

Acomb Neighbourhood Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion

Prepared by the Neighbourhood Planning & Infrastructure Team
Northumberland County Council

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1. Introduction and Summary

Acomb Neighbourhood Plan

- 1.01 Neighbourhood Plans are prepared by a qualifying body under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by Acomb Parish Council (as the “relevant body”) and will be ‘made’ by Northumberland County Council as the local authority.
- 1.02 The preparation of Neighbourhood Plans is subject to The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012 (and subsequent amendments) and the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017.
- 1.03 Communities have a right to be able to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. However, communities are not required by legislative, regulatory or administrative purposes to produce such a plan.
- 1.04 Acomb Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Acomb administrative Parish area. Once ‘made’ it will form part of the statutory development plan for Northumberland.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 1.05 To be ‘made’, a Neighbourhood Plan must meet certain basic conditions, including compliance with EU Obligations. One such obligation is the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment¹. This is often referred to as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive.
- 1.06 The purpose of the SEA Directive is to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to integrate considerations of the environment into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 1.07 The SEA Directive sets out criteria for assessing the significance of the impact of a plan or programme on the environment. Any assessment must consider both positive and negative effects.
- 1.08 In the first instance, it is necessary to ascertain if SEA is required. This process is referred to as ‘screening’.

¹ [European Directive 2001/42/EC \(SEA Directive\)](#)

- 1.09 This report presents the findings of an SEA screening opinion on the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan, provided by Northumberland County Council as the Local Planning Authority. It adopts a proportionate approach in applying a series of criteria, as set out in the SEA Directive², to look at the draft Acomb Neighbourhood Plan and determine whether a significant effect or effects are likely.
- 1.10 Based on the characteristics of the draft Acomb Neighbourhood Plan and the area characteristics, the conclusion of the SEA Screening, in the opinion of Northumberland County Council, is the plan is unlikely to have significant effects on the environment and SEA is therefore not required.
- 1.11 This report was sent to statutory consultation bodies³, that is: the Environment Agency; Historic England; and Natural England, in order to seek their views on its conclusions⁴. On completion of consultation, a determination can be made.
- 1.12 This final report considers the representations made by the consultation bodies on the Screening Opinion. The representations made can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 1.13 The conclusion of this Final Report is that the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to result in significant environmental effects and that Strategic Environmental Assessment is therefore not required.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 1.14 A Neighbourhood Plan could potentially have impacts on sites covered by the Habitats Regulations. The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to a separate HRA screening assessment to ascertain whether an Appropriate Assessment is required under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, which relate to Articles 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive.

² See footnote above, plus [Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 \(SEA Regulations\)](#)

³ As set out in Regulation 4(1) of the SEA Regulations 2004.

⁴ As set out in Regulation 9(2)(b) of the SEA Regulations 2004.

2. Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 2.01 Regulation 15 of The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) requires that certain specified information is provided alongside a draft neighbourhood plan when it is submitted to the local planning authority. In summary, this information is:
- (a) A map or statement which identifies the area to which the proposed neighbourhood development plan relates;*
 - (b) A consultation statement;*
 - (c) The proposed neighbourhood development plan;*
 - (d) A 'basic conditions statement'; and*
 - (e) (i) an environmental report, or*
(ii) a screening opinion indicating that an environmental report is not required.
- 2.02 The SEA process is a means of testing the environmental impacts of plans and programmes. It should shape and hone a neighbourhood plan's content to ensure the plan effectively ensures sustainable development.
- 2.03 In order to determine whether the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, there are criteria for assessment set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive. They are split into two categories: those relating to the characteristics of the plan and those to the characteristics of the effects and areas likely to be affected (see Figure 1). An assessment of the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan against these criteria is set out accordingly in Figure 1 and Table 1 of this report.

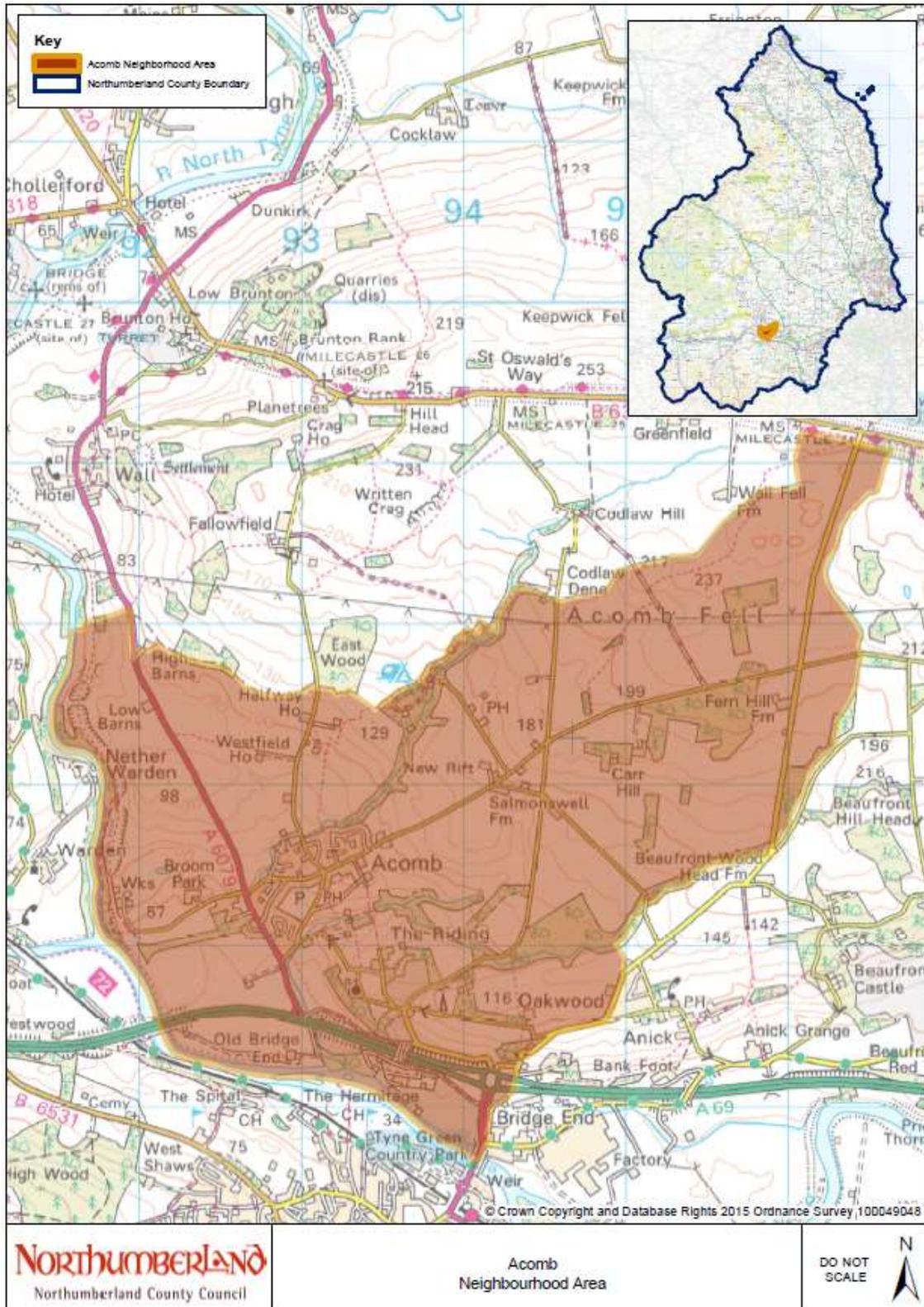
Figure 1: Criteria for determining likely significance of effects on the environment

- 1. The characteristics of neighbourhood plans, having regard, in particular, to:**
 - (a)** the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;
 - (b)** the degree to which the plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;
 - (c)** The relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;
 - (d)** Environmental problems relevant to the plan;
 - (e)** The relevance of the plan for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or waste protection)
- 2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:**
 - (a)** The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;

- (b)** The cumulative nature of the effects;
- (c)** The transboundary nature of the effects;
- (d)** The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents);
- (e)** The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
- (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;
 - (iii) Intensive land use
- (g)** The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.

3. Acomb Neighbourhood Plan

3.01 Acomb parish is a rural civil parish in Northumberland, situated to the north of Hexham. The Acomb Neighbourhood Area covers the entire civil parish of Acomb. The Neighbourhood Area is shown below:



3.02 The Vision Statement and Objectives of the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan are set out below:

Acomb Neighbourhood Plan Vision:

“Value, protect and promote the Parish of Acomb, by respecting its heritage, appreciating its current community and being aspirational when planning for future generations, ensuring Acomb Parish continues to be a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and work.”

Neighbourhood Plan Objectives

Objective 1: Community Facilities and Local Green Space

“We will protect the community facilities we have, and promote new community facilities. Our most highly valued outdoor spaces will be designated as Local Green Spaces.”

Objective 2: Flooding

“We will seek to ensure that the impacts of flooding are reduced in Acomb and support measures to reduce those impacts.”

Objective 3: Traffic, Walking and Cycling in Acomb

“We will seek to reduce the negative impact that road traffic has on the village of Acomb. We will seek to enhance and develop the local network of paths and bridleways.”

Objective 4: Housing

“We will support small-scale housing development within the settlement of Acomb, with a particular emphasis on providing housing that meets identified needs.”

Objective 5: Local Employment and Business

“To support existing local businesses to meet their needs and provide a positive environment for new businesses to flourish.”

Objective 6: Heritage, Conservation, Buildings and Design

“Preserve and where possible, enhance the character of our Conservation Area and wider Parish by requiring any new development to be high quality and reflect the principles in the Acomb Conservation Area Character Appraisal.”

3.03 The Plan contains a series of policies which seek to deliver the aims and objectives. In summary, the plan seeks to designate areas of Local Green Space; identify important community facilities; identify active travel routes; identify a list of non-designated

heritage assets and to provide a planning framework for development within the settlement boundary.

- 3.04 The Plan is supportive of sustainable development within the overall policy context of the statutory development plan in terms of the built and natural environment.

4. SEA Screening Assessment

4.01 The policies set out in the draft version of the pre-submission Acomb Neighbourhood Plan have been used to undertake the screening assessment based on the criteria within the SEA Directive.

Table 1: Assessment of the likelihood of significant effects on the environment

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant Environmental Effect likely?	
	Yes/no	Justification
The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:		
(a) 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.	No	The main framework will continue to be at the Local Plan/Core Strategy level. The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to allocate land for development, and sets out positive planning policies seeking to encourage development which would be sympathetic to the area, in line with specific protective policies elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Plan.
(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	No	It is possible that the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan could inform future supplementary guidance in the area. The present draft document is in accordance with existing higher-level plans and programmes and builds upon them through the inclusion of locally-specific policies which seek to protect and enhance the local built and natural environments. Due to the locally-specific nature of the policies, the effects of the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan on other plans and programmes within the wider development plan will be slight.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	No	The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan seeks to promote sustainable development overall and does not seek any relaxations to sustainable development principles set out in higher-level plans. The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan includes policies relating to the designation of Local Green Space, reduction of flood risk, the Acomb Conservation Area and non-designated heritage assets. The Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to address any significant environmental problems in the area, nor are there considered to be significant environmental problems that may be exacerbated by the Neighbourhood Plan.

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant Environmental Effect likely?	
	Yes/no	Justification
The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:		
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	No	The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan is not anticipated to result in significant environmental problems.
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection)	No	<p>The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan has to be in conformity with the strategic policies contained within other relevant planning documents. The current adopted local plan for the area consists of the saved policies in the Tynedale District Local Plan (2000) and Tynedale LDF Core Strategy (2007). Policies in these plans are material planning considerations where they comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (2012).</p> <p>The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan supports the implementation of higher level policies at the Neighbourhood Area level. It is therefore not considered to have significant influence on other plans and programmes or their effects on the environment.</p>

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant Environmental Effect likely?	
	Yes/no	Justification
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:		
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	No	No allocations are included within the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan and no significant effects are predicted as a result. The Neighbourhood Plan is supportive of sustainable development within the overall protective policy context of the development plan in terms of the built environment.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	No	It is unlikely that any significant environmental effects would be observed as a result of the policies contained within the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to facilitate a level of development above that of higher-level documents within the development plan. The Neighbourhood Plan does support sustainable development which would protect and enhance the built and natural environment but it is not anticipated that the Neighbourhood Plan would result in significant effects, whether in isolation or cumulatively.
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects	No	It is not anticipated that the Neighbourhood Plan would result in significant effects, nor result in significant effects beyond the administrative area of Northumberland County Council.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	No	It is considered unlikely that there would be risks to human health or the environment arising from the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).	No	The Acomb Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to allocate land for development. While the Plan is supportive of sustainable development, this is in the wider context of the development plan. Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan is not anticipated to have significant environmental effects.
(f)(i) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to special natural characteristics or cultural heritage.	No	The Acomb Neighbourhood Area contains a small number of designations, including, but not limited to, designated and non-designated heritage assets and SSSIs. While it is clear that the Neighbourhood Area contains a number of sensitive/potentially vulnerable receptors, it is unlikely that these would be affected by the majority of the Neighbourhood Plan policies.

Criteria (Schedule 1)	Significant Environmental Effect likely?	
	Yes/no	Justification
(f)(ii) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values.	No	This would be unlikely to result from the proposals.
(f)(iii) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to intensive land use.	No	This would be unlikely to result from the proposals.
(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	No	Given the content of the Neighbourhood Plan and its focus on sustainable development which is sympathetic to the qualities of the area, significant effects resulting from the Neighbourhood Plan are unlikely.

5. SEA Screening Opinion Summary and Conclusion

- 5.01 The potential effects of the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan on the environment have been found not to be significant.
- 5.02 The Plan covers a relatively small rural area within the County of Northumberland. The policies set out within the Plan seek to supplement other statutory development plan policies. Notably the plan seeks to identify and provide protection to areas of Local Green Space and Community Facilities within the Neighbourhood Area. It provides a planning framework for development proposals to ensure sustainable development, which is sympathetic to the qualities of the area.
- 5.03 Significant effects are considered unlikely. The Plan does not propose or allocate sites for potentially environmentally harmful development nor is such development anticipated in the area.
- 5.04 On the basis of the reasons set out in the SEA Screening Assessment set out in Table 1, the conclusion is that, in the opinion of Northumberland County Council, and having regard to formal representations made by the consultation bodies⁵, the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan *is unlikely to have significant effects on the environment* when considered against the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. **It is therefore considered that the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan need not be subject to SEA.**

⁵ Consultation Body responses are included in Appendix 1 of this Final Report.

Appendix 1: Responses received from consultation bodies

creating a better place



Rob Naples
Northumberland County Council
Planning Strategy
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

Our ref: NA/2009/103757/SE-
12/SC1-L01

Your ref:

Date: 01 December 2017

Dear Rob

Acomb Neighbourhood Plan SEA Screening Opinion

Thank you for referring the above SEA Screening Opinion

The Environment Agency agrees that the impact of the Acomb Neighbourhood Plan would not result in any significant environmental effects beyond those already assessed as part of the preparation of the Local Plan. On this basis, we consider that Neighbourhood Plan would not require a SEA.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

Lucy Mo
Senior Planning Advisor - Sustainable Places

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Direct Dial: 0191-2691232

Our ref: PL00218262

6 December 2017

Dear Mr Naples

Acomb Neighbourhood Plan - Strategic Environmental Assessment - Screening

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the above. As the government's champion for the historic environment, we are pleased to offer our comment.

Based on the analysis set out in your Screening Opinion and within the areas of interest to Historic England, we agree that the emerging plan is unlikely to result in significant environmental effects and, therefore, it does not need SEA. In coming to this view we have taken the following factors into consideration:

- The plan area contains a many heritage assets including a conservation area, several listed buildings, and the potential for non-designated assets.
- Heritage assets are fragile and irreplaceable and can be damaged by change through development both directly and indirectly by development in their setting.
- The plan is not expected to allocate sites for development.
- The plan is not expected to create additional constraint or protection over and above national and local policy and so is unlikely to result in a significant environmental impact to heritage assets beyond those of the existing policies.

As such, the need for SEA of the draft plan can be screened out as it is unlikely to result in significant environmental effects within our area of interest. We reserve the right to review this should the plan change materially in its content and direction.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries relating to our comments or would like any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Jules Brown
Historic Places Adviser
jules.brown@historicengland.org.uk



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Telephone 0191 269 1255
HistoricEngland.org.uk



Historic England is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). All information held by the organisation will be accessible in response to an information request, unless one of the exemptions in the FOIA or EIR applies.

Date: 12 December 2017
Our ref: 231050
Your ref: Acomb Neighbourhood Plan - Consultation on SEA Screening Opinion



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T 0300 060 3900

Dear Mr Naples

Planning consultation: Acomb Neighbourhood Plan - Consultation on SEA Screening Opinion
Location: Northumberland

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 09 November 2017 which was received by Natural England on the same date.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Strategic Environmental Assessment - Screening

Where Neighbourhood Plans could have significant environmental effects, they may require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) under the Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Further guidance on deciding whether the proposals are likely to have significant environmental effects and the requirements for consulting Natural England on SEA are set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance at:

<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal/sustainability-appraisal-requirements-for-neighbourhood-plans>

The guidance highlights three triggers that may require the production of an SEA, for instance where:

- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

We have checked our records and based on the information provided, we can confirm that in our view the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.

We are not aware of significant populations of protected species which are likely to be affected by the policies / proposals within the plan. It remains the case, however, that the responsible authority should provide information supporting this screening decision, sufficient to assess whether protected species are likely to be affected.

Notwithstanding this advice, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all potential environmental assets. As a result the responsible authority should raise environmental issues that we have not identified on local or national biodiversity action plan species and/or

habitats, local wildlife sites or local landscape character, with its own ecological and/or landscape advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local landscape and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by this plan, before determining whether an SA/SEA is necessary.

Please note that Natural England reserves the right to provide further comments on the environmental assessment of the plan beyond this SEA screening stage, should the responsible authority seek our views on the scoping or environmental report stages. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact Ellen Bekker on 0208 225 7091 or ellen.bekker@naturalengland.org.uk. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Ellen Bekker
Lead Adviser
Sustainable Development
Northumbria Area