

**Babergh & Mid Suffolk District
Councils**

**Aldham Neighbourhood
Plan Review
SEA Screening Opinion**

Final report
Prepared by LUC
May 2024

Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The existing Aldham Neighbourhood Plan was adopted ('made') by Babergh District Council in 2020. Aldham Parish Council is now in the process of reviewing the 2020 Neighbourhood Plan to bring it in line with the new policies for the location of development across Babergh, as set out in the recently adopted Part 1 Joint Local Plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk. Aldham is located within Babergh District, approximately three miles north east of Hadleigh and nine miles from Ipswich, to the east. LUC has been appointed by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils to consider whether there is a need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan Review.

1.2 SEA may be required for a Neighbourhood Plan, if it is likely to have significant environmental effects. Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is similar to SEA. However, SA includes assessment of the likely significant effects of a plan or programme on economic and social factors, as well as environmental factors. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)¹ clarifies that there is no legal requirement for a Neighbourhood Plan to be subject to SA, but that SA can be used to demonstrate how the plan will contribute to sustainable development.

1.3 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have commissioned LUC to carry out SEA Screening of the Aldham Neighbourhood Plan Review March 2024 (hereafter referred to as the Neighbourhood Plan Review) in order to determine whether an assessment is required under European Directive 2001/42/EC (the SEA Directive), transposed into UK law through the SEA Regulations².

1.4 SEA Screening for the current Neighbourhood Plan was carried out by Place Services on behalf of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and determined that a full SEA would not be required. The scope of the Neighbourhood Plan Review is limited to Chapters 3 (Planning Policy Context) and 5 (Planning Strategy) of the 2020 Neighbourhood Plan, and

¹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2016, updated 2021). Planning Practice Guidance. (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>)

² The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SI 2004/1633), as amended by The Environmental Assessments and

Miscellaneous Planning (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/1232). It should be noted that the purpose of the amendments to the SEA Regulations is to ensure that the law functions correctly after the UK has left the European Union. No substantive changes are made to the way the SEA regime operates.

therefore this SEA Screening focuses on those elements of the Neighbourhood Plan only.

1.5 In October 2023 the Levelling up and Regeneration Act received royal assent, setting out detailed reforms to the planning system. Amongst other things, the Act allows for the replacement of the current SEA regime with a new requirement for an Environmental Outcomes Report. The specific requirements will be set out in forthcoming regulations, along with information about transition arrangements; however at present the requirement for SEA remains as set out in existing legislation.

Chapter 2

SEA Screening

Scope of the Neighbourhood Plan Review

2.1 Aldham Parish Council has prepared a Neighbourhood Plan Review Public Consultation document (March 2024), which is being subject to public consultation until 13th May 2024.

2.2 The existing Neighbourhood Plan sets out seven planning policies (ALD1 - 7) which outline the spatial strategy as well as the approach to local green space and protected habitats. The majority of the 2020 Neighbourhood Plan policies have been retained with Policy ALD1 – Spatial Strategy being the only policy that will be updated. The revised Policy ALD1 states that the Neighbourhood Area will accommodate development commensurate with the policies of the adopted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan – Part 1. The focus for new development will be within the defined Settlement Boundaries where the principle of development is accepted. The policy specifies that proposals for development outside of that area will only be permitted where they are in accordance with national, district and neighbourhood level policies and where they would not have a detrimental impact. The 2020 Neighbourhood Plan allocated two sites for around 15 dwellings under Policies ALD3 and ALD4, and these aspects of the Plan are not subject to review.

Baseline Information

2.3 This section summarises baseline information for the parish of Aldham, drawing from the information set out in the 2020 Neighbourhood Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan Review March 2024.

Context

2.4 Aldham is one of the smallest villages within Babergh District, in the county of Suffolk. The village is approximately three miles north east of Hadleigh and nine miles west of Ipswich, with the main built-up area primarily focused as a ribbon along The Street. There are also two clusters of dwellings at Red Hill and around Aldham Hall and Church.

Biodiversity, flora and Fauna

2.5 There are no internationally designated conservation sites within Aldham although the parish is within 13km of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA) to the south east. In addition, a portion

of Hintlesham Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) falls within south eastern part of the parish. The parish also contains pockets of Ancient Woodland, the largest being Wolves Wood. There are also two priority habitats present: deciduous woodland and good quality semi-improved grassland.

2.6 The Neighbourhood Plan area is located within the 13km “Zone of Influence” of the Stour and Orwell Estuary SPA and Ramsar site to the south east. Unless mitigated against, Natural England considers that additional residential development within the Zone of Influence could have a detrimental impact on the designations due to an increase in recreational trips.

Population

2.7 At the time of the 2021 Census, Aldham had a population of 184 people. The 2011 Census indicates that 53.2% of those aged 16 years and over were in work compared to 46.7% being economically inactive. The largest age group within the parish was between 165 to 64.

Human Health

2.8 Based on the 2021 census, 82.9% of the Aldham population was in either ‘very good health’ or ‘good health’ which is very slightly higher than the average for Babergh District as a whole which is 82.2%.

2.9 There are no GPs within Aldham and the closest hospital is in Ipswich.

Soil

2.10 The entirety of the parish is Grade 3 Agricultural Land, although it is not clear if it is Grade 3a (classed as high quality) or the lower quality Grade 3b. The soilscape is made up of lime-rich loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage and slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils.

Water

2.11 A small portion of the parish lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3, with those areas associated with a small stream, a tributary to the River Brett, which is located in the south west. Flood Zone 3 comprises land assessed as having a 1 in 100 or greater annual probability of river flooding (>1%), or a 1 in 200 or greater annual probability of flooding from the sea (>0.5%) in any year.

Air Quality and Climatic Factors

2.12 There are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) within or near to Aldham Parish. The closest AQMA is nine miles from the parish to the west within Ipswich.

2.13 Climate data are not available at parish level, but within Babergh District as a whole, reductions in overall carbon emissions of 28% were achieved between 2005 and 2019. This reduction was mostly due to progress in reducing emissions from domestic sources, closely followed by industrial and commercial sectors, with minimal progress on transport emissions. Transport makes the largest contribution to carbon emissions in Babergh District.

Material Assets

2.14 The 2020 Neighbourhood Plan designated Pump Green, The Street as Local Green Space and this remains unchanged in the Neighbourhood Plan Review.

2.15 Public transport is poor, with just a limited weekly Community Transport service available. The nearest railway station is located in Ipswich 9 miles to the east.

2.16 The parish contains multiple Public Rights of Way that provide access to the surrounding countryside.

2.17 There are no shops or facilities in Aldham and it relies on the use of neighbouring Elmsett’s village hall, primary school, shop, public house and playing field. However, the Church of St Mary lies in one of the built up areas of the village.

Cultural Heritage

2.18 The parish contains six Listed Buildings, the most notable of which is the Grade I listed Church of St. Mary. The remainder of the Listed Buildings date primarily from the 16th or 17th century and are as follows:

- Aldham Hall, Church Lane;
- Church Lane Cottage, Church Land;
- Flemish House, Red Hill;
- Redhill Cottage, Red Hill; and
- Yew Tree Farmhouse, The Street.

2.19 There have also been a number of archaeological finds in the Neighbourhood Plan area, including Roman coins and pottery, and Saxon metalwork.

Landscape

2.20 There are no designated landscapes within or very close to Aldham Parish, the nearest being Dedham Vale National Landscape approximately 5km to the south.

2.21 The central and eastern part of the Parish is located relatively high on a plateau with extensive views across the surrounding countryside. The western end is dominated by the steep valley sides of a tributary to the River Brett.

2.22 The Parish sits within the South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland National Character Area. It is an ancient landscape of wooded arable countryside with a distinct sense of enclosure. The overall character is of a gently undulating, chalky boulder clay plateau, the undulations being caused by the numerous small-scale river valleys that dissect the plateau. The Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment states that Aldham falls within Ancient Plateau Claylands.

SEA Screening

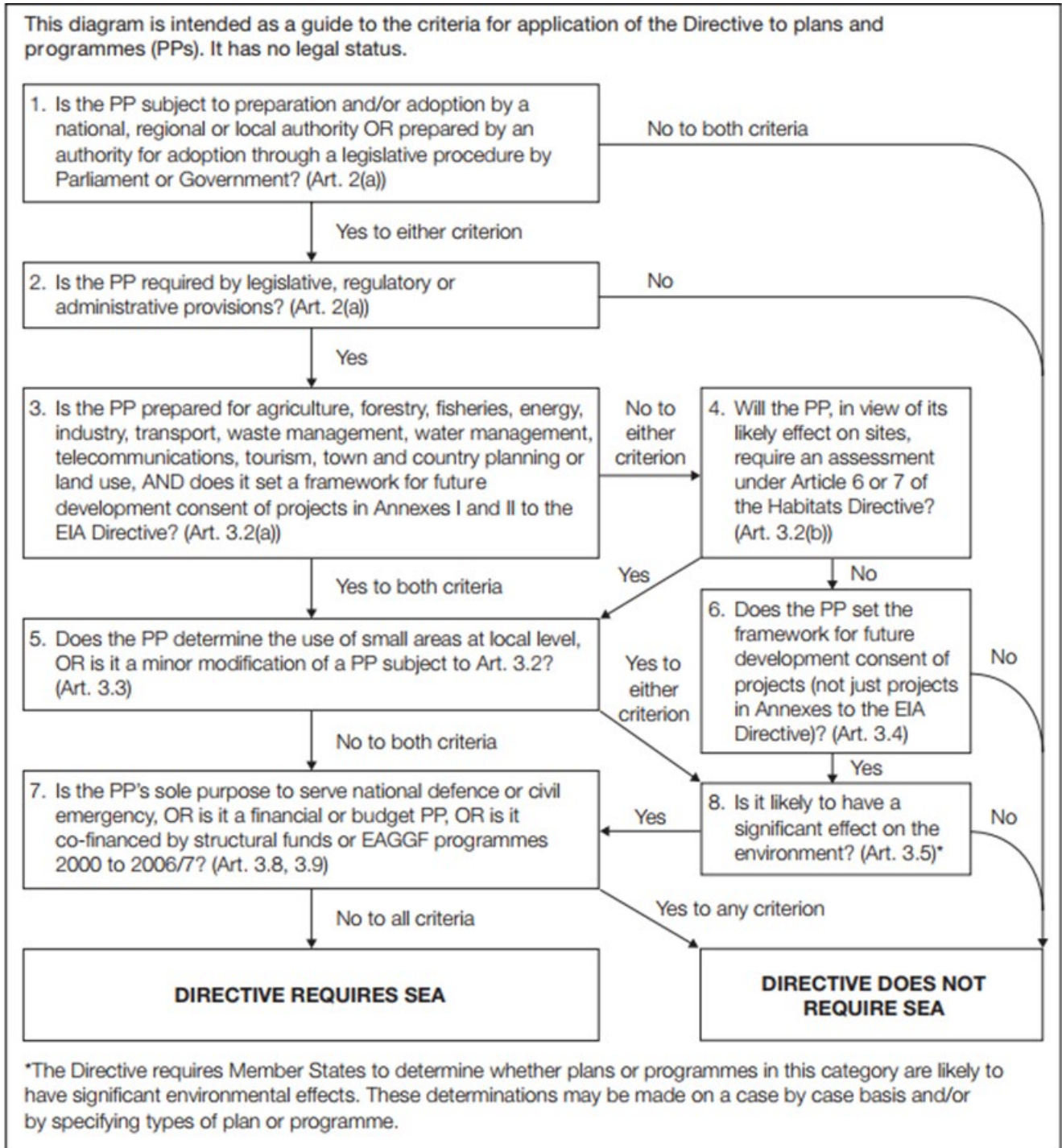
2.23 An assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the Neighbourhood Plan Review March 2024 requires SEA in accordance with the SEA Regulations.

2.24 **Figure 2.1** overleaf presents the flow diagram entitled 'Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes' which is taken from the Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive³, published in September 2005. This is a useful guide when considering whether a plan should be subject to SEA (The Practical Guide has been superseded by the Planning Practice Guidance; however it still provides a useful and relevant guide to the process to use in making SEA screening decisions).

³ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005). A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. (see

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf)

Figure 2.1: Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes



2.25 Table 2.1 below presents the assessment of whether the Aldham Neighbourhood Plan Review will require a full SEA. The questions in the first column are drawn from the diagram above which sets out how the SEA Directive should be applied.

Table 2.1: Application of SEA Directive to the Aldham Neighbourhood Plan Review

Stage	Yes/No	Reason
1. Is the PP (plan or programme) subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Article 2(a))	Yes	The Neighbourhood Plan Review is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and will be adopted ('made') by the Local Authority (Babergh District Council) as part of the statutory development plan. Move to Q2.
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Article 2(a))	No	The Neighbourhood Plan Review is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. However, there is no requirement to produce a Neighbourhood Plan; it is an optional plan. Once made it will become part of the statutory development plan. Therefore, it should continue to be screened. Move to Q3.
3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Article 3.2(a))	Yes and No	The Neighbourhood Plan Review is being prepared for town and country planning and land use, but it does not set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive. Move to Q4.
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Article 3.2 (b))	No	Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening of the Neighbourhood Plan Review has been undertaken separately on behalf of Babergh District Council and has concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan Review is not likely to have a significant effect on any European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Move to Q6.
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)	Yes	The 2020 Neighbourhood Plan allocated two sites for housing development, one of which already has planning permission and the other does not, although these are outside of the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan Review and the Review does not make any additional site allocations. The Neighbourhood Plan Review does include a revised policy against which proposals for development within the Parish will be assessed. Move to Q8.

Stage	Yes/No	Reason
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	No	See Table 2.2. SEA IS NOT REQUIRED.

2.26 Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations sets out the criteria for determining the likely significance of effects. These are listed in **Table 2.2** below along with comments on the extent to which the Aldham Neighbourhood Plan Review meets these criteria.

Table 2.2: Likely Significant Effects of the Aldham Neighbourhood Plan Review

SEA Requirement	Comments
The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:	
1. the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	<p>Once made, the Neighbourhood Plan Review will become part of the statutory development plan and will guide the delivery of development in Aldham, including in terms of design. The Neighbourhood Plan Review does not involve changes to the sites allocated in the 2020 Neighbourhood Plan or allocate any additional sites.</p> <p>The previously adopted Babergh Core Strategy (2014) identified Aldham as a 'Hinterland Village' under Policy CS2: Settlement Pattern. This policy also sought to direct development to towns/urban areas (which includes the Ipswich Fringe) and then to the Core Villages and Hinterland Villages. Policy CS3 made provision for 1,050 homes to be delivered at Core and Hinterland Villages over the Plan period to 2031.</p> <p>The recently adopted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 (Nov 2023) does not set out a settlement hierarchy. Following the examination of the Joint Local Plan it was decided that an up-to-date settlement hierarchy will now come forward in Part 2 of the Plan. This is at an early stage in its development and is unlikely to be adopted for some time.</p>
2. the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan Review has to be in general conformity with the local strategic framework (i.e. the adopted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 and saved policies from the previous local plans). The Neighbourhood Plan Review must also have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework. The Neighbourhood Plan Review does not have influence over other plans. Once made, the Neighbourhood Plan Review will form part of the statutory development plan for Aldham Parish and will be used in conjunction with the adopted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 and the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 2 (once adopted) to determine planning applications.</p>

SEA Requirement	Comments
3. the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,	One of the Basic Conditions which the Neighbourhood Plan Review must meet is to contribute to sustainable development.
4. environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,	Baseline information relating to Aldham Parish was described earlier in this report. Key issues of relevance to the Neighbourhood Plan Review are the presence of land within flood zones 2 and 3, one SSSI (Hintlesham Woods), multiple Priority Habitats and Ancient Woodland.
5. the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).	N/A
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:	
6. the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,	The Neighbourhood Plan Review does not allocate any additional sites for housing. The Neighbourhood Plan Review covers the period up to 2036. Effects of the Neighbourhood Plan Review are expected to be mostly indirect, due to no additional sites being allocated. Most effects will be long-term and permanent.
7. the cumulative nature of the effects,	<p>Cumulative effects could result from the Neighbourhood Plan Review in combination with development that takes place in the surrounding towns and villages – albeit the Neighbourhood Plan Review does not allocate any additional sites for development and the parish of Aldham is rural and around three miles to the nearest settlement (Hadleigh) approximately three miles southwest.</p> <p>The previously adopted Babergh Core Strategy (2014) identified Aldham as a ‘Hinterland Village’ in the settlement hierarchy, with the expectation that it would accommodate some development to help meet local need. The adopted Part 1 Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan does not identify a minimum housing requirement for Aldham.</p>
8. the transboundary nature of the effects,	The Neighbourhood Plan Review focuses on Aldham Parish only. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers to transboundary effects on other EU Member States; therefore they are not relevant to this Neighbourhood Plan Review.
9. the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),	There are no anticipated risks to human health or the environment from the Neighbourhood Plan Review.
10. the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),	The Neighbourhood Plan Review covers the entirety of Aldham Parish. The population of the parish, according to the 2021 Census, was 184 people.

SEA Requirement	Comments
<p>11. the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, ■ exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, ■ intensive land-use, 	<p>Aldham Parish is home to Priority Habitats, and there are six listed buildings within the parish. There are several sensitive locations within the parish including the Hintlesham Woods SSSI, as well as patches of ancient woodland. The parish contains Grade 3 agricultural land. There are no internationally designated nature conservation sites within the parish, but the parish is within 13km of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar and SPA.</p>
<p>12. the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>There are no designated landscapes within or very close to Aldham Parish, the nearest being Dedham Vale National Landscape approximately 5km to the south.</p>

SEA Screening Conclusion

2.27 A screening assessment has been undertaken by applying the criteria from the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations to determine whether or not the Aldham Neighbourhood Plan Review is likely to have significant environmental effects when assessed against the topics listed in the SEA Regulations.

2.28 The Neighbourhood Plan Review amends only one policy in the 2020 Neighbourhood Plan, to bring it in line with the new policies for the location of development across Babergh, as set out in the recently adopted Part 1 Joint Local Plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk. It does not allocate any additional sites for development.

2.29 On this basis, it is considered that the Aldham Neighbourhood Plan Review is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and full SEA is therefore not required.

Next Steps

2.30 This SEA screening opinion will be sent to the three statutory consultees (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) and will be reviewed as appropriate in light of any comments received.

LUC
May 2024