

COOMBE BISSETT AND HOMINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT (HRA)

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) has been undertaken in response to an HRA screening request from the Coombe Bissett and Homington Neighbourhood Plan (CB & HNP) Steering Group. The HRA relates to the Pre Regulation 14 Draft of the Coombe Bissett and Homington Neighbourhood Plan dated 25 March 2021.
- 1.2. The HRA has been carried out to comply with Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019¹, hereafter referred to as the Habitats Regulations. Under these Regulations, a competent authority must consider whether a relevant plan is likely to have a significant effect on any European sites before deciding to give any consent, permission or other authorisation. If the screening exercise demonstrates significant effects are likely, whether or not these are addressed through mitigation measures², the competent authority must undertake an appropriate assessment (AA) to examine the effects of the plan on the conservation objectives of the European sites in question, consult the appropriate nature conservation body and have regard to its representations. Both the screening and any subsequent AA must consider the impacts of the plan alone and in combination with other plans or projects.
- 1.3. It is usually the case that a plan of this nature does not go into the detailed aspects of development proposals and therefore the full effects of potential development cannot be accurately assessed at the plan making stage. Those details will typically be identified through a planning application which would be subject to further, more detailed HRA. The principle that a HRA need only consider the effects of a proposal or policy in as much detail as is specified by the plan was explained by Advocate General Kokott in a judgement brought against the UK government in 2005:
*“Many details are regularly not settled until the time of the final permission. It would also hardly be proper to require a greater level of detail in preceding plans or the abolition of multi-stage planning and approval procedures so that the assessment of implications can be concentrated on one point in the procedure. Rather, adverse effects on areas of conservation must be assessed at every relevant stage of the procedure to the extent possible on the basis of the precision of the plan. This assessment is to be updated with increasing specificity in subsequent stages of the procedure.”*³
- 1.4. Where AA is undertaken, the competent authority may go on to authorise the plan or project provided that it will not adversely affect the integrity of any European sites. Where an **adverse effect on the integrity (AEol)** of any European sites cannot be ruled out, and where there are no alternative solutions, the plan can only be authorised and proceed if there are **imperative reasons of over-riding public interest (IROPI)** and if the necessary compensatory measures can be secured.
- 1.5. Wiltshire Council has conducted the following HRA as competent authority for the Coombe Bissett and Homington Neighbourhood Plan (NP). Where risks to European sites are identified, changes are recommended to remove or reduce the risks, and these should be incorporated into the plan before it is

¹ On 1st January 2021 the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 were amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. Most of these changes involved transferring functions from the European Commission to the appropriate authorities in England and Wales. All other processes or terms in the 2017 Regulations remain unchanged and existing guidance is still relevant. The obligations of a competent authority in the 2017 Regulations for the protection of sites or species do not change [Changes to the Habitats Regulations 2017 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/changes-to-the-habitats-regulations-2017)

² Court of Justice of the European Union, Case C 323/17 “People Over Wind”/P. Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta

³ Commission of the European Communities v UK and NI, opinion of Advocate General KoKott, 9 June 2005, Case C-6/04

made. Likewise, if the policies or planning context change after the HRA is completed, the HRA process must be repeated before the final plan is considered by a referendum and adopted.

2. Screening Methodology

2.1. Each element of the plan has been categorised against screening criteria developed by Natural England to provide a clear audit trail for the screening assessment.

2.2. The screening criteria used are as follows:

- Category A1: The policy will not itself lead to development e.g., because it relates to design or other qualitative criteria for development.
- Category A2: The policy is intended to protect the natural environment.
- Category A3: The policy is intended to conserve or enhance the natural, built or historic environment.
- Category A4: The policy would positively steer development away from European sites and associated sensitive areas.
- Category A5: The policy would have no effect because no development could occur through the policy itself, the development being implemented through later policies in the same plan, which are more specific and therefore more appropriate to assess for their effects on European sites and associated sensitive areas.
- Category B: No significant effect.
- Category C: Likely significant effect alone; and
- Category D: Likely significant effects in combination.

2.3. The effect of each policy has been considered both individually and in combination with other plans and projects (see Table 1 below). Where potential for likely significant effects have been identified, an AA has been undertaken in subsequent sections.

3. Higher Level HRAs

Wiltshire Core Strategy

3.1 The Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) HRA (October 2009, February 2012⁴, March 2013⁵, February 2014⁶ and April 2014⁷) and the South Wiltshire Core Strategy HRA⁸ identified general parameters to determine the likelihood of potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites (now known as the national site network⁹). The WCS was initially screened for effects on all European sites within 15km of the administrative boundary of Wiltshire. The following potential impact pathways and associated parameters were identified and assessed for the European sites stipulated below.

- *Recreation – European sites within 5km of the plan area, or where the New Forest SPA is within 8km of the plan area or where Salisbury Plain SPA is within 15km of the plan area (it should be noted that the relevant parameter for the latter has since been revised on the basis of data obtained by means of visitor surveys and is now 6.4km):*

⁴ Wiltshire Core Strategy Submission Draft – Assessment under the Habitats Regulations, Wiltshire Council, February 2012

⁵ Wiltshire Core Strategy – Assessment under the Habitats Regulations, Wiltshire Council, March 2013

⁶ Update to the Wiltshire Core Strategy habitats Regulations Assessment, February 2014 (Exam/89)

⁷ Wiltshire Core Strategy Updated Habitats Regulations Assessment, April 2014

⁸ South Wiltshire Proposed Submission Core Strategy HRA Report, Appendix 13. NPA for Wiltshire Council, July 2009

⁹ On 1st January 2021 the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) were amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

- Salisbury Plain SAC / SPA
- River Avon SAC
- New Forest SAC / SPA
- Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC (added post adoption of Wiltshire Core Strategy)
- *Hydrology / Hydrogeology – European sites that fall wholly or partly within the Wessex Water Resource Zone may be susceptible to impact:*
 - Salisbury Plain SAC / SPA
 - Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC
 - Pewsey Downs SAC
 - North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC
 - River Avon SAC
 - River Lambourn SAC
 - Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC
- *Air Pollution / Nitrogen Deposition – European sites within 200m of a main road*
 - Porton Down SPA
 - Salisbury Plain SAC / SPA
 - Southampton Water SPA
 - North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC
 - River Avon SAC
 - Rodborough Common SAC
 - Cotswolds Beechwoods SAC
- *Physical Damage / Interruption of Flight Lines / Disturbance*
 - Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC
 - Salisbury Plain SPA
 - Porton Down SPA
 - Chilmark Quarries SAC (added post adoption of Wiltshire Core Strategy)
 - Mottisfont Bats SAC (added post adoption of Wiltshire Core Strategy)

Wiltshire Housing Site Allocations Plan

- 3.2 Since the WCS was adopted, the Council published a pre-submission draft of the Wiltshire Housing Site Allocations Plan (WHSAP) together with a HRA dated 21 June 2017. A schedule of proposed changes was considered by Cabinet supported by an Addendum to the HRA dated May 2018. A schedule of changes and an Addendum to the HRA incorporating minor factual changes were published in September 2018 for public consultation. Subsequently, the WHSAP (Council Version, February 2020) was adopted by Full Council on 25th February 2020, and this was accompanied by the final WHSAP Assessment under the Habitats Regulations (Wiltshire Council, February 2020).

- 3.3 The screening criteria for the adopted WHSAP and final HRA were modified for some European sites from those used for the WCS subsequent to the acquisition of results from new surveys, and in light of advice from Natural England. This includes the zone of influence around the Salisbury Plain SPA used to screen for likely significant effects as a result of recreational pressure being revised from 15km to 6.4km on the basis of data obtained by means of visitor surveys.
- 3.4 Furthermore, since the WCS was adopted, Natural England has advised Wiltshire Council of its concerns regarding the growing number of visitors to the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC in recent years which has led to an increase in trampling. NE has advised that this is particularly evident at North Meadow (which is also a National Nature Reserve (NNR)) during April and May when visitors come to see the Snake's-head fritillaries in flower. Natural England considers that the increase in recreational pressure upon the SAC is primarily as a result of increases in the local population, and that major new housing developments within a short travel distance of North Meadow are likely to add to the existing visitor pressure and trampling effects.
- 3.5 Impacts of development in Wiltshire on the New Forest SPA were considered in the HRA for the South Wiltshire Core Strategy (SWCS) adopted in 2012¹⁰. The assessment used data from the Tourism South East PROGRESS survey for 2004/05 and census data from 2001 for the former Salisbury District to examine patterns of visitors to the New Forest from across south Wiltshire. That HRA concluded that the development in south Wiltshire would increase visitor pressure by less than 1% and 89% of this would be through additional local day visits from within 8 km of the National Park. The WCS addressed the New Forest's mitigation requirements through Core Policy 50, identifying that a New Forest Mitigation Strategy would be prepared to address recreational impacts. Since the WCS was adopted, the council has joined a partnership of local authorities seeking to develop a strategic approach to address the impacts of recreational pressure on the New Forest SPA. A Government grant through the Planning Delivery Fund enabled visitor surveys to be conducted across the New Forest in 2018/19. This work was recently published, and the Council is now part of a steering group working to agree a common approach to mitigation including the extent of the zone of influence and how to fairly reflect different visit rates within it. This evidence is informing the preparation of an Interim Recreation Mitigation Strategy and will be further revised to support the Local Plan Review (LPR).
- 3.6 Since the WCS was adopted and on the advice of Natural England, any plan or project that will lead to development within the catchment of the River Avon SAC must be phosphorous neutral and be subject to AA which concludes no adverse effect on the SAC alone or in-combination with other plans or projects in order to be authorised.

Emerging Evidence and Advice from Natural England Subsequent to Adoption of WHSAP

- 3.7 Similarly, it came to light in spring 2020 that any plan or project that will lead to development within the catchment of the River Test must be nitrogen neutral as the Test drains into the Solent and this region is protected by a number of European and international designations including the Solent Maritime SAC, Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA, Portsmouth Harbour SPA and Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site. In 2018 and 2019 Natural England undertook a number of condition assessments of the features of these designated sites around the Solent. These assessments identified that high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus are entering this water environment and that there is sound evidence that nitrogen in particular is causing eutrophication at the aforementioned designated sites and that the resulting excessive growth of green algae and plants, which reduces oxygen and light levels, is leading to negative effects on the special features for which the European sites are designated. These nutrient inputs currently mostly come either from agricultural sources or from wastewater from existing housing

¹⁰ South Wiltshire Proposed Submission Core Strategy HRA Report, Appendix 13. NPA for Wiltshire Council, July 2009

and other development. These findings were published by Natural England in June 2020 in *Advice on Achieving Nutrient Neutrality for New Development in the Solent Region*. This advice also stipulates that:

“There is uncertainty as to whether new growth will further deteriorate designated sites. This issue has been subject to detailed work commissioned by local planning authorities (LPAs) in association with Natural England, Environment Agency and water companies. This strategic work, which updates early studies, is on-going. Until this work is complete, the uncertainty remains and the potential for future housing developments across the Solent region to exacerbate these impacts creates a risk to their potential future conservation status.

One way to address this uncertainty is for new development to achieve nutrient neutrality. Nutrient neutrality is a means of ensuring that development does not add to existing nutrient burdens and this provides certainty that the whole of the scheme is deliverable in line with the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

This report sets out a practical methodology to calculating how nutrient neutrality can be achieved. This methodology is based on best available scientific knowledge, and will be subject to revision as further evidence is obtained. It is our advice to local planning authorities to take a precautionary approach in line with existing legislation and case-law when addressing uncertainty and calculating nutrient budgets.”

- 3.8 In accordance with Natural England’s advice, any plan or project which will lead to development within the catchment of the River Test cannot be approved unless nitrogen neutrality has been demonstrated via quantitative means, and an AA conducted by the competent authority has concluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of any of the Solent region European sites.

Screening of Coombe Bissett and Homington NP Area

- 3.9 The following screening assessment of the Coombe Bissett and Homington NP area applies the most up to date criteria available from the HRA of the WHSAP and advice from Natural England.

Recreation

- 3.10 The current Zone of Influence (Zoi) for the New Forest SPA comprises the 8km radius around the SPA within which the majority of day visitors to the New Forest originate^[1]. Dwellings falling within this zone are considered to contribute the majority of visitors to the New Forest and contributions are taken from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) towards mitigation projects which reduce their impacts. However, local authorities around the New Forest are currently considering the implications of recent visitor surveys and it is expected the Zoi will increase to potentially include Coombe Bissett and Homington NP area. This matter will therefore need to be kept under review as the NP goes forward to Regulation 16.
- 3.11 The NP area lies almost entirely outside of the 8km radius around the New Forest SPA except where the aforementioned radius coincides with a small section of the plan area along its eastern boundary. The extent of the NP area that falls within the 8km radius comprises an area approximately 632m in length by 68m in width at its widest point. The NP does not allocate or promote any sites for development within the small section of the NP area that lies within the 8km radius around the SPA and thus, for the time being the NP can be screened out of AA in relation to the New Forest SPA.
- 3.12 Recreational pressure on the River Avon SAC is recognised to occur predominately in circumstances where significant development lies in close proximity to the SAC. The River Avon SAC does not flow through the NP area and is approximately 2.39km from the plan area at its closest point. The NP does not

^[1] Wiltshire Core Strategy Updated Habitats Regulations Assessment, April 2014

allocate or promote any major housing or tourism sites and so would not result in significant additional recreational pressure on the SAC.

- 3.13 In relation to Salisbury Plain, the SAC habitat features were screened out of appropriate assessment for the Core Strategy on the advice of Natural England. Recreational/visitor pressure is a known issue for the Salisbury Plain SPA; however, the NP area lies beyond the 6.4km zone around the SPA within which the majority (75%) of visitors to the Plain are expected to live. This is based on the data collated by means of a visitor survey commissioned by the Council in 2015. The SPA/SAC is located approximately 16.4km north of the plan area at its closest point. Therefore, AA of the NP is screened out in respect of the Salisbury Plain SPA/SAC.
- 3.14 In respect of the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC, the NP area lies more than 31km southeast from the closest component area of the SAC, and also lies well beyond any bat consultation zones around the SAC or core roosts associated with the SAC. Thus, appropriate assessment with respect of this European site can be screened out.
- 3.15 Great Yews SAC lies to the immediate southeast of the NP area, however, the HRA to the WCS and the WHSAP screened out appropriate assessment in respect of recreational and visitor impacts upon the SAC as the threats and pressures have been identified as being non-development related and include deer browsing and nitrogen deposition (non-vehicular). Moreover, the NP does not allocate or promote any sites for development in the vicinity of the SAC, and therefore further assessment in respect of this SAC will not be required.
- 3.16 Prescombe Down SAC is located approximately 10.3km to the west of the NP area. The HRA to the WCS and the WHSAP screened out appropriate assessment in respect of recreational and visitor impacts upon the SAC as the threats and pressures have been identified as being non-development related and include changes in species distribution and nitrogen deposition (non-vehicular). Furthermore, the NP does not allocate or promote any major development sites that could result in significant visitor pressure upon the SAC. As such, appropriate assessment in relation to this SAC will not be necessary.

Hydrology / Hydrogeology

- 3.17 In terms of hydrology/hydrogeology, the entire NP area lies within the catchment of the River Avon SAC. Consequently, any proposals for development within the NP area will need to be phosphate neutral and demonstrate that it will not prevent the SAC conservation objectives from being met within timescales identified in the River Avon Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). The Council is working with the Environment Agency and Natural England to ensure appropriate mitigation is in place for development coming forward under the Core Strategy and Local Plan Review. The NP allocates sites for development and includes policies that promote residential and tourism development thereby giving rise to a pathway for likely significant effects on the SAC. As such, these policies will need to be subject to appropriate assessment.

Air Pollution / Nitrogen Deposition

- 3.18 The Wiltshire Core Strategy identified that increased traffic would lead to potential effects through an increase in atmospheric pollution and nitrogen deposition upon a range of European sites within 200m of a main road. Such effects were considered to be very small and difficult to predict at the strategic level¹¹ (WCS HRA Update February 2014). The housing site allocations in the Coombe Bissett and Homington NP allow for a further 16 dwellings which is considered to be a small number in relation to the total for the county. All of the European sites listed above, except the River Avon SAC, are a considerable distance from the NP area and effects are likely to be negligible. In relation to the River Avon SAC, the Wiltshire Core Strategy HRA concluded no likely significant effect where the existing approach to mitigation in Core

¹¹ Update to the Wiltshire Core Strategy habitats Regulations Assessment, February 2014 (Exam/89)

Policy 55 of the WCS is implemented. Furthermore, the River Avon SAC is located approximately 2.39km from the plan area at its closest point. It is therefore concluded that the proposals for housing in this NP would not have an adverse effect on European sites or the integrity of its qualifying features as a result of nitrogen or particulate matter deposition.

- 3.19 The Great Yews SAC is situated immediately southeast of the NP area boundary, and an identified threat to the SAC is nitrogen deposition; however, of non-vehicular origin. Therefore, the HRA of the WCS and the WHSAP screened out appropriate assessment of this SAC in respect of air pollution/nitrogen deposition. Furthermore, the NP does not allocate or promote any sites for development in the vicinity of the SAC, and therefore further assessment in respect of this SAC will not be required.

Physical Damage / Interruption of Flight Lines / Disturbance

- 3.20 Porton Down SPA is located approximately 9.66km northeast of the NP area its closest point. It is considered that the plan area is sufficiently distant from the SPA and known functionally linked habitat, for any development within the plan area to cause direct physical damage to, or fragmentation of, breeding and foraging habitat for the Annex I species stone-curlew. It is also considered too remote for development within the plan area to result in anthropogenic disturbance or visual stimuli that could have an adverse effect on stone-curlew breeding at Porton Down. As such AA in respect of this European site is not necessary.
- 3.21 Salisbury Plain SPA is located approximately 16.4km north of the NP area at its closest point and is therefore deemed too distant for any development within the plan area to have implications for the Annex 1 species stone-curlew and quail that breed at the SPA, or to have effects on the Annex 1 species hen harrier, that winters at the SPA. Therefore, AA in relation to this European site is not necessary.
- 3.22 The NP area is sufficiently distant from the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC, Chilmark Quarries SAC and Mottisfont Bats SAC that it is deemed the potential for likely significant effects upon these European sites and the Annex II bat species associated within them can be screened out, and further assessment will not be required.

4. Screening of Policies in Coombe Bissett and Homington NP: Pre Regulation 14 Draft

- 4.1 The Coombe Bissett and Homington NP comprises nineteen planning policies.
- 4.2 All parts of the Pre Regulation 14 Draft of the Coombe Bissett and Homington NP have been screened for potential impacts which may arise from the plan alone or in combination with other plans and projects. Taking into consideration the location, scale and nature of proposals in the NP, there is a potential mechanism for effect upon one European site, namely the River Avon SAC, on account of six policies. These comprise Policies ASD1, AS1, AS2, AS3, EM1 and EM2 which have the potential to give rise to significant effects upon the aforementioned SAC in combination with other plans and projects. These policies must therefore be taken forward to appropriate assessment in accordance with Regulation 105 of the Habitats Regulations at the Regulation 14 consultation stage.
- 4.3 The other policies within the NP would either not lead directly to development or relate to design or other qualitative criteria for development and would have no significant effects either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

TABLE 1: Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening of the Coombe Bissett and Homington NP

| |
|------------------------------|
| A / B (Green) – Screened out |
| C / D (Red) – Screened in |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|---|--|----------------------|---|
| Policy H1: Promoting a more balanced housing stock | <p>This policy requires that all proposals for new housing development should demonstrate how they contribute to maintaining an appropriate mix of tenures, types and size of dwellings for the Parish and address unmet dwelling needs.</p> <p>This policy itself will not lead directly to development and instead sets out criteria for new housing development. As such, the policy will not result in a likely significant effect upon any European sites.</p> | A1 | |
| Policy ASD1: Promoting limited development on allocated and windfall (infill) sites | <p>This policy supports the development of allocated or infill sites provided that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The character of the CC AONB should not be adversely affected and where possible provides a net enhancement to it. 2. The site is a contained or infill site surrounded by or adjacent to existing development within the settlement boundary, unless otherwise identified as an allocated site in this Plan. 3. It does not lead to an increased coalescence between other settlements, notably between the villages of Coombe Bissett and Homington. 4. Agricultural land of Grade 3 and above should be conserved and enhanced; appropriate mitigation measures should be taken to provide a net enhancement to biodiversity on or off-site on developed land of lower agricultural grade. <p>The policy goes on to state that unless an allocated site is in this Plan, development in the Countryside will be limited to that which supports community uses, essential infrastructure and that which requires a rural location (including the special circumstances set out in paragraph 55 of the NPPF).</p> | D for River Avon SAC | Policy is to be taken forward to appropriate assessment which will be undertaken at the Regulation 14 consultation stage. |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|---|--|-----------------------------|--|
| | <p>The policy itself does not allocate sites for development, however, it does support infill development in the plan area and as such there is a mechanism for a likely significant effect upon the River Avon SAC in combination with other plans and projects as the whole plan area lies within the catchment of the River Avon SAC. On this basis the policy is taken forward to appropriate assessment.</p> <p>Furthermore, any planning applications for infill development within the plan area will need to be considered at the planning application stage to ensure compliance with other Development Plan policies including Core Policy 50 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS)(Adopted January 2015), and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).</p> | | |
| <p>Policy ASD2: Maintaining a settlement gap between Coombe Bissett and Homington</p> | <p>This policy stipulates that development which would detract from the open character between Coombe Bissett and Homington as a settlement gap or reduce its visual separation and current extent should not be permitted. It goes on to state that development for recreational use such as a park or informal public open space may be supported providing the proposals do not detract from the open and undeveloped character of the area.</p> <p>This policy aims to preserve the distinct identity of the settlements of Coombe Bissett and Homington and will not lead directly to development. Therefore, the policy will not give rise to likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | <p>B</p> | |
| <p>Policy AS1: Provisionally Allocated Site - The Old Vicarage</p> | <p>This policy allocates the Old Vicarage site for residential purposes for up to four dwellings subject to the following conditions being met:</p> <p>Landscaping:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A landscaping scheme should be implemented to provide for an improvement in biodiversity, to protect the residential amenities of existing residents and to minimise the impact of noise and disturbance of traffic including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The retention of important trees (including the mature trees at the entrance of the site) and hedgerows. ii. Additional planting along the boundaries of the site. | <p>D for River Avon SAC</p> | <p>Policy is to be taken forward to appropriate assessment which will be undertaken at the Regulation 14 consultation stage.</p> |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|--------|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | <p>Flooding: 2. Assessment of water drainage and spring occurrence and effect on surrounding properties, with corresponding appropriate mitigation measures, including the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) and suitable permeable materials.</p> <p>Design: 3. Dwellings are designed in accordance with Coombe Bissett and Homington Design Guide. 4. Dwellings are compatible with the needs of older persons. 5. The design of the development should be complementary to the visual and historic character in the Conservation Area.</p> <p>Highways and Access: 6. Pedestrian egress from the Old Vicarage on to the pavement that leads to the centre of Coombe Bissett. 7. Development must meet the requirements of Wiltshire Council Highways. 8. Any development gain should contribute to improved road safety measures from Shutts Lane to the Homington Road.</p> <p>The allocated site lies in the catchment of the River Avon SAC and therefore, development of the site has potential to result in a likely significant effect upon the SAC and as such is screened into appropriate assessment on this basis.</p> <p>In addition, the allocated site lies approximately 40m from the River Ebble which flows eastwards into River Avon SAC. Therefore, any works at the site could lead to effects on the SAC downstream, most likely in-combination with other plans and projects given the small scale of development that would take place at the site.</p> <p>Details of any proposal(s) for development of the Old Vicarage site will need to be considered at the planning application stage to ensure acceptability with respect of other Development Plan policies including Core Policy 50</p> | | |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|--|--|-----------------------------|--|
| <p>Policy AS2: Provisionally Allocated Site - Kenora Paddock</p> | <p>(Biodiversity and Geodiversity) of the WCS and the NPPF.</p> <p>This policy allocates the site at Kenora Paddock for residential purposes for up to six dwellings providing the following criteria are met:</p> <p>Highways and access: 1) Development must meet the requirements of Wiltshire Council Highways to ensure safe access. 2) Any development gain arising from the site should be used to fund road safety infrastructure to the A354 to enable safe walking routes into the centre of the village from the site.</p> <p>Landscaping, Biodiversity and Noise: A landscaping scheme should be implemented to provide for an improvement in biodiversity, to protect the residential amenities of existing residents and to minimise the impact of noise and disturbance of traffic including: a) The retention of important trees and hedgerows. b) Additional planting along the boundaries of the site.</p> <p>Design: 4) Dwellings are designed in accordance with Coombe Bissett and Homington Design Guide. 5) Dwellings are compatible with the needs of younger families.</p> <p>Affordable Housing: 6) Development must include Affordable Housing provision of at least 40% (net).</p> <p>The allocated site lies in the catchment of the River Avon SAC and therefore, development of the site has potential to result in a likely significant effect upon the SAC and as such in screened into appropriate assessment on this basis.</p> <p>Details of any proposal(s) for development of the Kenora Paddock site will</p> | <p>D for River Avon SAC</p> | <p>Policy is to be taken forward to appropriate assessment which will be undertaken at the Regulation 14 consultation stage.</p> |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|---|---|-----------------------------|--|
| | <p>need to be considered at the planning application stage to ensure acceptability with respect of other Development Plan policies including Core Policy 50 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) of the WCS and the NPPF.</p> | | |
| <p>Policy AS3: Reserve Site – Rear of Avalon (eastern half)</p> | <p>This policy allocates the rear of Avalon (eastern half) as a reserve site for the development of up to six dwellings subject to the following criteria:</p> <p>Highways and access: 1) Development must meet the requirements of Wiltshire Council Highways to ensure safe access. 2) Any development gain arising from the site should be used to fund road safety infrastructure to the A354 to enable safe walking routes into the centre of the village from the site.</p> <p>Flooding: 3) There is an assessment of water drainage and its possible effect on surrounding properties, with corresponding appropriate mitigation measures, including the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) and suitable permeable materials.</p> <p>Landscaping, Biodiversity and Noise: 4) A landscaping scheme should be implemented to provide for an improvement in biodiversity and protect the residential amenities of existing residents, including where appropriate, additional planting along the boundaries of the site.</p> <p>Design: 5) Dwellings are designed in accordance with Coombe Bissett and Homington Design Guide. 6) Dwellings are compatible with the needs of younger families.</p> <p>Affordable Housing: 7) Development must include Affordable Housing provision of at least 40% (net).</p> | <p>D for River Avon SAC</p> | <p>Policy is to be taken forward to appropriate assessment which will be undertaken at the Regulation 14 consultation stage.</p> |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|---|---|----------------------|---|
| | <p>The allocated site lies in the catchment of the River Avon SAC and therefore, development of the site has potential to result in a likely significant effect upon the SAC and as such in screened into appropriate assessment on this basis.</p> <p>Details of any proposal(s) for development of the site at the rear of Avalon (eastern half) will need to be considered at the planning application stage to ensure acceptability with respect of other Development Plan policies including Core Policy 50 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) of the WCS and the NPPF.</p> | | |
| Policy EM1: Working from Home | <p>This policy states that planning permission for new development and extensions to current buildings will be granted if:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It provides infrastructure that enables full-fibre connection to superfast broadband. 2. It is in keeping with the scale, form and character of its surroundings. 3. It is of a density that is appropriate for a rural area and complies with the CB&HNP Design Guide. <p>Whilst this policy does not allocate sites for residential development, it does support new development for the purposes of facilitating increased levels of home working. Given that the whole NP area lies within the catchment of the River Avon SAC, any development that comes forward which is supported by this policy could give rise to a mechanism for a likely significant effect upon the SAC and as such in screened into appropriate assessment on this basis.</p> | D for River Avon SAC | Policy is to be taken forward to appropriate assessment which will be undertaken at the Regulation 14 consultation stage. |
| Policy EM2: Business in the Countryside | <p>This policy specifies that development that supports small-scale businesses, particularly where this is met through the conversion or re-use of buildings, will be permitted where the development is for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Restaurant and café or other rural business (Classes A3 and B1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987) (as amended). 2. The diversification of agricultural or other land-based rural business. 3. The provision or expansion of tourist and visitor facilities. 4. Planning applications for the conversion or extension of shops and leisure uses, including public houses, which are designed to improve their viability. | D for River Avon SAC | Policy is to be taken forward to appropriate assessment which will be undertaken at the Regulation 14 consultation stage. |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|---------------------|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | <p>5. The conversion of rural buildings to farm shops, which contribute to the rural economy.</p> <p>In addition, business in the countryside must:</p> <p>6. Ensure that the repurposing of existing buildings or the development of new buildings is in accordance with the Design Guide and in keeping with the scale, form and character of its surroundings.</p> <p>7. Have good access to and from the A354 and not significantly increase traffic through Coombe Bissett or Homington village.</p> <p>8. Not have a detrimental impact on road safety or significantly increase vehicle traffic flow along Homington Road.</p> <p>9. Have safe and suitable access to the site for all people.</p> <p>Whilst this policy does not allocate sites for development, it does promote development including the expansion of tourist and visitor facilities. Therefore, given that the whole NP area lies within the catchment of the River Avon SAC, any development for housing, tourism or visitor accommodation that comes forward as supported by this policy could give rise to a mechanism for a likely significant effect upon the SAC and as such in screened into appropriate assessment on this basis.</p> | | |
| Policy EDH1: Design | <p>This policy requires that all forms of development plan for the achievement of high-quality design; for example, by using local and traditional building materials to ensure respect for the local vernacular and historic character. It specifies that consideration should be given to using materials that promote recycling and reuse, and that new development must contribute to local character by retaining a sense of place appropriate to its location and actively demonstrate how it meets the Coombe Bissett and Homington Design Guide (AECOM, 2019) or successor document.</p> <p>The policy goes on to state that suburban influences should be minimised, new development should not exceed two storeys in height and development should be in keeping with its rural character. It requires that parking should be sensitive to the area’s rural and historic character and permeable surfaces should be used where possible to alleviate potential future flood impacts.</p> | A1 | |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|--|---|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | <p>The policy will not itself lead to development because it relates to design and other qualitative criteria for development. Therefore, the policy will not give rise to likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | | |
| <p>Policy EDH2: Views and Landscape Character</p> | <p>This policy states that new development will be in keeping with existing settlement patterns, maintaining the shape of the villages within the landscape and protecting their distinctive identity and landscape character. It states that development will be supported where it:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conserves and enhances the landscape and scenic beauty of the Parish and the key characteristics of this part of the CC AONB. 2. Safeguards open countryside and cherished public views from inside and outside of the Parish. 3. Does not adversely impact on the identified views and vistas listed in the NP. 4. Does not adversely impact on Local Green Spaces identified in Policy - Local Green Spaces. 5. Retains the defined gap between Coombe Bissett and Homington which maintains the distinct character of the two villages. 6. Conserve landscape features such as hedgerows, trees, woodlands, and watercourses. <p>The policy goes on to stipulate that development within land adjoining Coombe Bissett Down that contributes to the setting of Coombe Bissett Down Nature Reserve will only be permitted where it enhances and does not detract from its visual qualities and essential characteristics, and in particular should not adversely affect the views into and out of the Down by virtue of its location or design.</p> <p>The policy will not itself lead to development because it relates to design and other qualitative criteria for development and aims to conserve and enhance the natural and built/historic environment. Therefore, the policy will not result in likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | <p>A1 / A3</p> | |
| <p>Policy EDH3: The Environment and Biodiversity</p> | <p>This policy stipulates that development will be supported subject to compliance with other policies in the Plan and that it must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give the highest priority to conservation and enhancement of the amenity, | <p>A1 / A2</p> | |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|--|---|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | <p>visual quality, natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the CC AONB.</p> <p>2. Not adversely affect landscape character but where appropriate include measures to conserve, restore or enhance.</p> <p>3. Contribute towards the ecology of the area with measures to support a net gain in biodiversity. Development that is likely to have either a direct or indirect adverse impact upon the locally designated sites for nature conservation, priority habitats and/or protected species should demonstrate that appropriate mitigation and/or compensation will be provided.</p> <p>4. Maintain and where appropriate extend tree cover. Where removal is proposed due consideration shall be made of the Hedgerows Regulations, and in particular the hedges’ historic potential. Where removal is justified, the impact of removal shall be mitigated by the provision of additional appropriate planting. Where development will affect trees and/or hedgerows, proposals should be accompanied by a survey which establishes the health and longevity of affected trees and/or hedgerows and an appropriate management plan. Tree and woodland management must be sensitive to other ecological considerations such as protecting chalk downland.</p> <p>The policy will not itself lead to development because it relates to design and other qualitative criteria for development and aims to protect the natural environment. Thus, the policy will not result in likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | | |
| <p>Policy EDH 4: Energy and lighting</p> | <p>This policy specifies that development should have a minimal (approaching zero) environmental impact in terms of use of natural resources, such as energy and water, and consideration should be given to how development can have a positive environmental impact.</p> <p>It states that where compatible with the Design Code, the incorporation of rain harvesting, greywater recycling, high standards of insulation and renewable energy systems in new and existing development will be encouraged. It states that requirements for plug-in vehicles and ultra-low energy vehicle installations should be incorporated within all new housing and employment development.</p> | <p>A1 / A2</p> | |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|--|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | <p>The policy states that BREEAM assessments or equivalent are encouraged for non-residential development, and that roof designs should incorporate solar PV, either for immediate or future installations if it is not proven viable at the point of development and it does not adversely affect local character.</p> <p>The policy goes on to state that development proposals will only be supported if they do not jeopardise the status of the CC AONB dark skies reserve, and that any applications for development that requires a lighting scheme should demonstrate how the status of dark skies will be protected.</p> <p>The policy will not itself lead to development because it relates to design and other qualitative criteria for development and aims to protect the natural environment. As such, the policy will not result in likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | | |
| <p>Policy EDH5: Local Heritage Assets</p> | <p>This policy lists twelve non-listed heritage assets that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.</p> <p>The objective of this policy is to ensure local heritage assets are conserved and enhanced and it will not itself lead to development. As such, the policy will not result in likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | <p>A3</p> | |
| <p>Policy FDM1: Flooding and Drainage Management</p> | <p>This policy states that development within Flood Zones 2 and 3, or in known spring areas will only be supported if appropriate anti-flooding measures are incorporated into the development to the satisfaction of Wiltshire Council's Flooding Team; and concerns of the Parish Council are taken into account in the design of these measures. Any development within the Environment Agency Flood Alert Areas must also apply stringent flooding prevention and protection measures.</p> <p>The policy specifies that all proposals must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate that flood risk will not be increased in the vicinity of the development or elsewhere in the Parish. 2. Prove that the proposal will not have a detrimental impact on surface water run-off and sewage discharge in the Parish. 3. Be appropriately flood resilient and resistant for their lifetime. | <p>A1</p> | |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | <p>4. Consider how design and construction may affect the long-term hydrology of the site and the surrounding area, as well as the wider run-off and drainage to the River Ebble.</p> <p>5. Not result in any temporary or permanent adverse effect on the watercourse/s and consider the potential for waterlogging, land contamination and wastewater treatment capacity.</p> <p>The policy goes on to stipulate that all development will be expected to include an appropriately designed, constructed and maintained Sustainable Drainage System (SuD) and that the system may include at least one or a combination of the SuD design features detailed in the policy. It also requires that new development must be built to the highest optional water efficiency standards provided for by building regulations and highlights that these are currently a maximum water use of 110 litres per day (G2 of the Building Regulations, 2010).</p> <p>This policy will not itself lead to development and the objective of the policy is to ensure that new and windfall development addresses potential flood risk from all sources both on-site and for surrounding buildings and the wider environment. Therefore, the policy itself will not give rise to a likely significant effect upon any European sites.</p> | | |
| Policy STRF1: Road Safety | <p>This policy states that development that will generate greater levels of additional traffic should include within a Transport Statement consideration of how traffic impacts will be mitigated to ensure that the rural character of the Neighbourhood Area and the CC AONB will be conserved.</p> <p>It states that through engagement with landowners and Wiltshire Council Highways, new development should seek to address, where feasible:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhancement of existing and/or provision of additional passing places to avoid damage to the roadside edges. 2. Improvement to verges. 3. Provision of appropriate traffic calming measures. 4. Addressing road safety issues to prevent accidents. | A1 | |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|--|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | <p>It specifies that roadside footpaths should be sensitive to design features in keeping with the Design Code and the area’s rural character and should be accessible to all, where feasible.</p> <p>The objective of this policy is to encourage road safety in the Parish, and it will not itself lead to development. As such, the policy will not result in likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | | |
| <p>Policy SDRF2: Enabling a ‘Walkable Village’</p> | <p>This policy stipulates that the loss of existing footpaths, bridleways and byways will be strongly resisted. New development should be built around the concept of a ‘walkable village’ with integrated pathways/footpaths and, wherever possible, enable safe and accessible walking routes that link to the village centres and amenities. Roadside pavements/footpaths should be sensitive to design features in keeping with the Design Code and the area’s rural character and should be accessible to all, where feasible.</p> <p>The policy will not itself lead to development, instead setting out design and qualitative criteria for development. Therefore, the policy will not result in likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | <p>A1</p> | |
| <p>Policy STRF3: Sustainable Transport</p> | <p>This policy requires that any development should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Include charging points for motorised vehicles including mobility scooters. 2. Any extension that requires planning permission, or the replacement of a garage should include charging points for motorised vehicles including mobility scooters. 3. The provision of infrastructure to support sustainable transport will be encouraged such as secure and weatherproof cycle racks, if appropriate. 4. Fully consider and address where possible the needs of those who have mobility issues. <p>The policy also states that where development gain is used to support improved road infrastructure, adequate signage and space for cyclists should be fully considered.</p> <p>The policy will not itself lead to development, instead setting out design and qualitative criteria for development. Therefore, the policy will not lead to</p> | <p>A1</p> | |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|---|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| <p>Policy LWCF1: Local Green Spaces</p> | <p>likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> <p>This policy designates the seven outdoor recreation and amenity areas shown on the LGS proposals map in the NP and listed in the policy as Local Green Spaces due to their particular local significance for the community and their recreational, amenity, historic and/or environmental value.</p> <p>The policy stipulates that the management of these LGS should be consistent with green belt policy in the NPPF and that planning permission on recreation sites will be supported only if these enhance their primary function for designation.</p> <p>The policy goes on to state that development adjoining public open spaces and important gaps should enhance the character of these spaces by either providing a positive interface or a soft landscaped edge to complement the character of these spaces.</p> <p>The objective of this policy is to protect and promote recreational and amenity areas through the allocation of Local Green Spaces, and it will not itself lead to development. As such, the policy will not result in likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | <p>A1 / A3</p> | |
| <p>Policy LWCF2: Community facilities</p> | <p>This policy requires the siting of any infrastructure to address any adverse impact on local character and the CC AONB. All cabling should be underground, where feasible, and polemounted transformers should be avoided.</p> <p>The policy states the loss of a community building will only be acceptable where:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An equivalent or better replacement building is provided at another suitable location. 2. It can be demonstrated that all or part of a community building is no longer valued by the community either in its present use or alternative community uses. <p>It requires that new community facilities must be accessible for those with</p> | <p>A1</p> | |

| Policy | Policy Summary and Assessment under Habitats Regulations | Screening Category | Comments and Recommendations |
|--------|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| | <p>additional mobility requirements and the needs of those without the use of a car should be considered where appropriate.</p> <p>New community facilities or upgrades to existing facilities should: promote natural features within the development; provide spaces for outside interaction whilst providing for wildlife habitats, including gardens, open spaces and trees; and be sensitive to the setting of the area within the CC AONB.</p> <p>The policy goes on to detail off-site infrastructure requirements identified as a priority for relevant S106 agreements or CIL, and these comprise road safety measures to provide pedestrian access and footpath enhancements and the formal designation of a right of way across the boundary of the Coombe Bissett Down.</p> <p>The objective of this policy is to improve community facilities and recreational and amenity areas in the Parish, and it will not itself lead to development. As such, the policy will not give rise to likely significant effects upon any European sites.</p> | | |

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The HRA screening exercise presented in this document has concluded that the current draft of the Coombe Bissett and Homington NP has potential to lead to a likely significant effect on one European site and its qualifying features in-combination with other plans and projects. This is due to the allocation of three sites for residential development by means of Policy AS1 (4 dwellings), Policy AS2 (6 dwellings) and Policy AS3 (6 dwellings) within the catchment of the River Avon SAC, and on account of the support and promotion of residential and tourism development within the plan area (the whole of which lies within the River Avon SAC catchment), by means of Policy ASD1, Policy EM1 and Policy EM2. These six policies have potential to lead to significant effects on the aforementioned European site due to the contribution that development makes to river phosphorus levels through inputs from sewage treatment works and package treatment plants. Development in close proximity to the River Ebbel, which flows eastwards through the NP area into the River Avon, may also result in indirect effects on the SAC in combination with other plans and projects.
- 5.2 It is therefore necessary for the six aforementioned NP policies to be taken forward to appropriate assessment under Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. The appropriate assessment will be conducted by the competent authority, namely Wiltshire Council, at the Regulation 14 consultation stage.
- 5.3 It should also be noted that if any changes are made to the NP or the policies contained therein, it will be necessary for the amended NP to be subject to a repeat HRA screening exercise.

Prepared by Emma Fisher, Ecologist, Wiltshire Council
13th August 2021