

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report

January 2022

Quality information

| Prepared by | Checked by | Verified by | Approved by |
|---|--|--|--|
| Cheryl Beattie Principal Environmental Planner | Alastair Peattie Associate Director | Nick Chisholm- Batten Associate Director | Nick Chisholm- Batten Associate Director |
| Emma Hazell Graduate Environmental Planner | | | |

Revision History

| Revision | Revision date | Details | Name | Position |
|----------|---------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| V1 | January 2022 | First draft for internal review | Cheryl Beattie | Principal Environmental Planner |
| V2 | January 2022 | For draft for QB review | Hugh Phillips/ Andrea Long | Steering group/ Compasspoint Planning |
| V3 | January 2022 | Final for submission | Cheryl Beattie | Principal Environmental Planner |

Prepared for:

Boxford Parish Council

Prepared by:

AECOM Limited
3rd Floor, Portwall Place
Portwall Lane
Bristol BS1 6NA
United Kingdom

T: +44 117 901 7000

aecom.com

© 2021 AECOM Limited. All Rights Reserved.

This document has been prepared by AECOM Limited (“AECOM”) in accordance with its contract with Locality (the “Client”) and in accordance with generally accepted consultancy principles, the budget for fees and the terms of reference agreed between AECOM and the Client. Any information provided by third parties and referred to herein has not been checked or verified by AECOM, unless otherwise expressly stated in the document. AECOM shall have no liability to any third party that makes use of or relies upon this document.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------|
| Non-Technical Summary (NTS) | i-vii |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 2. What is the Boxford NP seeking to achieve? | 2 |
| 3. What is the scope of the SEA? | 4 |
| Part 1: What has plan-making/ SEA involved to this point? | 6 |
| 4. Introduction (to Part 1) | 7 |
| 5. Establishing alternatives | 8 |
| 6. Assessing alternatives | 14 |
| 7. Establishing the preferred approach | 23 |
| Part 2: What are the SEA findings at this stage? | 25 |
| 8. Introduction (to Part 2) | 26 |
| 9. Appraisal of the 'submission version' Boxford NP | 28 |
| 10. Conclusions and recommendations | 38 |
| Part 3: What are the next steps? | 39 |
| 11. Next steps and monitoring | 40 |
| Appendices | 41 |
| Appendix A Regulatory requirements | 42 |

Non-Technical Summary (NTS)

Introduction

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Boxford Neighbourhood Plan (NP).

SEA is a required process for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects.¹

The Boxford NP is being prepared under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the adopted and emerging local development framework of Babergh District Council. Once 'made' the Boxford NP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, as part of the Babergh local development framework.

The SEA Environmental Report, including this NTS, is published alongside the 'submission' version of the Plan, under Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).

Structure of the Environmental Report/ this NTS

SEA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:

1) What has plan-making / SEA involved **up to this point?**

- including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.

2) What are the SEA findings **at this stage?**

- i.e., in relation to the draft plan.

3) What happens **next?**

Each of these questions is answered in turn within a discrete 'part' of the Environmental Report and summarised within this NTS. However, firstly there is a need to set the scene further by answering the questions 'What is the Plan seeking to achieve?' and 'What's the scope of the SEA?'

What is the Plan seeking to achieve?

The following vision has been established for the Boxford NP:

“Boxford village, together with Stone Street, Calais Street and Hagmore Green will continue to be a desirable place to live, work and play. A place with appropriate market and affordable housing to meet the needs of the thriving community, with safe pedestrian routes, green spaces and a high-quality built environment which maintains and enhances the rural character of the village and its surrounding hamlets.”

¹ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an environmental report; or, B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process. The Boxford NP was subject to screening in 2021, on the basis of which it was determined that there *is* a requirement for SEA (i.e. the plan was 'screened-in').

What is the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is reflected in a list of themes, objectives, and assessment questions, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological ‘framework’ for assessment. A summary framework is presented here, and a full framework which includes assessment questions is provided within the SEA Scoping Report that is submitted alongside the Boxford NP.

| SEA theme | SEA objective |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Biodiversity | Protect, maintain, and enhance the quality, function, and connectivity of biodiversity habitats and species: achieving a net environmental gain and stronger ecological networks. |
| Climate change | At the neighbourhood scale, support wider district, national, and global climate change initiatives to reduce carbon emissions and increase climate resilience. |
| Flood risk | Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan area to the risks of flooding. |
| Health and wellbeing | Protect and improve the health and wellbeing of residents in Boxford by enhancing the quality and accessibility to open space and facilities for recreation and health. |
| Historic environment | Protect, enhance, and manage the distinctive character and setting of heritage assets and the built environment of Boxford. |
| Land and soil resources | Ensure the efficient and effective use of land. |
| Landscape | Protect, enhance, and manage the distinctive character and appearance of landscapes. |
| Population and communities | Support the creation of thriving communities while ensuring housing growth is aligned with the needs of all residents in the NP area and is supported by the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure. |
| Transportation | Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel. |
| Water resources and quality | Protect and enhance water quality and use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner. |

Plan-making/ SEA up to this point

An important element of the required SEA process involves assessing ‘reasonable alternatives’ in time to inform development of the draft proposals, and then publishing information on reasonable alternatives for consultation alongside the draft proposals.

As such, Part 1 of the Environmental Report explains how work was undertaken to develop and assess a ‘reasonable’ range of alternative approaches for the Boxford NP.

Specifically, Part 1 of the report –

1. Explains the process of establishing the reasonable alternatives.

2. Presents the outcomes of assessing the reasonable alternatives; and
3. Explains reasons for developing a preferred option, considering the assessment.

Establishing the alternatives

Part 1 of the Environmental Report explores both the strategic parameters provided by the Local Plan and the available site options to establish alternatives to the preferred approach for housing development.

Five sites are recognised as potentially suitable for development, either in full or in part. These five sites, as listed below, are potentially in contention for allocation in the Boxford NP and represent the alternative options for the Plan:

- **Option 1:** Land east of Sand Hill (SS0293) for the development of up to ten dwellings in a smaller portion of the site off Sand Hill
- **Option 2:** Land South of Hadleigh Road, Calais Street (SS0403) for the development of five homes.
- **Option 3:** Land East of Stone Street Road (BNP1/ SS1247) for the development of seven homes in the western section of the site.
- **Option 4:** Fitzgerald Meadow (BNP3) for the development of seven homes in the east of the site.
- **Option 5:** Land West of Sand Hill (SS0292) for the development of up to ten dwellings in a smaller portion of the site between the agricultural access and the existing housing on Sand Hill.

Assessing the alternatives

The full assessment of the options for housing are presented in Part 1 of the Environmental Report. The summary findings are presented below.

| SEA theme | | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|----------------------|---------------------|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Biodiversity | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Climate change | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Flood risk | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Health and wellbeing | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Historic environment | Significant effect? | Uncertain | No | Yes - negative | Yes - negative | Uncertain |
| | Rank | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

| SEA theme | | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Land and soil resources | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Landscape | Significant effect? | No | Yes - negative | No | No | Yes - negative |
| | Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Population and communities | Significant effect? | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive |
| | Rank | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Transportation | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Water resources and quality | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |

Overall, all options are considered likely to lead to significant positive effects in relation to population and communities.

Potential negative effects of significance in relation to the historic environment are identified under Options 3 and 4 due to their location within the Boxford Conservation Area; however, it is recognised that mitigation and sensitive design has good potential to reduce the significance of these effects. Uncertainty is also noted under Options 1 and 5 in relation to the historic environment, reflecting the identified need for further archaeological investigation at these sites.

The potential for negative effects of significance in relation to the landscape are also identified under Options 2 and 5, relating to their sensitive location either adjacent to the AONB (Option 2) or on higher ground (Option 5).

Option 3 performs notably well across a number of themes and this reflects its more central location providing good access to local services and facilities, and good potential to support active travel opportunities.

Developing the preferred approach

The Boxford NP Steering Group's reasons for developing the preferred approach (Option 3) considering the assessment are identified below.

The Boxford Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group considered all of the site-based evidence from the SEA and the Site Options Assessment, together with the results of informal consultation and the formal Regulation 14 Pre-Submission public consultation carried out between in July and September 2021 and came to the following conclusions:

Option 1: Land east of Sand Hill: Site is located at the settlement edge; even a smaller development here laid out in a linear form has the potential for development

to contribute to coalescence between Boxford and Calais Street; the edge of settlement location makes it more remote from and less accessible to village centre facilities than other options; the site is not supported by the local community due to concerns about accessibility and highway safety.

Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Road: *Site has been identified as a proposed allocation (LS01) in the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan, at this stage no allocation of the site is made recognising a potential for conflict with the emerging Plan which is undergoing changes through examination.*

Option 3: Land east of Stone Street Road: *Site score well against a number of the SEA criteria and access to major routes such as the A1071 can be gained via Church Street without the need to draw traffic through the village core; site is located close to the village centre and village facilities particularly the school and the village hall; the site provides the opportunity for improved public pedestrian access, green space and biodiversity benefits. However most importantly it provides for bus parking and turning and a car park adjacent to the school, which will have the benefit of reducing congestion at the school at peak times and improving safety. The provision of the car park will also provide opportunities for visitors to the village to park off street, in a location close to the village centre with the potential to reducing on street parking in other locations such as Church Street; the car park will also provide car parking for the village hall with the potential of reducing on-street, car-parking on Stone Street Road. Concerns over traffic, parking, and safety in and around the Primary School and the village centre have been the most consistently raised issues identified by the community throughout the Neighbourhood Plan process; this option seeks to address this issue.*

Option 4: Land at Fitzgerald Meadow: *Site is an edge of settlement location which makes it more remote from and less accessible to village centre facilities than other options; access to the site would be likely to draw traffic through the village core; site scores well against a number of the SEA criteria but its distance from the village facilities means that it does not offer the same scope for opportunities for relieving community identified concerns in the village centre as other options.*

Option 5: Land west of Sand Hill: *Site is located at the settlement edge on higher ground which gives it a visual prominence in the landscape; the edge of settlement location makes it more remote from and less accessible to village centre facilities when compared against other options.*

Taking the above into account, the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group therefore concluded that they would continue with the preferred option of a small housing allocation at Stone Street Road together with the provision of a car park adjacent to the primary school. The policy criteria take into account appropriate safeguards in respect of heritage, landscaping, flood risk and highways access. In addition, the Neighbourhood Plan makes it clear that the delivery of the car park is the overriding issue and that support for the housing is predicated on the delivery of the car park and the benefits to the school, village hall and the village centre that it provides.

Assessment findings at this stage

Part 2 of the Environmental Report presents an assessment of the Boxford NP as a whole. Assessment findings are presented as a series of narratives under the 'SEA framework' theme headings. The following overall conclusions are reached:

The Boxford NP proposes low growth at a centrally located site. Seven additional homes are sought to target locally identified needs for more affordable and smaller homes in an accessible area which could promote active travel. On this basis, **significant positive effects** are concluded in relation to population and communities.

Constraints at the sites are avoided through the development proposal and supporting policy framework, which for example, directs vulnerable development away from the Flood Zone and provides a natural buffer between development and the River Box. As a result, **broadly neutral effects** (indicating no significant deviation from the baseline) are concluded across many of the SEA themes, including biodiversity, climate change mitigation, flood risk, water resources and quality, and health and wellbeing.

Notable elements of the plan include the continued policy protection proposed for the former Boxford Valley SLA, and identification of locally important non-designated heritage assets, historic views, public scenic views, and Local Green Spaces. Considering these elements, **significant positive effects** are concluded in relation to landscape, and **minor positive effects** are concluded in relation to the historic environment.

Inevitable **minor negative effects** are also identified in relation to land and soil resources, and transportation. This reflects the loss of greenfield land and a likely minor increase in vehicle use in the Plan area.

In terms of recommendations, an initial version of the SEA Environmental Report was shared with the Boxford NP Steering Group which contained the following two recommendations:

- To ensure the policy framework provides a direct link with the community project work happening in the future, it is recommended that Policy BOX 2 is extended to include a reference to potential future sources of evidence that may need to be considered over the Plan period. Following identification of the housing needs assessment, the simple addition of “*or the most up-to-date evidence*” should suffice in this respect.
- Policy BOX 12 identifies ‘Important Public Scenic Views’ as enjoyed from publicly accessible locations. Identification of these views provide localised evidence for community assets in relation to the landscape and minor positive effects are inferred. However, it is recognised that positive effects could be enhanced should Policy BOX 12 directly state its policy intention to protect these views in the long-term.

These recommendations have been incorporated into the finalised Plan for submission (as reflected through this current version of the SEA).

No further recommendations are made at this stage.

Next steps

Plan finalisation

Following submission, the plan and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it

meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.

If the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the Neighbourhood Plan will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Babergh District Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the Development Plan for the Babergh District, covering the defined Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Monitoring

The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report. This refers to the monitoring of likely significant effects of the Neighbourhood Plan to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.

It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by Babergh District Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). No significant negative effects are considered likely in the implementation of the Boxford NP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Babergh District Council.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Boxford Neighbourhood Plan (NP).
- 1.2 The Boxford NP is being prepared under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the adopted and emerging local development framework of Babergh District Council. Once 'made' the Boxford NP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, as part of the Babergh local development framework.
- 1.3 SEA is a required process for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects.²

SEA explained

- 1.4 It is a requirement that the SEA process is undertaken in-line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 1.5 In-line with the Regulations, a report (known as the Environmental Report) must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan that "*identifies, describes and evaluates*" the likely significant effects of implementing "*the plan, and reasonable alternatives*".³ The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.6 More specifically, the Report must answer the following three questions:
 4. What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?
 - including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.
 5. What are the SEA findings at this stage?
 - i.e., in relation to the draft plan.
 6. What happens next?

This Environmental Report

- 1.7 This report is the Environmental Report for the Boxford NP. It is published alongside the 'submission' version of the Plan, under Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended).
- 1.8 This report answers questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn, to provide the required information.⁴ Each question is answered within a discrete 'part' of the report.
- 1.9 However, before answering Q1, two further introductory sections are presented to further set the scene.

² Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an environmental report; or, B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process. The Boxford NP was subject to screening in 2021, on the basis of which it was determined that there *is* a requirement for SEA (i.e. the plan was 'screened-in').

³ Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

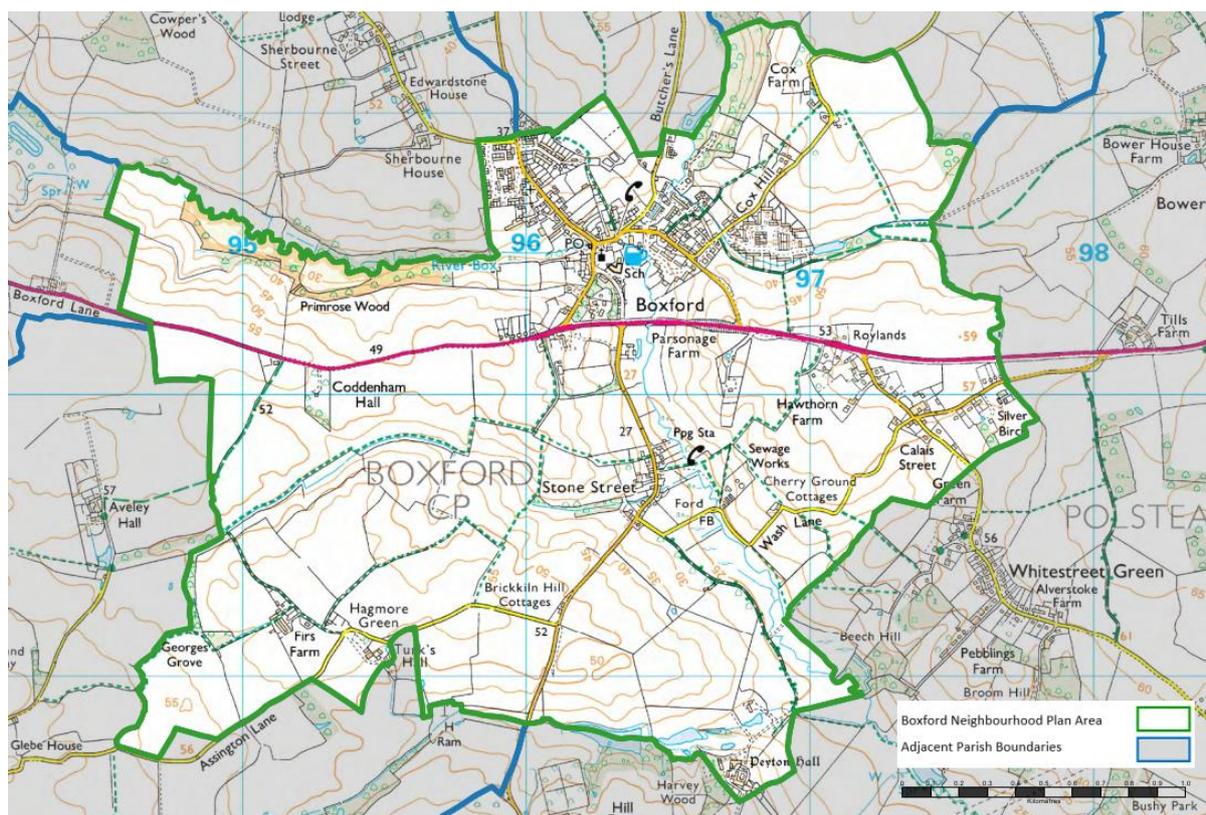
⁴ See **Appendix A** for further explanation of the report structure including its regulatory basis.

2. What is the Boxford NP seeking to achieve?

Introduction

2.1 This section considers the context provided by the Babergh local development framework before setting out the established NP vision and objectives. **Figure 2.1** presents the Plan area.

Figure 2.1: Boxford Neighbourhood Plan area



Strategic planning context

- 2.2 The Parish falls within the boundary of Babergh District. The adopted Babergh local planning framework predominantly consists of the Core Strategy (adopted 2014) and the saved policies of the Babergh Local Plan (adopted 2006)
- 2.3 Babergh District Council are currently working with Mid Suffolk District Council to develop a Joint Local Plan (JLP). The JLP is at a relatively progressed stage of development, having been submitted for Examination in March 2021 and with hearings currently in progress.
- 2.4 The Boxford NP must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local development framework for Babergh, in line with footnote 18 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).⁵ Additionally, NPPF Para 48 states that “*local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans*” according to set criteria which includes its stage of

⁵ MHCLG (2021) [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

preparation. For the purposes of this SEA, focus is placed on the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk JLP.

- 2.5 The JLP categorises Boxford as a 'Core Village' in the settlement hierarchy and both Calais Street and Stone Street are categorised as 'Hamlet Villages'. Policy SP4 Table 04 (Minimum housing requirement for NP Areas) identifies a requirement for 13 new homes in Boxford in the period up to 2037, 8 of which had already obtained planning permission in 2018. The residual requirement for 5 homes is met through the allocation policy LS01 which allocates the 'Land south of Hadleigh Road' to deliver 5 homes.
- 2.6 However, it is recognised that the JLP is currently undergoing amendment in response to examiner recommendations.

Boxford NP vision and objectives

- 2.7 The following vision has been established in the development of the Boxford NP:

"Boxford village, together with Stone Street, Calais Street and Hagmore Green will continue to be a desirable place to live, work and play. A place with appropriate market and affordable housing to meet the needs of the thriving community, with safe pedestrian routes, green spaces and a high-quality built environment which maintains and enhances the rural character of the village and its surrounding hamlets."

- 2.8 In support of achieving this vision, the Plan has identified nine objectives as follows:
1. To provide for housing growth of all tenures and sizes to meet the needs of the current and future generations.
 2. To support development that ensures safe vehicular and pedestrian access to the village centre.
 3. To enable the creation of a village car park.
 4. To support new development that is well designed and of a high quality, that enhances the rural setting and character of the individual settlements within the Parish.
 5. To conserve and enhance the character of the Conservation Area and historic assets.
 6. To protect and enhance Boxford's natural assets, important views, and the scenic beauty of the wider landscape setting of the open countryside.
 7. To encourage new sustainable housing growth that is future proofed against climate change.
 8. To maintain and enhance community cohesion and protect existing village infrastructure from unacceptable development; and
 9. To support existing businesses in the village and allow them to expand in a suitable way.

3. What is the scope of the SEA?

Introduction

- 3.1 The aim here is to introduce the reader to the scope of the SEA, i.e., the sustainability themes and objectives that should be a focus of the assessment of the Plan and reasonable alternatives.
- 3.2 The Boxford NP SEA Scoping Report (October 2021) submitted alongside the Boxford NP presents further information, setting out the policy context and baseline information that has informed the development of key issues and the sustainability objectives.

Consultation

- 3.3 The SEA Regulations require that “*when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies*”. In England, the consultation bodies are the Environment Agency, Historic England, and Natural England.⁶
- 3.4 As such the SEA Scoping Report (October 2021) was sent to these authorities for consultation over the period Monday 25th October to Monday 29th November 2021.
- 3.5 Responses were received from Natural England and Historic England, both of whom were satisfied with the proposed scope with no specific comments to make. No response was received from the Environment Agency.

The SEA framework

- 3.6 The SEA framework presents a list of themes, objectives and assessment questions that together comprise a framework to guide the assessment. A summary framework of the themes and objectives is provided in **Table 3.1**, with the full SEA framework presented in the SEA Scoping Report (October 2021) submitted alongside the Boxford NP.

⁶ These consultation bodies were selected “*by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes*” (SEA Directive, Article 6(3)).

Table 3.1: Summary SEA framework

| SEA theme | SEA objective |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Biodiversity | Protect, maintain, and enhance the quality, function, and connectivity of biodiversity habitats and species: achieving a net environmental gain and stronger ecological networks. |
| Climate change | At the neighbourhood scale, support wider district, national, and global climate change initiatives to reduce carbon emissions and increase climate resilience. |
| Flood risk | Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan area to the risks of flooding. |
| Health and wellbeing | Protect and improve the health and wellbeing of residents in Boxford by enhancing the quality and accessibility to open space and facilities for recreation and health. |
| Historic environment | Protect, enhance, and manage the distinctive character and setting of heritage assets and the built environment of Boxford. |
| Land and soil resources | Ensure the efficient and effective use of land. |
| Landscape | Protect, enhance, and manage the distinctive character and appearance of landscapes. |
| Population and communities | Support the creation of thriving communities while ensuring housing growth is aligned with the needs of all residents in the NP area and is supported by the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure. |
| Transportation | Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel. |
| Water resources and quality | Protect and enhance water quality and use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner. |

Part 1: What has plan-making/ SEA involved to this point?

4. Introduction (to Part 1)

Overview

- 4.1 Whilst work on the Boxford NP has been underway for some time, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work to date, but rather to explain work undertaken to develop and appraise reasonable alternatives.
- 4.2 More specifically, this part of the report presents information on the consideration given to reasonable alternative approaches to addressing a particular issue that is of central importance to the Plan, namely the allocation of land for housing, or alternative sites. Land is currently being identified to deliver additional housing targeting specific tenure needs. There is also recognised uncertainty in relation to the allocation site within the JLP, noting the opportunity for the Boxford NP to secure an appropriate site to deliver the residual need for five homes.

Why focus on sites?

- 4.3 The decision was taken to develop and assess reasonable alternatives in relation to the matter of allocating land for housing, given the following considerations:
- Boxford NP objectives, particularly the core objective to understand housing needs and deliver a range of housing tenures.
 - Housing growth is known to be a matter of key interest amongst residents and other stakeholders; and
 - The delivery of new homes is most likely to have a significant effect compared to the other proposals within the Plan. National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that SEA should focus on matters likely to give rise to significant effects.

Structure of this part of the report

- 4.4 This part of the report is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 5** – explains the process of establishing reasonable alternatives.
 - **Chapter 6** – presents the outcomes of appraising reasonable alternatives; and
 - **Chapter 7** – explains reasons for selecting the preferred option, considering the appraisal.

5. Establishing alternatives

Introduction

- 5.1 The aim of this chapter is to explain the process that led to the establishment of alternative sites and thereby present “*an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with*”.⁷
- 5.2 Specifically, there is a need to explain the strategic parameters that have a bearing on the establishment of options (in relation to the level and distribution of growth) and the work that has been undertaken to date to examine site options (i.e., sites potentially in contention for allocation in the Boxford NP). These parameters are then drawn together to arrive at ‘reasonable alternatives.’

How much growth?

- 5.3 To reiterate, the JLP has identified a need for 13 new homes in Boxford in the period up to 2037, eight of which have already obtained planning permission. The residual requirement for five homes is met through the allocation Policy LS01 which allocates the ‘Land south of Hadleigh Road’ to deliver five homes. However, as previously recognised, the JLP is currently undergoing change in response to examiner recommendations, and it is uncertain at this stage whether the allocated site will remain in the modified JLP.
- 5.4 Notably, Policy SP4 Table 04 of the JLP identifies the outstanding planning permissions as of April 2018. Additional permissions have been granted to date which will contribute a further 9 homes⁸. On this basis, the identified housing need in the current version of the JLP has been exceeded without the JLP allocation of the ‘Land south of Hadleigh Road’ under Policy LS01.
- 5.5 Despite this, in the development of the Boxford NP, a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) has also been undertaken to establish local needs in relation to housing tenure and sizes. The HNA identified a need for approximately 28 affordable homes and the NP group is exploring additional land allocations which could contribute towards meeting this identified need.

Where should growth be located?

- 5.6 In the development of the Boxford NP, a Site Options Assessment (SOA) has been undertaken to assess all sites arising from the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) (October 2020) and a local ‘Neighbourhood Plan Call for Sites’. A total of 11 sites were identified and assessed (see Figure 5.1) and the SOA concluded that whilst no site is entirely free of constraints and immediately suitable for development, three sites are potentially suitable for development and therefore could be allocated for residential use in the Plan, either in full or in part, subject to identified constraints being mitigated. The remaining eight sites were not considered suitable for allocation in the Boxford NP, either due to site constraints or the fact that they have already received planning permission.

⁷ Schedule 2(8) of the SEA Regulations.

⁸ Planning application references: DC/17/02491, DC/18/04967, DC/19/02781, DC/20/02336, DC/20/03680, and DC/20/04286

Figure 5.1: Site options assessed through the SOA

5.7 The eight sites that were not considered suitable for development are identified in **Table 5.1** below along with a summary of constraints and whether any changes have occurred since the SOA which could warrant reconsideration of the site. This table highlights that two sites previously ruled out of the SOA have been bought back in for consideration through the SEA.

Table 5.1: Sites considered not suitable for development in the SOA

| Site reference | Site name | Constraints | Progression through the SEA? |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| BNP2 | Daking Avenue | The site is owned by the Council but at present there is no evidence that the site is available for redevelopment (as an existing car park). Four private houses backing onto the area have an easement across the access and do not support development of the site. On this basis, the site is considered not currently available and possibly not viable for development. | No |
| SS0898 | Land South of Daking Avenue | The site has been subject to two planning applications, the first of which | No |

| Site reference | Site name | Constraints | Progression through the SEA? |
|----------------|--|---|------------------------------|
| | | (for 2 dwellings) was refused at appeal. A second application for 6 dwellings was subsequently refused. The main concerns associated with this site relate to impacts on landscape character and setting, alongside an increase vehicular traffic along Swan Street. On this basis, the site is not considered suitable for allocation in the NP. | |
| SS1128 | Land West of Butchers Lane | The site is proposed for designation as a green space in the emerging JLP. The site is also situated on higher ground with greater potential for visual impacts. Additionally, there are constraints associated with telegraph wires and poles crossing the site. On this basis, the site is not considered to be suitable for allocation in the NP. | No |
| SS0293 | Land East of Sand Hill | A planning application for 64 new dwellings was submitted in 2020. The application was granted permission in December 2020 and then subsequently the permission was quashed by the High Court following a Judicial Review. The application is currently going through a redetermination process with the Local Planning Authority and the decision will be made outside of the NP process. If the site does come forward, it is anticipated that the emerging NP policies will seek to encourage a proportion of affordable housing provisions on site. If any further application is made at the site, a smaller scheme allocating the site in-part off Sand Hill for around ten dwellings could be considered as an alternative which could meet plan objectives. | Yes |
| SS0403 | Land South of Hadleigh Road, Calais Street | This is the current allocation site in JLP Policy LS01 for five dwellings . The SOA concludes the site as not suitable for allocation to avoid duplication of an allocation site | Yes |

| Site reference | Site name | Constraints | Progression through the SEA? |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| | | across the Plans. However, given the current uncertainty around whether the site allocation will be included in the modified Plan or not, it is considered appropriate at this stage to further consider the site through the SEA. | |
| SS0922 | Land South of Hadleigh Road | The JLP SHELAA considered the site unsuitable due to incompatible adjoining land uses (employment land). The SOA supports this conclusion. On this basis, the site is not considered suitable for allocation in the NP. | No |
| SS0402 | Land South of Calais Street | The JLP SHELAA considered the site unsuitable due to its poor connectivity to the existing settlement area. The SOA further concludes likely significant landscape and visual impacts and access constraints. On this basis, the site is not considered suitable for allocation in the NP. | No |
| SS1257 | Land South of Hadleigh Road | The site has received planning permission for four dwellings. See para 5.4. | No |

5.8 The three sites that were considered to have potential for development are identified in **Table 5.2** below.

Table 5.2: Sites considered potentially suitable for development in the SOA

| Site reference | Site name | Constraints | Progression through the SEA? |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| BNP1/ SS1247 | Land East of Stone Street Road | Constraints at this site include Grade 3 agricultural land, two Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), and a lack of suitable access to the site (including pedestrian access). Flood constraints also exist across approximately half of the site. The western section of the site (outside of the Flood Zone) is considered alone for the development of around seven dwellings . A car park is also proposed within the Flood Zone subject to negotiation with Babergh | Yes |

| Site reference | Site name | Constraints | Progression through the SEA? |
|----------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| | | Council. The site is within Boxford Conservation Area and the southern boundary of the site is adjacent to an 'environmentally sensitive area'. | |
| BNP3 | Fitzgerald Meadow | Constraints at this site include Grade 3 agricultural land, and the availability of the site is unknown. New access to the site is likely to cross a Flood Zone area. Part of the site falls within a Flood Zone which would be excluded from the developable area. Development would be focused on the east of the site and could deliver up to seven dwellings . The site is within Boxford Conservation Area. | Yes |
| SS0292 | Land West of Sand Hill | Constraints at the site include no identified suitable access and potential flood risk. The site is also located within Boxford Conservation Area on higher ground. Telegraph wires cross the south western part of the site which could restrict development. The site was submitted with a capacity of up to 60 new homes. A smaller portion of the site between the agricultural access and the existing housing on Sand Hill is considered for up to ten dwellings . | Yes |

5.9 On this basis five sites are considered at this stage for their potential as allocations in the Boxford NP.

Establishing reasonable alternatives

5.10 The preceding text has served to highlight that the housing requirement for 13 homes in the Boxford area has been met (and exceeded) through existing planning permissions for 17 new homes. However, the NP group are exploring additional allocations to support an identified local need for more affordable housing.

5.11 Having explored all identified site options, five sites are recognised as potentially suitable for development, either in full or in part. For the purposes of SEA, these five sites, as listed below, are potentially in contention for allocation in the Boxford NP and represent the alternative options for the Plan:

- **Option 1:** Land east of Sand Hill (SS0293) for the development of up to ten dwellings in a smaller portion of the site off Sand Hill
- **Option 2:** Land South of Hadleigh Road, Calais Street (SS0403) for the development of five homes.
- **Option 3:** Land East of Stone Street Road (BNP1/ SS1247) for the development of seven homes in the western section of the site.
- **Option 4:** Fitzgerald Meadow (BNP3) for the development of seven homes in the east of the site.
- **Option 5:** Land West of Sand Hill (SS0292) for the development of up to ten dwellings in a smaller portion of the site between the agricultural access and the existing housing on Sand Hill.

6. Assessing alternatives

6.1 This chapter provides the assessment findings for the five alternative options established in the previous chapter. To reiterate, the options are:

- **Option 1:** Land east of Sand Hill (SS0293) for the development of up to ten dwellings in a smaller portion of the site off Sand Hill
- **Option 2:** Land South of Hadleigh Road, Calais Street (SS0403) for the development of five homes.
- **Option 3:** Land East of Stone Street Road (BNP1/ SS1247) for the development of seven homes in the western section of the site.
- **Option 4:** Fitzgerald Meadow (BNP3) for the development of seven homes in the east of the site.
- **Option 5:** Land West of Sand Hill (SS0292) for the development of up to ten dwellings in a smaller portion of the site between the agricultural access and the existing housing on Sand Hill.

Methodology

6.2 For each of the options, the assessment examines likely significant effects on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability themes and objectives identified through scoping (see **Table 3.1**) as a methodological framework. Where appropriate neutral effects, or uncertainty will also be noted.

6.3 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, where there is a need to rely on assumptions to reach a conclusion on a 'significant effect' this is made explicit in the appraisal text.

6.4 Where it is not possible to predict likely significant effects based on reasonable assumptions, efforts are made to comment on the relative merits of the alternatives in more general terms and to indicate **a rank of preference**. This is helpful, as it enables a distinction to be made between the alternatives even where it is not possible to distinguish between them in terms of 'significant effects.' Numbers are used to highlight the option or options that are preferred from an SEA perspective with 1 performing the best.

6.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted considering the criteria presented within Regulations.⁹ So, for example, account is taken of the duration, frequency, and reversibility of effects.

⁹ Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Biodiversity

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |

- 6.6 None of the options intersect with a designated site or are known to contain any priority habitat. Whilst all options fall within the Edwardstone Woods Site of Specific Scientific Importance (SSSI) Impact Risk Zone (IRZ), the scale of development proposed is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects.
- 6.7 Priority habitats lie near Options 3 and 4 where onsite mitigation, particularly during construction, should be considered to minimise the effects of disturbance, noise and light pollution.
- 6.8 The need for mitigation under Options 3 and 4 make these options rank marginally less preferably than Options 1, 2, and 5 overall.

Climate change

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 |

- 6.9 Given the small scale of development being proposed under all options (up to 10 dwellings), no significant effects are considered likely in relation to climate change mitigation. Furthermore, all options are considered to have equal potential to deliver small scale renewables and efficiency measures through good design and policy guidance.
- 6.10 Option 3 notably lies adjacent to the primary school and in closest proximity to the village centre, with good opportunity to support active travel in local journeys. As a result, Option 3 is considered to rank marginally better than the remaining options. On the other hand, Option 2 is notably further from the village's service offer, located in Calais Street (and thus less likely to promote active travel). On this basis, Option 2 is ranked least favourably in relation to this theme.

Flood risk

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|---------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |

- 6.11 Both fluvial and surface water flooding in Boxford is largely concentrated around the River Box.
- 6.12 Half of Option 3 falls within Flood Zone 2, however only the western half of the site, which falls outside of the Flood Zone, has been allocated for housing. On this basis, no significant effects are anticipated. Nevertheless, the western half of the site still has a low likelihood of surface water flooding.
- 6.13 Similarly, part of Option 4 falls within Flood Zone 3, however only the eastern section of the site, which falls outside of the Flood Zone, has been allocated for housing. On this basis, no significant effects are anticipated. Unlike Option 3, surface water flooding is not known to affect the section of the site allocated for housing.
- 6.14 Part of Options 1 and 5 also intersect the floodplain at the boundaries of the sites, however, again development will avoid this area of the site with a significant buffer in between. Whilst all options will avoid vulnerable development within the floodplain, resilience measures should be considered in development at Options 3 and 4 in light of future flood risk.
- 6.15 Overall, by avoiding development near a Flood Risk Zone, Options 1, 2, and 5 are ranked slightly more favourably than Options 3 and 4.

Health and wellbeing

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|---------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

- 6.16 Boxford has a number of key health and wellbeing facilities, including a primary school, general practice surgery, post office, allotments, recreation ground, play space, tennis court and bowling green.
- 6.17 Option 3 is located adjacent to the primary school, and out of all the options is closest to the general practice surgery and post office. Options 3 and 4 also provide good access to the recreation ground, which is also home to allotments, play space and a tennis court.
- 6.18 Option 2 is relatively far away from key health and wellbeing facilities in comparison to the other options. For example, the recreation ground and associated facilities are approximately 1.5 kilometres away by foot. As the distance between Option 2 and the key health and wellbeing facilities is greater,

it is likely that development at Option 2 will lead to an increase in the use of private vehicles to access facilities.

- 6.19 Overall, Options 3 and 4 are considered for a good potential to support active travel and are ranked most favourably in this respect. Option 2 on the other hand is noted for a more limited potential to support active travel and is ranked least favourably on this basis. Options 1 and 5 as settlement edge locations will provide reasonable access and significant effects are not considered likely under any of the options.

Historic environment

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|
| Significant effect? | Uncertain | No | Yes - negative | Yes - negative | Uncertain |
| Rank | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

- 6.20 Options 3 and 4 both fall within Boxford Conservation Area, close to the village core, which is considered of high sensitivity with many listed buildings and a historic street pattern. In the absence of appropriate policy mitigation to provide steer in terms of design, massing, and layout, at this stage potential negative effects of significance are identified.
- 6.21 Option 5 borders the Boxford Conservation Area and covers the site of a HER monument (Sand Hill). Option 1 also covers the site of a HER monument (Findspot of a Post Medieval bronze oval setting from a seal ring). Appropriate archaeological investigation is required to inform the significance of potential effects, and on this basis, uncertainty is noted at this stage.
- 6.22 In comparison, development under Option 2 is not known to be significantly constrained by the historic environment.
- 6.23 Overall, Option 2 is considered to perform best in relation to this SEA theme by avoiding effects in relation to known designated and non-designated assets. Constraints are identified under all remaining options, because of either development within the Boxford Conservation Area or a need for prior archaeological investigation with local find spots on site. Whilst the overall effects under Options 1 and 5 are uncertain at this stage, development is not ranked more preferably to options that fall within the conservation area as mitigation may be able to reduce the significance of effects under each of development scenarios.

Land and soil resources

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| Rank | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

- 6.24 The 'Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Assessment' for Eastern England classified agricultural land at Option 2 as 'Very Good'. In comparison, agricultural land at the other options was classified as 'Good to Moderate'.
- 6.25 The 'Predictive Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land Assessment' for Eastern England indicates that Option 2 has a high likelihood (>60%) of being underlain by BMV land. In comparison, the other options only have a moderate likelihood (20-60%) of being underlain by BMV land.
- 6.26 Due to the findings of these two assessments, Option 2 has been ranked slightly less favourable than the other four options. However, given the scale of development proposed, no significant effects are considered likely.
- 6.27 The entire Plan area is known to fall within a Minerals Consultation Area and the options have not been differentiated on this basis. However, it is recognised that development under any option is likely to require further consultation with the Minerals authority (Suffolk County Council). As small-scale growth is proposed under all options, no significant effects are considered likely at this stage.

Landscape

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | No | Yes - negative | No | No | Yes - negative |
| Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 |

- 6.28 The southern part of the NP area forms part of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Although none of the options fall directly within the Dedham Vale AONB, Option 2 is very close to the boundary of the AONB and is therefore considered for potential negative effects of significance.
- 6.29 Options 2, 3 and 5 fall within the Box Valley Special Landscape Area (SLA). As a locally designated landscape (the policy designation for which will soon cease to exist) the potential for greater effects on the intrinsic character and quality of the landscape is recognised at these options.
- 6.30 Option 3 contains two Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). However, in terms of visual impact, Options 3 and 4 have a good chance of remaining nestled in the settlement and hidden from view in the wider landscape due to screening from trees, especially in the summer months.
- 6.31 Alternatively, Option 5 is a large site that sits on much higher ground than the rest of the village. Therefore, the visual impact of development at Option 5 is

likely to be greater when compared to the other options. Due to this, the potential for significant negative effects is identified at this stage.

- 6.32 Development at Option 1 could contribute to coalescence with Calais Street, especially if it consists of a linear development along Sand Hill.
- 6.33 Overall, the identified potential for negative effects of significance under Options 2 and 5 make these options rank least favourably. Whilst Option 3 lies within the designated Box Valley SLA it is relatively well screened by trees, as is the case for Option 4, as a result no significant effects are considered likely. These options are considered to perform marginally better than Option 1, due to the potential for development to contribute to coalescence between Boxford and Calais Street under Option 1.

Population and communities

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|---------------------|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive |
| Rank | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 |

- 6.34 All options are considered likely to perform well in relation to this theme through the additional delivery of housing that will be targeted towards meeting local needs for more affordable and smaller homes. By potentially delivering a few more homes, Options 1 and 5 are noted for marginally enhanced positive effects.
- 6.35 Boxford is supported by a reasonable range of services, and Option 3 is ideally located centrally to provide good access to these. Options 1, 4 and 5 are located at the settlement edge, slightly further afield but still providing reasonable access. Option 2 is located further at Calais Street, with the A1071 potentially creating a barrier to safe walking access to local services and facilities.
- 6.36 Overall, all options are considered likely to support significant positive effects through the delivery of new affordable and smaller homes to meet locally identified needs. Option 3 performs notably well in terms of local accessibility and is ranked most favourably as a result. Options 1 and 5 are considered to perform marginally better than the remaining options through the delivery of a few more homes targeted at meeting local needs. Option 2 is considered to rank least favourably given its more limited potential to promote active travel locally.

Transportation

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 |

6.37 All options are considered as small-scale rural development options that will ultimately lead to a minor increase in vehicle use in the area. However, this is not considered likely to lead to significant effects in relation to the local road network or highway capacity.

6.38 Option 3 is notably located more centrally, providing good access to local services and facilities, including the adjacent Boxford Primary School. The option has good potential to support active travel and avoid/ reduce negative effects for example through increased congestion associated with the school run. In contrast, Option 2 is located further afield at Calais Street with the A1071 potentially creating a barrier to safe pedestrian access to local services and facilities.

6.39 Based on the accessibility of the sites, Option 3 is ranked most favourably overall as a centrally located site, whilst Option 2 is ranked least favourably given its more limited potential to promote active travel. No distinct differences are drawn between Options 1, 4, and 5 which, as settlement edge locations, provide reasonable access and can also support active travel opportunities. No significant effects are considered likely under any the options.

Water resources and quality

| | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |

6.40 In relation to water resources, all options seek to deliver housing that would be over and above that planned for in Boxford through the emerging JLP, however, this is not of a scale that is considered likely to lead to any significant impacts at the catchment level.

6.41 In relation to water quality, Options 3 and 5 lie adjacent to the River Box. However, the housing being proposed under each site is located further from the river, with a significant natural buffer protecting water quality at both options. Alongside the effective application of sustainable drainage systems, no significant effects are considered likely. However, by avoiding development in the proximity of the river, Options 1, 2 and 4 are considered to perform marginally better than Options 3 and 5 overall.

Summary findings

| SEA theme | | Option 1: Land East of Sand Hill | Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Rd | Option 3: Land East of Stone St Rd | Option 4: Fitzgerald Meadow | Option 5: Land West of Sand Hill |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Biodiversity | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Climate change | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Flood risk | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Health and wellbeing | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Historic environment | Significant effect? | Uncertain | No | Yes - negative | Yes - negative | Uncertain |
| | Rank | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Land and soil resources | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Landscape | Significant effect? | No | Yes - negative | No | No | Yes - negative |
| | Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Population and communities | Significant effect? | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive | Yes - positive |
| | Rank | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Transportation | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Water resources and quality | Significant effect? | No | No | No | No | No |
| | Rank | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |

6.42 Overall, all options are considered likely to lead to significant positive effects in relation to population and communities.

6.43 Potential negative effects of significance in relation to the historic environment are identified under Options 3 and 4 due to their location within the Boxford Conservation Area; however, it is recognised that mitigation and sensitive design has good potential to reduce the significance of these effects. Uncertainty is also noted under Options 1 and 5 in relation to the historic

environment, reflecting the identified need for further archaeological investigation at these sites.

- 6.44 The potential for negative effects of significance in relation to the landscape are also identified under Options 2 and 5, relating to their sensitive location either adjacent to the AONB (Option 2) or on higher ground (Option 5).
- 6.45 Option 3 performs notably well across a number of themes and this reflects its more central location providing good access to local services and facilities, and good potential to support active travel opportunities.

7. Establishing the preferred approach

7.1 The Parish Council's reasons for developing the preferred approach considering the assessment are identified below:

The Boxford Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group considered all of the site-based evidence from the SEA and the Site Options Assessment, together with the results of informal consultation and the formal Regulation 14 Pre-Submission public consultation carried out between in July and September 2021 and came to the following conclusions:

Option 1: Land east of Sand Hill: *Site is located at the settlement edge; even a smaller development here laid out in a linear form has the potential for development to contribute to coalescence between Boxford and Calais Street; the edge of settlement location makes it more remote from and less accessible to village centre facilities than other options; the site is not supported by the local community due to concerns about accessibility and highway safety.*

Option 2: Land south of Hadleigh Road: *Site has been identified as a proposed allocation (LS01) in the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan, at this stage no allocation of the site is made recognising a potential for conflict with the emerging Plan which is undergoing changes through examination.*

Option 3: Land east of Stone Street Road: *Site score well against a number of the SEA criteria and access to major routes such as the A1071 can be gained via Church Street without the need to draw traffic through the village core; site is located close to the village centre and village facilities particularly the school and the village hall; the site provides the opportunity for improved public pedestrian access, green space and biodiversity benefits. However most importantly it provides for bus parking and turning and a car park adjacent to the school, which will have the benefit of reducing congestion at the school at peak times and improving safety. The provision of the car park will also provide opportunities for visitors to the village to park off street, in a location close to the village centre with the potential to reducing on street parking in other locations such as Church Street; the car park will also provide car parking for the village hall with the potential of reducing on-street, car-parking on Stone Street Road. Concerns over traffic, parking, and safety in and around the Primary School and the village centre have been the most consistently raised issues identified by the community throughout the Neighbourhood Plan process; this option seeks to address this issue.*

Option 4: Land at Fitzgerald Meadow: *Site is an edge of settlement location which makes it more remote from and less accessible to village centre facilities than other options; access to the site would be likely to draw traffic through the village core; site scores well against a number of the SEA criteria but its distance from the village facilities means that it does not offer the same scope for opportunities for relieving community identified concerns in the village centre as other options .*

Option 5: Land west of Sand Hill: *Site is located at the settlement edge on higher ground which gives it a visual prominence in the landscape; the edge of*

settlement location makes it more remote from and less accessible to village centre facilities when compared against other options.

Taking the above into account, the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group therefore concluded that they would continue with the preferred option of a small housing allocation at Stone Street Road together with the provision of a car park adjacent to the primary school. The policy criteria take into account appropriate safeguards in respect of heritage, landscaping, flood risk and highways access. In addition, the Neighbourhood Plan makes it clear that the delivery of the car park is the overriding issue and that support for the housing is predicated on the delivery of the car park and the benefits to the school, village hall and the village centre that it provides.

Part 2: What are the SEA findings at this stage?

8. Introduction (to Part 2)

8.1 The aim of this chapter is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the current 'Submission' version of the Boxford NP. This chapter presents:

- An appraisal of the current version of the Boxford NP under the ten SEA theme headings; and
- The overall conclusions at this current stage and recommendations for finalising the submission version of the Plan.

Boxford NP policies

8.2 The Boxford NP puts forward 19 policies to guide development in the Plan area, including one site allocation policy. **Table 8.1** identifies the policy list.

Table 8.1: Boxford NP policies

| Policy reference | Policy name |
|------------------|---|
| BOX 1 | Housing strategy for Boxford |
| BOX 1A | Housing allocation for 7 dwellings and new car park at Stone Street |
| BOX 2 | Housing mix |
| BOX 3 | Rural Exception Sites |
| BOX 4 | Safety for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists |
| BOX 5 | Improving access and connectivity |
| BOX 6 | New village car park adjacent to the primary school |
| BOX 7 | The design of new development |
| BOX 8 | Historic Environment and Conservation Area |
| BOX 9 | Non-designated heritage assets |
| BOX 10 | Boxford Historic Views |
| BOX 11 | The River Box Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity (ALLS) |
| BOX 12 | Important Public Scenic Views |
| BOX 13 | Protection and enhancement of natural features |
| BOX 14 | Local Green Spaces |
| BOX 15 | Localised flooding |
| BOX 16 | Environmental Design |
| BOX 17 | Protection of Existing Village Services and Facilities |
| BOX 18 | Supporting new community infrastructure |
| BOX 19 | Support for small scale extensions to existing businesses |

Methodology

- 8.3 The assessment identifies and evaluates 'likely significant effects' on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability objectives identified through scoping (see **Table 3.1**) as a methodological framework.
- 8.4 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the strategic nature of the policies under consideration and understanding of the baseline (now and in the future under a 'no plan' scenario) that is inevitably limited. Given uncertainties there is a need to make assumptions, e.g., in relation to plan implementation and aspects of the baseline that might be impacted. Assumptions are made cautiously and explained within the text (with the aim of striking a balance between comprehensiveness and conciseness). In many instances, given reasonable assumptions, it is not possible to predict 'significant effects', but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) of the draft plan in more general terms.
- 8.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. So, for example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of effects as far as possible. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e., the potential for the Neighbourhood Plan to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes, and projects. These effect 'characteristics' are described within the assessment as appropriate.

9. Appraisal of the ‘submission version’ Boxford NP

Introduction

- 9.1 The assessment is presented below under the ten SEA themes established through scoping (see **Chapter 3**). Finally, cumulative effects are explored. **Chapter 10** then presents overall conclusions and any recommendations.

Biodiversity

- 9.2 Key biodiversity assets in the Plan area are recognised as Boxford Spinney, an 8-acre site of woodland and meadow managed by the local Scout and Guide Groups and Primrose Wood. Primrose Wood was a millennium project which delivered 28.6 acres of new broad-leaved woodland, unimproved grassland, and water meadow. The water meadow is a locally designated County Wildlife Site to protect the Southern Marsh Orchids and other plants found there. Further habitats are also associated with the River Box and Dedham Vale AONB.
- 9.3 The proposed site for development does not intersect any locally designated biodiversity sites and is not known to contain any priority habitat. Despite this, it borders the River Box in the east, where biodiversity considerations include riverside habitats and ecological water quality. The site is also recognised as a Habitat Network Enhancement Zone. The site allocation policy (Policy BOX 1A) requires appropriate screen planting “*using predominantly native species of a type to be agreed*” along the north, east and south boundaries, connecting with the river, with “*the area west of the river within the floodplain to remain undeveloped and left open*” as a nature area. On this basis effects in relation to the River Box and its associated habitats are likely to be avoided or minor and positive in nature from new planting.
- 9.4 Policy BOX 7 (The design of new development) includes provisions which support retaining features which contribute to biodiversity at development sites. This includes minimising the loss of trees and hedgerows in the creation of new site access points and retaining tree belts and hedgerows elsewhere onsite “*making a feature of them as part of development*”. Further provisions seek to enhance biodiversity, particularly the requirement to “*include features to encourage and attract wildlife, create new habitats, provide a biodiversity net gain and enhance and extend existing wildlife corridors*”.
- 9.5 Policy BOX 13 (Protection and enhancement of natural features) recognises the biodiversity of the Plan area as an integral part of the landscape contributing to its overall character, appearance, and quality. The policy expects development proposals “*to protect and enhance existing ecological networks and wildlife corridors*”, including ponds, trees, and hedgerow, and the priority habitats found in the Plan area such as traditional orchard, grassland, deciduous woodland, wood pasture, and parkland. Net gain is also supported through the creation of new habitats, tree, or hedgerow planting, and/ or the “*restoring, repairing, and connecting of fragmented biodiversity networks and habitats to create wildlife corridors*”.

- 9.6 Considering the above, no significant effects, or significant deviations from the baseline are anticipated overall, and **broadly neutral effects** are concluded. This assumption reflects the wider context of national planning policy and regulations (e.g., The Environment Bill) which include a general premise for net gain in development.

Climate change

- 9.7 In the context of a declared 'climate emergency' the Boxford NP can provide planning support for the transition to a low carbon/ carbon neutral future and increase resilience considering the expected changes to come.
- 9.8 Low growth is being proposed through the Boxford NP (Policy BOX 1A) at a single site which is relatively centrally located with good access to the available services in Boxford. On this basis, development is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects.
- 9.9 The provisions of Policy BOX 7 (The design of new development) provide indirect support for climate change mitigation, particularly through the policy encouragement for high levels of sustainability in design, or proposals which *"help to raise the standard of design more generally in an area"*. Sustainable local building materials are encouraged in development which *"prioritises the movement of pedestrians and cyclists"*. The addition of electric vehicle charging points are also supported through Policy BOX 5 (Improving access and connectivity).
- 9.10 Chapter 11 of the Boxford NP provides a detailed insight into measures which are generally taken to address climate change mitigation. This links to the evidence provided by the Boxford Design Code (2020). The evidence grapples with issues such as the sensitive context of the conservation area and covers a wide range of interventions, such as solar panels, permeable pavements, green roofs, storage, and slow release, and bioretention systems. Policy BOX 16 pulls together this evidence to identify range of listed technologies which will be supported in principle in development proposals. The policy states the intention to encourage measures in new development that will *"help to offset or mitigate climate change whilst minimising visual impact"*.
- 9.11 The additional policy provisions will continue to support the move towards carbon neutrality in the context of the declared climate emergency, and minor positive effects are inferred in this respect. However, overall, no significant deviations from the baseline are considered likely, with many climate mitigation and resilience measures being driven largely at the regional or national scale. On this basis, **broadly neutral effects** are concluded in relation to climate change mitigation.

Flood risk

- 9.12 Flood risk is a constraint for development within the Parish, and this largely follows the course of the River Box through the settlement area. Surface water flood risk largely follows the same course through the settlement but also extends further into the east and west of the Plan area.
- 9.13 At the centrally located proposed development site, there are areas of high flood risk bordering the allocation, but away from the area of the site proposed

for housing development. The proposed car park will intersect areas of high flood risk; however, the use (as a car park) is not considered particularly vulnerable as to expect significant negative effects. The flood constraints on-site are reflected in Policy BOX 1A (the site allocation policy) which requires “*layout to take account of the flood risk on the site*” and supported by MAP 7 directing housing to the western extent of the site adjacent to Stone Street Road. Policy BOX 1A states that the area west of the river within the floodplain is to remain undeveloped.

- 9.14 Flooding through the village has been a historic problem for Boxford. However, the Plan recognises that flood risk has improved in recent years, with steps taken by the district council and the Environment Agency to increase the watercourses’ capacity. Since these works, the Boxford NP reports that there has been no bank overflow anywhere in the village even after very intense rainfall. Recent developments in the Plan area have also delivered attenuation schemes to slow drainage to the stream. The supporting text of Chapter 11 also identifies a range of overarching principles for the implementation of sustainable drainage systems to inform the requirements of Policy BOX 15 (Localised flooding). This policy requires that all new development incorporates appropriate sustainable drainage systems and demonstrates “*how it can mitigate its own flooding and drainage impacts, avoid the increase of flooding elsewhere and seek to achieve lower than greenfield runoff rates.*”
- 9.15 On this basis, no significant effects are considered likely, and **broadly neutral effects** are concluded with no anticipated significant deviations from the baseline.

Health and wellbeing

- 9.16 With residents currently reporting high levels of good health in an area of relatively low deprivation, it is assumed that small-scale development can continue to support future residents with positive health outcomes.
- 9.17 There is a GP practice with pharmacy and a private medical centre in the village, providing residents with good access to local healthcare facilities. Policies BOX 17 and BOX 18 support the retention and enhancement of local services and facilities to ensure they continue to cater for future residents. Notably, Policy BOX 18 (Supporting new community infrastructure) encourages flexible multi-use spaces that could support improved access to health and social care services.
- 9.18 The identification of Local Green Spaces (Policy BOX 14) as well as publicly accessible viewpoints (Policy BOX 12), and a network of key footpaths (Map 9) also support residents with continued access to natural spaces and recreational/ leisure opportunities. Again, providing continued support for positive health outcomes.
- 9.19 Policy BOX 7 (The design of new development) delivers a range of provisions that also indirectly support positive health outcomes, including requirements to “*integrate with the existing footway network and prioritise the movement of pedestrians and cyclists*” and “*include built in crime reduction measures*”.
- 9.20 The Housing Needs Assessment and Boxford NP both identify that there is no existing specialist housing for the elderly within the Plan area and that there

may be a more limited potential for adaptation to the existing stock given the historic nature of the village. The Plan rightly identifies that this makes it more necessary for either new specialist housing for older people to come forward, or a more widespread application of national accessibility standards in new development, where appropriate to the rural location and context. With high accessibility standards in some specialist housing for the elderly, it is recognised that some types of housing development may be more suited to strategically connected places such as main towns.

- 9.21 Overall, the Boxford NP is considered likely to continue to support long-term positive health outcomes, in line with the current baseline. With no significant deviations from the baseline expected, **broadly neutral effects** are considered likely overall.

Historic environment

- 9.22 Whilst the rural village has seen significant expansion in modern times, the historic core remains largely untouched and is a conservation area containing most of the listed buildings within the Parish.
- 9.23 The proposed development site lies within the designated conservation area, forming part of a largely open strip of land between the village and Stone Street hamlet. The site allocation policy (Policy BOX 1A) requires development proposals to provide a detailed heritage statement “*which addresses the issues of historic connections between the core of the village and the countryside and how this has been eroded*”. Furthermore, any application (whether in outline or in full) is expected to “*include full details of the proposed layout, scale and landscaping to show how the development would safeguard the setting of the Conservation Area.*” This is echoed through Policy BOX 6 guiding the development of the proposed car park at Stone Street Road.
- 9.24 The site allocation under Policy BOX 1A will locate housing development along Stone Street Road adjacent to the primary school. Stone Street Road is recognised as a ‘green entrance’ to the village and the view further south of the road (beyond the A1071) is identified as an important historic view under Policy BOX 10. No significant effects in relation to this view are anticipated in development at the proposed site (given the intersection of the A1071 which sets the site slightly further back and east). Mitigation is also provided through Policy BOX 10 which identifies that proposals “*that would be visible within or would affect an historic view should ensure that they respect and take account of the view concerned*”. Where impacts cannot be mitigated, it is the view of the Policy that development will not be supported.
- 9.25 Policy BOX 8 (Historic environment and conservation area) provides direct support for the protection of the “*special character of the conservation area*” and the significance of listed buildings and protected trees. Under this policy development is expected to protect “*the setting of the conservation area, including views into or out of the area where it contributes to its character and appearance.*”
- 9.26 Whilst the site is located within the conservation area, it is recognised as a central location providing excellent access to the services available in Boxford, including the adjacent primary school. This level of accessibility can promote walkable journeys to reduce the impacts of further congestion within the

conservation area, particularly for example at school run times, and potentially more so than perhaps an alternative site located outside of the conservation area could. The housing development will also enable the new car park, which will notably reduce congestion within the conservation area.

- 9.27 Additional intentions to protect and enhance the historic environment are identified. Namely, Policy BOX 9 (Non-designated heritage assets) provides protections for five identified non-designated assets which contribute to the historic character and setting and are known to be locally important to Boxford.
- 9.28 Further of note, is the community intent through the identified community projects to enhance the significance of the Grade II listed 'Old Gaol'. Intentions are laid out to refurbish the external brickwork and provide an interpretation board identifying its various past uses. Whilst this is outside of the scope of NP policies, the identified actions will be supported by the Community Infrastructure Levy to deliver successful outcomes where possible, and minor positive effects are considered likely at this stage.
- 9.29 Overall, whilst the spatial strategy will see development within the conservation area, accessible central development that is well-designed (in keeping with the proposed design policies) could be beneficial for the conservation area by avoiding further impacts in relation to localised congestion issues, particularly in respect of the school run. At this stage no significant effects are anticipated, however, there remains an element of uncertainty until detailed site proposals emerge. Despite this, the additional policy protections afforded to locally identified non-designated heritage assets, and the community support and outlined project to restore and enhance the listed 'Old Gaol' are considered likely to lead to **long-term minor positive effects**.

Land and soil resources

- 9.30 Most of the land immediately surrounding the settlement areas is identified as Grade 3 agricultural land and is susceptible to loss in future development. The tight settlement boundaries and limitations to rural development provided by Policy BOX 1 (Housing strategy for Boxford) will help to ensure its long-term retention, and positive effects are inferred in this respect.
- 9.31 The proposed site allocation whilst identified as Grade 3 agricultural land, connects well with the settlement core and is not in any current agricultural use. It is not known locally to have been in agricultural use for at least the past two decades, and since the building of the A1071 it is largely severed by the road and the river, preventing its practical use for agricultural or grazing purposes.
- 9.32 Overall, the small-scale growth proposed through the Boxford NP is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects in relation to this SEA theme. Whilst greenfield development is proposed this is largely a reflection of a lack of suitable brownfield alternatives within the Plan area. Furthermore, the site is not in current agricultural use, nor has it known to be for some time, it is also not considered the most practical site for grazing/ agricultural purposes. On this basis, **marginal/ minor and unavoidable negative effects** are concluded.

Landscape

- 9.33 The Plan area is classified¹⁰ in two zones of Rolling Valley Farmland or Ancient Rolling Farmlands, which together recognise features of large arable fields, meadowland, streams, hedgerows, and narrow, winding lanes. The Plan provides a more localised and intimate view of the landscape as mainly pasture with numerous trees. In summer the trees obscure the settlement, becoming largely evident only by the church tower and glimpses of red roofs. The Plan area is also framed in the south east by the Dedham Vale AONB.
- 9.34 By largely defining the limits for most future housing development to the existing settlement areas, Policies BOX 1 (Housing Strategy for Boxford) and BOX 1A (a site allocation policy) provides indirect support for the long-term protection of the wider rural landscape. Including by remaining hidden by existing tree screening.
- 9.35 The site allocation under Policy BOX 1A will locate housing development along Stone Street Road adjacent to the primary school. Stone Street Road is recognised as a 'green entrance' to the village and the view further south of the road (beyond the A1071) is identified as an important historic view under Policy BOX 10. No significant effects in relation to this view are anticipated in development at the proposed site (given the intersection of the A1071). Mitigation is also provided through Policy BOX 10 which identifies that proposals *"that would be visible within or would affect an historic view should ensure that they respect and take account of the view concerned"*. Where impacts cannot be mitigated, it is the view of the Policy that development will not be supported. Tree and hedgerow borders are also provided protection through BOX 7 (The design of new development) which are recognised as assets within this area.
- 9.36 Most of the Plan area is currently recognised as part of the Box Valley Special Landscape Area, including the proposed site allocation. Adopted Local Plan policies which protect and enhance the intrinsic landscape qualities in this area will no longer exist following formal adoption of the emerging JLP. On this basis, the Boxford NP proposes to retain a policy designation for this area and puts forward Policy BOX 11 'The River Box Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity (ALLS)'. The policy seeks to protect its *"visual, scenic, and undeveloped character this area"*, *"from development that may adversely affect its landscape character, its function as an important piece of green infrastructure, and its contribution to the wider network of green spaces"*.
- 9.37 The Built and Historic Environment chapter of the Boxford NP identifies the clear intention to *"promote an understanding of what elements make up the character of the area and what constitutes good design that respects local character"* (para 9.3). The Design Code and Design Guidelines which have been developed to support of the Boxford NP identifies three distinct character areas for Boxford, the 'Village Core', 'Meandering Neighbourhoods', and 'Linear Neighbourhoods'. Each area is described in terms of building groupings, building line, boundary treatments, heights and rooflines, and car parking, providing key evidence to underpin development proposals in different areas of the Parish. Policy BOX 7 (The design of new development) directly links the design codes work and identified character areas and provides guidance in

¹⁰ Suffolk County Council and Babergh District Council (2015) Landscape Character Assessment

relation to materials, density and building heights, connections, accessibility and parking, and green spaces and landscaping.

- 9.38 Policy BOX 13 (Protection and enhancement of natural features) seeks to protect specific features that contribute to landscape character and quality, including biodiversity features, recognised as part of the landscape character types.
- 9.39 Furthermore, Policy BOX 12 identifies 'Important Public Scenic Views' as enjoyed from publicly accessible locations. Identification of these views provide localised evidence for community assets in relation to the landscape and minor positive effects are inferred. An early version of the SEA recognised that positive effects could be enhanced should Policy BOX 12 directly state its policy intention to protect these views in the long-term and it is noted that this recommendation has been incorporated into Policy BOX 12.
- 9.40 Similarly, the identification of Local Green Spaces under Policy BOX 14 provides evidence of locally valued community spaces to be retained and enhanced in the future, which further contribute to local landscape character.
- 9.41 Overall, the spatial strategy is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects in relation to the landscape within and surrounding the Plan area. Whilst it is within the designated Special Landscape Area and proposed ALLS only seven dwellings are proposed, and these can continue to remain 'hidden' within the settlement area with appropriate tree screening as planned. Wider Plan policies which restrict rural development, provide continued landscape protection for what will be the former 'Special Landscape Area', and identify and protect important views and open spaces are considered likely to lead to **significant long-term positive effects**.

Population and communities

- 9.42 The strategically identified housing need to accommodate for future growth in Boxford has already been met through existing commitments and completions. The additional housing land being allocated through the Boxford NP (Policies BOX 1 and BOX 1A) is aimed at delivering against local housing needs for more affordable homes and smaller homes, and the potential for significant positive effects are drawn from this.
- 9.43 This intention seeks to address the issues of historic development, where, in the latter half of the 20th Century an influx of people saw new housing estates of various types, rents, and prices, some of which were clearly built to house professionals planning to commute to Sudbury, Hadleigh, Colchester, Ipswich and even London. This led to many more four and five-bedroom houses being built from 1980 onwards and not much housing was being built to meet local needs. More recent 21st Century development has sought to cater for more local needs and retain younger people through affordable housing schemes, which continues to be an issue to address (affordability). Furthermore, in the context of an ageing population, it will become increasingly important to plan for local housing needs, including specialist housing needs such as retirement homes, downsizing opportunities, and specialist elderly accommodation.
- 9.44 Policy BOX 2 (Housing mix) links the evidence provided in the most recent housing needs assessment, identifying preferred affordable housing

compositions and dwelling sizes. The delivery of affordable housing is also bolstered by Policy BOX 3 (Rural Exception Sites) outlining the support provided for small-scale edge of settlement affordable housing schemes. The outlined community project to undertake a housing needs assessment every 5 years will ensure robust evidence is available to underpin housing delivery moving forward. To ensure the policy framework provides a direct link with the community project work happening in the future, an early iteration of the SEA recommended that Policy BOX 2 be extended to include a reference to potential future sources of evidence that may need to be considered over the Plan period. It is noted that this recommendation has been incorporated into the submission Plan.

- 9.45 At the heart of the village there are a good range of services for residents in a rural context. This includes a primary school, post office and store, village shop, a butcher, café, wine shop, hairdresser, GP practice and pharmacy, two garages, playing fields and recreational facilities, and two pubs. These services attract and are further supported by residents outside of the immediate area, including nearby villages such as Groton and Edwardstone. The site allocation made in the Boxford NP is well placed to enable good access to the village centre and adjacent school.
- 9.46 However, primary school capacity is an issue for significant growth in Boxford, with the submission JLP identifying that:
- “Boxford CEVC Primary School does not have any additional capacity once existing commitments are taken into account, and it is not possible to expand the primary school in its current position. Development within the area will be required to secure a solution to primary school provision”.*
- 9.47 The Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire (2018) further highlights a key concern around parking at the school. The new car park in Stone Street is to be used in conjunction with the school and in this respect seeks to address the locally identified concerns. Given the small scale of development proposed (7 dwellings) targeting smaller homes for first time buyers or downsizing, it is not considered likely that the allocation site will lead to significant effects in relation to the capacity constraints identified at Boxford Primary School.
- 9.48 Additional community projects have been identified through the Plan, outlining the intent to improve further aspects of village life for residents. Projects include a priority investment list for money derived from the Community Infrastructure Levy, public realm, historic environment, and footpath improvements, and habitat enhancements. Policy BOX 18 also provides support for the appropriate development of new community infrastructure, including the car park to serve Boxford Primary School.
- 9.49 Additional design and natural environment policies (e.g., Policies BOX 7, and BOX 10-14) seek to ensure that future development is in keeping with the character and charm of Boxford and supported by access to open space. Further positive effects are considered likely to be realised from these policies.
- 9.50 Overall, the targeted strategy to deliver more affordable homes and homes of the right size to address locally identified needs is considered likely to lead to **long-term significant positive effects** in relation to population growth and community cohesion. These effects are enhanced by additional policies which

seek to address the parking issues associated with Boxford Primary School and deliver high quality design, as well as outlined community projects which seek localised improvements to enhance village life.

Transportation

- 9.51 Boxford settlement has evolved as a natural fording place where four trackways met to cross the River Box. These routeways still dominate the structure and shape of the village today. The Boxford NP notes that at busy times, movement, parking, and pinch point congestion are a continuing challenge. Furthermore, as a rural village with no train station, sustainable transport links are limited. Limited parking associated with Boxford Primary School exacerbates congestion issues in the village.
- 9.52 In the absence of strategic transport interventions, growth in Boxford is likely to exacerbate these issues, and continued reliance on the private vehicle is considered likely to prevail over the Plan period. However, the addition of seven dwellings as proposed through the Boxford NP (Policy BOX 1A) is not considered likely to lead to significant effects in respect of the baseline. The allocated housing is also centrally located, perfectly positioned for walkable access to the village's service and facility offer.
- 9.53 The site allocation policy (Policy BOX 1A) requires proposals to include a new pedestrian link connecting Stone Street with the existing underpass under the A1071. This should contribute to enhancing pedestrian and cycle access to the school and minor positive effects are considered likely. Notably, the policy also requires the provision of a new car park to be used in conjunction with the school which will significantly contribute to alleviating the congestion associated with on-street parking at school run times.
- 9.54 Specific issues associated with local roads are brought to the forefront through the NP, which brings together a range of evidence to demonstrate highway safety issues along Swan Street, Broad Street, and Ellis Street in the supporting text. This further recognises that solutions are also constrained by the designated conservation area. However, notably, it identifies that "*there is an abundance of existing green assets within and around the village that could be better linked in order to improve connectivity and therefore, walking and cycling*" (para 8.14).
- 9.55 Policies BOX 4-6 seek to address these issues, identifying the key junctions that require intervention and specific opportunities for enhancement (e.g., footpath enhancement at The Croft, bus shelters, and cycle parking at transport interchanges).
- 9.56 Further support for accessible development is provided through Policy BOX 7 (The design of new development) which identifies that as part of good design development will "*integrate with the existing footway network and prioritise the movement of pedestrians and cyclists*".
- 9.57 Overall, the growth proposed through the Boxford NP is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects or significant deviations from the baseline. **Minor negative effects** are considered likely because of minor increases in road traffic. However, the site allocation is well-placed centrally, and the outlined policy provisions and community projects seek notable enhancements. This

includes the car park to address local priority concerns and improved footpath/cycle links. Such provisions are also considered likely to lead to **minor long-term positive effects**.

Water resources and quality

- 9.58 Anglian Water's Water Resource Management Plan (WRMP) highlights the acute stresses that the catchment faces in the coming years and the challenges faced in terms of securing water supply. Anglian Water works with the district councils in any given catchment area to plan for forecasted housing growth and long-term water supply. Whilst the Boxford NP proposes additional growth to that planned for through the emerging JLP, this is small-scale (seven dwellings) and not considered likely to lead to any significant effects at the catchment scale. Furthermore, the provisions of Policy BOX 16 (Environmental design) seek efficiency measures in development, supporting the development of grey water recycling and rainwater capture solutions which bolster local resilience.
- 9.59 In relation to water quality, the proposed development site lies adjacent to the River Box in the east. The site allocation policy (Policy BOX 1A) requires appropriate screen planting "*using predominantly native species of a type to be agreed*" along the north, east and south boundaries, connecting with the river and with "*the area west of the river within the floodplain to remain undeveloped and left open*" as a nature area. With housing development directed away from the river and a significant natural buffer provided in between, no significant effects are considered likely. Policy BOX 6 (New village car park adjacent to the primary school) further identifies that proposals for the car park are to ensure a "*suitable landscaping scheme around the perimeter*". Minor positive effects may be considered in relation to ecological water quality because of new tree planting along the eastern border of the site.
- 9.60 The supporting text of Chapter 11 also identifies a range of overarching principles for the implementation of sustainable drainage systems to inform the requirements of Policy BOX 15 (Localised flooding). This policy requires that all new development incorporates appropriate sustainable drainage systems and "*features to protect against pollution, provide drainage and wider amenity, recreational and biodiversity benefits.*"
- 9.61 Overall, no significant effects are considered likely in relation to water resources and quality. With small-scale development and adequate policy mitigation proposed, no significant deviation from the baseline is anticipated and **broadly neutral effects** are concluded.

Cumulative effects

- 9.62 Cumulatively, the Boxford NP will deliver additional homes within the District and contribute to meeting forecasted housing needs. The policy provisions which seek to encourage the right size and tenure of homes will also contribute to balancing housing supply with housing need, and positive cumulative effects are considered likely in this respect.
- 9.63 The small-scale development proposed through the Boxford NP is considered to have limited interactions with other plans and projects that would be likely to have a significant effect on any sensitive receptors.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- 10.1 The Boxford NP proposes low growth at a centrally located site. Seven additional homes are sought to target locally identified needs for more affordable and smaller homes in an accessible area which could promote active travel. On this basis, significant positive effects are concluded in relation to population and communities.
- 10.2 Constraints at the sites are avoided through the development proposal and supporting policy framework, which for example, directs vulnerable development away from the Flood Zone and provides a natural buffer between development and the River Box. As a result, broadly neutral effects (indicating no significant deviation from the baseline) are concluded across many of the SEA themes, including biodiversity, climate change mitigation, flood risk, water resources and quality, and health and wellbeing.
- 10.3 Notable elements of the plan include the continued policy protection proposed for the former Boxford Valley SLA, and identification of locally important non-designated heritage assets, historic views, public scenic views, and Local Green Spaces. Considering these elements, significant positive effects are concluded in relation to landscape, and minor positive effects are concluded in relation to the historic environment.
- 10.4 Inevitable minor negative effects are also identified in relation to land and soil resources, and transportation. This reflects the loss of greenfield land and a likely minor increase in vehicle use in the Plan area.

Recommendations

- 10.5 An initial version of the SEA Environmental Report was shared with the Boxford NP Steering Group which contained the following two recommendations:
- To ensure the policy framework provides a direct link with the community project work happening in the future, it is recommended that Policy BOX 2 is extended to include a reference to potential future sources of evidence that may need to be considered over the Plan period. Following identification of the housing needs assessment, the simple addition of “*or the most up-to-date evidence*” should suffice in this respect.
 - Policy BOX 12 identifies ‘Important Public Scenic Views’ as enjoyed from publicly accessible locations. Identification of these views provide localised evidence for community assets in relation to the landscape and minor positive effects are inferred. However, it is recognised that positive effects could be enhanced should Policy BOX 12 directly state its policy intention to protect these views in the long-term.
- 10.6 These recommendations have been incorporated into the finalised Plan for submission (as reflected through this current version of the SEA).
- 10.7 No further recommendations are made at this stage.

Part 3: What are the next steps?

11. Next steps and monitoring

11.1 This part of the report explains the next steps that will be taken as part of plan-making and SEA.

Plan finalisation

11.2 Following submission, the plan and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.

11.3 If the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the Neighbourhood Plan will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Babergh District Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the Development Plan for the Babergh District, covering the defined Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Monitoring

11.4 The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report. This refers to the monitoring of likely significant effects of the Neighbourhood Plan to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.

11.5 It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Neighbourhood Plan will be undertaken by Babergh District Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). No significant negative effects are considered likely in the implementation of the Boxford NP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Babergh District Council.

Appendices

Appendix A Regulatory requirements

As discussed in **Chapter 1**, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) explains the information that must be contained in the Environmental Report; however, interpretation of Schedule 2 is not straightforward. **Table AA.1** overleaf links the structure of this report to an interpretation of Schedule 2 requirements, whilst **Table AA.2** explains this interpretation. **Table AA.3** identifies how and where within the Environmental Report the regulatory requirements have/ will be met.

Table AA.1: Questions answered by this Environmental Report, in-line with an interpretation of regulatory requirements

| | | Questions answered | As per regulations... the Environmental Report must include... |
|---------------------|---|--|---|
| Introduction | What's the plan seeking to achieve? | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes |
| | | What's the sustainability 'context'? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance |
| | What's the SEA scope? | What's the sustainability 'baseline'? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance |
| | | What are the key issues and objectives that should be a focus? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e. provide a 'framework' for) assessment |
| Part 1 | What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point? | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (and thus an explanation of the 'reasonableness' of the approach) The likely significant effects associated with alternatives Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives assessment / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan |
| Part 2 | What are the SEA findings at this current stage? | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan |
| Part 3 | What happens next? | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A description of the monitoring measures envisaged |

Table AA.2: Questions answered by this Environmental Report, in-line with regulatory requirements

| <u>Schedule 2</u> | <u>Interpretation of Schedule 2</u> | |
|--|---|--|
| <i>The report must include...</i> | <i>The report must include...</i> | |
| (a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes; | An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes | i.e. answer - <i>What's the plan seeking to achieve?</i> |
| (b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan | Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance | i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'context'?</i> |
| (c) the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected; | | |
| (d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme 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 relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level | i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'baseline'?</i> |
| (e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State 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 relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan' | |
| (f) 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 environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected | |
| (g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan; | Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance | i.e. answer - <i>What are the key issues & objectives?</i> |
| (h) 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 know-how) encountered in compiling the required information | Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of appraisal | |
| (i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring. | An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (i.e. an explanation of the 'reasonableness of the approach) | i.e. answer - <i>What has Plan-making / SA involved up to this point?</i> [Part 1 of the Report] |
| | The likely significant effects associated with alternatives, including on issues such as... ... and an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of the alternatives considered / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan. | |
| | The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan | i.e. answer - <i>What are the assessment findings at this current stage?</i> [Part 2 of the Report] |
| | The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan | |
| | A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring | i.e. answer - <i>What happens next?</i> [Part 3 of the Report] |

Table AA.3: ‘Checklist’ of how (throughout the SA process) and where (within this report) regulatory requirements have been, are and will be met.

| Regulatory requirement | Discussion of how requirement is met |
|---|--|
| Schedule 2 of the regulations lists the information to be provided within the SA Report | |
| 1. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes; | Chapter 2 (‘What is the plan seeking to achieve’) presents this information. |
| 2. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme; | These matters have been considered in detail through scoping work, which has involved dedicated consultation on a Scoping Report. The ‘SEA framework’ – the outcome of scoping – is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What is the scope of the SEA?’). |
| 3. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected; | |
| 4. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme 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.; | |
| 5. The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation; | The SEA framework is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What is the scope of the SEA’). Also, the SEA Scoping Report presents key messages from the context review. With regards to explaining “ <i>how...considerations have been taken into account</i> ”, Chapter 7 explains the Steering Group’s ‘reasons for supporting the preferred approach’, i.e., explains how/ why the preferred approach is justified in light of alternatives appraisal. |
| 6. 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. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects); | Chapter 6 presents alternatives appraisal findings (in relation to housing growth, which is a ‘stand-out’ plan policy area). Chapters 9 presents an appraisal of the plan. With regards to assessment methodology, Chapter 8 explains the role of the SEA framework/scope, and the need to consider the potential for various effect characteristics/ dimensions, e.g., timescale. |
| 7. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme; | The assessment highlights certain tensions between competing objectives, which might potentially be actioned by the Examiner, when finalising the plan. Also, specific recommendations are made in Chapter 10. |
| 8. 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 know-how) encountered in compiling the required information; | Chapters 4 and 5 deal with ‘Reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with’, in that there is an explanation of the reasons for focusing on particular issues and options. Also, Chapter 7 explains the Parish Council’s ‘reasons for selecting the preferred option’ (in-light of alternatives assessment). |

| Regulatory requirement | Discussion of how requirement is met |
|---|--|
| 9. Description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10; | Chapter 11 presents measures envisaged concerning monitoring. |
| 10. A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings | The NTS is provided at the beginning of this Environmental Report. |
| The SA Report must be published alongside the Draft Plan, in accordance with the following regulations | |
| authorities with environmental responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the Draft Plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2) | At the current time, this Environmental Report is published alongside the 'submission' version of the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan, with a view to informing Regulation 16 consultation. |
| The SA must be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan. | |
| The environmental report prepared pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of any transboundary consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 shall be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its adoption or submission to the legislative procedure. | Assessment findings presented within this Environmental Report, and consultation responses received, have been fed back to the Steering Group and have informed plan finalisation. |

aecom.com