

# **Cheddington Neighbourhood Plan 2015 - 2033**

**Final Strategic Environmental Assessment Report**

**Published by Cheddington Parish Council for examination in  
accordance with EU Directive 2001/42**

**March 2015**

## Non-Technical Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment of any significant environmental effects resulting from the policies and proposals of the Submission version of the Cheddington Neighbourhood Development Plan

2. The Neighbourhood Plan contains a number of policies for the use and development of land in the Parish of Cheddington in the plan period up to 2033. These policies, together with the policies of the development plan - that is currently the saved policies of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan (AVDLP) and the policies of the forthcoming Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan in due course - and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), will be used by the District Council in determining planning applications once the Neighbourhood Plan is approved in due course.

3. The Neighbourhood Plan area contains a number of designated heritage and nature features, including a number of listed buildings around the village – most notably Cheddington Manor - and the hill fort Scheduled Ancient Monument at Southend Hill. This same area was designated a Local Landscape Area by the AVDLP in 2004 to recognise its special importance relative to other landscapes in the district and its character has remained unchanged since then. In addition, the parish is approximately 2km north of the Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are some locally designated wildlife sites formed by the orchards on Station Road.

4. The area does not suffer from any significant environmental problems. The community consultations have shown that traffic speeds on Mentmore Road can be problematic and there is a concern that the private orchards off Station Road will deteriorate further in their appearance without investment. The community is also worried about significant housing development schemes harming the character of the village and being incapable of being supported by the local infrastructure. However, there are no pressing environmental problems to which the Neighbourhood Plan needs to respond.

5. The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to key address planning issues in the Neighbourhood Plan area. As the Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with national and local strategic policies, it does not therefore seek to repeat them.

6. To assess the sustainability performance of the Neighbourhood Plan, the following assessment framework has been adopted. The proposed framework was consulted upon with the statutory consultees as part of the SEA Scoping Report. The consultees made no comments on the selection of the proposed SEA objectives, which are as follows:

1. To preserve and enhance the quality of built environment and heritage of the village
  - Will the Neighbourhood Plan sustain and enhance the significance of designated heritage assets?
  - Will the Neighbourhood Plan sustain and enhance the significance of non-designated heritage assets?

2. Ensure that the natural environment within and surrounding the village is conserved and enhanced, biodiversity is improved and designated habitats are protected

- Does the Neighbourhood Plan respect the special landscape character of Southend Hill?
- Will the Neighbourhood Plan deliver a net biodiversity gain?
- Will the Neighbourhood Plan avoid development in a designated habitat site?

3. To encourage walking and cycling journeys to services, facilities and work

- Will the Neighbourhood Plan encourage and enable more journeys to be made without the need for a private car?
- Will the Neighbourhood Plan encourage the retention of community facilities and services in the village?

7. The assessment has also been used to assist in shaping the alternative spatial plan options for consultation with the local community and in formulating other plan policies.

8. The four strategic objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan are outlined in Section 3 of this report. They cover a small number of social and environmental issues in support of realising the Vision. Each of these objectives is assessed against the SEA objective. There are no negative impacts of the strategic objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan. In many other respects, the relationship between the Neighbourhood Plan objectives and the key environmental measures is complementary, with the prospect of some positive environmental impacts.

9. The Neighbourhood Plan contains seven proposed policies in pursuit of its strategic objectives. These policies are assessed against each of the three SEA objectives. In overall terms, there is a reasonably good fit between the chosen policies and the SEA objectives. There are no negative impacts. There are positive impacts on walking and cycling as a result of a number of policies seeking to focus development within or on the edge of the main village. Similarly, that focus will ensure there are no negative impacts and some positive impacts on protecting Southend Hill and delivering biodiversity value.

10. In summary, the assessment shows that there are no significant adverse effects resulting from the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan. The policies have been specifically chosen and formulated to adhere to the principles of sustainable development as defined by the NPPF. The policy options chosen in the Neighbourhood Plan have been assessed as those, where genuine, plausible options were available, that achieved an appropriate balance between avoiding any significant environmental impact and meeting the

strategic objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.

11. The Neighbourhood Plan proposes that the progress in its implementation will be assessed using the identified measures. The data for some of these measures is collected by the District Council in its planning monitoring reports. In other cases, the Parish Council will endeavour to collect data on an annual basis to report on the progress of the plan. Should any real or potential negative impacts be identified then the Parish and District Councils will seek to review the relevant policies and their implementation.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment of any significant environmental effects resulting from the policies and proposals of the Submission version of the Cheddington Neighbourhood Development Plan ("the Neighbourhood Plan") in accordance with EU Directive 2001/42 on strategic environmental assessment (SEA). Figure A below shows the designated Neighbourhood Area.

1.2 The Neighbourhood Plan was published for pre-submission consultation during January-February 2015 by Cheddington Parish Council under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012. In July 2014, Aylesbury Vale District Council ("the District Council") issued a screening opinion requiring an SEA of the Neighbourhood Plan under the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004. A Scoping Report was consulted upon with the statutory consultees in October/November 2014. It contained the baseline information for this report and is published as a separate document in the evidence base of the Neighbourhood Plan.

1.3 The Final SEA report therefore provides an assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan in a way that is proportionate to this task and that recognises the limitations of the available data and means of measuring direct impacts.

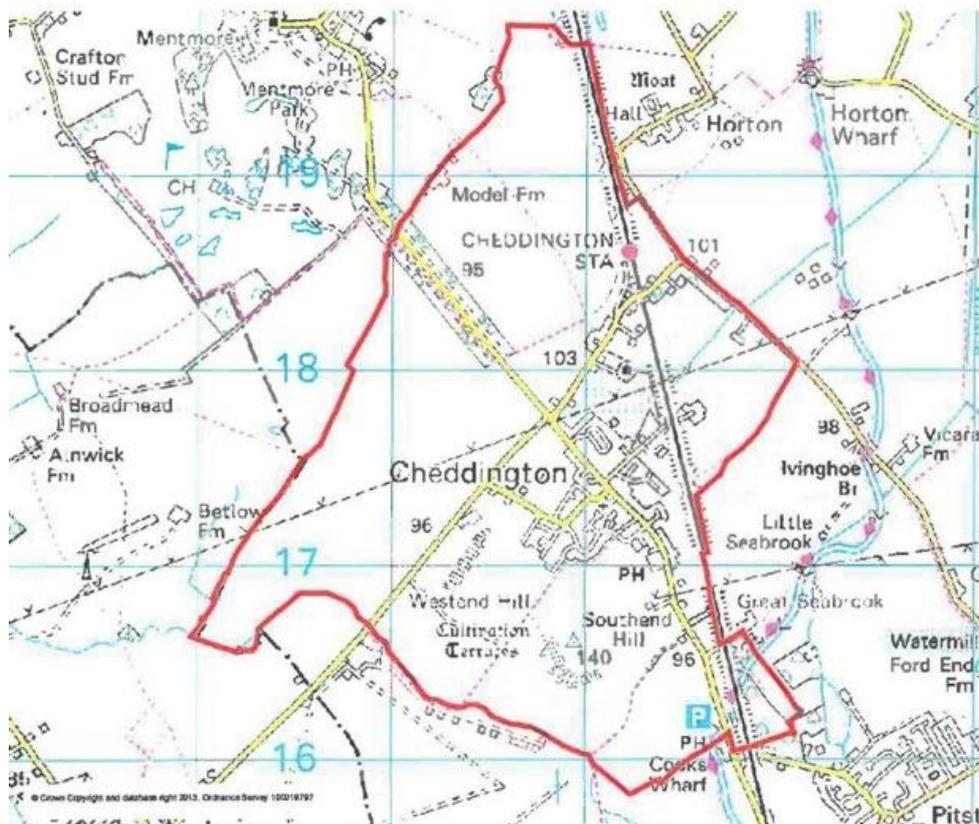


Figure A: The Designated Cheddington Neighbourhood Area

## 2. Background to Strategic Environmental Assessment

2.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) involves the evaluation of the environmental impacts of a plan. The requirement for an SEA is set out in the European Directive 2001/42/EC adopted into UK law as the "Environmental Assessment of Plans or Programmes Regulations 2004" as follows:

- An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan, and relationship with other relevant plans or programmes
- The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan
- The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected
- Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC
- The environmental protection objectives, established at international, community or national level, which are relevant to the plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation
- The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors
- The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce, and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan
- An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of competency encountered in compiling the required information
- A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Article 10

2.3 Since 2004, the requirement for SEA of relevant plans and programmes has been aligned with the similar process of SAs in the UK. During the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, the Government confirmed that a SA is not required of a Neighbourhood Plan but that SEA may still be necessary in circumstances where policies may have a significant environmental effect.

2.4 The methodology for the assessment is intended to be proportionate to the task of assessing the modest development proposals of a Neighbourhood Plan in a relatively small parish area.

2.5 The report responds to each of the SEA requirements in turn, beginning with a short description of the Neighbourhood Plan, identifying the key environmental features of the parish and then assessing the impact of the

strategic objectives and policies of the Neighbourhood Plan on those features, using a number of SEA objectives and measures.

### **3. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan and relationship with other relevant plans or programmes**

3.1 The Neighbourhood Plan contains a number of policies for the use and development of land in the Parish of Cheddington in the plan period up to 2033. These policies, together with the policies of the development plan - that is currently the saved policies of the Aylesbury Vale District Local Plan (AVDLP) and the policies of the forthcoming Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan in due course - and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), will be used by the District Council in determining planning applications once the Neighbourhood Plan is approved in due course.

3.2 The Vision of the Neighbourhood Plan is:

*We have a vision of Cheddington in 2031 as a thriving local community, where the village has grown sustainably and where local businesses and facilities have had the freedom to grow and develop to changing needs.*

*Cheddington has grown and changed over the last 70 years, and will continue grow and develop as the world around us changes. Whilst Cheddington has not seen any larger scale development take place since the Church Hill estate was established in the 1990's, we have nevertheless seen approximately 40 houses built over the last 20 years, infilling within the existing village boundary.*

*This plan will ensure that Cheddington retains its sense of community by carefully managing change within its Parish boundary and by protecting its setting and surrounding open countryside from unnecessary development.*

3.3 In pursuit of this Vision, the Neighbourhood Plan contains six strategic objectives and specific measures:

#### Housing

- To provide a mix of dwelling types including particularly smaller dwellings for young families, starter homes for younger people and homes suited to older households
- To provide some affordable homes for local people

#### Environment

- To maintain and protect the rural character of the Parish and its landscape features, especially Westend Hill and Southend Hill
- To maintain, protect and enhance local green spaces and areas of biodiversity value

### Community Services

- To protect the community assets of the Parish.
- To support and enhance key community services.

### Transport

- To encourage safe walking, cycling and horse riding
- To manage car parking effectively.

### 3.4 The policies are as follows:

- Policy 1: A Spatial Plan for the Parish – establishing the Cheddington Settlement Boundary to distinguish the built up area of the main village from the surrounding countryside
- Policy 2: Housing Site Allocations – allocating three housing sites on the northern edge of the village for approximately 100 new homes
- Policy 3: Community Facilities – protecting important community assets
- Policy 4: Design – encouraging a high quality of design of all development proposals
- Policy 5: Southend Hill & Westend Hill Heritage Asset & Special Landscape – protecting the area to the south west of the village from development
- Policy 6: Green Infrastructure & Biodiversity – protecting biodiversity value and promoting green infrastructure
- Policy 7: Local Green Spaces – safeguarding land from future development

3.5 A policy was included in the Pre Submission Neighbourhood Plan on education but following the consultation period it has been decided to delete it from the final version. In addition, on the advice of the District Council, it was decided to divide former Policy 6 into two separate policies – now 5 and 6 – for clarity.

## **4. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan**

4.1 The Neighbourhood Plan area contains a number of designated heritage and nature features, including a number of listed buildings around the village – most notably Cheddington Manor - and the hill fort Scheduled Ancient Monument at Southend Hill. This same area was designated a Local Landscape Area by the AVDLP in 2004 to recognise its special importance relative to other landscapes in the district and its character has remained unchanged since then. In addition, the parish is approximately 2km north of the Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are some locally designated wildlife sites formed by the orchards on Station Road.

4.2 The Plan contains only modest policies and proposals for development that are consistent in scale and location with the village and with the adopted development plan. Without it, proposals for housing development in the parish would be left to individual planning applications. This would make little difference to controlling the environmental impact of those proposals as they must in any event demonstrate they confirm to development plan and NPPF policy.

## **5. Any existing environmental problems that are relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan**

5.1 The area does not suffer from any significant environmental problems. The community consultations have shown that traffic speeds on Mentmore Road can be problematic and there is a concern that the private orchards off Station Road will deteriorate further in their appearance without investment. The community is also worried about significant housing development schemes harming the character of the village and being incapable of being supported by the local infrastructure. However, there are no pressing environmental problems to which the Neighbourhood Plan needs to respond.

## **6. The environmental protection objectives that are relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation**

6.1 The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to key address planning issues in the Neighbourhood Plan area. As the Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with national and local strategic policies, it does not therefore seek to repeat them.

6.2 To assess the sustainability performance of the Neighbourhood Plan, the following assessment framework has been adopted. The proposed framework was consulted upon with the statutory consultees as part of the SEA Scoping Report. The consultees made no comments on the selection of the proposed SEA objectives, which are as follows:

1. To preserve and enhance the quality of built environment and heritage of the village
  - Will the Neighbourhood Plan sustain and enhance the significance of designated heritage assets?
  - Will the Neighbourhood Plan sustain and enhance the significance of non-designated heritage assets?
2. Ensure that the natural environment within and surrounding the village is conserved and enhanced, biodiversity is improved and designated habitats are protected
  - Does the Neighbourhood Plan respect the special landscape character of Southend Hill?
  - Will the Neighbourhood Plan deliver a net biodiversity gain?
  - Will the Neighbourhood Plan avoid development in a designated habitat site?
3. To encourage walking and cycling journeys to services, facilities and work
  - Will the Neighbourhood Plan encourage and enable more journeys to be made without the need for a private car?
  - Will the Neighbourhood Plan encourage the retention of community facilities and services in the village?

6.3 In most cases, it is acknowledged the data is not collected or reported at a parish scale to enable an accurate assessment. In addition, the scale of development proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan is too small in comparison with the scale of existing development in the Parish, making the identification of cause-and-effect relationships between inputs and outputs very uncertain. However, it seeks to identify the relative attributes of the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan to inform the reader.

6.4 The assessment has also been used to assist in shaping the alternative spatial plan options for consultation with the local community and in formulating other plan policies.

## 7. Assessing the impact of the Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Objectives

7.1 The four strategic objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan are outlined in Section 3 of this report. They cover a small number of social and environmental issues in support of realising the Vision. Each of these objectives is assessed against the SEA objectives below.

PREFERRED OBJECTIVES & POLICIES	Built Environment	Natural Environment	Walking & Cycling
	1	2	3
<b>SEA Objectives</b>	1	2	3
<b>Plan Objectives:</b>			
Housing	Orange	Orange	Orange
Environment	Green	Green	Orange
Community Services	Orange	Orange	Orange
Transport	Orange	Orange	Green

	<i>Positive impact</i>
	<i>No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures</i>
	<i>Negative impact with no proposed mitigation measures</i>

Table A: Assessment of Neighbourhood Plan Objectives

7.2 The Table shows there are no negative impacts of the strategic objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan. In many other respects, the relationship between the Neighbourhood Plan objectives and the key environmental measures is complementary, with the prospect of some positive environmental impacts.

7.3 This outcome is to be expected as the Neighbourhood Plan must also satisfy the local community in its provisions for protecting the essential character and identity of the village and parish.

## 8. Assessing the impact of the Neighbourhood Plan policies

8.1 The Neighbourhood Plan contains seven proposed policies (outlined in para 3.4 of this report) in pursuit of its strategic objectives. In Table B below these policies are assessed against each of the three SEA objectives.

PROPOSED OBJECTIVES & POLICIES	Built Environment	Natural Environment	Walking & Cycling
SEA Objectives	1	2	3
<b>Plan Policies</b>			
1: Spatial Plan for the Parish	Positive impact	Positive impact	Positive impact
2: Housing Site Allocations	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures	Positive impact	Positive impact
3: Community Facilities	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures	Positive impact
4: Design	Positive impact	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures
5: Southend Hill etc	Positive impact	Positive impact	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures
6: Green Infrastructure etc	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures	Positive impact	Positive impact
7: Local Green Spaces	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures	Positive impact	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures



Positive impact

No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures

Negative impact with no proposed mitigation measures

Table B: Assessment of Proposed Neighbourhood Plan Policies

8.2 In seeking to grow the village on its north western edge, the spatial plan of Policy 1 will continue to protect land of special heritage and landscape value to the southwest of the village and land of biodiversity value beyond its northern edge. However, in response to the Pre Submission consultations, the proposed Cheddington Settlement Boundary will be drawn more tightly around the north western edge of the village to reduce the developable land on that edge and to increase the distance between new development and the setting of the Grade II listed Cheddington Manor. As a result, the policy will now have a positive rather than neutral effect by ensuring in principle that the village expansion on this edge sustains the significance of this heritage asset.

8.3 Given the sites allocated by Policy 2 each accords with the spatial plan of Policy they are by definition also suitable in environmental terms. Further, the requirements of each allocation to deliver on-site green infrastructure, including footpath and cycleway connectivity, will have positive environmental impacts. Especially important are the provisions of the policy for future planning applications to have special regard to the significance of the setting of Cheddington Manor when considering their layout and landscaping schemes.

8.4 The community facilities policy 3 is neutral in terms of impacts on the built and natural environments but has potentially positive impacts on encouraging walking a cycling as the survival of viable community assets will avoid local residents having to travel outside the village for those benefits. Policy 3(iii) also makes a specific requirement for proposals for the scout hut to have regard to the biodiversity value of the surrounding land.

8.5 The design and environmental policies 4 and 6 mostly have neutral effects but also some positive effects, in respect of ensuring proposals protecting existing green infrastructure assets and the character of the village.

8.6 The subdivision of former Policy 6 into two policies (5 and 6) has positive effects. The protection of the Southend Hill and Westend Hill landscape from any development on the open hill sides will be especially important in sustaining the setting of the ancient (and scheduled) hill fort on Southend Hill. The integrity of the landscape setting will only be maintained by ensuring that the edge of the village does not encroach any further than at present. The hills are also prominent in views throughout the area and from within and beyond the village and are therefore key features that establish the character of Cheddington from other villages in the area.

8.7 The proposed Local Green Spaces designations of Policy 7 will have a positive effect on ensuring the natural environment within the village is protected from unsuitable and unacceptable development, which will not be consistent with the spatial plan of Policy 1.

8.8 In overall terms, there is a reasonably good fit between the chosen policies and the SEA objectives. There are no negative impacts. There are positive impacts on walking and cycling as a result of a number of policies seeking to focus development within or on the edge of the main village. Similarly, that focus will ensure there are no negative impacts and some positive impacts on protecting Southend Hill and delivering biodiversity value.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES	Built Environment	Natural Environment	Walking & Cycling
	1	2	3
<b>SEA Objective</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Plan Policies</b>			
1: Spatial Plan for the Parish			
Alternative Option A *			
Alternative Option B **			
2: Housing Site Allocations ***			
3: Community Facilities			
4: Design			
5: Southend Hill etc			
6: Green Infrastructure etc			
7: Local Green Spaces			

	Positive impact
	No or some impact but policy has mitigation measures
	Negative impact with no proposed mitigation measures

**Notes:**

- \* Option A to policy assumes a spatial plan connecting the two parts of the village
- \*\* Option B to policy assumes chosen plan + Option A
- \*\*\* Alternative to policy is no development principles included in the policy wording  
Alternative to all other policies is no policy

Table C: Assessment of Neighbourhood Plan Policy Alternatives

8.9 A summary of the assessment of the reasonable alternatives to the chosen policies is set out in Table C above. The chosen spatial plan compares well with the two alternatives of growing the main village along Station Road (Option A) to the station and of growing in both directions to deliver double the number of homes (Option B). More detailed versions of the chosen option and of Option A were tested with the local community prior to the Pre Submission Plan being finalised. These versions have been simplified for the SEA to aid comparison between distinctive alternatives. Option B has been added to enable comparison with a much larger growth option. This was not consulted on as it was not considered acceptable but it has allowed for its technical merits to be assessed here. Although the community preference was for the chosen spatial plan to grow the main village to the north west, this was not a significant preference in comparison to Option A.

8.10 The 'Station Road' alternative performs slightly less well given the possible loss of biodiversity interest of key sites in that area and arguably the impact of development in this location on the heritage asset of the church. That said, a section of the community did express the view that some enabling development on a small part of the orchard sites may have the benefit of securing the investment required to improve the biodiversity value and appearance of the remaining orchard area. Development in that location may also 'connect' the smaller part of the village around the station with the main village. This alternative is assessed as marginally less well than the proposed spatial plan though this should not be considered significant.

8.11 The other alternative of growing the village in both directions was not considered a reasonable alternative in practice. Aside from the biodiversity and heritage asset issues raised by the Station Road spatial plan, the bigger issue is that of overall scale of development and its effects on the character of the village. As the outcome of doubling the total number of new homes to approximately 200 over half a dozen sites would not win the support of the local community at the referendum, this alternative was in any event rejected.

8.12 The policy 2 alternative of including no development principles and relying on generic development management policies has a neutral effect, with potentially a number of negative effects if those policies are not fully applied. For example, two of the sites adjoin Cheddington Manor, a Grade II listed building and may to an extent form part of its wider setting. The policy recognises this at the outset and makes a specific requirement that future proposals have full regard to this matter. The changes to the developable areas of these sites to reflect the tighter Settlement Boundary will lead to a positive effect of the policy as development is separated from the setting of the heritage asset by a greater distance than before.

8.13 Sites that did not form part of the alternative spatial plans tested and assessed in Policy 1 have not been assessed here. The Site Assessments Report in the evidence base acknowledged that some additional sites have been promoted for inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan or the Local Plan (primarily through the SHLAA). These sites were not only discounted as not being a coherent part of a spatial plan for the village but were also located in areas where other policies of the Plan make special provision for protection.

8.14 The policy 3 alternative of having no policies on these matters will have a neutral impact as other development management policies will control future proposals, though the positive benefits of a supportive policy may be lost. Similarly, the alternative of having no policy 4 on design or 6 on green infrastructure and biodiversity would place a reliance on generic development management policies and risks losing the positive effects of the policy.

8.15 The alternative of having no policy 5 would result in the reliance on saved Policy RA8 of the AVDLP, which designates the identical area as a Local Landscape Area. Whilst that designation was justified by the landscape character assessments undertaken for that Plan, and the 2008 Assessment

reiterated the value of this landscape, the local community is concerned that such a reliance may be undermined by housing development proposals that sought to demonstrate the saved policy was no longer up-to-date or relevant. This alternative has therefore been assessed as having potential negative effects in increasing the risk of speculative applications for housing development that cause significant harm to a special heritage asset and to a cherished landscape setting to that asset through a highly visible encroachment.

8.16 The alternative of designating no Local Green Spaces through Policy 7 would be to rely on other development plan policy criteria to manage development proposals. As with some other policies, this may lead to the loss of the positive effects of the chosen policy and sites but is unlikely to lead to negative effects, assuming other development plan policies are correctly applied and implemented. Other candidate Local Green Spaces – the orchards off Station Road - have been suggested during the consultation process. Whilst the orchards have some merit as potential candidates, they are not considered to meet the criteria of the NPPF for designation and so are not considered reasonable alternatives for the purpose of the SEA.

8.17 In summary, therefore, the assessment shows that there are no significant adverse effects resulting from the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan. The policies have been specifically chosen and formulated to adhere to the principles of sustainable development as defined by the NPPF. The policy options chosen in the Neighbourhood Plan have been assessed as those, where genuine, plausible options were available, that achieved an appropriate balance between avoiding any significant environmental impact and meeting the strategic objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.

## **9. A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring**

9.1 The Neighbourhood Plan proposes that the progress in its implementation will be assessed using the measures identified in Table A. The data for some of these measures is collected by the District Council in its planning monitoring reports. In other cases, the Parish Council will endeavour to collect data on an annual basis to report on the progress of the plan. Should any real or potential negative impacts be identified then the Parish and District Councils will seek to review the relevant policies and their implementation.