



Final Screening Report

Draft Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment & Habitats Regulation Assessment

October 2024

On behalf of Sleaford Town Council in relation to the Draft Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan

Date of assessment:	17 October 2024
Date/ version of neighbourhood development plan to which Screening Report applies:	Regulation 14 Consultation Draft Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan v3.22, June 2024

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Overview

Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) to which this Screening Report applies:

Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan

Version/ date of NDP to which this Screening Report applies:

Regulation 14 Consultation Draft Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan v3.22, June 2024

Neighbourhood area to which the NDP applies:

Sleaford Neighbourhood Area. This draft NDP applies to the entirety of the Neighbourhood Area.

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Acronyms

ALC	Agricultural Land Classification
ANGSt	Access to Natural Greenspace Standard
AQMA	Air Quality Management Area
NKDC	North Kesteven District Council
EA	Environment Agency
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
EUWA	European Union (Withdrawal) Act
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
IRZ	Impact Risk Zone
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LPA	Local Planning Authority
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
NCA	National Character Area
NDP	Neighbourhood Development Plan
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
SPZ	Source Protection Zone
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SUE	Sustainable Urban Extension
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WRC	Water Recycling Centre

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Sleaford Town Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (Neighbourhood Development Plan/ 'the Neighbourhood Plan'). To be 'made', a Neighbourhood Plan must meet certain Basic Conditions. These include that the making of the plan "*does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.*" One of these obligations relates to Directive 2001/42/EC 'on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment'. This is often referred to as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive.
- 1.2. The SEA Directive seeks to provide a high level of protection of the environment by integrating environmental considerations into the process of preparing plans and programmes. The SEA Directive is transposed into English law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (the 'SEA Regulations') and it is these regulations that the plan will need to be compatible with.
- 1.3. This report considers whether there is a need to undertake a full SEA for the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.4. However, this Screening Report is not just about SEA. Another element of the Basic Conditions relates to Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, often referred to as the Habitats Directive. Under the Habitats Regulations which implement the Directive, an assessment referred to as 'an appropriate assessment' must be undertaken if the plan in question is likely to have a significant effect on a European protected wildlife site. This forms part of a wider assessment known as a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).
- 1.5. Therefore, this report also considers whether there is a need to undertake a full HRA for the Neighbourhood Plan.

2. Legislative Background and Screening Process

- 2.1. The UK left the EU on 31st January 2020. Under the UK-EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018 (EUWA), a transition period ended on 31st December 2020, during which time all EU law continued to apply to the UK. During the transition period the UK needed to continue following domestic law that implements EU law, or directly applicable EU law that is given effect through the EUWA 2018. Beyond the transition period, the SEA Regulations will continue to apply as before unless and until new legislation is introduced.
- 2.2. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill became law from 26 October 2023. The Act proposes the replacement of the current SEA regime with a new requirement for an Environmental Outcomes Report. The specific requirements will be set out in forthcoming regulations, along with information about transition arrangements. At present, the requirement for SEA remains as set out in existing legislation.
- 2.3. A key stage in the neighbourhood planning process is determining whether SEA is required. The process for deciding whether SEA is necessary is referred to as 'screening'.
- 2.4. SEA is a process with specific documents that are consulted on and considered through the decision-making process. Failure to adhere to the process and generate the required documents may increase the risk of legal challenge to the adoption of that plan.
- 2.5. The SEA Regulations set out a series of sequential steps that must be undertaken as part of any SEA. Article 3(5) of Directive 2001/42/EC details the criteria for determining whether plans are likely to have significant environmental effects. These criteria are outlined in **Appendix 1**.

- 2.6. The (former) Department of the Environment produced a flow chart diagram¹ which sets out the process for screening a planning document to ascertain whether a full SEA is required. The flow chart diagram is provided in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.7. More recently, the national Planning Practice Guide reflects the SEA Regulations in a six-stage flowchart process for undertaking SEA for a Neighbourhood Plan (see **Appendix 3**).
- 2.8. These various pieces of law and guidance have been used to help prepare this report. **Section 6** provides firstly, a screening assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan, against the assessment criteria in **Appendix 1** to identify the significance of effects which may arise as a result of the plan's implementation.
- 2.9. Secondly, it applies the SEA Directive to the Neighbourhood Plan, as per the flow chart in **Appendix 2**, to determine if a SEA is required.
- 2.10. To decide whether a SEA is required, North Kesteven District Council (NKDC) needs to consider the following sorts of issues:
- How the policies in the NDP might affect the environment, community or economy;
 - Whether the policies are likely to adversely affect a “sensitive area”, such as a European Site (Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar) or a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR) etc.;
 - Whether the policies propose a higher level of development than what is set out in the existing development plan and that has been assessed by the SEA or Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of that plan;
 - Whether the implementation of the policies is likely to lead to new development;
 - Whether the cumulative impact of the policies taken together may give rise to a significant effect.
- 2.11. Not every Neighbourhood Plan will need SEA. However, when a parish or town council submits a plan proposal to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) it is mandatory to provide, either:
- a statement of reasons as to why SEA was not required; or
 - if SEA is required, an Environmental Report (a key output of the SEA process).
- 2.12. As a rule of thumb, SEA is more likely to be necessary if both of the following two elements apply:
- a Neighbourhood Plan allocates sites for development (for example, for housing, employment etc.); **and**
 - the neighbourhood area contains sensitive environmental assets (a SSSI or a National Landscape, for example) that may be affected by the policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.13. In light of these two considerations, it is very unlikely that a Neighbourhood Plan would require SEA if the plan were not allocating land for development (which isn't already allocated in the Local Plan or with consent). This is because allocating land for development is more likely to generate physical changes which lead to significant effects.
- 2.14. In terms of HRA, a decision by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) (People Over Wind & Sweetman vs. Coillte Teoranta) in April 2018 has had a significant impact on the HRA process for both Neighbourhood Plans and Local Plans. In short, the ECJ ruled that to determine whether it is necessary to carry out a full HRA of the implications of a plan, it is not appropriate to take account of mitigation measures at the screening stage. Rather, consideration of mitigation will need to occur at the full appropriate assessment stage.

¹ Department of the Environment, A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2005)

- 2.15. Following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU), decisions by the ECJ are no longer legally binding but may continue to be relevant².
- 2.16. A consequence of the ECJ's decision is that mitigation measures set out in a plan cannot be used at the screening stage to conclude there will be 'no likely significant effects' on European Sites. Therefore, if a Neighbourhood Plan includes measures to counter the plan's effects on European Sites these should, in effect, be ignored at the screening stage.
- 2.17. Previously, plan-making in the UK has followed case law as set out in *Application of Hart District Council; vs. the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in 2008*, which concluded that: *'anything which encourages the proponents of plans and projects to incorporate mitigation measures at the earliest possible stage in the evolution of their plan or project is surely to be encouraged'*.
- 2.18. The Government has acknowledged that the ECJ's ruling has caused uncertainty in preparing Neighbourhood Plans and could result in more plans requiring a full SEA or HRA. In December 2018, The Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018³ came into force, amending the Basic Conditions and allowing affected NDPs and Orders to proceed.
- 2.19. For the avoidance of doubt, this screening report has been undertaken in accordance with the ECJ's ruling, insofar that the effects of any mitigation measures set out in the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan (June 2024) have not been considered.
- 2.20. The SEA Directive requires that if an eligible plan or programme requires an appropriate assessment under the Habitats Directive, then that plan, or programme will also require a SEA. It is therefore advisable to check whether an assessment under the Habitats Regulations is required by undertaking HRA screening at the same time as screening for SEA. That is what has been done in this document.
- 2.21. Returning to the purpose of this document, there are three recommended steps in the initial screening process:
1. Prepare a screening report (this document);
 2. Request a screening opinion from the consultation bodies in light of this report; and
 3. Considering their responses, determine whether the plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment (and therefore require SEA).
- 2.22. Whilst it is not prescribed, in most instances the LPA, which is NKDC in this case, will undertake SEA screening for a Neighbourhood Plan. This is because the LPA will ultimately be responsible for ensuring that the SEA requirements have been met prior to the Neighbourhood Plan being made. **It is confirmed that NKDC prepared this Screening Report.**
- 2.23. The Neighbourhood Plan should be screened as soon as there is sufficient information available to consider whether the proposed content of the plan or its likely intent (e.g., will it allocate development sites or not?) are likely to lead to significant effects to effectively inform the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.24. The purpose of this report, therefore, is to undertake a screening exercise to determine whether the Neighbourhood Plan (June 2024) requires a full SEA and/ or HRA. The screening exercise will therefore support the Neighbourhood Plan in satisfying the Basic Conditions and can be submitted as part of the evidence base which will accompany the Neighbourhood Plan. Sleaford Town Council is the 'Qualifying Body' for the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/16/section/6/enacted>

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/1307/contents/made>

(which is coterminous with the Sleaford parish boundary). Only Sleaford Town Council has the legal right to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area.

- 2.25. Please note that this screening report uses the term 'European Site' when referring collectively to SPAs, SACs, and Ramsar sites. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also expects candidate SACs, potential SPAs and Ramsar sites to be included within the assessment.
- 2.26. For the purposes of SEA, the statutory bodies are executive non-departmental public bodies with responsibilities for managing the environment on government's behalf, namely:
 - The Environment Agency;
 - Historic England; and
 - Natural England
- 2.27. The statutory bodies have been requested to review and make representations during consultation on this screening report.

3. Strategic Planning Context

- 3.1. The Basic Conditions require a Neighbourhood Plan to be in *general conformity* with the strategic policies contained in the development plan (primarily, the Local Plan) for the area. Through its strategic policies, the Local Plan effectively defines the parameters within which a Neighbourhood Plan may operate.
- 3.2. Throughout their preparation, Local Plans are subject to SEA (generally incorporated through a Sustainability Appraisal (SA)) and HRA. Where a Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan, it is likely that many of the environmental effects of the plan will have already been considered through the Local Plan plan-making process.
- 3.3. National policy states that evidence should be proportionate and should not repeat policy assessment already undertaken. It is therefore relevant to consider the strategic policy context for the purpose of avoiding duplication.

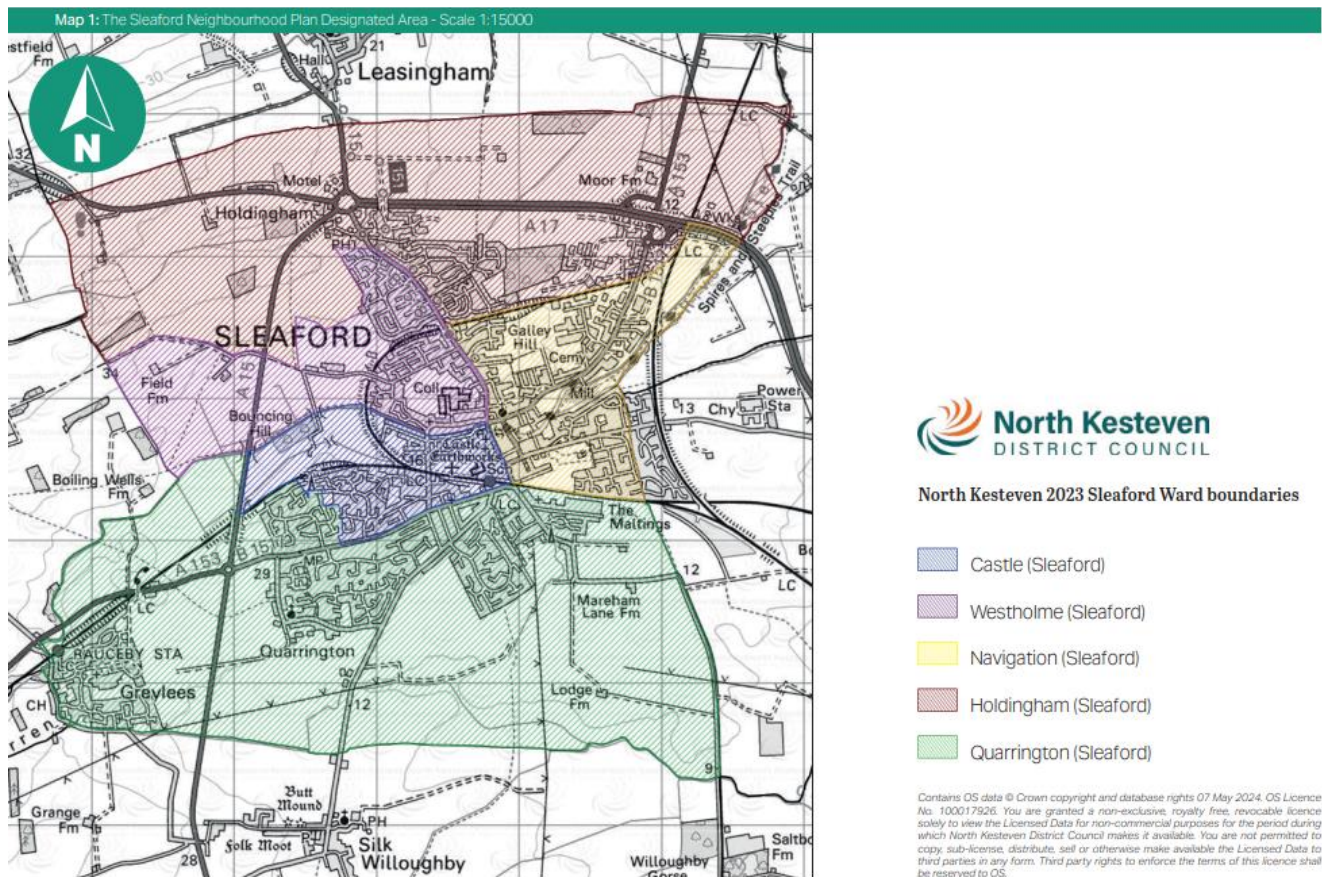
Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, April 2023

- 3.4. The spatial strategy in the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan seeks to concentrate growth on the three main urban areas, including Sleaford, which is identified as a "Main Town". To maintain and enhance its role as a main town, and to meet the objectives for regeneration, Sleaford is intended to be the focus for substantial housing development supported by appropriate levels of employment growth, retail growth and wider service provision. Around 12% of Central Lincolnshire's housing requirement for the plan period (2018-2040) is allocated to the Sleaford area which equates to around 3,498 new dwellings, primarily delivered through a strategy of sustainable urban extensions (SUEs), allocations and other sites within the urban area.
- 3.5. Sleaford has two SUEs with an indicative total of 2,900 dwellings, of which 2,350 are expected to be built during the plan period. Four housing sites have also been allocated within the Local Plan with a total of 919 indicative dwellings for the plan period. Sleaford Enterprise Park is identified as a Strategic Employment Site offering 14.7ha of employment land and an additional 3ha are allocated at the Sleaford West SUE.

4. Summary of the Neighbourhood Plan (June 2024 version)

- 4.1. The subject of this screening report is the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan (June 2024).
- 4.2. The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared by Sleaford Town Council, the 'qualifying body' for the purposes of neighbourhood planning. The Sleaford Neighbourhood Area was formally designated by NKDC on 4th September 2020. The designated Neighbourhood Area is shown on **Map 1** below.

Map 1: Boundary of the designated Sleaford Neighbourhood Area



Source: Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan

- 4.3. The purpose of this document is to screen the Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan and supporting information are available to view and download from the Sleaford Neighbourhood Development Plan's website⁴. Where necessary, please refer to the Neighbourhood Plan alongside this screening report.

⁴ Available at: [Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan – Community planning in Sleaford](#)

4.4. The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a vision, aims and objectives for Sleaford shown on the “green wheel” diagram below. The vision at the centre is surrounded by four overarching aims underpinned by twelve detailed objectives to address the key issues facing Sleaford. These are:



4.5. To deliver the vision and objectives, the Neighbourhood Plan proposes twelve policies, which are summarised in **Table 1** below. Note that the table provides a summary of the policies intent, not the actual policy wording.

Table 1: The Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Policy	Summary
Policy 1: Sustainable Development	The policy requires development to contribute to the sustainability of Sleaford as defined in the vision, aims and objectives in the “green wheel”. Delivering a mix of

Policy	Summary
	housing tenures, sizes and affordability within the developed footprint, as defined in the glossary or designated SUEs. Development should not harm amenities, character, social, built, historic, cultural and natural assets.
Policy 2A: Delivering Good Design	The policy requires development to take account of the principles and guidance set out in the Sleaford Design Codes and Guidance and identifies character areas.
Policy 2B: Inclusive Design	The policy requires buildings and spaces to provide for inclusive access and use where practicable and reasonable.
Policy 3A: Access and Transport	The policy requires development to be located and designed to be consistent with the Transport Strategy for Sleaford, prioritising active travel and public transport and supporting improvement and further provision of public transport stops and stations.
Policy 3B: Car Parking for the Town Centre	A policy supporting the provision of car parking sites within walking distance of the town centre.
Policy 4: Sustaining the Local Economy	<p>This policy supports the development of businesses that do not have an adverse impact with a locational preference for Use Class E within the town centre and Use Classes B2 and B8 in Sleaford Industrial Area, Sleaford Enterprise Park and the West Quadrant SUE.</p> <p>Development within Use Class E outside of the City Centre would be supported if locally appropriate in terms of needs, scale, accessibility and not detracting from business functions in defined employment areas.</p> <p>Small/ micro businesses would be supported provided they did not have an adverse impact of an area's character and appearance and/ or amenity of neighbours.</p>
Policy 5: Town Centre	<p>The policy supports the development of shops, services, businesses, social, cultural and leisure facilities, housing and vibrant urban environment in the Town Centre.</p> <p>To aid this, support is given to the maintenance or creation of an attractive and safe public realm which is accessible and uncluttered and maintaining and/ or enhancing the quality and appearance of buildings and places contributing to the distinctive character of Sleaford (incl. its watercourses).</p> <p>Support is particularly given to the "Heart of Sleaford" proposal at Southgate, refurbishment/ redevelopment of the Riverside Centre, development of a transport interchange/ hub at the railway station, repurposing of the market square and enhancement of Westgate.</p>

Policy	Summary
Policy 6: Community Facilities	This policy supports the development, improvement or expansion of facilities and seeks to prevent the loss of existing facilities unless it can be demonstrated that it is no longer viable, required or suitable or that alternative facilities are being provided.
Policy 7: Heritage Assets	This policy requires any loss or dilution of heritage value of an assets to be weighed in balance against any economic and social benefits. The loss of a heritage assets would only be supported where it is demonstrated that every effort has been made to retain it and a balanced judgement made between the significance of the asset and any loss or dilution of value against any economic or social benefits.
Policy 8: Educational Facilities	<p>This policy supports the improvement, expansion, integration or relocation of schools and other educational facilities, provided it is well integrated with the surrounding area and accessible in accordance with the active travel priorities set out in policy 3A.</p> <p>Initiatives to improve access to vocational, further and higher education would be supported incl. establishing suitable premises and improving transport links.</p>
Policy 9: Green Infrastructure	The policy identifies an additional Local Green Space at Eastgate Green. It also identifies an area of open countryside known as “Leasingham Gap” between Sleaford and Leasingham where urbanisation would be resisted.
Policy 10: Blue Infrastructure	This policy seeks to prevent any loss or harm to the River Slea unless need for and benefits of the development demonstrably outweigh any adverse impacts and suitable mitigation measures are provided.

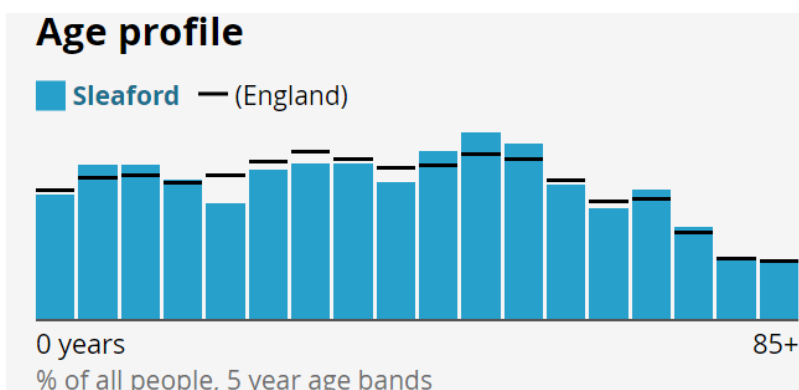
5. The Environmental Characteristics of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 5.1. To determine the likely significant effects of the Neighbourhood Plan on the environment, it is important to consider the characteristics of the area likely to be affected and the key areas of sensitivity. Enough information needs to be included in the screening report to allow the consultation bodies to take a view on the likely significant effects of implementing the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.2. The following paragraphs provide a high-level contextual overview of environmental issues and key areas of sensitivity in and around the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area. A range of sources of information have been used to gather this information, including Office for National Statistics, DEFRA Magic Maps, Environment Agency Flood Risk Maps for Planning, and the Neighbourhood Plan’s own evidence base.

Population and human health

- 5.3. The total population of Sleaford parish at the time of the 2021 Census⁵ was 19,800 people, an increase of 12% from 2011. 51.6% of the total population were female and 48.4% were male, similar to the average for Lincolnshire as a whole and the England average.
- 5.4. The age profile for Sleaford parish from the 2021 Census reveals that it broadly follows the England average. This can be seen clearly in **Figure 1** below.

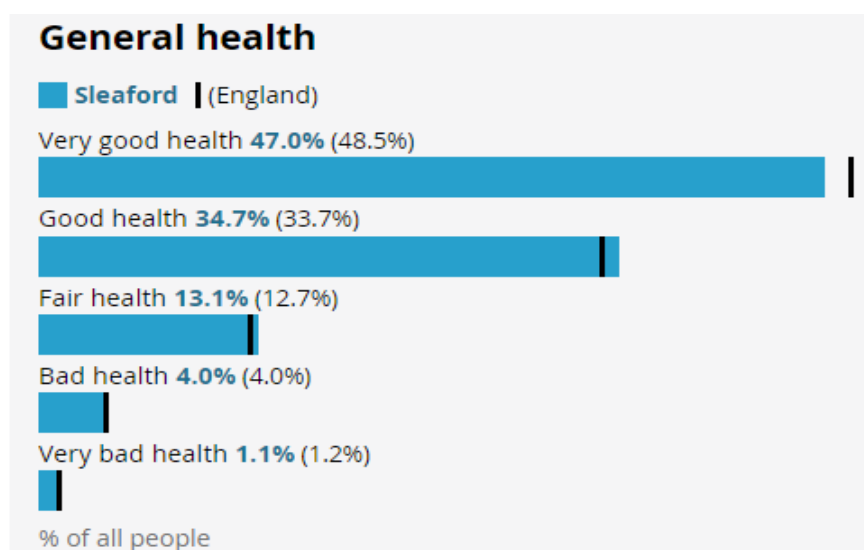
Figure 1: Age profile of Sleaford residents on 2021 Census Day



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

- 5.5. Life expectancy at birth in North Kesteven District is above the England average for both males and females⁶. 47% of the parish population described their health as 'very good' and 34.7% as 'good'.
- 5.6. 18.5% of the parish population were classed as disabled under the Equality Act. This figure is similar to the figure for North Kesteven as a whole but higher than the England average of 17.3%.

Figure 2: General Health of Sleaford residents on 2021 Census Day



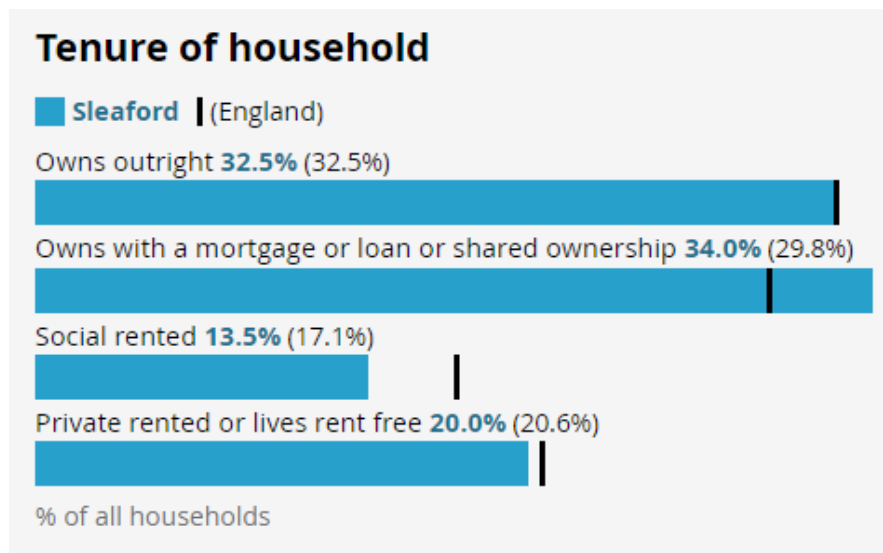
Source: ONS

⁵ Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

⁶ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, access online at <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles>

- 5.7. The 2021 Census recorded a total of 8,700 households (rounded to the nearest 100) within the parish of Sleaford. 32.5% of those households were owned outright (the same as the national average, but below the North Kesteven average of 40%). The number of households owned with a mortgage or loan or shared ownership are similar to those in North Kesteven and higher than the national average while the number of social rented or private rented households, also similar to those in North Kesteven, are lower than the national average, as shown in **Figure 3** below.

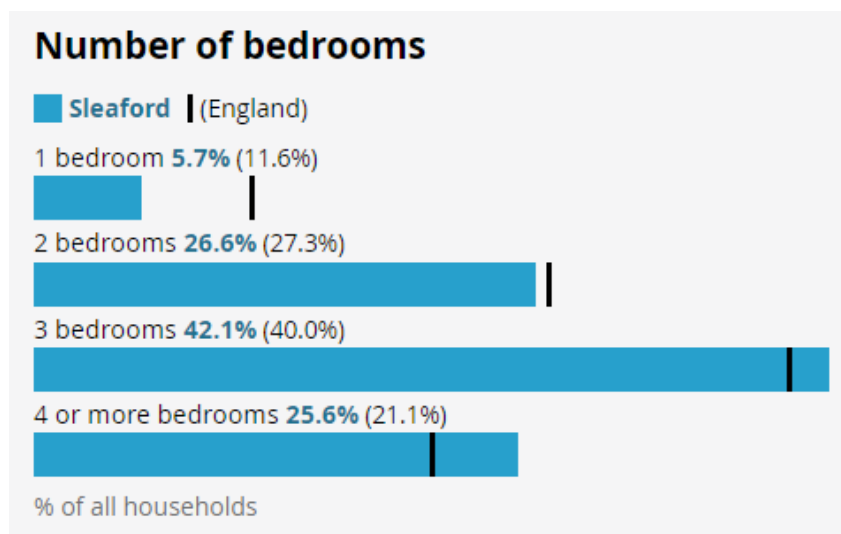
Figure 3: Tenure of households Sleaford Parish on 2021 Census Day



Source: ONS

- 5.8. There are a higher proportion of 3 and 4 bedroom households within Sleaford parish compared to the national average. This is similar to the North Kesteven average.

Figure 4: Number of bedrooms as a % of all households



Source: ONS

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

Internationally Designated Sites

- 5.9. There are no European Sites within the boundary of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area. However, there are some European Sites within 30km⁷ of the centre of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area:
- Grimsthorpe SAC
 - Baston Fen SAC
- 5.10. There are no proposed Ramsar sites, possible Special Areas of Conservation, or potential Special Protection Areas in proximity to the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

- 5.11. There are no NNRs within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area.
- 5.12. Sleaford parish does not include any SSSIs, however Wilsford & Rauceby Warrens SSSI is adjacent, immediately to the south-west of the Neighbourhood Plan area. This 57.4ha site consisting of Rauceby Warren and Sleaford Golf Course comprises the most extensive remaining areas of limestone grass heath in South Lincolnshire. This nationally scarce habitat type has virtually all now been converted to arable. At Wilsford and Rauceby, variation in the thickness of these glacial meltwater deposits gives rise to a mosaic of dry lime-rich and lime-poor soils with a correspondingly high botanical diversity. The site's rich flora is best seen around the margins of the old sand pits in Rauceby Warren and on the roughs of the golf course. A large population of a nationally rare plant occurs. Great Crested newts breed in one of the old water filled workings. The majority of the site has been assessed by Natural England⁸ as in unfavourable recovering condition and there is one recorded pressure for this site.
- 5.13. Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) are a GIS tool developed by Natural England to make a rapid initial assessment of the potential risks posed by development proposals to: SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites. The tool reflects Natural England's current understanding of SSSI sensitivities and pressures. The IRZ tool includes 'notes' that provide additional advice for development types that should be followed.
- 5.14. Impact Risk Zones (IRZ) for the adjacent Wilsford & Rauceby Warrens SSSI sites extend across the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area⁹. They include a note which states Natural England should be consulted for advice on a list of potential developments to assess the nature of the possible impacts and how these might be avoided or mitigated.

Locally Designated Sites

- 5.15. There are two Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area.
- Lollycock's Field LNR, Eastgate, Sleaford and
 - Mareham Pastures LNR
- 5.16. There are seven Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) located within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area (or on or very close to the boundary):

⁷ [Click here](#) to view European Sites within 30km of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area

⁸ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/UnitDetail.aspx?UnitId=1001212> and <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/UnitDetail.aspx?UnitId=1001213>

⁹ [Click here](#) to view SSSIs and IRZs in relation to the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area

Within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area:

- Sleaford Fen;
- Sleaford Meadows;
- Lollycock's Field;
- A15 Holdingham Road Verges; and
- Mareham Pastures;

On or very close to the boundary of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area:

- Kirkby La Thorpe Pit; and
- Rauceby Warren Road Verge

- 5.17. LWSs are defined areas, identified and selected locally for their nature conservation value based on important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species within a national, regional and importantly a local context. LWSs are areas of land important for their wildlife and can be found on public and private land. They vary in shape, size and may encompass a variety of different habitat types. The habitats and species present are often because of past management and many sites provide a refuge for rare or threatened plants and animals.

Ancient Woodland

- 5.18. There are no areas of ancient woodland within or adjacent to the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area. However, the area does contain Sleaford Wood to the north, Godsons Holt to the south and Mareham Pastures, also to the south which has been recently planted.
- 5.19. The Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory¹⁰ maps the oldest and most important trees in the UK. It is a live database where records are provided by members of the public and verified by the Woodland Trust. Whilst there are some ancient and veteran trees recorded at nearby South Rauceby, there are none currently recorded on the database within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area.

Priority Habitats

- 5.20. Priority Habitats are those which have been deemed to be of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity, being listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, and with maintenance and restoration of these habitats being promoted through agri-environment schemes.
- 5.21. Areas of priority habitat within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area have been recorded and mapped by Natural England and include areas of deciduous woodland, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, lowland calcareous grassland, traditional orchard and areas with no main habitat but with additional habitats present.

Landscape

National Character Areas (NCAs)

- 5.22. The Sleaford Neighbourhood Area falls within the Southern Lincolnshire Edge NCA.¹¹ This character area is defined by the dramatic limestone cliff to the west and the dip slope that drops gently away to the edge of the fens in the east. Key characteristics state that there is "Sparse settlement on higher land, with springline villages along the foot of the cliff, parklands and country estates such as Rauceby and Belton on lower ground, and larger settlements, including Sleaford, Ruskington and Metheringham, to the east of the dip slope.". Heavy clay

¹⁰ <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

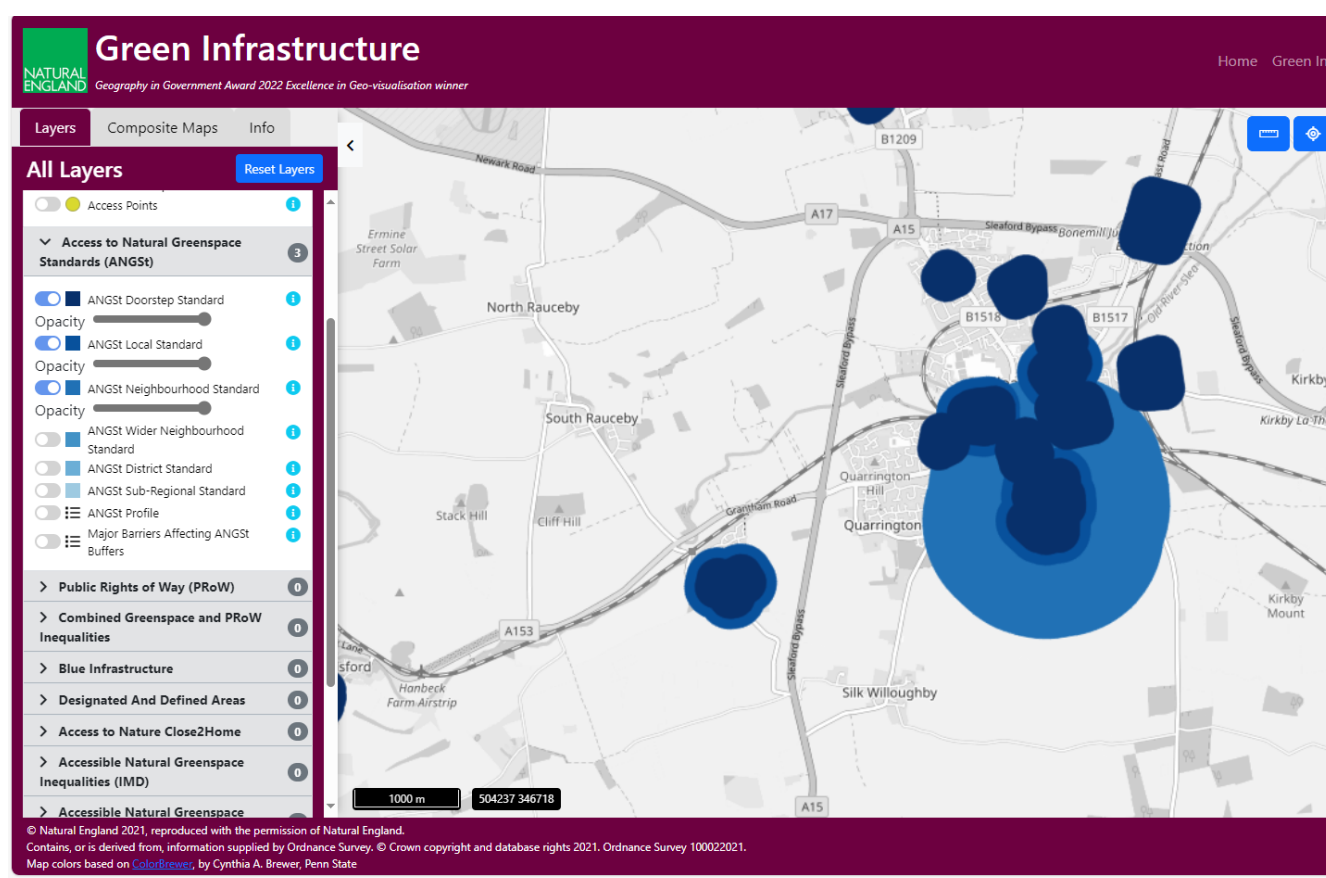
¹¹ [47. Southern Lincolnshire Edge National Character Area Profile](#)

soils in the east and south-west of the area support grazing land in small, less regular fields, along with small areas of woodland and parkland. There are also semi-natural habitats in small, isolated fragments, with pockets of woodland on clay soils, fen at the foot of the dip slope and flower-rich limestone grassland, particularly along road verges.

Green Infrastructure

- 5.23. Natural England's Green Infrastructure Map is a useful source of evidence to help understand current green infrastructure provision. The mapping shows what access residents in Sleaford have to natural greenspace. **Figure 5** below shows that whilst a large number of residents have access of a ANGSt neighbourhood standard (at least 10ha within 1km), local standard (at least 2ha within 300m) and doorstep standard (at least 0.5ha within 200m), there are large gaps in provision across the area.

Figure 5: Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard buffers for Sleaford parish



Source: Natural England

Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage

- 5.24. There are two Conservation Areas within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area: the Sleaford Conservation Area and the Rauceby Hospital Conservation Area at Greylees.¹² The Sleaford Conservation Area covers the historic core of Sleaford which represents an important concentration of historic features within the Neighbourhood Area. The Rauceby Hospital Conservation Area covers the site of the former Rauceby Hospital, part of the former landscape setting and two original entrance drives, about one mile to the south east of

¹² [Map of Sleaford Conservation Area](#) and [Map of Rauceby Hospital Conservation Area](#)

Sleaford. According to Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register 2023¹³, both Conservation Areas are at risk. Sleaford Conservation Area is in a very bad condition and deteriorating whilst the Rauceby Hospital Conservation Area is also assessed as being in a very bad condition and deteriorating significantly.

- 5.25. There are 180 listed buildings within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area (one Grade I, six Grade II* and 173 Grade II).¹⁴ They are mainly concentrated within or close to Sleaford Town Centre, with clusters at the former Bass Maltings, Cogglesford Mill, Holdingham and Quarrington. The former Bass Maltings is a Grade II* listed building and has been identified as being at risk and in 'poor' condition with slow decay and where the 'buildings and site continue to deteriorate'.¹⁵
- 5.26. There are two Scheduled Monuments within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area: Sleaford Castle and a settlement and enclosure, Holdingham. Mareham Grange Scheduled Monument lies just outside the Neighbourhood Area, immediately to the southeast.¹⁶
- 5.27. There is a Registered Park and Garden in the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area at Rauceby Hospital.¹⁷ It is identified as being at risk with "extensive significant problems", highly vulnerable and declining.¹⁸
- 5.28. NKDC maintains a list of sensitive buildings/ buildings of local interest that is currently in the process of being reviewed. Buildings of local interest have no statutory protection in legislation but are recognised in the NPPF as non-designated heritage assets. Buildings of local interest within the Sleaford conservation area were reviewed as part of the Conservation Area Appraisal in 2016, whilst buildings outside of the Conservation Area were last reviewed in 1980. There are currently over 650 sensitive buildings of local interest identified at the time of the last review across the Sleaford area.

Soil, Air and Water

- 5.29. There are three main soil types in the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area according to the national soil map¹⁹:
- Freely draining lime-rich loamy soils;
 - Loamy soils with naturally high groundwater; and
 - Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils.
- 5.30. The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) classifies land into six grades (plus 'non-agricultural' and 'urban'), where Grades 1 to 3a are the 'best and most versatile' land and Grades 3b to 5 are of poorer quality. The ALC data does not distinguish between Grades 3a and 3b (instead simply referring to Grade 3). More detailed assessment would be required to identify subgrades 3a and 3b. Sleaford Town is classed as land predominantly in urban use which is largely surrounded by Grade 3 good to moderate land with very good Grade 2 land to the north and northeast.²⁰

¹³ [Heritage at Risk Register 2023 - Midlands](#)

¹⁴ [Search the List: Map Search | Historic England](#)

¹⁵ [Heritage at Risk Register, Historic England](#)

¹⁶ [Click here](#) to view on DEFRA's Magic Map

¹⁷ [Click here](#) to view on DEFRA's Magic Map

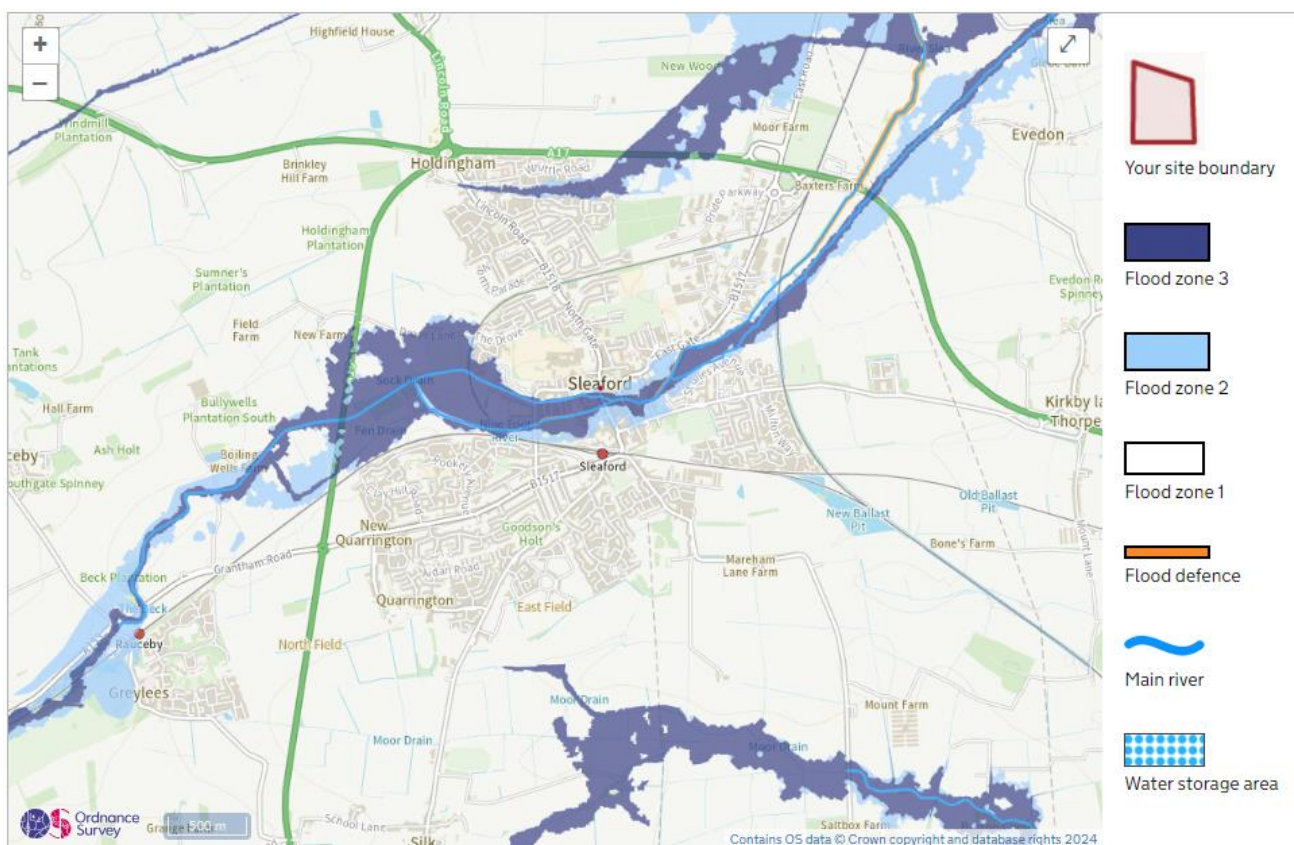
¹⁸ [Historic England - Heritage at Risk Register 2023, Midlands](#)

¹⁹ [Click here](#) to view on DEFRA's Magic Map

²⁰ [Click here](#) to view Agricultural Land Classification Maps

- 5.31. Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) are designated because they are not likely to achieve national air quality objectives. At the time of preparing this report, there were no AQMAs within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area. Indeed, there are no AQMAs within North Kesteven district²¹.
- 5.32. The Environment Agency has assessed water company areas and determined whether they are either in 'not serious' or in 'serious' water stress.²² Water stress applies both to the natural environment and to public water supplies. Both will be affected by climate change. The Sleaford Neighbourhood Area falls within the Anglian Water company area, which has been classified as seriously water stressed.
- 5.33. According to the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning,²³ the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area includes areas of fluvial flood risk (i.e. areas located in Flood Zones 2 and 3) as shown in **Figure 6** below. These areas of higher flood risk are associated with the River Lea, Old River Lea, The Beck and various drains which run through the town to Greylees and Field Beck and drains to the north.

Figure 6: Extent of flood risk from rivers in the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area



Source: Environment Agency

- 5.34. The majority of the Neighbourhood Area is in Flood Zone 1. There are some parts of the Neighbourhood Area at risk of surface water flooding including areas within Sleaford and Greylees. The risk of groundwater and reservoir flooding in the area is unlikely.

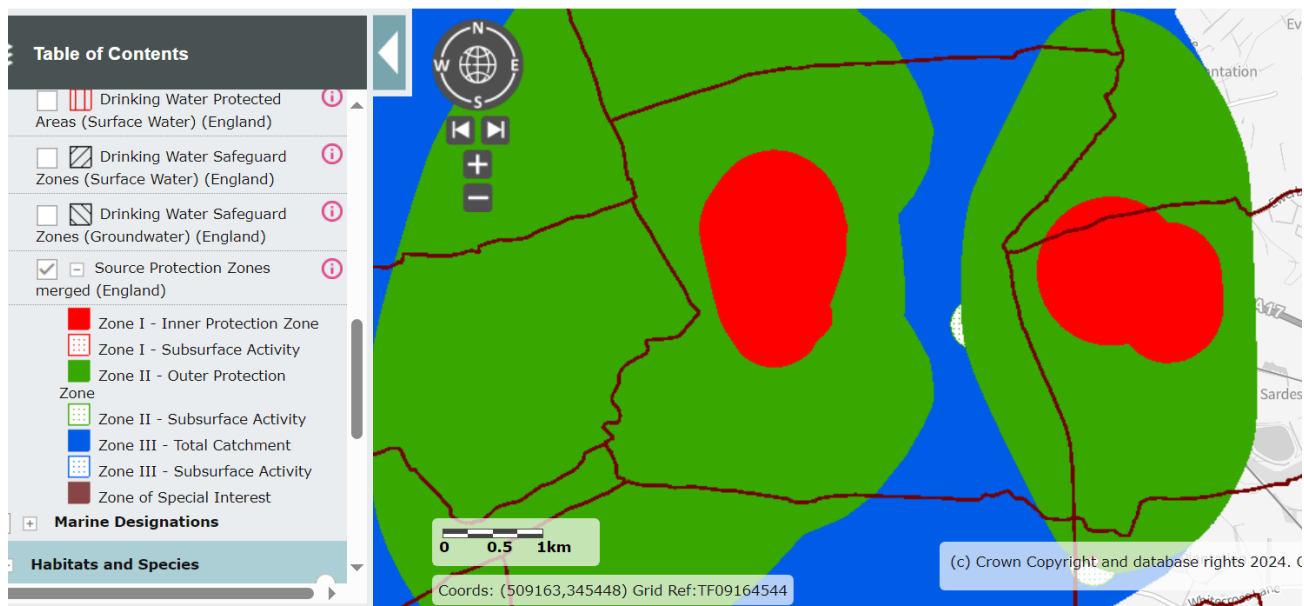
²¹ <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/aqma/maps/>

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-stressed-areas-2021-classification>

²³ <https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/>

- 5.35. The Sleaford Neighbourhood area is served by the Sleaford Water Recycling Centre (WRC). The Environment Agency advise that the evidence available to them demonstrates that additional flows could lead to the WRC exceeding its permit limits which could cause pollution of the receiving watercourse. The EA do not consider that Anglian Water Services have demonstrated how they would manage the additional flow from the area if there is no capacity at the WRC to treat it.
- 5.36. The Anglian Water Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (2023) undertook a baseline risk and vulnerability assessment for the Sleaford Area where no concerns were identified by stakeholders with infiltration reduction/ removal identified as medium and long term plans.²⁴
- 5.37. Source Protection Zones (SPZ's) for groundwater sources such as wells, boreholes and springs used for public drinking water supply have been designated by the Environment Agency. These zones show the risk of contamination from any activities that might cause pollution in the area. Generally, the closer the activity, the greater the risk. Three main zones (inner, outer and total catchment) have been applied to groundwater sources with a fourth zone of special interest occasionally applied. An Inner zone (Zone 1) is defined as the 50 day travel time from any point below the water table to the source. This zone has a minimum radius of 50 metres.
- 5.38. The Sleaford Neighbourhood Area contains areas that fall within Zone 1 (Inner Protection Zone), Zone 2 (Outer Protection Zone), Zone 2c (Subsurface Activity) and Zone 3 (Total Catchment) shown on **Figure 7** below:²⁵

Figure 7: Sleaford Source Protection Zones



Source: DEFRA

- 5.39. There are three Water Framework Directive (WFD) Catchment water bodies within the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan area. These are the Sleas, Ruskington Beck and the Cliff Beck. The Sleas and Ruskington Beck within the Wiltham Lower Operational Catchment both have a

²⁴ [Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan - 2023 \(Anglian Water\)](#)

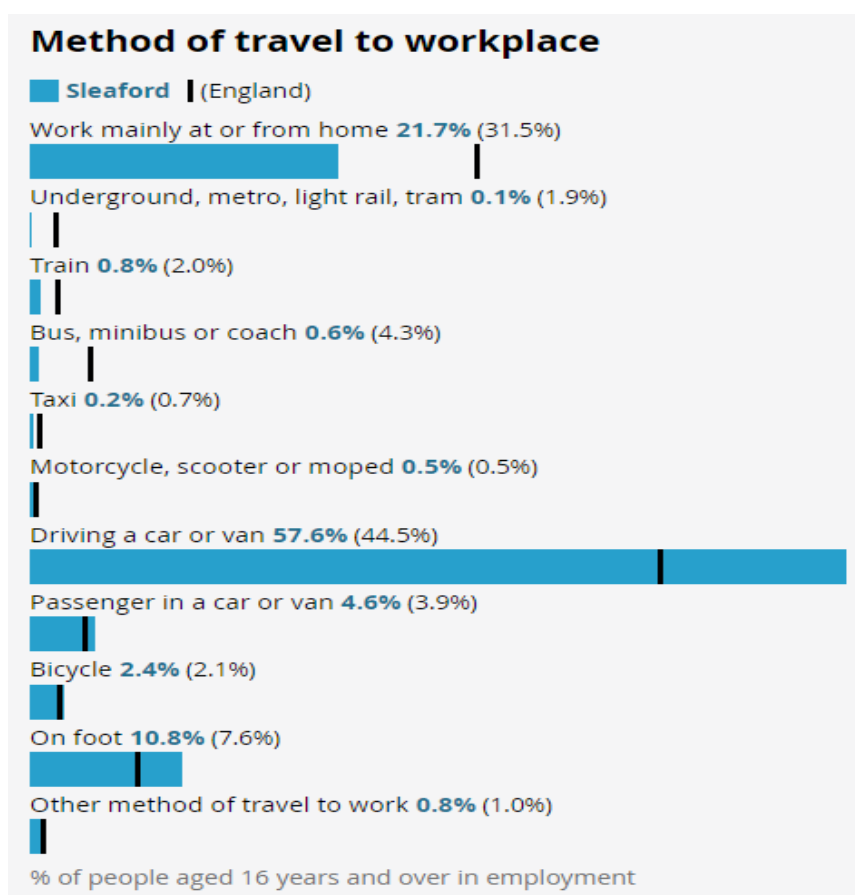
²⁵ [Click here](#) to view on DEFRA's Magic Map

moderate ecological WFD status and the Cliff Beck within the South Forty Foot Drain Operational Catchment also has a moderate ecological WFD status.²⁶

Climatic factors

- 5.40. The UK climate is changing. In 2019 North Kesteven District Council declared a climate emergency reporting that the district will continue to experience hotter, drier summers and warmer, wetter winters, making it essential to rapidly reduce emissions now to stay within the national and local carbon budgets to minimise further disruption. North Kesteven are working towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions producing a Climate Emergency Strategy and related Climate Emergency Action Plan in 2020, that was refreshed in 2022.²⁷
- 5.41. Car ownership is high in the Neighbourhood Area, with 17.3% of all households recorded in the 2021 Census with no cars or vans in the household compared to an England average of 23.5%, although it is not as high as the average for North Kesteven as a whole at 11.4%. This is reflected in the method of travel to workplace recorded through the Census (**Figure 8**), where 62.2% of all people aged 16 years and over in employment travelled to work by driving a car or van or as a passenger in a car or a van. This is above the England average of 48.4% but only slightly above the North Kesteven average of 61.5%.

Figure 8: Method of travel to place of work in Sleaford Parish on 2021 Census Day (% of people aged 16 and over in employment)



Source: ONS

²⁶ [Click here](#) to view river basin management plan data on Catchment Data Explorer

²⁷ [Climate emergency strategy and action plan | North Kesteven District Council \(n-kesteven.gov.uk\)](#)

Materials assets

- 5.42. The SEA Directive does not define what is meant by 'material assets' and it can be interpreted in several ways. This screening report takes material assets to include a range of social, physical and environmental infrastructure, such as schools, health facilities, roads, railways, bus services, wastewater treatment works, flood defences etc. Impacts on materials assets are likely to relate to several other SEA topics.
- 5.43. Provision of community services and facilities is generally very good in Sleaford. Whilst there are some shortfalls and there could be some improvements, it is well served by schools, health facilities and transport infrastructure. The Neighbourhood Plan Community Engagement Report, September 2022 "identified the top current attraction of Sleaford as being its range of amenities, meaning its desirable or useful facilities such as but not limited to outdoor sports facilities, recreation areas, the Hub, theatre, market, public library, museum, pubs, and indoor leisure facilities." The Neighbourhood Plan lists facilities of community value on page 57, that are shown on Map 4 on page 81.

6. Determination of likely significant environment effects - SEA Screening

- 6.1. Once data on environmental issues and sensitivities has been gathered, it is then possible to determine whether there would be any likely significant effects (positive or negative) on the environment. The 'responsible authority' in the case of SEA must determine whether a plan or programme, in this case the Neighbourhood Plan, is likely to have a significant environmental effect with reference to specified criteria.
- 6.2. The following section sets out an assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan against these criteria, considering the area characteristics outlined in Section 4 above.
- 6.3. When the Plan is read as a whole, and tested against the SEA themes (as set out in Annex I (f) of the SEA Directive), the following conclusions are drawn:

Population and human health:

- 6.4. Overall, the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to have a significant negative impact on population and human health as no new sites are specifically allocated for development within the plan. Through its various policy measures, it is likely that the needs of the population, and standards of human health, will be maintained and potentially enhanced. For example, requiring a mix of housing tenures, size and affordability, seeks to meet the various needs of residents via draft Policy 1; requiring inclusive design via draft Policy 2B seeks to ensure that development takes into account the physical needs of everyone in the community; supporting the development, improvement or expansion of existing facilities and seeking to prevent their loss via draft Policy 6 provides opportunities for residents to partake in activities to support their physical and mental health and wellbeing. However, these effects are not likely to be 'significant' for the purposes of SEA.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna:

- 6.5. Overall, the potential for significant negative impacts on biodiversity, flora and fauna to arise from the implementation of the plan are unlikely as the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate new sites for development, and other opportunities for development broadly aligned with the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan 2023. The environmental effects of the Local Plan policies and allocations were subject to SEA and HRA and have therefore already been considered through the plan-making process.

- 6.6. It is expected that the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan will help to protect and enhance biodiversity, flora and fauna in the Neighbourhood Area through the various policy measures it employs, particularly draft Policy 9 Green Infrastructure and Policy 10 Blue Infrastructure. Through the protection and enhancement of existing and proposed green spaces and the prevention of any loss or harm to the River Sleas, the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan could have a positive impact in reducing recreational pressure on the publicly accessible Wilsford and Rauceby SSSI (Rauceby Warren 001) which is adjacent to the Neighbourhood Area.

Landscape:

- 6.7. There are no nationally designated landscapes within the Neighbourhood Area. The Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate new sites for development and therefore, with the policies in the existing Local Plan and this proposed Neighbourhood Plan, it is considered unlikely that the plan would result in a significant impact on the local landscape. Draft Policy 9: Green Infrastructure designates an additional Local Green Space to add to those identified in the Local Plan and identifies an area of open countryside that it seeks to protect between Sleaford and Leasingham. This should contribute positively to the character and setting of the Neighbourhood Area. Draft Policy 2A: Delivering Good Design requires development to demonstrate how the principles and guidance set out in the Sleaford Design Codes and Guidance have been taken into account, which seeks to protect local green spaces, views and the distinctive character of the area. These policy measures should help to avoid any significant adverse effects on landscape features.

Cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage:

- 6.8. As highlighted in paragraphs 5.24 to 5.28 above, the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area has a rich heritage with many assets of national significance, which have been afforded statutory designations. The town of Sleaford and the former Rauceby Hospital at Greylees both have a Conservation Area which are classed as 'at risk' on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. There are also a significant number of buildings which do not satisfy the criteria for listing at a national level but are considered to be locally important.
- 6.9. The Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any new land or sites for development. Whilst opportunities for infill and windfall exist within the Developed Footprint, considering the heritage related policies in the Local Plan, and this proposed Neighbourhood Plan (draft Policy 7: Heritage Assets, Policy 2A: Delivering Good design and Policy 1: Sustainable Development), it is considered unlikely that any future development that may come forward within the Neighbourhood Area would adversely impact on any heritage assets or their settings.

Soil, air or water:

- 6.10. There are currently no 'significant' air quality issues in the neighbourhood area. Most of the neighbourhood area falls within Flood Risk Zone 1 and therefore fluvial flood risk is relatively low. There are areas in Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3, however, development proposed within these areas have been considered as part of the Local Plan process. There are some parts of the Neighbourhood Area at risk of surface water flooding including areas within Sleaford and Greylees and the Neighbourhood Plan Area contains Zone 1, 2, 2c and 3 groundwater source protection zones. The Environment Agency comments regarding the WRC and permit limits are noted. However, as the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan does not include any specific site allocations, it is unlikely that significant effects on soil, air or water would arise as a result of its implementation.

Climate Factors:

- 6.11. Climatic factors involve the consideration of a plan or programme in relation to climate change. Climate change adaptation and mitigation are closely interrelated and are closely linked to other environmental issues.
- 6.12. Draft Policy 1 requires development to meet the sustainable vision, aims and objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan, including more carbon neutral travel, care for the natural environment and providing places and buildings designed to help reduce the impacts of climate change.

Draft Policy 2A requires development to take account of the principles and guidance set out in the Sleaford Design Codes and Guidance which cover resilience to the climate emergency, including energy efficiency, implementing passive environmental design principles, the embodied carbon of building materials and flood mitigation. Draft Policy 3A requires development to be located and designed to prioritise active travel and public transport and Draft Policy 6 seeks to maintain and enhance local services and facilities which may have a positive effect on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport by reducing the need to travel as well as length of journeys. This is likely to have a positive effect on this SEA issue.

- 6.13. Overall, it is considered unlikely that implementing the policies in the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan would give rise to significant effects on climate factors.

Material assets:

- 6.14. The SEA Directive does not define what is meant by ‘material assets’ and it can be interpreted in a number of ways. This screening report takes material assets to include a range of social, physical and environmental infrastructure, such as schools, health facilities, roads, railways, bus services, wastewater treatment works, flood defences, etc. Impacts on materials assets are likely to relate to several other SEA topics. The Neighbourhood Plan does contain a policy that encourages the provision of public/ communal car parking provision within walking distance of the town centre but does not specify a size or specific location. It also contains a policy that does allow for the potential relocation of schools but again, does not specify a quantum or location. The policies are both generally enabling, but given the lack of specific details at this time, it is considered unlikely that that implementation of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan would have significant effects on material assets. Indeed, many of the policies seek to protect and where opportunities arise, enhance infrastructure, services and facilities, but these could only be fully assessed if and when further details became known.

Conclusion:

- 6.15. Following review, and in conclusion, it is considered **unlikely** that implementation of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan will result in significant environmental effects. The main reason for this conclusion is that the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan is not proposing any new additional site allocations or any other policies which are likely to lead to new additional significant growth opportunities that are not already allocated in the Local Plan. In addition, implementation of all other policies or proposal within the draft Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan are not considered likely to result in any significant environmental effects, especially when compared with the baseline position of the Neighbourhood Plan not proceeding.
- 6.16. **Figure 9** provides assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan to identify likely significant effects on the environment. The first column uses the SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as set out in **Appendix 1**).

Figure 9: Assessment of the likely significant effects on the environment

The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to -	Assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan (June 2024)	Likely significant environmental effect
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with	The Neighbourhood Plan would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and contribute to the framework for future development projects. However, the Neighbourhood Plan would only apply to a relatively small geographical area (the Sleaford	None

regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;	Neighbourhood Area) where proposals anticipated over the plan period are already anticipated and tested via existing plans and programmes (such as the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan 2023). The Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to allocate land for residential or other forms of development.	
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;	The Neighbourhood Plan is required to be in general conformity with the strategic policies set out in the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan 2023. The Neighbourhood Plan must also have regard to the NPPF and Practice Guidance. The Neighbourhood Plan would not influence other plans and programmes to a significant degree due to the locally specific nature of the policies contained within the plan. Once 'made' the Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the statutory development plan and will be used in conjunction with the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan to determine planning applications.	None
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;	It is a Basic Condition that a Neighbourhood Plan must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The proposed Neighbourhood Plan includes several policies which promote environmental considerations and promote opportunities for sustainable development. However, the scale of development identified is not expected to exceed that which has been identified and assessed through the preparation of the existing Local Plan.	None
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and	Baseline information in relation to Sleaford parish is described in Section 4 above. There are no specific environmental problems relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan that have not been identified and assessed through the higher-level Local Plan 2023 and accompanying SA/ SEA and HRA.	None
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	The Neighbourhood Plan is not relevant to the implementation of Community legislation on the environment.	None
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to -	Assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan (June 2024)	Likely significant environmental effect

<p>(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;</p>	<p>The effects of the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan are expected to be minimal in terms of probability, duration and frequency. Any effects will be indirect due to the Neighbourhood Plan not allocating land for development.</p> <p>This has been tested through the SA/ SEA of the Local Plan 2023.</p> <p>As the draft Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for housing or other forms of development, the effects of the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan are uncertain to a certain extent, as they will depend on windfall sites that may come forward. However, such windfall sites are expected to be limited to small scale, infill development, and therefore the effects are not likely to be significant and are expected to be minimal. It is likely that some policies may result in positive effects by helping to preserve and enhance the environmental features within the Neighbourhood Area.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>(b) the cumulative nature of the effects;</p>	<p>The cumulative effects of development sites have been considered through the Local Plan process, namely the SA and HRA.</p> <p>The cumulative effects of implementing the Neighbourhood Plan, both between the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan and with other plans and programmes, are expected to be very limited in nature and scale, as the plan does not identify a quantum of growth, nor allocate specific land or sites for housing or other forms of development.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>(c) the transboundary nature of the effects;</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan focuses on Sleaford parish only. The Neighbourhood Plan is not expected to give rise to any transboundary effects. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers to transboundary effects on other EU Member States; therefore, they are not relevant to this Neighbourhood Plan.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan is not expected to pose any risks to human health or the environment: the effects of policies within the Neighbourhood Plan may, if any, enhance these elements.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);</p>	<p>The population of Sleaford parish at the time of the 2021 Census was 19,800 people.</p> <p>The Sleaford Neighbourhood Area is coterminous with the Sleaford civil parish, which includes Sleaford and Greylees. The extent of any effects of the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan are</p>	<p>None</p>

	expected to be limited to the immediate local area, the extent of which is, therefore, spatially small.	
(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to— (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use; and	The scale of growth proposed by the Neighbourhood Plan reflects that proposed by the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. The effects of this growth upon the environment have therefore been assessed through the HRA and Sustainability Appraisal of the Local Plan, and other supporting evidence base documents. The key natural and cultural heritage characteristics of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area are provided in Section 4 above. As highlighted in Section 6 above, it is considered unlikely that the Neighbourhood Plan would adversely impact the special natural characteristics or cultural heritage of the Neighbourhood Area. The draft Neighbourhood Plan is not expected to exceed environmental quality standards or lead to intensive land use.	None
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	There are no protected areas or landscapes within the Neighbourhood Area of a national or international protection status, such as a National Landscape or National Park. Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to result in any significant adverse effects.	None

6.17. **Figure 10** applies the advice prepared by the (former) Department of Environment to ascertain whether a full SEA is required for a plan or programme. Please note that as the questions have been answered using the flow diagram, some of the questions may not be applicable because of previous answers: where this is the case, the response is stated as N/A ('not applicable').

Figure 10: Application of the SEA Directive to the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan

Criteria	Response: Yes/ No/ Not applicable	Details
1. Is the NDP subject to preparation and/ or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?	Yes	The preparation and adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan is allowed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared by Sleaford Town Council it will be adopted by NKDC as the local authority. GO TO CRITERIA 2

Criteria	Response: Yes/ No/ Not applicable	Details
2. Is the NDP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions?	Yes	<p>Whilst the production of a Neighbourhood Plan is not a requirement and is optional, it will, if made, form part of the Development Plan for the NKDC area. It is therefore important that this screening process considers the potential effects.</p> <p>GO TO CRITERIA 3</p>
3. Is the NDP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive?	<p>Yes – Town & Country Planning/ land use;</p> <p>No - EIA Directive Annex I & II</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared for town and country planning and land use. It does not set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive.</p> <p>GO TO CRITERIA 4.</p>
4. Will the NDP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive?	No	<p>See Section 7.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan will not require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive.</p> <p>GO TO CRITERIA 6</p>
5. Does the NDP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of an NDP subject to Art. 3.2?	N/A	
6. Does the NDP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)?	Yes	<p>Alongside the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, once 'made' the Neighbourhood Plan will set the framework for development consents in the neighbourhood area.</p> <p>GO TO CRITERIA 8</p>
7. Is the NDP's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7?	N/A	
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?	No	<p>The extent to which implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan will result in likely significant environmental effects is assessed in Section 6 of this screening report.</p> <p>The assessment identifies that no likely significant environmental effects are</p>

Criteria	Response: Yes/ No/ Not applicable	Details
		expected to arise through implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan. GO TO CONCLUSION
Conclusion: SEA IS NOT REQUIRED		

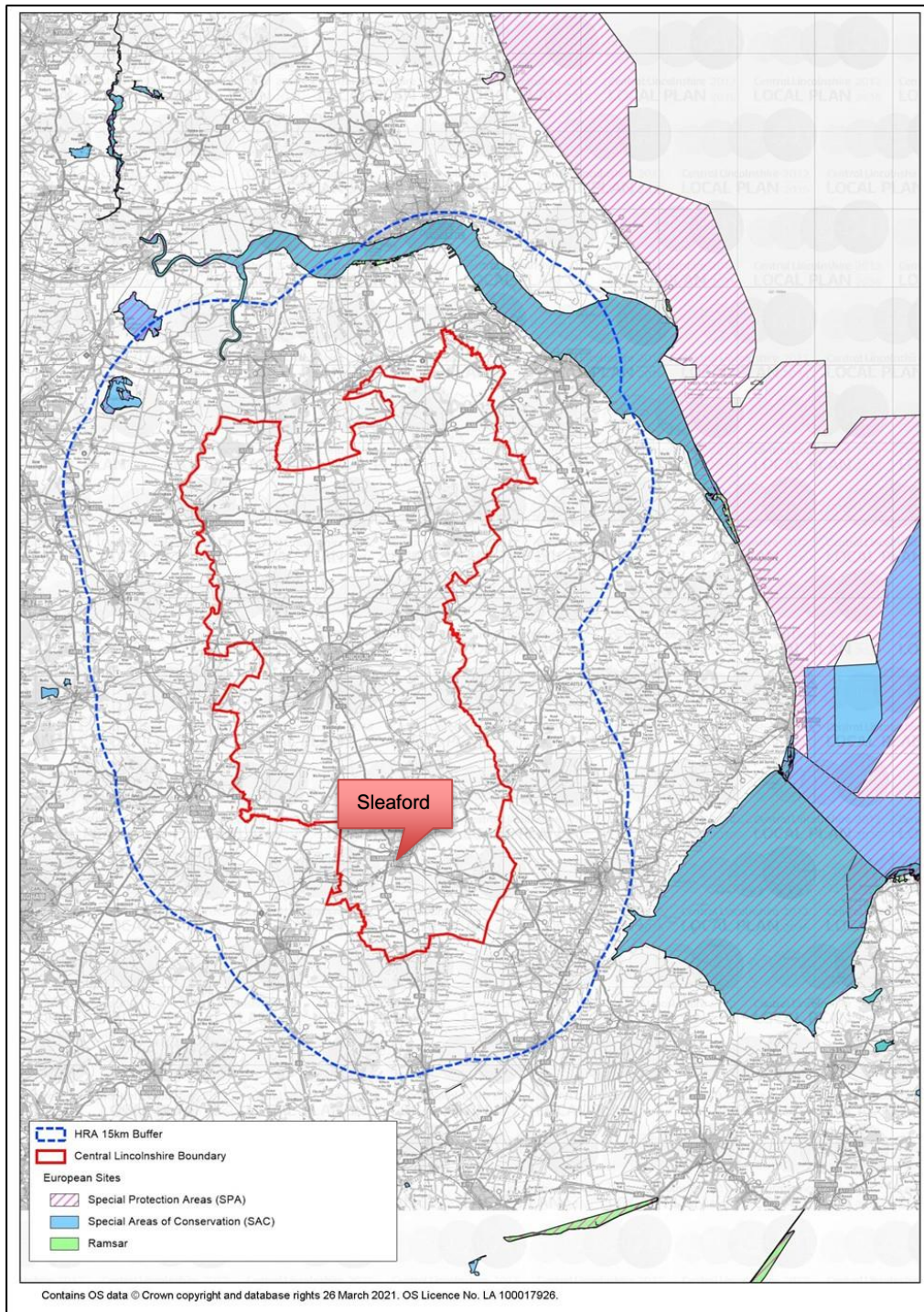
7. Determination of likely significant effects on European Sites – HRA Screening

- 7.1. HRA refers to the assessment of the potential for ‘likely significant effects’ of a plan or programme on one or more European Sites, either alone or in combination. In determining whether a proposed development plan or programme is likely to have significant effects, the competent authority must incorporate the ‘precautionary principle’ into its decision. This means that if there is any uncertainty as to whether the plan or programme would cause significant effects on a European Site, a full Appropriate Assessment would be required.
- 7.2. The HRA screening assessment therefore considers whether the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan could have likely significant effects on a European Site.
- 7.3. Government Guidance²⁸ confirms that a HRA previously carried out by another competent authority can be used.
- 7.4. Central Lincolnshire’s latest Habitats Regulations Assessment (March 2022) report²⁹ accompanied the proposed submission Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (March 2022). The purpose of the HRA report was to set out the method, findings and conclusions of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (Stage 1 Screening and Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment) of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan. The HRA was carried out by the Central Lincolnshire Local Plans Team, as the competent authority, in consultation with Natural England.
- 7.5. The following European Sites, all outside Central Lincolnshire’s administrative boundary, were scoped into the HRA for consideration:
- Humber Estuary SPA, SAC and Ramsar
 - Thorne Moor SAC
 - Thorne and Hatfield Moors SPA
 - Hatfield Moor SAC
 - The Wash SPA and Ramsar
 - The Wash and North Norfolk Coast SAC
- 7.6. As discussed in paragraph 5.9 above, within Sleaford parish (and consequently the Sleaford Neighbourhood Area), there are no European Sites. However, the Neighbourhood Plan has the potential to impact on areas that are beyond the Neighbourhood Area. The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan HRA considered all European sites within a buffer distance of 15km of the Local Plan boundary (see Figure 11). Consideration was then given to whether more distant European sites may be connected to the plan area via effects pathways, for example through hydrological links.

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/habitats-regulations-assessments-protecting-a-european-site#make-decision-making-quicker>

²⁹ See <https://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/STA005.1a%20HRA%20Main%20Report%20Proposed%20Submission%20Draft.pdf>

Figure 11: European Sites within 15km of the Central Lincolnshire Area



Source: Central Lincolnshire

Potential for likely significant effects

7.7. The HRA Report prepared for the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan concluded:

“Provided that the identified mitigation and recommendations made in this report are implemented, it is possible to conclude that the Local Plan is compliant with the Habitats Regulations and will not result in likely significant effects on the integrity of any of the European Sites identified, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects”.

- 7.8. Natural England confirmed the HRA followed accepted methodology, was in line with relevant legislation and guidance, and agreed with the conclusion of the HRA.
- 7.9. The Neighbourhood Plan's growth strategy reflects that of the adopted Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (April 2023). The Neighbourhood Plan does not make new site allocations and provides only limited opportunities for new development. The effects arising from planned development on the integrity of European sites have therefore been previously tested through the HRA of the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan.

HRA Screening: The Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan, June 2024

- 7.10. Having regard to the nature of the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan and vulnerabilities of European Sites, this HRA screening considers that the Neighbourhood Plan is **not likely to have a significant effect** on any European Site, either alone or in combination, with other plans and projects. However, it is expected that any windfall development which the Neighbourhood Plan supports and is within the plan boundary may be required to undertake an individual project-level HRA to determine impacts on European Sites.

8. SEA and HRA Screening Conclusion

- 8.1. The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any land or sites for housing or other form of development. The effects of any potential growth have been considered previously through the adopted Central Lincolnshire Local Plan 2023 and supporting evidence base, including the Sustainability Appraisal (which incorporated SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment. For the purposes of SEA screening, this evidence base is considered appropriate and relevant.
- 8.2. To take an alternative approach, such as preparing evidence bespoke to the Neighbourhood Plan would be disproportionate and result in unnecessary duplication. This would be contrary to national planning policy.
- 8.3. Several Neighbourhood Plan policies are particularly environmentally conscientious and address environmental issues positively by seeking to improve the quality of new development to reduce its impacts on the environment. However, for the purposes of SEA, these effects are not considered 'significant'.
- 8.4. Based on the findings of the screening assessment in section 6 and subject to consultation with Statutory Agencies, NKDC is of the view that the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan will not result in likely significant environmental effects. **As such, a full SEA is not required for the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan (June 2024).**
- 8.5. The assessment in section 7 also considers the effects of the Neighbourhood Plan in respect of European sites. The assessment determines that implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan is not expected to result in likely significant effects on European sites. **As such, a full HRA is not required for the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan (June 2024).**
- 8.6. If the objectives, aims and/ or policies covered by the Neighbourhood Plan should change significantly during the plan-making process, this screening process will be reviewed.

Appendix 1: SEA assessment criteria

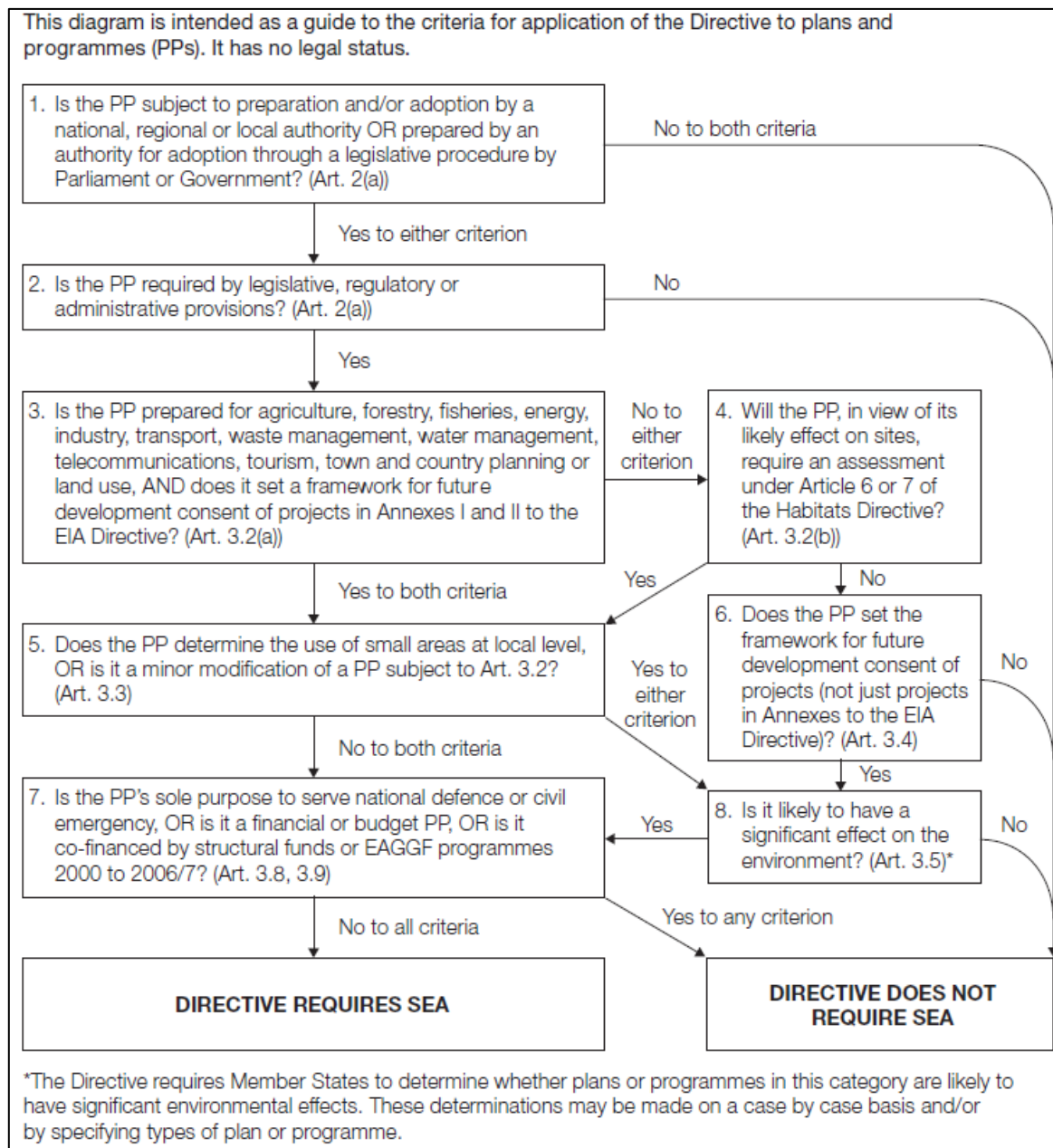
Article 3. Scope

5. Member States shall determine whether plans or programmes referred to in paragraphs 3 and 4 are likely to have significant environmental effects either through case-by-case examination or by specifying types of plans and programmes or by combining both approaches. For this purpose Member States shall in all cases take into account relevant criteria set out in Annex II, in order to ensure that plans and programmes with likely significant effects on the environment are covered by this Directive.

Annex II Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5)

1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to
 - the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;
 - the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;
 - the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;
 - environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme;
 - 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).
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to
 - the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;
 - the cumulative nature of the effects;
 - the transboundary nature of the effects;
 - the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents);
 - the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
 - the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:
 - special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;
 - exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;
 - intensive land-use;
 - the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

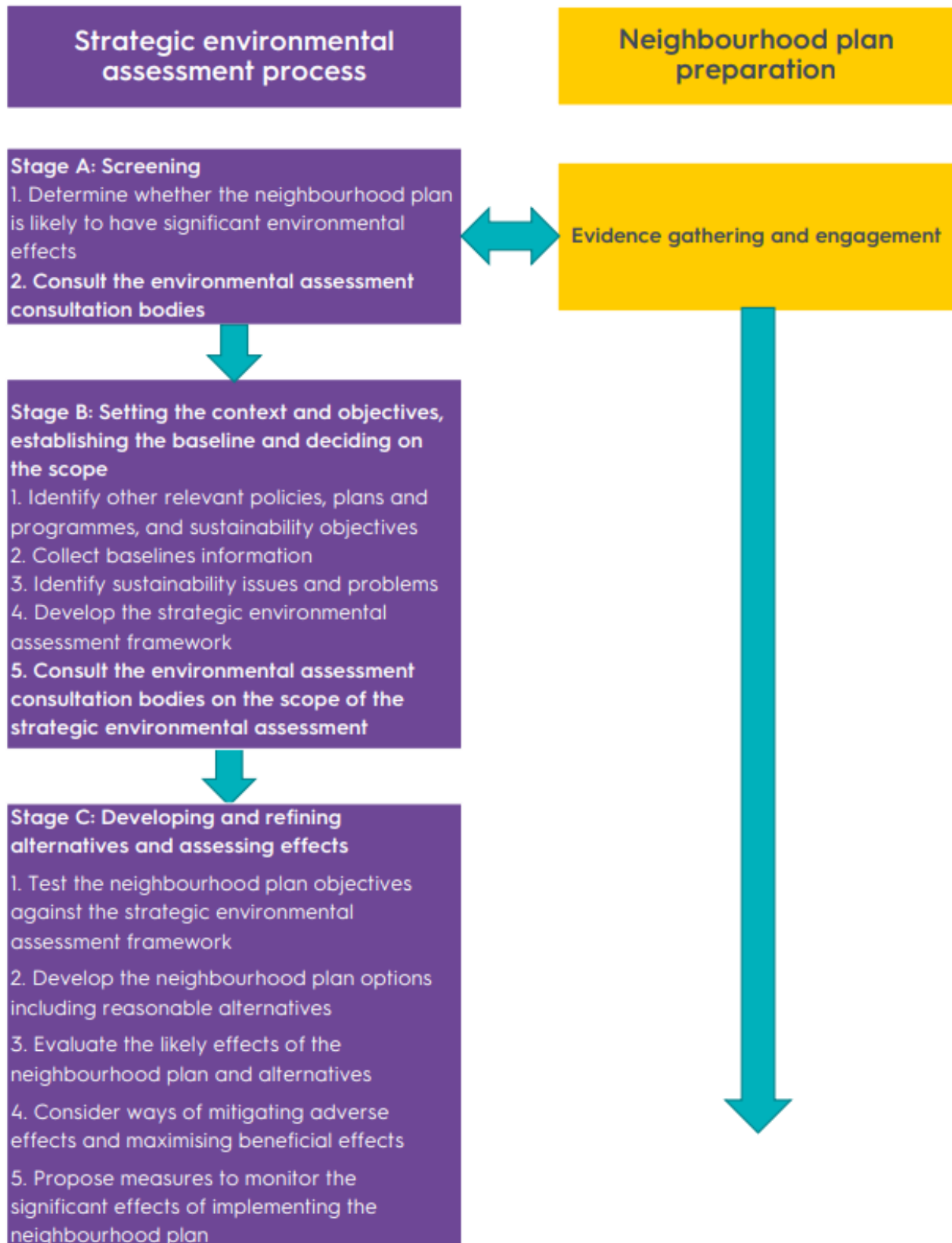
Appendix 2: Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes³⁰

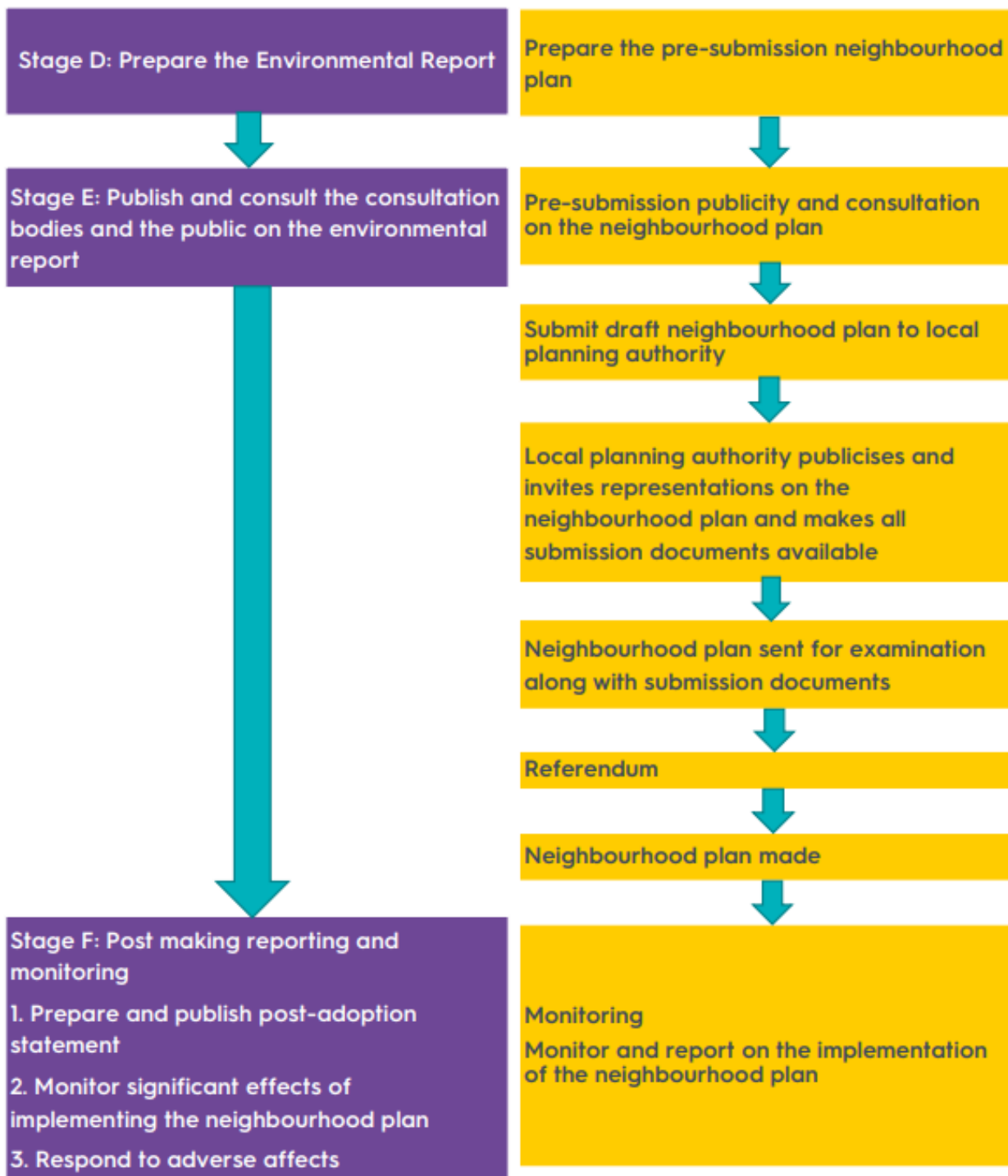


³⁰ Annexes I and II of Directive 2011/92/EU (as referred to in Figure 2, question 3) available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32011L0092&from=EN> (see <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eia/eia-legalcontext.htm> for details of amendments). Articles 6 and 7 of the Habitats Directive (as referred to in Figure 2, question 4) available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31992L0043&from=EN>.

Appendix 3: SEA process for Neighbourhood Planning

(source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal#Strategic-environmental-assessment-process>)





Appendix 4: Consultation with Statutory Agencies

The assessment indicates that North Kesteven District Council consider that it is not likely that there will be any significant environmental effects arising from the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan (as drafted at the date of this assessment) and thus a SEA and/ or HRA is not required. The relevant Statutory Agencies, namely the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England, were consulted on this screening opinion on 4th September 2024 based on the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan in its current form. The responses received during this consultation are detailed below.

Response from the Environment Agency

Thank you for consulting us on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report and the accompanying Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) [dated September 2024] for the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan.

We aim to reduce flood risk, while protecting and enhancing the water environment. Our comments on this matter are therefore made solely from these points of view.

Environment Agency position

The response includes detailed comments on the Draft Neighbourhood Plan for consideration by the Parish Council. Those elements of the response that relate to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report and the accompanying Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) for the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan are listed below:

We have reviewed the SEA and HRA Screening Report, from the point of view of the topics outlined above, and agree with the conclusions that a full SEA and HRA are not required for the Sleaford Neighbourhood Plan.

Notwithstanding this, we do have a number of initial comments on the draft Neighbourhood Plan which accompanied the screening reports, and we should be grateful if they could be taken into account as this matter progresses.

These are as follows:

...Water quality and foul drainage

Whilst the SEA Screening Report does mention the River Slea, we note that it does not refer to its Water Framework Directive (WFD) status (Slea WFD waterbody- GB105030056670) or to the other WFD catchments in the Sleaford Neighbourhood area: Ruskington Beck (GB105030056700) and Cliff Beck (GB105030056630). It is considered that this additional information should be added.

Further details of the WFD status of these waterbodies can be found here: [England | Catchment Data Explorer](#)...

Related to this, the area is served by the Sleaford Water Recycling Centre (WRC). The evidence available to us demonstrates that this WRC has exceeded its permitted dry weather flow limits for 4 out of the past 5 years. Additional flows could lead to the WRC exceeding its permit limits, which could cause pollution of the receiving watercourse.

Anglian Water Services (AWS) is legally obliged to operate within permit limits and the Environment Agency will take all necessary action to ensure that the receiving watercourse is protected. AWS has not yet demonstrated how it would manage the additional flow from this area if there is no capacity at the WRC to treat it.

We therefore encourage the Parish Council to consult with AWS about this as part of the Neighbourhood Planning process....

Should you require any additional information, or wish to discuss these matters further, please do not hesitate to contact me using the details below.

Response from Historic England

For the purposes of consultations on SEA Screening Opinions, Historic England confines its advice to the question, "Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?" in respect of our area of concern, cultural heritage.

Our comments are based on the information supplied with the screening request. On the basis of the information supplied and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of the 'SEA' Directive], Historic England concurs with your view that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

Regarding HRA Historic England does not disagree with your conclusions but would defer to the opinions of the other statutory consultees. The views of the other statutory consultation bodies should be taken into account before the overall decision on the need for a SEA is made. If a decision is made to undertake a SEA, please note that Historic England has published guidance on Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Historic Environment that is relevant to both local and neighbourhood planning and available at:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/sustainability-appraisal-and-strategic-environmental-assessment-advice-note-8/>

Response from Natural England

Thank you for your consultation. Natural England agree with the conclusion of the 'Strategic Environmental Assessment & Habitats Regulation Assessment' that there is likely to be no significant effect of the Sleaford Neighbourhood Development Plan on European sites.