majority of the Plan area is at low risk of flooding with stretches of Flood Zone 2 and 3 running along the River Beane. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) identified properties between the High Street and the River Beane as being at risk from fluvial flooding.
- 9.8 In terms of housing allocations; the Walkern Rd. site in policy WAS3 is close to an area of Flood Zone 2 and 3 due to the proximity of the Beane at the western boundary of the site. However, it ought to be possible to avoid placing development in the most vulnerable areas given the size of the site and the existing buffer between the river corridor and the western boundary of this site. The designation of LGS6 is also likely to increase resilience by protecting this river flood plain. The Walkern Rd development (WAS3) includes the provision of a new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the River Beane (also part of Policy WAS10). As this is located in a Flood Zone 3b, the design of the bridge would require careful consideration and discussion with the Environment Agency to ensure adequate mitigation of the potential risk to bridge users and the potential impacts on the flood retention capacity of the river and associated flood plain.
- 9.9 Well planned green infrastructure can help an area adapt to and manage the risks of climate change (including flood risk). Enabling and providing for green infrastructure within Watton-at-Stone is therefore a key means to promoting climate change adaptation measures within the WNP. Policies WAS19 (Wildlife Sites and Habitat Enhancement) and WAS20 (Green Corridors and the River Beane) perform positively in this respect. Multi-functional benefits likely to be delivered include assisting carbon sequestration and promoting walking and cycling through the attractive public realm as well as flood attenuation.
- 9.10 The avoidance of development within the floodplain, alongside the measures to increase climate resilience are considered to have positive effects on climate change adaptation. However, the potential for **minor negative effects** remains due to the uncertainty regarding the location of the bridge across the Beane (in WS3) which would require suitable design and mitigation measures to be agreed with the Environment Agency.

## Health and wellbeing

9.11 The health and wellbeing of residents will be supported by WNP policies which support a high-quality public realm, local distinctiveness and landscape/townscape character. This is discussed to some extent under the 'Landscape' and 'Historic Environment' SEA themes below. In this context Policy WAS6 (Design Code) applying the Watton-at-Stone Design Code to all development in the NP area should ensure maintaining and enhancing the attractiveness of the Neighbourhood Plan area will positively affect residents' quality of life, contributing to the satisfaction of residents with their neighbourhood as a place to live.

9.12 Policies WAS17-19, WAS3-4, are all important in this respect. Policy WAS18 (Protected Views) identifies eight important vistas that from an important part of the landscape and townscape character of the NP area. The policy stipulates that development proposals likely to impact these views should include an assessment of the impact of the development on the key views where appropriate. Similarly, Policy WAS21 (Watton-at-Stone Conservation Area) seeks to protect the character of the conservation area which covers a substantial part of the NP area. The policy requires development take account of the historic fabric, the significance of the asset and the contribution of the setting to the significance. Proposals are required to conserve or where appropriate enhance the asset or its setting.

9.13 A high-quality living environment will also be supported through Policies WAS17-19, through protecting and enhancing the Plan area's most valued open spaces and improving connectivity. Community engagement highlighted the need for new amenities including the provision of youth sports, completions of circular paths and enhancement of the natural environment. In this context policies WAS4, WAS15-17 are important as they seek to provide improved sports and recreational facilities including football provision on Mill Lane. Policy WAS16 allocated 6 areas of open space as Protected Recreational Open Space and Policy WAS17 designates 7 areas as Local Green Space. Policy WAS10 (Proposed new footpath/ cycle connections) provides a footbridge/ cycle path across the Beane to enable a circular walk around the village facilitating sustainable movement; and a key consideration for development in the Plan area, specifically supporting access to Railway station and encouraging active travel.

9.14 Policies WAS11 (Valued community facilities) and WAS 12 (Enhanced community facilities) seek to protect valued community facilities (identified through community consultations) within the NP area, such as, public houses, supermarket, post office, community hall, places of worship, a scouts hut and a clinic. Furthermore, WAS12 supports proposals that improve the range, quality and accessibility of facilities for residents.

9.15 It is considered that the WNP will support health indicators relating to housing by providing high-quality new homes that meet identified local housing needs. Policy WAS1 (Sustainable housing) allocates at least 92 new homes to enable the delivery of sustainable housing tailored to meet the needs of the parish. The allocations of the two brownfield sites, the Walkern Rd. and Stevenage Rd. sites will enable the WNP to meet and exceed HDP's housing requirement for the NP area thus ensuring flexibility in the type, size and affordability of new homes in the parish. Overall, the proposed spatial strategy

and policy provisions seek to protect resident health and wellbeing, deliver improved community facilities, open green and recreational spaces and promote more active travel opportunities. As a result, **minor long-term positive effects** are anticipated.

## Historic environment

9.16 There are numerous historic environment assets which contribute to the attractiveness and character of Watton-at-Stone, future growth in the Plan area has the potential to affect the settings and significance of assets.

9.17 In terms of housing site allocations, there are no listed buildings within the Walkern Rd and Stevenage Rd sites. The majority of heritage assets within the NP area lie south of these sites with the nearest being the Grade II listed bridge over the River Beane but this is separated from the proposed sites by existing development. The SOA noted that both the Walkern Rd site and the Stevenage Rd sites are in an Area of Archaeological Significance, assessing the sites as having 'some impact and /or mitigation possible'. Given the size of the sites and the fact that the WNP is not proposing to develop the sites in their entirety appropriate mitigation should be possible here. Archaeological heritage is likely to be further protected through policy WAS23 (Archaeology) which requires that development likely to impact heritage assets or areas of archaeological significance, include an evaluation to determine whether site surveys are necessary.

9.18 The Brownfield sites allocated for smaller scale development in policy WAS5 (Brownfield Sites) are also not anticipated to engender adverse effects on the historic environment. The former Hertfordshire County Council Depot site (15 dwellings) and the former Doctor's site at Great Innings North (2 units and overflow parking) were both rated Green in the SOA and Policy WAS5 requires new development here to enhance/ complement the existing development nearby at Moorymead Close.

9.19 Policy WAS21 (Watton-at-Stone Conservation Area) seeks to preserve the historic character of the CA, requiring development proposals to adhere to the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2014. Proposals deemed to have an impact on designated heritage assets would be required to take account of the historic fabric and significance of the heritage assets and their settings. Similarly, Policy WAS22 (Non-designated Buildings and Structures) identifies seven non-designated structures as having local historic or architectural importance and seeks to protect them from demolition. Development proposals likely to impact these must consider the significance of the non-designated assets and weigh up their significance against the scale of potential harm or loss through new development.

9.20 A primary plan objective is to '*Protect and enhance natural and historic environment*' and to '*protect the historic fabric, character, and rural identity, including listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets and the Conservation Area and its setting.*' The cumulative effects of growth on the Conservation Area could also have negative implications, particularly as a result of increased traffic and congestion. The Plan seeks to combat this through connected development that integrates pedestrian and cycle paths within the development and to adjoining links to surrounding streets, spaces and access to sustainable transport.

9.21 All relevant development in the NP area would be required to follow the Watton-at-Stone Design Code (Policy WAS6 Design Code). The Code seeks to ensure that new development is sympathetic to the existing local character. For example; new development is required take into account existing the seize, height, vernacular and materials of adjacent buildings. Similarly, surrounding form and context would be key determinants of the form, massing and Layout of new development.

9.22 Overall, the potential for **minor negative effects** is recognised, namely through the Stevenage Road and Walkern Road site allocations due to potential effects on Areas of Archaeological Significance. Whilst the policy framework seeks to provide adequate mitigation, it is recognised that detailed archaeological survey and design schemes are required to fully assess and address the potential impacts.

## Landscape

9.23 The Neighbourhood Plan area is located within the Woodhall Park and Watton-at-Stone Slopes Local Character Areas (LCA). The London Metropolitan Green Belt covers around 60% of the NP area. Several policies within the adopted EHDP provide some protection to current landscape features in Watton-at-Stone. However, depending on the scale of development, a lack of overall vision and framework could result in the delivery of less sympathetic development styles, layouts and material choice. In this context the WNP's Design Code is central as it seeks to ensure the preservation of the character of the parish's landscapes by requiring new development to follow the Watton-at-Stone Design Code. This requires '*design proposals should be informed through contextual analysis of the built, natural, and historic environment [...] and landscape details of the surrounding area.*' It adds: '*land should be used efficiently whilst respecting the existing landscape character and green infrastructure. A density of 30 units per hectare should be achieved within any development. This will ensure the efficient use of land and avoid over dense development which is not in keeping with the village character.*'

9.24 Other policies within the WNP such as WAS17 (Local green space) and WAS18 (Protected views) are will also have beneficial impacts on the landscape character of Watton-at-Stone serving to protect keys aspects of the landscape such as open spaces and important vistas.

9.25 In terms of the proposed allocations sites, the Walkern Rd site is adjacent to an existing built-up area but would be reasonably well screened by roads and vegetation. The Stevenage Rd site is screened and bound to the west by trees and shrubs but part of it is visible and on rising ground as one enters the village from the north-west. Policy (WAS4) serves to overcome potential landscape impacts by allocating the part of a field on the western side of Stevenage Road (the portion within the parish boundary) below the 65m contour line, for development. The area above the 65m contour line is designated as Local Green Space (LGS7), which ensures protection for valued views across the river valley. The policy includes a requirement that development would include careful planting to identify the village boundary and to soften the approach. Having said that both of the main development sites proposed are within the greenbelt and allocating them would represent an extension of the village into the greenbelt. The SOA concluded that development at the Walkern Rd site would not result in coalescence with Hook's Cross (the adjacent parish to the north) with the A602

representing a strong permanent barrier to prevent sprawl to the north of NP area. Similarly in the case of the Stevenage Rd site the SOA concluded that some containment of the village, the railway line to the west and the A602 to the north, act as more permanent, defensible Green Belt boundaries to sprawl.

9.26 Wider protections for trees (Policy WAS19), Local Green Spaces (Policy WAS17) and green corridors and watercourses (WAS19) are considered likely to support positive effects, prioritising the protection and enhancement of the NP area and contributing towards Watton-at-Stone's special landscape character, features, and setting.

9.27 Overall, whilst policy mitigation is provided, it is recognised that the spatial strategy proposes development within the Green Belt, significantly altering the character and landscape at the northern boundary of the village, particularly associated with the Stevenage Rd site. Consequently, residual **minor negative effects** are predicted due to development on greenfield land.

## Population and community

9.28 The EHDP's growth strategy for group 1 villages such as Watton-at-Stone (Policy VILL1) sees these villages as '*the most sustainable villages in the District*', adding that '*growth in these areas will help to sustain existing shops, services and facilities, deliver affordable housing, provide local job opportunities and deliver community benefits.*' The policy requires Watton-at-Stone to provide at least 92 new dwellings through the plan period to 2033. The policy also states that '*development in excess of the minimum number indicated, may be considered appropriate, depending on site availability, site suitability and upon the capacity of infrastructure to meet the additional demand that arises.*'

9.29 The WNP1 (Sustainable housing) seeks to deliver at least 92 homes over 3 main sites, within or adjacent to the village development boundary, in order to enable the delivery of a sustainable housing strategy in accordance with the District Plan and manage housing growth tailored to the needs of the parish. The majority of growth will be delivered across the two greenfield sites (at Walkern Rd. and Stevenage Rd) with each delivering up to 60 units. The remaining allocations comprise 3 brownfield sites; the former Hertfordshire County Council depot site at Station Road (up to 15 dwellings), the old Doctors Surgery at Great Innings North (2 units plus car parking) and former haulage yard at Perrywood Lane (2 dwellings). The sites combined will meet and exceed the need outlined above, providing an element of flexibility (a buffer) to help housing delivery. Significant long-term positive effects are anticipated in this respect.

9.30 The WNP seeks to complement EHDP Policy HOU1 (Type and mix of housing) which requires an appropriate mix of housing tenures, types and sizes on developments of 5 or more units. WNP policy WAS7 (Housing mix) states that the mix of housing tenures, types and sizes shall be provided in accordance with the current and future housing need. It also recognises that smaller, more affordable homes, should be considered in the housing mix echoing one of the EHDP's strategic objectives to '*balance the housing market by delivering a mix of market, low cost, and affordable homes and accommodating the housing needs of an ageing population.*' The EHDP's policy HOU4 which supports the provision of rural exception affordable housing where these contribute towards meeting identified affordable housing need is supported by WAS8 (Rural affordable housing). The policy supports the provision of such rural exception

sites for persons who have strong connections to the parish (through residence and/or family). Positive effects are therefore anticipated in the long term, maximising housing delivery to meet local needs.

9.31 Of relevance to this SEA theme is the WNP's objectives to deliver community benefits through the Plan. The WNP seeks to deliver these benefits by allocating new development that exceeds the minimum growth requirements set by the EHDP through policies WAS3 and WAS4. The larger housing provision made possible through these two sites (up 120 dwellings) also serves to support EHDP's Policy VILL1, to accommodate additional development, especially where it contributes to the delivery of community benefits. The community benefits likely to be made possible by this higher level of development<sup>9</sup> include football pitches, a wetland meadow, circular walk around the village, out-of-hours school buildings and additional community hall carparking (Policy WAS26). These reflect the community's 'wish-list' as established through the consultations carried throughout Plan making process.

9.32 Overall, **significant long-term positive effects** are anticipated as a result of the growth strategy which will meet and exceed Watton-at-Stones housing requirement figure thus providing a buffer to better secure housing delivery and potentially deliver more choice and flexibility in the local housing market. The housing allocations are also likely to result in important community benefits.

## Transportation

9.33 The NP area is connected to the strategic road network by the A602 and the A119. The two main roads extend through the NP area, utilised by residents and visitors for connectivity with surrounding towns and cities. The A1(M) (junction 7) and the A10 (at Westmill Rd.) are both approximately five miles away, providing further access to neighbouring, large employment/ service centres. The village benefits from the Watton-at-Stone bypass (A602) which helps ease north/south traffic. Though east/west traffic congestion remains an issue in the village. This was one of the issues highlighted in the Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Event held at the end of November 2016 which revealed that the traffic implications of additional development were of concern and should be addressed at the planning stage with improvements to the highway provision, bus and rail services and cycle links to the neighbouring area. Policy WAS9 (Sustainable transport provision) supports the provision of more sustainable forms of transport by requiring development to consider maintaining/ developing high quality bus and community transport services as an integral part of new development. Additionally, policy WAS10 (Proposed new footpath/ cycle connections) identifies three new pedestrian/ cycle routes to improve connectivity/ walkability through the village. The policy states that proposals facilitating the delivery of these links would be favourably considered adding that implementation can also be funded through S106 or funding mechanisms. Policy WAS3 includes the provision of a pedestrian/ cycle bridge over the River Beane to connect with the pedestrian access to the railway station provided through the site. The bridge will also form part of a wider circular walk around the village.

9.34 Nearly half of residents rely on the car to travel to work. Due to the presence of the Watton-at-Stone train station, a number of local residents also commute to work by train. The WNP aims reduce car journeys and further encourage train

<sup>9</sup> Through S106 agreements, CIL and negotiations with developers.

travel through the proposed circular walk which is intended to promote walking and cycling from the new developments in WAS 3 and WAS4 to both the station, school and other services within the village thus helping reduce reliance on cars.

- 9.35 Almost 5% of working residents work from home in Watton-at-Stone<sup>10</sup> this is likely to have increased substantially since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. This positive trend in relation to transport is considered likely to prevail post lockdown to some degree further supporting reduced congestion at peak times, and subsequently contributing towards meeting climate commitments. Working from home is likely to be further helped by the WNP's policy WAS25 (Encouraging home working) which is supportive of improved digital connectivity as part of new development proposals.
- 9.36 In terms of the site allocations, the allocations at Walkern Rd. and Stevenage Rd. are at the northernmost boundary of the current settlement, however, the sites are still within 400-500m of the High Street. Having said that, the proposed growth will inevitably lead to increased vehicular movement in and around the NP area to some degree with the potential for minor negative effects. In terms of site allocations, the Watton-at-Stone Design Code requires that development schemes include connected cycleways and footpaths. All developments are to provide direct pedestrian and cycle links to local amenities within the village, the school, bus stops and train station.
- 9.37 Overall, whilst measures are implemented to bolster sustainable transport connections, including active travel connections, **minor long-term negative effects** are anticipated as a result of a likely residual increase in vehicular traffic in the area.

## 10. Conclusions and recommendations

- 10.1 Overall, the Plan appraisal has served to highlight the potential for both positive and negative effects of significance.
- 10.2 Significant positive effects are anticipated in relation to the population and housing SEA theme as a result of the growth strategy which will meet and exceed strategic growth targets set in EHDP helping to improve choice and potentially affordability in the market and generating community benefits. The additional growth also serves to provide a buffer to better secure housing delivery.
- 10.3 No significant negative effects are predicted but minor residual negative effects are highlighted in relation to landscape. This relates to the spatial strategy which focuses the bulk of development within the Green Belt, areas that are currently open green field land. This will inevitably alter the existing landscape character.
- 10.4 Minor negative effects are anticipated pertaining to the historic environment SEA theme primarily due to the potential effects on the Areas of Archaeological Significance at the Walkern Road and Stevenage Road sites. Whilst policy mitigation is provided to a certain extent, an archaeological survey and further consultation with Historic England are recommended as the Plan progresses.

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<sup>10</sup> 2011 Census

- 10.5 The growth strategy is also considered likely to increase traffic and congestion within the Plan area to some degree and this has minor negative implications for transportation.
- 10.6 Uncertain minor negative effects are forecast in relation to the climate change (adaptation) SEA theme due to the provision of a foot/cycle bridge across the River Beane; in a functional flood plain (Flood Zone 3b). This is potentially amenable to mitigation through appropriate design and safety measures but would need further discussion/ agreement with the Environment Agency.
- 10.7 Minor positive effects are expected in relation to health and wellbeing, predominantly reflecting the potential for connected and resilient development and the allocation of Local Green Space, recreation facilities and walkways and cycle routes. Broadly neutral effects are concluded in relation to biodiversity with no significant deviation from the baseline anticipated.

## **Part 3: What are the next steps?**

## 11. Plan finalisation

- 11.1 This Environmental Report accompanies the pre-submission version of the WNP for consultation. Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Neighbourhood Plan Committee, when finalising the plan for submission.
- 11.2 The 'submission' version of the plan will then be submitted to EHDC (alongside an Environmental Report Update, if necessary). The plan and supporting evidence will be then published for further consultation, and then submitted for examination.
- 11.3 If the outcome of the Independent Examination is favourable, the WNP will then be subject to a referendum, and the plan will be 'made' if more than 50% of those who vote are in support. Once made, the WNP will become part of the Development Plan for East Herts District.

## 12. Monitoring

- 12.1 The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report.
- 12.2 It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by East Herts District Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).
- 12.3 The SEA has not identified any potential for significant negative effects that would require closer monitoring.

# Appendices

# Appendix I: Meeting the Regulations

As discussed in Chapter 1 above, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) explains the information that must be contained in the Environmental Report; however, interpretation of Schedule 2 is not straightforward. Table AI.1 links the structure of this report to an interpretation of Schedule 2 requirements, whilst Table AI.2 explains this interpretation. Table AI.3 identifies how and where within this report the requirements have/ will be met.

*Table AI.1: Questions answered by this report, in-line with an interpretation of regulatory requirements*

<b>Introduction</b>	What's the plan seeking to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes</li> </ul>
SEA scope?	What's the sustainability 'context'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level</li> <li>▪ Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance</li> </ul>
SEA scope?	What's the sustainability 'baseline'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan</li> <li>▪ The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be affected</li> <li>▪ Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance</li> </ul>
SEA scope?	What are the key issues and objectives that should be a focus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e. provide a 'framework' for) assessment</li> </ul>
<b>Part 1</b>	What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (and thus an explanation of the 'reasonableness' of the approach)</li> <li>▪ The likely significant effects associated with alternatives</li> <li>▪ Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives assessment / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan</li> </ul>
<b>Part 2</b>	What are the SEA findings at this current stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan</li> <li>▪ The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan</li> </ul>
<b>Part 3</b>	What happens next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A description of the monitoring measures envisaged</li> </ul>

**Schedule 2****Interpretation of Schedule 2*****The report must include...******The report must include...***

(a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes	i.e. answer - <i>What's the plan seeking to achieve?</i>
(b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'context'?</i>
(c) the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level	
(d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;	The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan'	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'baseline'?</i>
(e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	
(f) the likely significant effects on the environment including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	
(g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan;	Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of appraisal	i.e. answer - <i>What are the key issues &amp; objectives?</i>
(h) an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information	An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (i.e. an explanation of the 'reasonableness of the approach)	i.e. answer - <i>What has Plan-making / SA involved up to this point?</i> [Part 1 of the Report]
(i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring.	The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan ... and an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of the alternatives considered / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan.	i.e. answer - <i>What are the assessment findings at this current stage?</i> [Part 2 of the Report]
	The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan	i.e. answer - <i>What happens next?</i> [Part 3 of the Report]
	A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring	

**Table A1.2: Interpretation of the regulations**

**Table A1.3: 'Checklist' of how (throughout the SEA process) and where (within this report) regulatory requirements are met**

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
<b>A) The Environmental Report must present certain information</b>	
1. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	Chapter 2 ('What is the plan seeking to achieve') presents this information.
2. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;	These matters have been considered in detail through scoping work, which has involved dedicated consultation on a Scoping Report.
3. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	The 'SEA framework' – the outcome of scoping – is presented within Chapter 3 ('What is the scope of the SEA?').
4. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.;	More detailed messages, established through a context and baseline review are also presented in Appendix II.
5. The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The SEA framework is presented within Chapter 3 ('What is the scope of the SEA'). Also, Appendix II presents key messages from the context review. With regards to explaining " <i>how...considerations have been taken into account</i> ", Chapter 7 explains 'reasons for supporting the preferred approach', i.e. explains how/ why the preferred approach is justified in light of alternatives assessment.
6. The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);	Chapter 6 presents alternatives assessment findings (in relation to housing growth, which is a 'stand-out' plan policy area). Chapters 9 presents an assessment of the draft plan. With regards to assessment methodology, Chapter 8 explains the role of the SEA framework/scope, and the need to consider the potential for various effect characteristics/ dimensions.
7. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	The assessment highlights certain tensions between competing objectives, which might potentially be actioned when finalising the plan, and specific recommendations are made in Section 9.

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
8. An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	Chapters 4 and 5 deal with 'Reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with', in that there is an explanation of the reasons for focusing on particular issues and options. Also, Chapter 7 sets out reasons for selecting the preferred option (in-light of alternatives assessment).
9. Description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10;	Chapter 11 presents measures envisaged concerning monitoring.
10. A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings	The NTS is provided at the beginning of this Environmental Report.
<b>B) The Report must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan</b>	
Authorities with environmental responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the Draft Plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2)	At the current time, this Environmental Report is published alongside the 'pre-submission' version of the Neighbourhood Plan, with a view to informing Regulation 14 consultation.
<b>C) The report must be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan</b>	
The environmental report prepared pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of any transboundary consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 shall be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its adoption or submission to the legislative procedure.	This Environmental Report, and consultation responses received, will be taken into account when finalising the plan.

# Appendix II: The scope of the SEA

## Introduction

This appendix presents additional information on the SEA scope, namely key issues under each of the SEA framework headings. As set out in the Scoping Report, these key issues were identified following a review of the context and baseline.

Additionally, this appendix presents a summary of responses received as part of the scoping consultation.

### Air quality

- There are no air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) within the NP area. The nearest AQMA is at Hertford around 5 miles away from the NP area.
- The scale of development associated with the plan is such that any additional effects, taken in isolation or in-combination, are not predicted to be significant. None of the potential sites for housing are located close to the Hertford AQMA, and so increased exposure is unlikely. The East Herts Air Quality Action Plan along with the LTP4 and EHDP policies are likely to produce further improvements in emissions reduction in NP area and its surroundings. Therefore, air quality has been scoped out of the SEA.

### Biodiversity

- There are no Internationally or nationally designated sites for biodiversity within the Neighbourhood Plan area. There are Priority Habitats and non-designated local sites that are recognised for their contribution to biodiversity, including watercourses. The NP presents an opportunity to ensure that future development does not lead to any fragmentation of habitats, and instead supports enhanced multifunctional green infrastructure networks which support the integrity of these habitats. Ecological enhancement of wildlife corridors and stepping stones between sites of biodiversity value represents a key opportunity for the Neighbourhood Plan.

### Climate change (including flood risk)

- With regards to climate change mitigation, the Plan is unlikely to have a significant effect on carbon emissions. It is limited in the ability to implement higher standards of energy efficiency, and there are no plans in the scope of the Plan to identify areas of potential for renewable energy schemes. The scale of growth will not lead to significant emissions beyond what might be otherwise experienced in the absence of the Plan (likewise, any reduction is not likely to be significant). Therefore, this factor has been scoped out of the SEA process.
- The NP area falls predominantly within Flood Zone 1 (low risk of flooding), although there are stretches of Flood Zone 2 and 3 running along the course of the River Beane. The likelihood of flooding from fluvial and non-fluvial sources could be exacerbated by development in the NP area. However, opportunities for mitigation exist in sustainable design and SuDS.
- Resilience to climate change and flood risk has been scoped into the SEA. There is the potential to explore how resilience to climate change can be enhanced as

well as how contribution may be made towards flood risk mitigation. Flood risk could also be an important factor in terms of the site selection process.

## Health and wellbeing

- Most residents in Watton-at-Stone consider themselves to be in very good health (48.7%), followed by good health (37.3%). A smaller proportion of residents in the NP area consider themselves to have Bad health (2.6%) or very bad health (0.8%) compared to the National average (4.2% and 1.2% respectively).
- With regards to long term health conditions, around 5.3% of the resident population said their day-to-day activities were limited a lot due to disability or poor health compared to 8.3% nationally.
- Life expectancy at birth for East Herts is 81.1 for males and 84.9 for females which is higher than the corresponding figures for the East of England region (80.5 for males and 83.9 for females) and England as a whole (79.8 and 83.4 respectively).
- The under 75 mortality rates from cardiovascular diseases and cancer are lower in East Herts than the rates for the wider region and the nationally.
- The NP area is within the 10% least deprived category with no areas of deprivation.
- There are areas of formal and informal green and open space within the NP area, though there is a deficit in amenity green space.

## Historic environment

- The Neighbourhood Plan area contains two scheduled monuments, a conservation area, a registered park and gardens and 51 listed buildings.

There is a conservation areas located within the plan area; the 'Watton-at-Stone Conservation Area'. The Conservation Area Appraisal<sup>11</sup> states that "most of the designated Conservation Area is visually rich, being either defined by high quality buildings or open spaces. Its historical and architectural quality is well defined and not unduly adversely affected by modern mid-late 20th century developments on its boundaries.

- There are currently no entries for Watton-at-Stone on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.
- The NP area is likely to contain many non-designated buildings and sites that contribute to the historic environment. The Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record contains 147 entries of locally important historical features and assets for Watton-at-Stone. These include Crop marks, fields, Neolithic artifacts, medieval ditches, mounds, sites of Farmsteads, Milestones, Roman pottery and Tiles.

## Landscape

- There are valuable landscapes in the NP area that make a significant contribution to the character of the area. These comprise the Woodhall Park & Watton-at-Stone Slopes LCA.
- The London Metropolitan Green Belt overlaps over 60% of the NP area and surrounds Watton-at-Stone village. However, the EHDP offers a degree of

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<sup>11</sup> East Herts Council Watton-at-Stone Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (July 2014) available at [https://cdn-eastherts.onwebcurl.com/s3fs-public/documents/Watton-at-stone\\_121216.pdf](https://cdn-eastherts.onwebcurl.com/s3fs-public/documents/Watton-at-stone_121216.pdf)

flexibility, potentially allowing changes to be made to the existing Green Belt boundary in order to accommodate new development.

- The EHDP's policies offer a degree of protection to landscape assets and their settings, but insensitive development could have a disruptive impact on landscape.

## Land, soil and water resources

- The Agricultural Land Classification shows that the majority of the Plan area is underlain by Grade 3 quality land, according to the pre-1988 assessment. Though it is not possible to ascertain whether this land is Grade 3a or 3b, the 'Predictive BMV Land Assessment' for the Eastern Region gives a moderate likelihood of best and most versatile land (BVM) in Watton-at-Stone (20-60% likelihood).
- The main water body in Watton-at-Stone is the River Beane, an example of a Chalk Stream habitat. The local water utility; Affinity Water, has been tasked with addressing issues affecting the River Beane with the aim of restoring these habitats, improving wildlife and recreational value while also increasing resilience to climate change.
- The NP area falls within a surface water Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (LEE NVZ ID443). As well as avoiding water pollution, there is a need to take wider steps to support the water environment, including minimising water use in the built environment.
- There are areas of important soil resources in the NP area that ought to be avoided. However, the limited scale of development proposed in the NP is unlikely to lead to significant effects upon soil resources. Therefore, soil has been scoped out of the SEA. This does not mean that higher quality agricultural land should not be protected.
- Whilst the NP area does overlap a SPZ and a NVZ (adverse impacts are primarily associated with agricultural land use), it is considered unlikely that significant effects upon water quality would occur as a result of the NP. Therefore, water quality has been scoped out of the SEA.

## Population and housing

- In 2019, the population of Watton-at-Stone was estimated to be 2,775 (ONS Parish population estimates) having increased by around 21% since 2011 levels (2,298). In comparison, East Hertfordshire as a whole has seen a 9% increase in population since 2011.
- The NP area has a similar age structure to that of the wider District, both of which have lower proportion of residents in the 25-44 age groups compared to England as a whole. Watton-at-Stone and East Herts have a higher proportion of residents in the 45-64 and 65-84 age groups compared to the national average. The 65+ cohort in the NP area (20%) is over represented when compared to England as a whole (16%). The NP area has a slightly higher proportion of residents in the 0-15 age group compared to the rest of the district and England.
- The proportion of owner occupation in the NP area is lower than in the wider District but higher than the average for England as a whole. Conversely, the proportion of rented accommodation (private and social rents) is higher than in the wider District but lower national levels. There is a small proportion of shared ownership tenures.
- Housing affordability has been an ongoing issue in East Herts and Hertfordshire with increases in property prices outstripping rates of income growth. The average

house price in the NP area is around £478,122 for the 12 months to August 2021. This equates to almost twice the average house price for England (£256,400).

## Transport

- Watton-at-Stone railway station is part of the Great Northern Route Service managed by Govia Thames Link. The local service runs between Stevenage and London (Moorgate/Kings Cross), using the Hertford Loop line. Connections to main-line services to London and the North can be made at Stevenage.
- The main bus route is the 390 which runs between Stevenage and Hertford, as does the less-frequent 383/384. In addition, there is a 203 morning-service to Welwyn Garden City on Thursdays.
- The bypass (A602) at Watton-at-Stone helps reduce north/ south traffic congestion in the NP area. However, congestion does occur in east/west traffic.
- The main roads leading into London, are the A1(M), which can be accessed at Stevenage or Welwyn, and the A10 which can be accessed at Ware or Hertford. The M25 and the M1 are approximately 35 minutes' drive. Luton and Stansted airports are approximately 20 miles away
- Car ownership in the Plan area (39%) is slightly lower than in the wider district (41%) and England as a whole (42%). The number of households with 2 cars (or vans) is slightly higher in Watton-at-Stone (37%) than the district (35%) and England (25%). The most popular mode of transport to work in the Neighbourhood Plan area is driving via a car or van.
- Public rights of way, footpaths and bridleways link parts of the village together. However, the foot path network is more sporadic to north west of the NP area. An issue of particular importance for the Watton-at-Stone community at present is the natural barrier formed by the river which hinders the ability to walk/ cycle across the NP area. Future development can potentially help deliver community benefits such as a bridge across the River Beane to improve walkability and connectivity across the river. This would facilitate pedestrian/ cycling access to the railway station, particularly relevant as there are a number of commuters within the parish who travel to work by train.

## Scoping consultation responses

The draft SEA scoping report was shared with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England for formal consultation in 2021. The responses received and how they have been addressed are presented below.

*Table AII.1: SEA scoping consultation responses*

Consultee	Consultation response summary	AECOM response
<b>Environment Agency</b>	Comments focused on the Flood risk implications associated with the pedestrian/cycle bridge proposed over the River Bean which is in a Flood Zone 3b.	Noted. The issue is discussed in 'Climate Change Including Flood Risk' chapter and also taken into consideration in the appraisal of the WNP in the ER.
<b>Historic England</b>	There is a need to assess all proposed allocations against sites on the HER.	It has not been possible to interrogate the HER or undertake specialist assessment, but readily available evidence has been drawn upon, and any further guidance provided by Historic England will inform further work prior to submission.
<b>Natural England</b>	NE provided standard guidance on 'Neighbourhood planning and the natural environment: information, issues and opportunities.'	Noted

