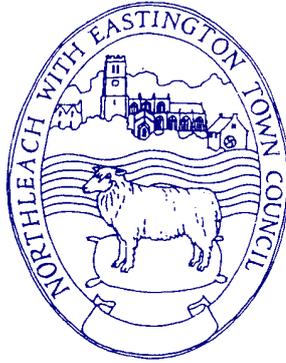


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Northleach with Eastington Neighbourhood Plan (NENP)

**Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA)
SCOPING LETTER TO**

Dear consultee,

Northleach with Eastington Neighbourhood Plan: Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Letter

I set out below for your attention the proposed scope of the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) to accompany the forthcoming Northleach with Eastington Neighbourhood Plan (NENP).

This letter and its appendices should be regarded as the Scoping Report of the NENP in accordance with Stage A of the provisions of the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004 (which implement EU Directive 2001/42).

As a statutory consultee in the Regulations you are invited to comment on this report and I would be grateful for your comments by Wednesday 9th December 2015.

Background

The NENP is being prepared by Northleach with Eastington Town Council as a qualifying body under the 2012 Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations. Cotswold District Council has not yet issued its formal screening opinion in accordance with the 2004 Regulations 2004, although it has been indicated that the primary reason an SEA is likely to be required (and that it would preferably be undertaken as part of a wider Sustainability Appraisal (SA/SEA)) is the likely intention of the NENP to contain policies allocating land for development within the AONB.

The guidance for undertaking SA/SEA is contained in the National Planning Practice Guidance (ID 11-030), which emphasises that it must "only focus on what is needed to assess the likely significant effects of the neighbourhood plan" and on the "environmental impacts that are likely to be significant". It then states that this "does not need to be done in any more detail, or using more resources, than is considered to be appropriate for the content and level of detail in the neighbourhood plan".

The NENP is likely to contain only a small number of policies that will seek to identify sites for housing development, either within the settlement boundary by encouraging the reuse of brownfield land, or immediately adjoining it, and policies that will shape any related development proposals. It will therefore work alongside other development plan policies for the district to guide the consideration of planning applications. It is likely that the NENP would seek small developments of up to 20-30 houses on sites either adjoining or within the existing settlement boundary up to a maximum of, say 100 (taking account of those for which planning has already been granted, specifically Fortey Road (22) Chequers (9) and the Sly Trust site at West End/ Back Lane (6)

The SA/SEA framework will be used to assess two or three spatial options for distributing this development in the parish, rather than to assess individual sites in isolation of each other. Its conclusions will direct the selection of sites to those locations assessed as the most suitable by taking account of the SA/SEA and the Town Council's view on the relative acceptability to the local community of the spatial options, bearing in mind the need for the NENP to win a majority vote at a referendum.

It is not anticipated that there will be any element of the plan which would trigger an EIA under the criteria listed in Schedule 2 of EIA Regulations.

Such aspirations as the plan is likely to espouse are consistent with the emerging local plan and the statement as to the proposed strategy for Northleach to the effect that by 2031 the town will have strengthened its position as a local service and employment centre, that a site for the development of small scale workspace will be identified, that opportunities will be sought to accommodate the expansion of local business and that the establishment of a small visitors car park would be supported.

The NENP may therefore contain policies relating to its local shops, employment sites, community facilities and sustainable infrastructure, all of which will be in general conformity with the relevant saved development plan policies, and will accord with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework. The consideration of these potential policies has begun but will await the conclusions of the consultation on this scoping exercise before progressing any further.

The NENP 'State of the Parish' report summarises the relevant evidence base for preparing the plan and is appended to this letter. The report contains a summary analysis of the relevant plans and programmes that may inform the NENP and provides an overview of its evidence base. In doing so, it provides the information required for Stages A1 and A2 of the SA/SEA process.

Other Plans & Programmes (Stage A1)

The NENP State of the Parish report will identify the saved policies taken from the Cotswold District Local Plan 2001-11 likely to have the most relevance in shaping the NENP. Indeed, the NENP must be able to show that its policies are in general conformity with those strategic policies and the emerging local plan and will seek to adhere to those and to anticipate those which may emerge from the forthcoming local plan.

However, it is clear that the new local plan is unlikely to have been adopted before the NENP goes forward to examination. Consequently, the NENP policies cannot yet rely upon the proposed local plan policies to justify its policies.

Baseline Information (A2)

The State of the Parish report contains a wide range of social, economic and environmental data. The Town Council is mindful that it is very difficult in most cases to measure impacts at this local scale as either the data is not reported at this scale and/or the impact is so relatively negligible that it can not be measured. In which case, the SA/SEA framework will be used to inform judgements on the impact of the proposed policies in relation to any reasonable alternatives there may be.

Sustainability Issues (A3)

The State of the Parish report highlights no significant sustainability issues that are not also common to small, historic market towns in rural England, especially in terms of access to affordable housing. The small town centre has a good basic mix of shops and services though these are under strong competitive pressures affecting all local 'high streets'. These also provide essential services to the wider rural hinterland population.

The local community appears to accept that new development may be required to help address some of these issues, provided it is small in scale, well located and is of a high quality design. As a result of the community engagement work completed thus far, a summary of which is contained in the State of the Parish report, the NENP will plan for new homes over the plan period 2015 – 2031. At this stage, from the evidence work already undertaken, the Town Council is confident the NENP will be able to do so within the environmental constraints.

Given the modest scale of growth likely to be planned for in the NENP, and its likely focus on the established settlement of Northleach, there will be no likely measureable impacts on any designated nature sites or heritage assets outside the parish boundary or, indeed, within it.

Appraisal Framework (A4)

In the light of the context and available data, the Town Council proposes to establish the following framework of environmental, social and economic objectives and measures in order to identify any likely significant environmental, social and economic effects.

For consistency with the Local Plan assessments, the Interim Sustainability Appraisal of May 2013 has been used to inform the proposed policy objectives.

The selection of objectives for the proposed framework reflects the general sustainability issues of the parish and the likely scope of policies in the NENP. It has selected those objectives that are considered the most relevant and informative for this purpose. The decision not to choose any particular policy objective does not necessarily mean that objective has no relevance to the NENP but that it is unlikely to enable the merits of policy options to be distinguished and is therefore unhelpful for this purpose.

The process of housing site selection will be informed by an analysis of their achievability, availability and acceptability and by an analysis of their suitability when assessed against the spatial policy of the NENP. That spatial policy, and any reasonable alternative spatial options, will be informed by the proposed SA/SEA framework.

1. To improve access to services and leisure/cultural facilities (including play, recreation in open spaces, parks and the countryside)
 - Will the NENP enable existing facilities to be protected and new ones created?
2. To provide an adequate supply of open market and affordable homes of different types to meet local needs
 - Will the NENP contribute to meeting district and local open market housing need?
 - Will the NENP contribute to meeting the needs of local people for affordable housing?
3. To preserve and enhance the quality of built environment and heritage of the town
 - Will the NENP sustain and enhance the significance of designated heritage assets?
 - Will the NENP sustain and enhance the significance of non-designated heritage assets?
4. Ensure that the natural environment surrounding the town is conserved and enhanced, biodiversity is improved and designated habitats are protected
 - Does the NENP justify the exceptional circumstances for development in the Cotswold AONB?
 - Will the NENP deliver a net biodiversity gain?
 - Will the NENP avoid development in a designated habitat site?
5. To reduce flood risk resulting from new developments
 - Will the NENP avoid development in an area of defined flood risk (i.e. EA flood zone 2 or 3)?
6. To create opportunities for the town's residents to find employment locally
 - Will the NENP plan for new employment land for businesses suited to an AONB location?
 - Will the NENP improve the competitiveness of existing employment land?
7. To improve the vitality and viability of the town as a local service centre
 - Will the NENP enable existing town centre retailers and other services to thrive?
 - Will the NENP enable new town centre floorspace and/or uses?

Statutory Consultation (A5)

The conclusions of this consultation will be considered by the Town Council in finalising the SA/SEA assessment framework. That framework will then inform the formulation of the Pre Submission NENP and will be set out and employed in the accompanying Draft SA/SEA report. It is expected that draft NENP policies will be formulated and assessed against one or more reasonable alternatives to ensure any significant environmental effects have been identified and any necessary mitigation measures are included in the policies.

If you have any queries then please contact our planning consultant, Neil Homer, of RCOH Ltd at neil.homer@rcoh.co.uk or call him on 07833 462991.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Catriona Crompton

Town Clerk
Northleach with Eastington Town Council

APPENDIX A

Northleach & Easington Neighbourhood Plan: State of the Parish Report

See separate document