

Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Radley Neighbourhood Plan

**Environmental Report
Non-technical summary**

September 2017

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Rev	Date	Details	Prepared by	Reviewed by	Approved by
1	Sept 2017	Non-technical summary of the Environmental Report published alongside the 'Pre-submission' version of the Radley Neighbourhood Plan	Mark Fessey Principal Consultant	Steve Smith Technical Director	Mark Fessey Technical Director

Limitations

AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited (AECOM) has prepared this Report for the sole use of Radley Parish Council ("the Client") in accordance with the terms and conditions of appointment. No other warranty, expressed or implied, is made as to the professional advice included in this Report or any other services provided. This Report may not be relied upon by any other party without the prior and express written agreement of AECOM.

Where any conclusions and recommendations contained in this Report are based upon information provided by others, it has been assumed that all relevant information has been provided by those parties and that such information is accurate. Any such information obtained by AECOM has not been independently verified by AECOM, unless otherwise stated in the Report.

AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited
 2 Leman Street, London E1 8FA
 Telephone: +44 (0)20 7798 5000

Introduction

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

The RNP is being prepared by Radley Parish Council (RPC), following a successful application to have the Parish designated as a Neighbourhood Plan area in 2015. The RNP is being prepared in the context of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031, and specifically will seek to supplement the strategic policies of the Local Plan with detailed policies and proposals to address local place-based issues.

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

The Neighbourhood Plan is at an advanced stage of preparation, with the 'pre submission' version currently published for consultation, under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations. An Environmental Report is published alongside the Proposed Submission VALP, as part of the SEA process.

This is a Non-technical Summary (NTS) of the Environmental Report.

Structure of the Environmental Report / this NTS

SA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:

1. What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?
 - i.e. preceding finalisation of proposals for consultation.
2. What are the appraisal findings at this current stage?
 - i.e. in relation to the proposals published for consultation.
3. What are the next steps?

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

What's the scope of the SEA?

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

The SEA framework)

Objectives

Maintain **air quality** and where necessary address any air pollution hotspots.

Protect and enhance all **biodiversity** and geological features.

Reduce the level of contribution to **climate change** made by activities within the area

Support the resilience of the area to the potential effects of climate change, including **flooding**

Protect, maintain and enhance the cultural **heritage** resource within the Neighbourhood Plan area, including the historic environment and archaeological assets.

Protect and enhance the character and quality of **landscapes** and townscapes.

Ensure the efficient and effective use of **land**.

Objectives

Promote sustainable **waste management**, encouraging the reduction, re-use and recycling of waste.

Use and manage **water resources** in a sustainable manner.

Cater for existing and future residents' needs as well as the needs of different groups in the community, and improve access to local, high-quality community **services and facilities**.

Reduce **deprivation** and promote a more inclusive and self-contained community.

Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable **housing**, and ensure an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures.

Improve the **health and wellbeing** residents within the Neighbourhood Plan area.

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 appraising 'reasonable alternatives' in time to inform development of the draft proposals, and then publishing information on reasonable alternatives for consultation alongside the draft proposals.

As such, Part 1 of the SA Report explains how work was undertaken to develop and appraise a 'reasonable' range of alternative approaches to addressing a key plan issue, namely the need to set **policy for the Radley Lakes area**.

Specifically, Part 1 of the report -

- 1) explains the process of **establishing** the reasonable alternatives;
- 2) presents the outcomes of **appraising** the reasonable alternatives; and
- 3) explains reasons for **establishing** the preferred option, in light of the appraisal.

Establishing reasonable alternatives

The main report explains how reasonable alternatives were established subsequent to a lengthy process of considering issues and options for the Radley Lakes area. Ultimately, it was determined appropriate to establish two quite high-level alternative policy approaches, as the 'reasonable alternatives'. Specifically, the following reasonable alternatives were established -

- Option 1 - Policy supporting use of Radley Lakes for nature conservation
- Option 2 - Policy supporting use of Radley Lakes for nature conservation and quiet recreation

Appraising reasonable alternatives

Summary alternatives appraisal findings are presented within the table below. Within each row (i.e. for each of the topics that comprise the SA framework) the columns to the right hand side seek to both categorise the performance of each option in terms of 'significant effects' (using **red** / **green**) and also rank the alternatives in relative order of performance.

Summary alternatives appraisal findings

Topic	Option 1 - Nature conservation	Option 2 - Nature conservation and quiet recreation
Air quality	=	=
Biodiversity	=	=
Climate change	=	=
Flooding	=	=
Heritage	2	★1
Landscape	=	=
Land	=	=
Waste	=	=
Water resources	=	=
Services and facilities	2	★1
Deprivation	=	=
Housing	=	=
Health	2	★1
Transport	2	★1

Summary appraisal findings

In summary, Option 2 (support for both nature conservation and recreation uses) stands-out as performing best in terms of a number of objectives, albeit it is recognised that several of these objectives are closely linked. In short, the appraisal serves to highlight a considerable opportunity to support quiet recreation within the Radley Lakes area, which in turn will lead to benefits to surrounding communities, particularly in terms of ‘Health’ objectives. Work in the short term to support quiet recreation (in addition to nature conservation) could support achievement of the long term aspiration to improve access to the area, which in turn could result in a ‘step change’ in recreational activity.

‘Biodiversity’ is also a key objective, and in this respect it is predicted that both options perform equally well. There is every reason to assume that ‘quiet recreation’ uses (Option 2) would be well managed, such that there is no conflict with nature conservation objectives.

No major draw-backs to Option to are highlighted, although it is notable that there would be a need to consider the possibility of increased recreational uses conflicting with established employment uses, and creating some challenges in transport / road safety terms.

Establishing the preferred option

The following is the Parish Council's response to the alternatives appraisal -

RPC notes the appraisal of alternatives set out in section 7 above, and supports the adoption of Option 2 (support for both nature conservation and quiet recreation) for the reasons given.

The planning conditions for former minerals working in the Lakes area already require restoration for nature conservation. The important policy issue is whether the area should be actively managed for both nature conservation and quiet recreation.

The report shows that nature conservation will bring significant benefits, especially for biodiversity. Quiet recreation is shown to bring additional benefits, most significantly for the health of residents, without diminishing the benefits from nature conservation. A key consideration here is the size of the area, which – if properly planned and managed - enables conflicts to be avoided. The report also highlights the importance of providing a new access route to the Lakes area, removing the current road safety hazards: it finds that providing for quiet recreation will help provide momentum for a solution, but that the full benefits will not be realised unless and until such a solution is realised

These findings support the strategy and policies in the consultation draft of Radley's Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan provides for a planning policy to support nature conservation and quiet recreation land uses, and for a community action to promote the active management of the land for these purposes and to work towards a new access solution. In carrying forward the community action, RPC will work in partnership with other stakeholders and will take account of the more detailed findings in the report, including the potential to provide benefit for Abingdon residents through linked walking routes.

APPRAISAL FINDINGS AT THIS STAGE

Part 2 of the Environmental Report presents an appraisal of the Pre Submission Plan. Appraisal findings are presented as a series of narratives under the 'SEA framework' headings. The following overall conclusion is reached -

The appraisal finds the Draft Plan to perform well in terms of a range of sustainability objectives, with no major draw-backs highlighted. Policies that seek to influence development of the three Vale LPP1 strategic housing sites, both in respect of the type of development and the approach to infrastructure delivery / upgrades, perform particularly well in terms of 'Services and facilities', 'Health' and 'Transport' objectives. These policies are also supported from a 'Water' perspective, recognising that policies are proposed to ensure that new development does not worsen existing issues around surface water runoff and wastewater management / sewerage. These policies could potentially have quite a direct influence on the planning permissions granted on these sites, albeit this is contingent on the policies being in place in time, i.e. prior to planning permissions being granted.

The proposed policy approach to Radley Lakes is also supported, in terms of a range of objectives. The appraisal serves to highlight a considerable opportunity to support quiet recreation within the Radley Lakes area, which in turn will lead to benefits to surrounding communities, particularly in terms of 'Health' objectives. Work in the short term to support quiet recreation (in addition to nature conservation) could support achievement of the long term aspiration to improve access to the area, which in turn could result in a 'step change' in recreational activity. In the short term there is a slight tension in that increased recreational activity could conflict with established employment uses, and create some challenges in transport / road safety terms; however, there will be good potential to manage the situation. It is noted that a proposed 'community action' is to prepare a detailed masterplan for the area.

Next steps

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

Plan finalisation

Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations, requires that the Forum submit (to the Local Authority) the 'Proposed' Plan and a 'Consultation Statement'. The Consultation Statement must describe issues or concerns raised through the current consultation and how these were addressed when preparing the 'Proposed Plan' for submission.

Regulation 16 then requires that the Local Authority 'publicises' the Proposed Plan so that stakeholders can make representations that may then be considered at Examination. It will be appropriate for the Local Authority to also publicise an updated version of the Environmental Report, with a view to informing representations.

Regulation 17 requires that the Local Authority submits (to the person appointed to carry out the Examination) the Proposed Plan and a copy of any representations which have been made in accordance with Regulation 16. It may be appropriate for the Local Authority to also submit the updated Environmental Report, with a view to informing the Examination.

Regulations 18 and 19 require that, subsequent to the Examination, the Local Authority publishes the Examiner's Report and a Decision Statement. The Decision Statement sets out whether or not the Local Authority is prepared to 'make' (i.e. adopt) the plan. If the Local Authority is prepared to make the plan, then a referendum can be held. It may be appropriate for the Local Authority to also publish an updated Environmental Report, with a view to informing the Referendum.

Regulation 20 states what the Local Authority must do when the plan is 'made' (i.e. adopted). The SEA Statement must be published alongside the made Plan, with a view to providing:

- information on the decision, i.e. an explanation of why the final plan approach was decided-upon in light of SEA and consultation; and
- measures decided concerning monitoring.

Monitoring

At the current time, there is a need to present 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring'.

The Draft Plan proposes that monitoring efforts should be focused on the three LPP1 strategic housing allocations, stating -

"Where there is a departure from a planning permission (for instance failure to implement a condition), or failure to obtain planning permission, RPC will take this up with the developer and/or notify the Vale as appropriate. Where the departure is significant RPC will press VWHDC to take enforcement action."

This is broadly supported, although the Council might want to consider what 'outcomes' could also be a focus of monitoring, e.g. monitoring of traffic (including walkers/cyclists) along Thrupp Lane and/or monitoring of flooding and/or water pollution incidents.