



Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Opinion for the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Review

June 2025

(Updated December 2025)

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Plan Description and Context	4
3. SEA Screening	6
4. HRA Screening	10
5. Conclusions.....	23

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This screening report assesses whether the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Review (FNPR) requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/ EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations. A SEA is required if the Neighbourhood Development Plan is deemed to have a likely significant effect on the environment. This screening opinion has been provided to the statutory consultation bodies for SEA (Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England) for their opinion.
- 1.2. Additionally, Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) considerations are also presented and discussed within **Section 4** of this screening opinion. This screening opinion, therefore, provides a view to whether the FNPR is likely to lead to significant environmental effects, thus requiring an SEA and/or HRA process.
- 1.3. This report is set out as follows:
 - **Section 2** will set out the description and context of the Neighbourhood Plan including its relationship with the emerging Local Plan in Uttlesford.
 - **Section 3** will set out the potential significant environment effects of the Neighbourhood Plan and their significance.
 - **Section 4** will provide a HRA test of likely significance (screening) for the FNPR
 - **Section 5** will provide a screening opinion for both the SEA and HRA.

2. Plan Description and Context

2.1. Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan (Review)

- 2.1.1. The Neighbourhood Development Plan will set out planning policies for the FNPR area. Once formally adopted, a Neighbourhood Development Plan carries the same legal weight as Local Development Plans adopted by the Local Planning Authority (LPA), in this case Uttlesford District Council.
- 2.1.2. The community has continued to utilize the vision from the adopted neighborhood plan for Felsted which is as follows:

The Vision for Felsted as reflected by the community's concerns and aspirations is as follows:

1. *Over the Plan period Felsted will continue to be a special place to live in a rural setting.*
2. *Our village amenities will have been expanded and enhanced, particularly our primary health care and village shopping. We will have a new larger community hall providing a focus for Parish public and private events.*
3. *Congestion at peak times will have been eased and pedestrians will be able to move around the village centre and our schools in safety and comfort.*
4. *The setting of listed buildings in the village centre along with Holy Cross Church will have been protected in an enhanced public space, which will have created a clearly defined historic centre, articulating to residents and visitors the value importance of this ancient settlement recorded in the Domesday Book*
5. *The dispersed nature of the Parish of Felsted with its 15 individual Greens and hamlets will remain. This Plan will have ensured the character and identity of this place and its ecology are protected from housing and infrastructure changes in the surrounding area.*
6. *Felsted will have met housing needs and supported additional market housing development where it supports provision of parish amenities and facilitates continuity of residence in the Parish.*
7. *Local employment will have been encouraged through supporting small business development.*
8. *Our schools will continue to be emblematic of educational excellence, meet emerging demands and will play an active role in the community.*
9. *The natural environment will have been protected and enhanced and a green infrastructure delivered.*
10. *New technology will have been used to provide information to users of footpaths and bridleways about the historical setting of the countryside, its wildlife and what might be expected to be seen at any given location.*

2.2. Uttlesford Local Plan context for the Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.2.1. The adopted Uttlesford District Local Plan (2005) identified Felsted as “other villages with development limits where there was limited development potential within the limits.
- 2.2.2. **Core Policy 3 – Settlement Hierarchy** in the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan identifies Felsted as a Larger Village where there is presumption in favour of sustainable development within the existing built-up area, or where development outside the existing built area of the settlement will only be permitted where it is allocated by the Local Plan by the Local Plan 2021-2041 or allocated within a Made Neighbourhood Development Plan.

- 2.2.3. In order to meet the needs of Rural Areas in accordance with paragraph 67 of the NPPF (2023) Core Policy 19 sets out housing requirement figures for the more sustainable settlements – Larger Villages. Felsted settlement is within includes a non-strategic Housing Requirement figure of 320 dwellings between 2021-2041, some of which have been delivered, leaving a Residual requirement of 104 dwellings to be allocated as of 1st April 2024. To note, this could be reduced prior to the Local Plan adoption if further speculative development comes forward through additional granted planning permissions.
- 2.2.4. The emerging Local Plan is anticipated to be adopted pending the outcome of the examination early 2026. According to the Uttlesford Local Development Scheme¹, the emerging Local Plan is anticipated to be adopted April 2026, following the outcome of the Examination in Public currently taking place.

¹ Available online: https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/12747/Local-development-scheme-October-2023/pdf/20240124_LDS_Oct2023_reviewed.pdf?m=1706114638360

3. SEA Screening

3.1. Legislative Background

3.1.1. Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment states that:

'Environmental assessment is an important tool for integrating environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.'

All plans and programmes which are prepared for a number of sectors and which set a framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Council Directive 85/337/EEC of 27 June 1985 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment(7), and all plans and programmes which have been determined to require assessment pursuant to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna(8), are likely to have significant effects on the environment, and should as a rule be made subject to systematic environmental assessment. When they determine the use of small areas at local level or are minor modifications to the above plans or programmes, they should be assessed only where Member States determine that they are likely to have significant effects on the environment.'

(11) Other plans and programmes which set the framework for future development consent of projects may not have significant effects on the environment in all cases and should be assessed only where Member States determine that they are likely to have such effects.'

3.1.2. The FNPR may influence frameworks for future development or be used in conjunction with plans and programmes that set such a framework. Therfore,it has been determined that the principle of the Neighbourhood Development Plan should be screened for necessary application of the SEA Directive.

3.1.3. The Report from the Commission to The Council, The European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions states, on the application and effectiveness of the Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Directive 2001/42/EC), that 'the following Plan & Programme (P&P), and modifications to them, are covered when prepared and/or adopted by an authority and required pursuant to legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions:

- P&P prepared for certain sectors and which set the framework for future development consent in respect of projects under the Environmental Impact Assessment-EIA-Directive.
- P&P requiring an assessment under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).
- P&P setting the framework for development consent in respect of projects (not limited to those listed in the EIA Directive and determined by "screening" as being likely to have significant environmental effects."

3.1.4. This Report represents the content and influence of the FNPR

3.2. SEA Directive Test

3.2.1. The Government publication “A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive” (ODPM, 2005)¹ which includes the criteria for determining the likely significant effects on the environment. These criteria are split into two categories: those relating to the characteristics of the plan and those relating to the characteristics of the effects and area likely to be affected

3.2.2. Plan Characteristics:

- 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 [European] Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).

3.2.3. Characteristics of the effects and the plan area

- 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 (for example, 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,
- the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status

3.3. SEA screening assessment

3.3.1. In order to identify any likely significant environmental effects, the Table below considers the characteristics of the FNPR :

Table 3.1: Potential environmental effects of the FNPR and their significance

SEA Topic	Discussion of potential effects and their significance	Is there potential for a significant effect
Biodiversity	<p>Western portion of the neighbourhood area including Felsted Village falls within the impact Risk Zone of the Garnetts Wood/Barnston Lays SSSI.</p> <p>There are no European sites within or close to the NP area. However, the eastern portion of the area falls within the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance & Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) which extends 22km from the Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar Site.</p> <p>These designations offer sensitivities around the eastern portion of the Neighbourhood Area, especially given the FNPR is seeking to allocate 104 dwellings through Core Policy 19 of the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan. In addition, 216 dwellings have come forward through completions and commitments already. These proposals have the <u>potential to have significant effects</u> on the biodiversity, through additional recreational pressure on the Blackwater Estuary habitat site. Although the plan aims to mitigate the effects of the allocation proposals through good design principles, the enhancement of green infrastructure networks in the area and protection of areas of biodiversity importance. It is still recommended that because of the potential impact this be assessed under the SEA directive.</p>	Yes
Climate Change	<p>The NP area is largely within fluvial Flood Zone 1. The River Chelmer, the River Ter and Stebbing Brook all mark corridors of Flood Zone 2 and 3. Flood risk from surface water flooding is more prevalent; covering areas in addition to the three river corridors. As the plan is seeking to allocate sites to meet the housing requirement impacts on climate change mitigation and adaptation <u>are likely to be significant</u></p>	Yes
Communities, equality, inclusion and health	<p>The plan area has an ageing population. Felsted's population in relation to the national profile and the Uttlesford profile is comparatively much older. In addition, a key focus of the Neighbourhood Plan is improving community facilities in the village through the delivery of new development. The benefits and costs to a community and quality of life can be wide-ranging. Due the quantum of development required in the Neighbourhood Plan review, impacts on communities, equality, inclusion and health <u>have the potential to be significant</u>.</p>	No

SEA Topic	Discussion of potential effects and their significance	Is there potential for a significant effect
Historic Environment	<p>There are 191 listed buildings within the Neighbourhood Plan area. Notably these include 8 Grade II* sites which are the Leez Priory Fisherman's Hut, Hartford End Mill, Bury Farm Barn, Boote House and the House Adjoining, The Pavilion, Ingrams Close and Old School Masters House. There is also a scheduled ancient monument, which is Leez Augustinian Prior and Tudor Mansion located to the southwest of the neighbourhood area. The impacts of the quantum of development required in the Neighbourhood Plan <u>has the potential to have significant effects on the historic environment.</u></p>	Yes
Land, Soils and Resources	<p>No noted issues. According to the Natural England Agricultural Land Classification, the NP area contains Grade 2 (very good) and Grade 3 (good to moderate) agricultural land /soil quality. <u>Development sites on greenfield land have the potential to have significant effect on the soil.</u></p>	Yes
Landscape	<p>There are no nationally designated landscapes in the vicinity of the neighbourhood area (E.g. AONBs or National Parks). As the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to identify allocated sites for housing or employment, <u>an assessment of significance of the impact on the landscape character of Felsted is required through an SEA.</u> These have been identified in the Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment (ULCA) and the National Character Assessment (NCA).</p>	Yes
Transport and Accessibility	<p>The Road Network in Felsted is made up of a collection of rural routes with one B Road that connects the A120 (East) to the North and the B1808 to the South which connects to Chelmsford. The previously adopted Neighbourhood Plan had highlighted traffic issues around the Felsted School site at peak times. The impact of proposed development within the Neighbourhood Plan on the transport network will need to be assessed through an SEA.</p>	Yes

4. HRA Screening

4.1. Habitat Regulations Assessment of Development Plans

4.1.1. This section forms a plan level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) as required by Regulation 63 of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). This section of this Report aims to:

- Identify the Habitats sites within 22km of FNPR area.
- Summarise the reasons for designation and Conservation Objectives for each site to be considered in this assessment.
- Screen the FNPR for its potential to impact upon a Habitats site.
- Assess the potential for in combination effects from other projects and plans in the area.
- Identify if there are any outstanding issues that need further investigation.

4.1.2. This Stage 1 HRA Screening report determines the requirement whether a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is needed for the FNPR.

4.2. Habitats (European) Sites

4.2.1. Habitats sites is the term used in the glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to describe any site which would be included within the definition at Regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) for the purpose of those regulations. These now form part of the UK national network of sites for nature protection. The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of UK's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

4.2.2. All Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated for birds and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated for other species, and for Habitats. Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites) are also part of the National Network of sites. This is because all SPAs and SACs are comprised of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and all Ramsar sites in England are SSSIs. Together, SPAs, SACs and Ramsar Sites make up the Habitats sites in England. The following offers a description and explanation of SPAs, SACs and Ramsar Sites.

4.3. Habitats (European) Sites

4.3.1. **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** are areas which have been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds. Legislation: The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

4.3.2. **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** are areas designated to protect habitat types that are in danger of disappearance, have a small natural range, or are highly characteristic of the region; and to protect species that are endangered, vulnerable, rare, or endemic. Example: Essex Estuaries SAC has Atlantic salt meadows, mudflats and sandflats. Legislation: The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

4.3.3. **Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites)** are designated to protect the biological and physical features of wetlands, especially for waterfowl habitats. For example, Colne Estuary (Mid-Essex Coast Phase 2) Ramsar site is important due to the extent and diversity of saltmarsh, and the site supports 12 species of nationally scarce plants and at least 38 Red Data Book invertebrate species. Ramsar sites often overlap with SACs and SPAs and UK planning policy determines that they should be accorded the same importance when developments are proposed. Legislation: Ramsar Convention (1971) – Wetlands of International Importance and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Table 4.1: Habitat sites within 20km to be considered in this assessment

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	Special Protection Areas (SPA)	Ramsar
Essex Estuaries SAC	Blackwater Estuary (Mid Essex Coast Phase 4) SPA	Blackwater Estuary (Mid Essex Coast Phase 4) Ramsar

Felsted Parish - 20km Buffer Zone

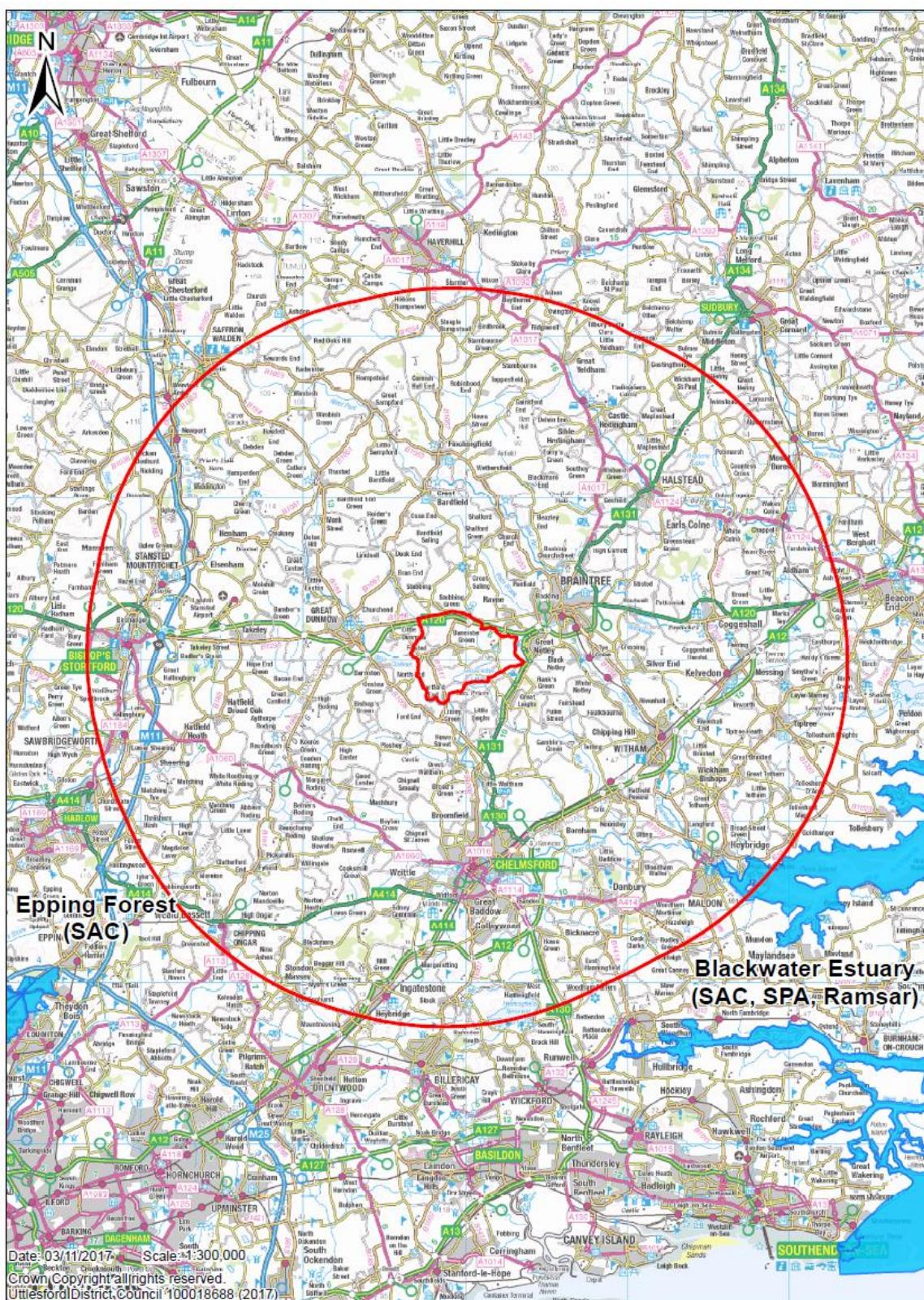


Figure 4.1. 20 KM Buffer around FNPR area.

4.3.4. The FNPR area lies within the Zone of Influence (ZOI) for the Essex Estuaries SAC that overlaps the Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar. The Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar has a zone of influence of 22.0 km which is larger than any of the other Habitat sites with which the Essex Coast SAC overlaps.

4.4. Method and Approach

4.4.1. This screening stage aims to categorise the policies or projects within the plan based on the likelihood of significant effect on a Habitats site. The Table below identifies the category assigned to each policy in the FNPR.

Category A = policies with no negative effect

Category B = policies no likely significant effect

Category C= policies likely to have a significant impact.

4.4.2. This screening stage is to identify if any significant effects are likely due to any policies or projects impacting on a Habitats site. The Table below identifies the category assigned to each policy in the FNPR

4.5. Potential impacts of the FNPR on habitat sites

4.5.1. Some of the potential impacts on Habitats sites include:

- land taken up by proposed development;
- loss of feeding ground for qualifying species due which travel outside protected sites
- an increase in disturbance due to recreational use from new residential development, improved access;
- Increased air pollution levels.

4.5.2. Each of the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Draft Policies will be assessed against the above criteria in the Table below.

Table 4.2. Assessment of Potential impacts on Habitat Sites

Nature of Potential Impact	How the FNPR (alone or in combination with other plans could affect the Habitats site	Considered significance of effects
Land taken by Development	The Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan Area is located outside the habitats' site boundaries.	No likely significant effects as no development will be allocated on designated land.
Impact on protected species outside the protected sites	The Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan Area does not contain land providing functional use by designated feature of the Habitats sites.	No risk of impacts on protected species outside of the protected sites. This impact pathway will not result in likely significant effects on the Habitats sites.
Recreational pressure and disturbance	The Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan area lies within the Zones of Influence of the Blackwater	The Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan allocates land for development so recreation impacts arising

Nature of Potential Impact	How the FNPR (alone or in combination with other plans could affect the Habitats site)	Considered significance of effects
	Estuary SPA & Ramsar. Natural England considers that visitors may travel to these sites for recreational purposes.	from the Neighbourhood Plan are screened in either alone or in combination with the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan.
Water quantity and quality	There is a potential pathway for development within the The Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan area to impact on the Habitats within the scope of this HRA due to the plan area containing Rivers Ter and the Chelmer which both connect to the Habitats sites.	Avoidance measures have been embedded in Policy HPE6 Flooding and SuDS so that developments will avoid significant impacts on the designation features of the Habitats sites. Local Plan policies also apply.
Changes in pollution levels	There is a potential pathway to result in an increase in pollution due to an increase in visitor road traffic from the proposed residential development in the Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan.	Likely significant effects are expected so changes in air pollution have been screened in when considered alone or in combination with other plans.

4.5 Results from HRA Screening of Neighbourhood Development Plan Policies

4.5.1. Each of the policies in the Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan Review was screened in turn to identify whether they would have any impact on a Habitats site and the result of this exercise is recorded in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2. Assessment of Potential Impacts from Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
Draft FEL/Review HVCI – Historic Village Centre	The Historic Village Centre (as shown on Map 2) is designated as a historic character area and local centre for its historic significance, its contribution to the character of the Neighbourhood Area, as well as for its amenity value which provides a focal point of facilities and amenities for all residents and visitors alike.	No Category A	No recommendations

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
	<p>Development proposals within the Historic Village Centre must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provide safe, and attractive pedestrian environment and improve the quality of the pedestrian environment; and ii. Ensure that the choice of materials, forms and designs integrate sympathetically with the existing historic environment <p>Proposals for additional services and facilities within the Historic Village Centre must also demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Safe access, and that off-street parking provision will be sufficient to avoid additional on-street parking; iv. The proposal will not result in severe traffic congestion; and v. The proposal will not adversely affect residential amenity through noise , fumes, smells or disturbance . 		
Draft FEL Review/HVC2 – Existing Village Shop and Post Office	The relocation of the village shop and Post Office to an alternative site within the Felsted Neighbourhood Area to a location no less accessible to users and which will not necessitate on street parking will be supported.	No Category A	No recommendations
Draft FEL Review /VA1 – Doctors' Surgery	The relocation of Royal British Legion (RBL) elsewhere within the Neighbourhood Area will be	No Category A	No recommendations

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
Draft FEL Review/HVC3 – Royal British Legion Site	supported. In the event that it successfully relocates within the Parish, the site (as shown on Map 2) is safeguarded for community use and for the provision of accessible public open space.		
Draft FEL Review/HVC4 – Additional Car Parking in the Village Centre	The provision of additional off-street parking spaces within the Felsted's built-up area will be supported where they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do not harm the character or appearance of the local area; • are appropriately landscaped; • are sensitively designed to reflect the local area and any surrounding buildings; and • alleviate pressure on the local highway network • include cycle parking in accordance with the most up to date parking standards of the highway authority 	Category B	No specific recommendation
Draft FEL Review/HVC5 – Managing Congestion at the T Junction in Felsted Village	FEL Review/HVC5 – Managing Congestion at the T Junction in Felsted Village <p>Development proposals which would increase the number of access points or significantly increase the volume of traffic in the areas identified on Map 2 (see below) must be subject to a Transport Statement/Assessment in accordance with ECC Development Management Policies (2011) to demonstrate how walking, cycling and passenger transport will be promoted and adverse impact on the existing conditions on the</p>	Category A	No recommendations

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
	<p>local highway network will be avoided:</p> <p>i) that section of Station Road between the Mill Road and Chelmsford Road junctions;</p> <p>ii) that section of Chelmsford Road between Station Road and Cromwell Park; and</p> <p>that section of Braintree Road between Chelmsford Road and the War Memorial</p>		
Draft FEL Review /VA1 – Doctors' Surgery	<p>FEL Review /VA1 – Doctors' Surgery</p> <p>The relocation of the GP surgery and associated dispensary within the Neighbourhood Area will be supported. In the event that the Surgery successfully relocates within the Neighbourhood Area, the redevelopment of the site (as identified as VA1 on Map 3) for residential (C3) or professional services/office (Class E) uses will be supported</p>	Category A	No recommendations
Draft FEL/Review/VA2 Memorial Hall	<p>The redevelopment of the Memorial Hall with a capacity of up to 250 people seated on the existing site or at another suitable site within the Neighbourhood Area will be supported</p>	Category A	No recommendations
Draft FEL Review/SC1 Supporting our Schools	<p>The following school related development proposals will be supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals to enable expansion and improvement of the schools, subject to it being demonstrated that they will not result in severe congestion or additional on-street parking 	Category A	No recommendations

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park and Ride or Park and Walk schemes which are designed to, alleviate pressure on the local highways network and respect the character and appearance of the local area. • Proposals that provide additional parking within or adjacent to the existing school site boundaries. <p>Development proposals that will result in additional on-street parking will not be supported.</p>		
Draft FEL/Review/HN1 Meeting our Housing Needs	<p>The following sites are allocated for housing development of 87 new homes within the plan period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FEL/HN 9: Sunnybrook Farm Site II (approx. 17 units) • FEL/HN10: Water Tower Site approx.. 70 units 	Category C	Undertake a Project level Habitats Regulation Assessment or be subject to a financial contribution towards avoidance and mitigation measures as specified in the Recreation disturbance and Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) SPD for the Essex Coast.
Draft FEL/HN 9: Sunnybrook Farm Site II (approx. 17 units)	<p>To be supported the development proposal must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Be designed and landscaped so as to enhance the character and appearance of the area and be consistent with the AECOM character assessment. ii) Incorporate a mix of housing to meet the latest assessment of local housing, including no less 	Category B	<p>The site falls within the scope of the Strategic Appropriate Assessment undertaken for the Uttlesford Local Plan. Compliance with the Essex Coast RAMS tariff (as required by ULP Core Policy 38) is sufficient to mitigate</p>

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
	<p>than 8 two or three-bedroom homes with accommodation suitable for families and older people, having regard to the supply of such units at the time of the application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii) All homes must be accessible and adaptable and compliant with Cat M4(2) (Building Regulations 2020 iv) Provide a landscaping plan which delivers landscaping and screening to the edge of the built-up area of the development to avoid coalescence with Felsted village and provide a positive transition into the village, v) Provide to the Felsted Community Land Trust an open space of not less than xxx sqm to the south of the site with. vi) Wide vehicular access to Braintree Road and suitable for the construction and operation of a shop and post office with off street parking and delivery space. The site to be provided as an open green space with shrub boarders. vii) Identify and promote opportunities to pursue walking, cycling and use of public transport to improve accessibility and integration into the wider community networks and to provide access to the Flitch Way. viii) Wide vehicular access to Braintree Road and suitable for the construction and 		<p>recreational pressure. No separate plan-level Appropriate Assessment is required, though project-level checks may apply at planning application stage.</p>

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
	<p>operation of a shop and post office with off street parking and delivery space. The site to be provided as an open green space with shrub boarders.</p> <p>ix) Identify and promote opportunities to pursue walking, cycling and use of public transport to improve accessibility and integration into the wider community networks and to provide access to the Flitch Way.</p> <p>x) Due to its location within the zone of influence of the Blackwater Estuary SPA and RAMSAR site, the proposal shall be accompanied by a project level Habitats Regulation Assessment which will demonstrate that the development proposal will have no adverse effects on the integrity of the European site; or, in the case of the Essex RAMS SPD being adopted, be subject to a financial contribution towards avoidance and mitigation measures as specified in the Recreational disturbance and Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) for the Essex Coast.</p>		
DRAFT FEL/HN 10 - Land <u>north of Garnetts Lane, Chestnut Walk and Stebbing Road</u> (land adjacent the Water Tower)	<p>The Plan allocates land <u>north of Garnetts Lane, Chestnut Walk and Stebbing Road</u>, as shown on Map X and Map Y, for housing development of approximately 70 units.</p> <p>To be supported, development proposals must satisfy the following criteria:</p>	Category B	The site falls within the scope of the Strategic Appropriate Assessment undertaken for the Uttlesford Local Plan. Compliance

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Be designed and landscaped so as to enhance the character and appearance of the area and be consistent with the AECOM character assessment; ii) Incorporate a mix of housing to meet the latest assessment of local housing need including a significant proportion of two- or three-bedroom accommodation suitable for young families and older people, having regard to the supply of such units at the time of application; iii) Provide, via transfer to the Felsted Community Land Trust, 6 fully completed turn-key homes, comprising 2x3 bed and 4x2 bed units including gardens, constructed to no less a standard than and integrated with the market homes; The provision of any remaining affordable homes, as may be required under planning policy, shall be reduced in order to reflect and offset the costs of providing the 6 homes to be transferred iv) Avoid unnecessary removal of hedgerows but where removal is necessary, provide on site replacement native hedgerows; iv) Be subject to a Transport Statement/Assessment in accordance with ECC Development 		<p>with the Essex Coast RAMS tariff (as required by ULP Core Policy 38) is sufficient to mitigate recreational pressure. No separate plan-level Appropriate Assessment is required, though project-level checks may apply at planning application stage.</p>

Policy No.	Policy Wording	Will Policy have likely Significant effects on the Habitats Sites	Recommendations
	<p>Management Policies (2011) and Car Parking Standards;</p> <p>v) Identify, promote and facilitate opportunities for walking, cycling and use of public transport to improve accessibility and integration into the wider community and wider networks;</p> <p>vi) All homes must be accessible and adaptable and compliant with Cat M4(2) (Building Regulations 2020.</p>		
DRAFT FEL Review /CW2 – Nature including Felsted Fen	<p>The area of Felsted Fen ,as shown on Map xx, is a designated as a Local Wildlife Site” with accordance with the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041 Core Policy 38: Sites Designated for Biodiversity or Geology. The area is an important area of nature to the local community, and should be protected from development in accordance with Core Policy 38.</p>	Category A	No
Draft FEL Review/CW5 Local Green Spaces	<p>Local Green Spaces currently being considered in accordance with NNPF guidance.</p>	Category A	<p>Local Green Spaces should be considered in accordance with NNPF criteria.</p>

5. Conclusions

5.1. Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion

- 5.1.1. The Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan has been prepared for town and country planning purposes and sets a framework for future development consent.
- 5.1.2. The policies of the Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan can be considered in the determination of use of small areas at local level.
- 5.1.3. Planning Guidance on SEA Neighbourhood Development Plans indicates that a strategic environment assessment may be required e.g. where a Neighbourhood Development Plan allocates development sites; the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be impacted by the proposals in the plan; or the Neighbourhood Development Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects that have already not been considered and dealt with through a sustainability of the Local Plan.
- 5.1.4. The Plan allocates sites for development purposes and the policies seek to-strengthen the protection and enhancement of assets at a local level and it is considered there is the potential for Likely Significant Effects the Felsted Neighbourhood Development Plan Review because of the plans intention to allocate housing. In addition, the cumulative effect that this could have on the environment, alongside the growth proposed in the Local Plan.
- 5.1.5. In consideration of the SEA Assessment in **Section 2, of this SCREENING Report, it is considered that there are likely significant effects resulting from the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Review and can be screened in** for its requirement of Strategic Environmental assessment in line with the requirements of Directive 2001/42//EC. Responses were received from Historic and Natural England and have been appended to this report in Appendix 1, 2 and 3. They agree with the main conclusions of this report

5.2. Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion

- 5.2.1. The Essex RAMS SPD 2020 indicates that the Zone of Influence for the Essex Estuaries (SAC overlaps with several other Habitats Sites, with the most relevant being the Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar. The Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar have a zone of Influence of 22.0km which is larger than any of the other Habitat sites with which the Essex Coast SAC overlaps.
- 5.2.2. The Uttlesford Local Plan provides Felsted Neighbourhood Plan for a 2021- 2041 Housing Requirement figure of (total) 320 dwellings and a Residual Requirement to be allocated through non-strategic allocations as at 01 April 2024 of 104 dwellings and these allocations may fall within the Zone of Influence of the SAC.
- 5.2.3. Based on the above, this HRA Screening report indicates the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Review is likely to have significant effects on the Essex Estuaries SAC. However, the likely significant effects regarding recreational pressure have been assessed at the

strategic level within the Uttlesford Local Plan HRA (June 2024)². As the Neighbourhood Plan allocations align with the Local Plan strategy and include requirements for RAMS mitigation, the findings of the Local Plan Appropriate Assessment are adopted. Therefore, a separate Appropriate Assessment for the Neighbourhood Plan is not required. A response from Natural England has been received that agrees with this position and is appended to this report in Appendix 4

² Available online: https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/media/13308/Habitat-Regulation-Assessment/pdf/Uttlesford_Local_Plan_HRA_FINAL.pdf?m=1723034664693

Appendix 1 – Natural England Response

Date: 03 July 2025
Our ref: 516727
Your ref: Felsted Neighbourhood Plan



BY EMAIL ONLY



Dear Demetria [REDACTED]

**Uttlesford District Council - Felsted Neighbourhood Plan - Review - SEA/HRA Screening
Opinion Consultation**

Thank you for your consultation on the above which was received by Natural England on 23 June 2025

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.

Natural England agrees with the conclusions of the SEA and HRA screening reports that there are likely significant effects resulting from the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan Review and it can therefore be screened in for its requirement of Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment. We have no significant comments to raise on the SEA Scoping Report; however, In addition to recreational pressure impacts on the Blackwater Estuary SPA and RAMSAR site, the SEA should assess the effects of site allocation *FEL/HN2 – Land At Braintree Road (Sunnybrook Farm)* on nearby SSSIs, including the River Ter Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), particularly through discharges.

We refer you to the advice in the attached annex which covers the issues and opportunities that should be considered when preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.

For any further consultations on your plan, please contact: consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Camilla Davidge
Higher Officer - Central Casework Team
Natural England

Annex 1 - Neighbourhood planning and the natural environment: information, issues and opportunities

Natural environment information sources

The [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)¹ website will provide you with much of the nationally held natural environment data for your plan area. The most relevant layers for you to consider are: **Agricultural Land Classification, Ancient Woodland, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Local Nature Reserves, National Parks (England), National Trails, Priority Habitat Inventory, public rights of way (on the Ordnance Survey base map)** and **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (including their impact risk zones)**. Local environmental record centres may hold a range of additional information on the natural environment. A list of local record centres is available from [the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres](http://theassociationoflocalenvironmentalrecordscentres.org/) .

Priority habitats are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found [here](#)². Most of these will be mapped either as **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**, on the Magic website or as **Local Wildlife Sites**. Your local planning authority should be able to supply you with the locations of Local Wildlife Sites.

National Character Areas (NCAs) divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each character area is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. NCA profiles contain descriptions of the area and statements of environmental opportunity, which may be useful to inform proposals in your plan. NCA information can be found [here](#)³.

There may also be a local **landscape character assessment** covering your area. This is a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It can help to inform, plan and manage change in the area. Your local planning authority should be able to help you access these if you can't find them online.

If your neighbourhood planning area is within or adjacent to a **National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONB), the relevant National Park/AONB Management Plan for the area will set out useful information about the protected landscape. You can access the plans on from the relevant National Park Authority or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website.

General mapped information on **soil types** and **Agricultural Land Classification** is available (under 'landscape') on the [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)⁴ website and also from the [LandIS website](http://landis.website)⁵, which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

Natural environment issues to consider

The [National Planning Policy Framework](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework)⁶ sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. [Planning Practice Guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-practice-guidance)⁷ sets out supporting guidance.

Your local planning authority should be able to provide you with further advice on the potential impacts of your plan or order on the natural environment and the need for any environmental assessments.

Landscape

Your plans or orders may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes. You may want to consider identifying distinctive local landscape features or characteristics such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls and think about how any new development proposals can respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness.

¹ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making>

⁴ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

⁷ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/>

If you are proposing development within or close to a protected landscape (National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or other sensitive location, we recommend that you carry out a landscape assessment of the proposal. Landscape assessments can help you to choose the most appropriate sites for development and help to avoid or minimise impacts of development on the landscape through careful siting, design and landscaping.

Wildlife habitats

Some proposals can have adverse impacts on designated wildlife sites or other priority habitats (listed [here⁸](#)), such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or [Ancient woodland⁹](#). If there are likely to be any adverse impacts you'll need to think about how such impacts can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for.

Priority and protected species

You'll also want to consider whether any proposals might affect priority species (listed [here¹⁰](#)) or protected species. To help you do this, Natural England has produced advice [here¹¹](#) to help understand the impact of particular developments on protected species.

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services for society. It is a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, a store for carbon and water, a reservoir of biodiversity and a buffer against pollution. If you are proposing development, you should seek to use areas of poorer quality agricultural land in preference to that of a higher quality. For more information, see [Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land¹²](#).

Improving your natural environment

Your plan or order can offer exciting opportunities to enhance your local environment and should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the [National Planning Policy Framework](#). If you are setting out policies on new development or proposing sites for development, you should follow the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy and seek to ensure impacts on habitats are avoided or minimised before considering opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. You may wish to consider identifying what environmental features you want to be retained or enhanced or new features you would like to see created as part of any new development and how these could contribute to biodiversity net gain and wider environmental goals.

Opportunities for environmental enhancement might include:

- Restoring a neglected hedgerow.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.
- Think about how lighting can be best managed to reduce impacts on wildlife.
- Adding a green roof to new buildings.
- Providing a new footpath through the new development to link into existing rights of way.

Site allocations should be supported by a baseline assessment of biodiversity value.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-land-assess-proposals-for-development/guide-to-assessing-development-proposals-on-agricultural-land>

The statutory biodiversity metric should be used to calculate biodiversity losses and gains for terrestrial and intertidal habitats and can be used to inform any development project. We refer you to [Calculate biodiversity value with the statutory biodiversity metric](#) for more information. For small development sites, [The Small Sites Metric](#) may be used. This is a simplified version of the statutory biodiversity metric and is designed for use where certain criteria are met.

Further information on biodiversity net gain including [planning practice guidance](#) can be found [here](#)

You may also want to consider enhancing your local area in other ways, for example by:

- Setting out in your plan how you would like to implement elements of a wider Green Infrastructure Strategy (if one exists) in your community.
- Assessing needs for accessible greenspace and setting out proposals to address any deficiencies or enhance provision. Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Framework](#) sets out further information on green infrastructure standards and principles
- Identifying green areas of particular importance for special protection through Local Green Space designation (see [Planning Practice Guidance](#)¹³).
- Managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips in less used parts of parks or on verges, changing hedge cutting timings and frequency).
- Planting additional street trees.
- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network, e.g. cutting back hedges, improving the surface, clearing litter or installing kissing gates) or extending the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition, or clearing away an eyesore).

Natural England's [Environmental Benefits from Nature tool](#) may be used to identify opportunities to enhance wider benefits from nature and to avoid and minimise any negative impacts. It is designed to work alongside the statutory [Biodiversity Metric](#) and is available as a beta test version.

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space>

Appendix 2 – Historic England Response



[External] >> Felstead Neighbourhood Plan Review - SEA Screening Opinion

[REDACTED] historicengland.org.uk>

Date Mon 2025-07-21 14:37

Dear Demetria,

Thank you for your email regarding the above consultation. As the Government's adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process. Therefore we welcome this opportunity to review this request for a Screening Opinion. For the purposes of this consultation, Historic England will confine its advice to the question, "Is it (the neighbourhood plan) likely to have a significant effect on the historic environment?". Our comments are based on the information supplied with the Screening Opinion.

The supporting information (screening report only) supplied with the consultation indicates that within the plan area there is a range of designated historic environment assets. There is also likely to be other features of local historic, architectural or archaeological value, and consideration should also be given to the wider historic landscape. The documentation indicates that the Neighbourhood Plan proposes to allocate sites for housing/other use.

We note that the Screening Report states 'The impacts of the quantum of development required in the Neighbourhood Plan has the potential to have significant effects on the historic environment.'

Given the likely significant effects (both positive and negative) upon the historic environment, Historic England hence concurs with the Council's view that a Strategic Environmental Assessment will be required.

I should be pleased if you can send a copy of the determination as required by REG 11 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Historic England strongly advises that the conservation and archaeological staff of the relevant local authorities are closely involved throughout the preparation of the plan and its assessment. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER), how the allocation, policy or proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.

We should like to stress that this opinion is based on the information provided by you with your correspondence below. To avoid any doubt, this does not reflect our obligation to provide further advice on later stages of the SA/SEA process and, potentially, object to specific proposals which may subsequently arise (either as a result of this consultation or in later versions of the plan/guidance) where we consider that, despite the SA/SEA, these would have an adverse effect upon the environment.

Please do contact me, either via email or the numbers below, if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Ross

Ross McGivern
Historic Places Adviser | Partnerships Team | East of England



Ensuring our heritage lives on and is loved for longer.
historicengland.org.uk

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Appendix 3 – Environment Agency Response



Uttlesford District Council
Council Offices London Road
Saffron Walden
Essex
CB11 4ER

Our ref: AC/2025/132861/01-L01
Your ref: FelstedNHP
Date: 17 July 2025

Dear Demetria

FELSTED NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (REVIEW) - SEA AND HRA SCREENING OPINION

FELSTED

Thank you for consulting us on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening and Scoping Reports for the Felsted Neighbourhood Plan.

Flood Risk

Based on a review of environmental constraints for which we are a statutory consultee, we find that there are areas of fluvial flood risk and watercourses within the neighbourhood plan area. In particular, we note that the boundary does extend into areas of Flood Zones 2 and 3 of the designated main River Chelmer.

On the basis that future development is steered away from the sensitive aspects of the environment highlighted, we do not consider there to be potential significant environmental effects relating to these environmental constraints. Nevertheless, we recommend the inclusion of relevant policies to cover the management of flood risk. Allocation of any sites and any windfall development delivered through the Plan period should follow the sequential approach. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 161 sets this out

Water Quality

We have identified that the Plan area boundary includes the Water Recycling Centre(s) Felsted which is currently operating close to its permitted capacity. There is potential for there to be a barrier to growth across the Plan Period and delivery of site allocations. Consideration for phasing of development in line infrastructure improvements may be required. We note that the Uttlesford Local Plan and evidence base is now older than 5 years. The assessment carried out within the Uttlesford Water Cycle Study (WCS) may be insufficient to cover this area over the Plan Period. The Neighbourhood Plan should consider how growth will be accommodated over the Plan period. We advise seeking the support of Anglian Water, to understand any latest infrastructure improvement plans, and if the WRC catchment will be able to accommodate this growth.

Water Resources

Being in one of the driest areas of the country, our environment has come under significant pressure from potable water demand. New developments should make a significant contribution towards reducing water demand and mitigate against the risk of deterioration to our rivers, groundwater and habitats from groundwater abstraction. We recommend you check the capacity of available water supplies with the water company, in line with the emerging 2024 Water Resources Management Plan which is due to be published in 2023. The Local Planning Authorities Water Cycle Study and Local Plan may indicate constraints in water supply and provide recommendations for phasing of development to tie in with new alternative strategic supplies.

New development should as a minimum meet the highest levels of water efficiency standards, as per the policies in the adopted Local Plan. In most cases development will be expected to achieve 110 litres per person per day as set out in the Building Regulations &c. (Amendment) Regulations 2015. However, a higher standard of water efficiency (e.g. 85 l/p/d) should be considered, looking at all options including rainwater harvesting and greywater systems. Using the water efficiency calculator in Part G of the Building Regulations enables you to calculate the devices and fittings required to ensure a home is built to the right specifications to meet the 110 l/p/d requirement. We recommend all new non-residential development of 1000sqm gross floor area or more should meet the BREEAM 'excellent' standards for water consumption.

Developments that require their own abstraction where it will exceed 20 cubic metres per day from a surface water source (river, stream) or from underground strata (via borehole or well) will require an abstraction licence under the terms of the Water Resources Act 1991. There is no guarantee that a licence will be granted as this is dependent on available water resources and existing protected rights. The relevant abstraction licencing strategy for your area provides information on water availability and licencing policy at [Abstraction licensing strategies \(CAMS process\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/abstraction-licensing-strategies-cams-process).

SPZs

Your plan includes areas which are located on Source Protection Zone 3. These should be considered within your plan if growth or development is proposed here. The relevance of the designation and the potential implication upon development proposals should be considered with reference to our Groundwater Protection guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/groundwater-protection>.

Informative

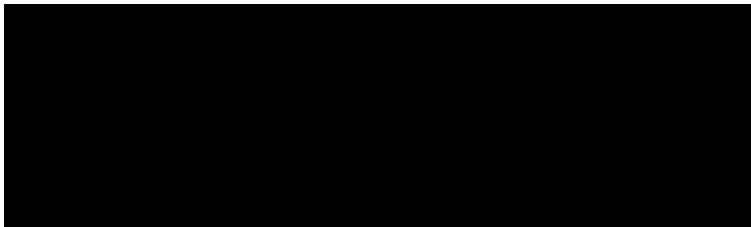
We encourage you to seek ways in which your neighbourhood plan can improve the local environment. For your information, together with Natural England, Historic England and Forestry Commission we have published joint guidance on neighbourhood planning, which sets out sources of environmental information and ideas on incorporating the environment into plans. This is available at:

Environment Agency
Iceni House Cobham Road, Ipswich, IP3 9JD.
Customer services line: 03708 506 506
www.gov.uk/environment-agency
Cont/d..

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/consider-environment-neighbourhood-plans/>.

We trust that this advice is useful.

Yours sincerely



Sustainable Places - Planning Advisor

Team e-mail

Team number

Appendix 3 – Natural England Response to HRA conclusion updates

Mr James Blakey
Uttlesford District Council

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
T [REDACTED]

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Mr Blakey

Felsted Neighbourhood Plan - Review - SEA/HRA Screening

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 12 December 2025.

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.

Natural England is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where they consider our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

Natural England does not have any specific comments on this draft neighbourhood plan, however, we agree with the conclusion that a separate Appropriate Assessment for the Neighbourhood Plan is not required, due to the Neighbourhood Plan allocations align with the adopted AA for Local Plan strategy and include requirements for RAMS mitigation

We refer you to the attached annex which covers the issues and opportunities that should be considered when preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and to the following information.

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Further information on protected species and development is included in [Natural England's Standing Advice on protected species](#).

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission [standing advice](#).

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If an Strategic Environmental Assessment is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

For any further consultations on your plan, please contact: [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]
Consultations Team

Annex 1 - Neighbourhood planning and the natural environment: information, issues and opportunities

Natural environment information sources

The [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)¹ website will provide you with much of the nationally held natural environment data for your plan area. The most relevant layers for you to consider are: **Agricultural Land Classification, Ancient Woodland, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Local Nature Reserves, National Parks (England), National Trails, Priority Habitat Inventory, public rights of way (on the Ordnance Survey base map)** and **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (including their impact risk zones)**. Local environmental record centres may hold a range of additional information on the natural environment. A list of local record centres is available from the [Association of Local Environmental Records Centres](http://associationoflocalenvironmentalrecordscentres.org.uk/).

Priority habitats are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found [here](#)². Most of these will be mapped either as **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**, on the Magic website or as **Local Wildlife Sites**. Your local planning authority should be able to supply you with the locations of Local Wildlife Sites.

National Character Areas (NCAs) divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each character area is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. NCA profiles contain descriptions of the area and statements of environmental opportunity, which may be useful to inform proposals in your plan. NCA information can be found [here](#)³.

There may also be a local **landscape character assessment** covering your area. This is a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It can help to inform, plan and manage change in the area. Your local planning authority should be able to help you access these if you can't find them online.

If your neighbourhood planning area is within or adjacent to a **National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONB), the relevant National Park/AONB Management Plan for the area will set out useful information about the protected landscape. You can access the plans on from the relevant National Park Authority or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website.

General mapped information on **soil types** and **Agricultural Land Classification** is available (under 'landscape') on the [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)⁴ website and also from the [LandIS website](http://landis.uk/)⁵, which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

Natural environment issues to consider

The [National Planning Policy Framework](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework)⁶ sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. [Planning Practice Guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-practice-guidance)⁷ sets out supporting guidance.

Your local planning authority should be able to provide you with further advice on the potential impacts of your plan or order on the natural environment and the need for any environmental assessments.

Landscape

Your plans or orders may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes. You may want to consider identifying distinctive local landscape features or characteristics such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls and think about how any new development proposals can respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness.

If you are proposing development within or close to a protected landscape (National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or other sensitive location, we recommend that you carry out a landscape assessment of the proposal. Landscape assessments can help you to choose the most appropriate sites for development and help to avoid or minimise impacts of development on the landscape through careful siting, design and landscaping.

Wildlife habitats

¹ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making>

⁴ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

⁷ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/>

Some proposals can have adverse impacts on designated wildlife sites or other priority habitats (listed [here](#)⁸), such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or [Ancient woodland](#)⁹. If there are likely to be any adverse impacts you'll need to think about how such impacts can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for.

Priority and protected species

You'll also want to consider whether any proposals might affect priority species (listed [here](#)¹⁰) or protected species. To help you do this, Natural England has produced advice [here](#)¹¹ to help understand the impact of particular developments on protected species.

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services for society. It is a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, a store for carbon and water, a reservoir of biodiversity and a buffer against pollution. If you are proposing development, you should seek to use areas of poorer quality agricultural land in preference to that of a higher quality in line with National Planning Policy Framework para 112. For more information, see [Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land](#)¹².

Improving your natural environment

Your plan or order can offer exciting opportunities to enhance your local environment and should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the [National Planning Policy Framework](#). If you are setting out policies on new development or proposing sites for development, you should follow the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy and seek to ensure impacts on habitats are avoided or minimised before considering opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. You may wish to consider identifying what environmental features you want to be retained or enhanced or new features you would like to see created as part of any new development and how these could contribute to biodiversity net gain and wider environmental goals.

Opportunities for environmental enhancement might include:

- Restoring a neglected hedgerow.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.
- Think about how lighting can be best managed to reduce impacts on wildlife.
- Adding a green roof to new buildings.
- Providing a new footpath through the new development to link into existing rights of way.

Site allocations should be supported by a baseline assessment of biodiversity value. The statutory [Biodiversity Metric](#) may be used to understand the number of biodiversity units present on allocated sites. For small development allocations the [Small Sites Metric](#) may be used. This is a simplified version of the statutory [Biodiversity Metric](#) and is designed for use where certain criteria are met. Further information on biodiversity net gain including [planning practice guidance](#) can be found [here](#)

You may also want to consider enhancing your local area in other ways, for example by:

- Setting out in your plan how you would like to implement elements of a wider Green Infrastructure Strategy (if one exists) in your community.
- Assessing needs for accessible greenspace and setting out proposals to address any deficiencies or enhance provision. Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Framework](#) sets out further information on green infrastructure standards and principles
- Identifying green areas of particular importance for special protection through Local Green Space designation (see [Planning Practice Guidance](#)¹³).
- Managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips in less used parts of parks or on verges, changing hedge cutting timings and frequency).
- Planting additional street trees.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-land-assess-proposals-for-development/guide-to-assessing-development-proposals-on-agricultural-land>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space>

- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network, e.g. cutting back hedges, improving the surface, clearing litter or installing kissing gates) or extending the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition, or clearing away an eyesore).

Natural England's [Environmental Benefits from Nature tool](#) may be used to identify opportunities to enhance wider benefits from nature and to avoid and minimise any negative impacts. It is designed to work alongside the statutory [Biodiversity Metric](#) and is available as a beta test version.