

`Pontesbury Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Statement

August 2022

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Statement for the Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan (PNDP)

Screening Statement under regulation 9 of the SEA Regulations 2004 on the determination of the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Introduction

The Government has confirmed that sustainability appraisals are only required for development plan documents and do not apply in the case of neighbourhood plans although the qualifying body must demonstrate how its neighbourhood plan will contribute to achieving sustainable development. However, neighbourhood plans must not breach and must be otherwise compatible with EU and Human Rights obligations. Neighbourhood plans therefore need to be considered against, for example, the Habitats and Strategic Assessment Directives and associated regulations. Whilst it is not the case that every neighbourhood plan will need an environmental assessment of the type normally associated with the process of preparing Local Plans, they may, subject to their scope and the issues they are seeking to address, be required to produce an environmental assessment if the plan is determined as likely to have significant environmental effects.

Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) are required by EU Directive 2001/42/EC, to assess the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. This Directive was implemented in the United Kingdom in July 2004 with the adoption of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations). The requirement for SEA is assessed under Regulation 9 (1). The SEA focuses on impacts on the natural environment with some limited consideration of human population needs and material assets. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) itself should, among other things, consider options, quantify potential impacts and offer advice on alternatives, or mitigating measures, where impacts are likely.

Regulation 8 of the SEA Regulations prevents the adoption or submission of a plan for which an environmental assessment is required before the SEA is completed and prohibits the adoption or submission of a plan before the responsible authority has determined whether the plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment.

It is not possible to rule out the need for an SEA without first carrying out a screening process to establish whether or not the PNDP is likely to have significant environmental effects (Article 3(1)). Under Article 3(4) of the Directive, and Regulation 5 of the Regulations, the responsible authority must determine which plans, other than those for which an SEA is automatically required, are likely to have significant environmental effects. The “responsible authority” as defined by Regulation 2, is the authority on whose behalf a plan is prepared.

Both the Directive (in Annex II), and the Regulations (in Schedule 1), set out specific criteria for determining the likely significance of the environmental effects of a plan. The process for determining whether or not an SEA is required is called screening. These criteria include specific considerations regarding the characteristics of the plan, the effects of the plan, and the area likely to be effected by the plan.

A determination cannot be made until the three statutory consultation bodies have been consulted: the Environment Agency; Natural England; and Historic England.

Within 28 days of making its determination, the Council must publish a statement setting out its decision. If it determines that an SEA is not required, the statement must include reasons for this.

Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood Planning is a community right introduced by the Localism Act 2011. Take up of the new right will be voluntary and at the discretion of neighbourhoods and communities.

The Government published a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2019, replacing almost all existing planning guidance. This was updated again in July 2021. This is what it says on neighbourhood planning:

29. Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies¹⁸.

30. Once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in a local plan covering the neighbourhood area, where they are in conflict; unless they are superseded by strategic or non-strategic policies that are adopted subsequently.

The Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (SI 637) came into force on 6 April 2012 and have since been amended most recently through the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 which became effective on 1st October 2016 (SI 934). This sets out the procedures for designating a Neighbourhood Plan area and getting the Plan adopted through the planning system.

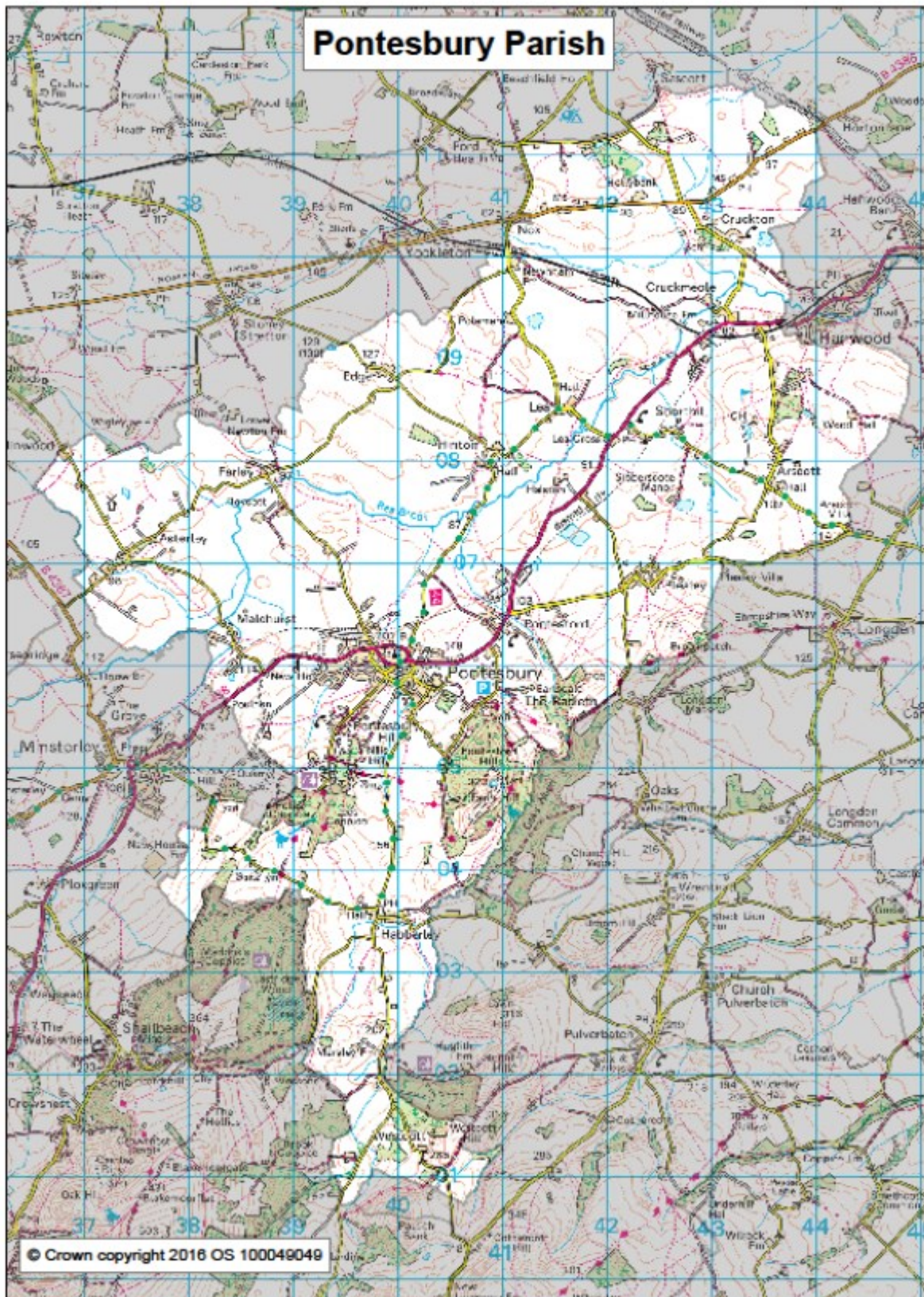
Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan

The PNDP must conform to higher level policy. This means that it must conform to national and local policy including Shropshire Council's strategic planning policy, which is contained in the Shropshire Core Strategy and the Site Allocations & Management of Development, which makes up the Development Plan.

However, the current development plan is out now out of date and therefore the existing documents are under review. Shropshire have now reached the examination stage of the Local Plan Review, an appropriate and sensible approach from this point is to proceed with the Neighbourhood Plan on the basis of the emerging strategy and policies, working closely with Shropshire Council during the preparation of the Neighbourhood Development Plan and supporting documents.

Pontesbury Parish Council submitted its application to Shropshire Council for designation of its Neighbourhood Area in September 2016. After a formal six week consultation Shropshire Council Cabinet resolved to support the Neighbourhood Area application made by Pontesbury Parish Council and that the area shown in the application should be designated as a Neighbourhood Area (see map below that shows the designated boundary). A formal notice was published on 1st March 2017 that confirmed the designation.

Pontesbury Designated Neighbourhood Area



The Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan is based around 6 key objectives that were drawn up from the 2018 public consultation, made available for approval at a drop in session on 2nd July 2019 and refined in light of the responses to the 2020 Questionnaire, these are:

- Protecting and developing Community Amenities
- Landscape and Local Character
- Provision of adequate and well-designed housing
- Movement and Transport
- Employment and Business Opportunities
- Green Environment

These themes and the related issues have informed the preparation of 16 planning objectives that in turn led to the development of draft planning policies. It is possible that these objectives and policies may be refined as the draft plan is considered at the formal consultation stages.

Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan Vision Statement and Objectives

Vision Statement

It is 2038 and Pontesbury parish still retains its largely rural character whilst having enhanced the range of services and facilities offered to all age groups. It has safeguarded the much loved rural environment, partly by only a modest population increase, with new development mainly confined to Pontesbury village. Adequate low-cost/affordable housing has met the needs of young people wishing to remain in the parish.

Employment opportunities have been created, mainly in the service sector. The attractive landscape of woodlands, hedges, hills and undulating countryside including the AONB has encouraged more visitors, who have provided diversification opportunities for farmers. Increased tree planting and mini-dam projects have reduced flooding risks. Pontesbury Parish has assisted Shropshire Council in their target of being carbon neutral by 2030.

The availability of high-speed broadband throughout the parish has aided businesses and helped more people to work from home, contributing to a reduction in commuter traffic along the A488. The hub building with its ultra-fast broadband offers support and development opportunities for new local business.

Measures have been taken to alleviate traffic problems including more parking spaces at Hall Bank and speed restrictions in residential areas throughout the Parish. Public and community transport initiatives have been implemented. All new houses built in the parish have electric car charging points.

Improved leisure facilities have been developed, partly by better use of green spaces and by opening up more waymarked footpaths to allow more residents and visitors to enjoy the attractive rural landscape. The village halls and community hub continue to be well used, providing vital social meeting places and activities for all ages which help to sustain the community spirit and reduce social isolation of elderly/disabled residents. Pontesbury continues to be a Dementia Friendly village. The community hub plays a strong role in providing information and support for local residents.

For its size, Pontesbury continues to have a wide range of services which have been sustained by the increased population and growing number of tourists. The rural landscape is still largely maintained by active farming, and is accessible for leisure use.

Objectives

A. Protecting and developing Community Amenities

1. To enhance facilities and services for a vibrant community

B. Landscape and Local Character

1. To conserve the character and beauty of the rural landscape of the parish
2. To conserve the historic heritage of the parish
3. To safeguard the setting and character of AONB and conservation areas of Plealey and Habberley
4. To safeguard amenity views
5. Maintain gaps between settlements
6. Conserve the character of the land adjacent to the A488

C. Provision of adequate and well-designed housing

1. Housing in Pontesbury village which respects variety of styles and materials and existing character.
2. Provision of small sized homes and affordable homes

D. Movement and Transport

1. To support safe, accessible network of roads, cycle ways and footpaths to promote healthier lifestyles and access to the countryside and improve active travel between homes and amenities
2. To improve car parking in Pontesbury

E. Employment and business Opportunities

1. To support small scale economic development including farm diversification which brings landscape developments

F. Green Environment

1. To protect Local green spaces
2. To protect and enhance natural habitats and wildlife and increase biodiversity
3. To reduce pollution
4. Carbon reduction

Monitoring and Review

Pontesbury Parish Council will monitor the delivery of its policies and work to ensure that benefits to the communities within the Parish are achieved.

Assessment of Requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Government has set down planning guidance following publication of the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). The guidance advises that ‘To decide whether a draft neighbourhood plan might have significant environmental effects, it must be assessed (screened) at an early stage of the plan’s preparation according to the requirements set out in regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. These include a requirement to consult the environmental assessment consultation bodies. Where it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, accordingly, does not require an environmental assessment), a statement of reasons for the determination should be prepared.’

In principle, neighbourhood plans should not be subject to the SEA Directive or require sustainability appraisal because they do not normally introduce new policies or proposals or modify planning documents which have already been subject to sustainability appraisal. However, they might occasionally be found likely to give rise to significant effects that have not been previously assessed. In screening a plan, Article 3 (6) of the SEA Directive requires that the relevant bodies concerned with environmental matters, as defined by individual Member states, shall be consulted as part of the screening process. In the case of the UK, the statutory environmental consultees are: Natural England; the Environment Agency; and Historic England.

It is considered that the screening methodology should address the issues identified in the table below.

Screening Stage	Purpose
Assessing the PNDP against Annex II Criteria	To establish whether or not the PNDP is likely to have a significant effect on the Annex II criteria. This will take account of the role of the PNDP in relation to existing policy context
Conclusion on whether the screening exercise identifies a need for SEA	To set out conclusions from the screening exercise
Recommendations for how the PNDP should proceed in relation to SEA requirements	To set out the broad approach needed to carry out an SEA on the PNDP or, where the screening report suggests no SEA is required, to determine the parameters within which the PNDP will need to operate to avoid triggering a need for SEA.

Assessing the PNDP against Annex II Criteria

Annex II of the SEA Directive sets out the criteria for determining if there are likely to be significant effects resulting from the implementation of a plan.

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects (Annex II SEA Directive)	Likely to have significant environmental effects	Summary of significant effects
1a) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature,	No	The PNDP proposes a framework for development proposals focussed on limiting the amount of housing, conserving and enhancing where possible the landscape quality and character, support small economic development, protecting and improving

<p>size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.</p>		<p>community amenities whilst also promoting sustainable movement and travel.</p> <p>Shropshire Council's Local Plan Review policy SP1 supports development that will contribute to meeting local needs and that make its settlements more sustainable.</p> <p>Policy S12 considers that Pontesbury will act as a Community Hub receiving development to support that function. Residential development will contribute towards achieving the housing guideline for the rural area of Shropshire. Allocations from the adopted SAMDev will be delivered alongside small scale windfall residential development.</p>
<p>1(b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans or programmes including those in a hierarchy.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The PNDP responds to other plans and programmes such as the Shropshire Development Plan and the NPPF. The PNDP has been specifically guided by and is aligned with the aims and objectives of the Shropshire Local Plan Review and is likely to have a positive impact on these plans through its policies to deliver sustainable development and protect and enhance the local character and environment.</p>
<p>1(c) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The PNDP recognises the objective of achieving sustainable development in the local area.</p> <p>The PNDP contains policies that seek to protect and retain local green spaces, public rights of way, provide small scale housing where appropriate and help to promote and support existing services and facilities.</p> <p>The PNDP seeks to promote opportunities for alternative sustainable means of travel as well providing opportunities to support small-scale employment and farm diversification.</p> <p>The PNDP acknowledges the need for small infill development which are suited to the needs of younger or older generations subject to clear local evidence of housing need.</p> <p>Proposal set out within the PNDP are designed to have a positive impact on local environmental assets and places valued by local people in the PNDP area. They will primarily focus on the protection and enhancement of green spaces and historic</p>

		buildings, as well as limiting the impact of pollution and supporting the transition to a zero-carbon economy by measures to meet a high level of sustainability and energy efficiency.
1(d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan	No	<p>There are no major allocations identified for housing and employment within the PNDP area.</p> <p>Policy SP6 of the Shropshire Local Plan Review promotes safe and well 'lit high quality walk and cycling routes. Policy SP3 and DP28 also prioritises use of active travel between new developments and from new developments to existing neighbourhoods and community facilities.</p> <p>Environmental issues may be triggered through the development of suitable infill housing sites. However, these sites will need to be in conformity with both national and local policy and, in particular, both the Local Plan and PNDP which seek to prevent environmental harm and promote and improve environmental quality.</p> <p>There are no Air Quality Management Areas within the TCNP area.</p>
1(e) The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)	No	The PNDP policies do not propose any changes that are likely to have a severe impact on the environment i.e. tree preservation orders or existing public rights of way. The Local Plan chapter on the Natural and Historic Environment contains positive enabling policies. The PNDP has adopted a similar approach that is intended to have a positive effect.
2(a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	No	Due to the limited scale of any new development, it is unlikely that the PNDP would result in any irreversible damaging environmental impacts. All new development should be sustainable and be in accordance with existing planning policy.
2(b) The cumulative nature of the effects	No	It is not possible to fully assess the cumulative effects of future development until planning applications have been submitted and assessed for the allocated sites. However, it is anticipated that forthcoming issues could include the effect on school capacity, highway safety and the loss and movement of jobs. It may be possible to address some or all of these

		<p>cumulative issues through mitigation measures, financial contributions, and in the detailed part of the planning application process. Further to this it is thought the policies within the PNDP will generate positive effects.</p> <p>Application of the policies contained in the PNDP attempt to prevent detrimental cumulative effects by assuring that new development will address environmental, social and economic issues created by each development.</p>
2(c) The transboundary nature of the effects	No	<p>The small scale infill housing and small scale employment proposals of the PNDP are unlikely to generate any significant cross-boundary effects.</p> <p>Improvements to more sustainable transport modes and linkages, including cycling, walking should help to minimise any trans boundary effects.</p>
2(d) The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	No	<p>It is unlikely that there will be any obvious risks to human health arising from the policies within the PNDP.</p> <p>Health and Safety standards on developments arising within the plan area will be controlled/ governed by relevant statutory guidelines and codes. Any risks arising from the policies and proposals in the PNDP will be managed in accordance with the relevant statutory frameworks; however no details have been submitted or are shown within the plan.</p>
2(e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	No	<p>The PNDP covers the parish of Pontesbury which covers an area of approximately 80.75 hectares. The PNDP is likely to affect a residential population of approximately 1873 people over the life of the Plan across a parish located in a rural area. The population of the parish is likely to grow further.</p>
2(f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. special natural characteristics or cultural heritage ii. exceeded environmental quality standards iii. intensive land-use 	No	<p>The PNDP is unlikely to adversely affect the value and vulnerability of the area in relation to its natural or cultural heritage. If anything it will provide greater support to enhance the setting of heritage assets and of green spaces.</p> <p>Where possible, policies will encourage new opportunities for recreation, access and leisure.</p>

		<p>The PNDP policies will aim to preserve and enhance all known sites of ecological or environmental importance.</p> <p>The policies contained in the PNDP provide opportunities for development if they are planned and designed to protect and enhance local wildlife species and habitats.</p> <p>The plan also designates areas of local green space alongside policies which seek to support the transition to a zero carbon economy including effective measures to minimise pollution and to meet high levels of sustainability and energy efficiency.</p> <p>These are in line with policies in the Local Plan dealing with the Natural and Historic Environment and Climate Change.</p>
<p>2 (g) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>It is considered that the PNDP is unlikely to have an adverse impact on its existing landscapes.</p> <p>Whilst there are areas of grade 2, 3 and 4 agricultural land within the parish the plan does not propose any new development on the best and most versatile land.</p> <p>A statement on Habitats Regulations Assessment has been prepared identifying whether a plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.</p> <p>The plan proposes to provide opportunities for development if they are planned and designed to protect and enhance local wildlife species and habitats, as well as protecting local green spaces which are likely to have beneficial impacts on the local character and qualities.</p>

Conclusion of the SEA Screening Process for the Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan

The policies within the Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan have been screened under the Strategic Environment Assessment process.

The conclusion of the SEA Screening Process is that none of the proposed policies within the draft Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan has the potential to have a significant effect on the natural environment.

The draft Pontesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan can be 'screened out' of the Strategic Environment Assessment process and an 'Appropriate Assessment' is not required.