

**Babergh & Mid Suffolk District
Councils**

**Boxford Neighbourhood
Plan**
SEA Screening Opinion

Final report
Prepared by LUC
July 2021

Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Boxford Parish Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. Boxford is located within Babergh District, approximately 6.5km to the south-east of Sudbury. 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.

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 but includes assessment of the likely significant effects of a plan or programme on economic and social factors, as well as environmental factors. Planning Practice Guidance¹ (PPG) 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 Pre-Submission Draft version of the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan (July 2021) 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 <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) and The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes

(Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/1531). 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.

Chapter 2

SEA Screening

Scope of the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan

2.1 Boxford Parish Council has prepared the Pre-Submission Draft (Regulation 14) version of the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan which is being subject to public consultation between July and September 2021.

2.2 The Neighbourhood Plan covers the entire parish of Boxford. The Pre-Submission consultation document includes a vision for the long-term future of Boxford along with nine objectives:

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 characters of the individual settlements within the parish.
5. To conserve and enhance the characters of the Conservation Area and historic assets.
6. To encourage new suitable housing growth that is future proofed against climate change.
7. To protect important views and the scenic beauty of the wider landscape setting of the open countryside.
8. To maintain and enhance community cohesion and protect existing village infrastructure from unacceptable development.
9. To support existing businesses in the village and allow them to expand in a suitable way.

2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan then sets out 19 policies to realise and deliver the vision for Boxford. Each policy relates to a particular objective under the following seven themes: Housing, A Transport Strategy for Boxford, The Built and Historic Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change, the Natural Environment, Community Infrastructure and Business. The overall spatial strategy for the plan area is set out in policy BOX 1 which specifies that new development will be focused within the defined settlement boundaries of Boxford village, Stone Street and Calais Street. Proposals for development

located outside the settlement boundaries will only be permitted for specific purposes.

2.4 It is noted that Boxford has already met the planned Local Housing Requirement up to 2037. The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan (BMSJLP) indicates a total homes requirement of 13 dwellings, nine of which are already committed in the form of unimplemented planning permissions up to 1st April 2018. A further nine dwellings have since been permitted, with a further 64 dwellings still in planning and subject to judicial review as of March 2021. Five dwellings have been allocated in the submitted BMSJLP at Calais Street.

2.5 The Neighbourhood Plan therefore only considers the potential for further specific small-scale growth within the parish either where it would contribute towards a specific identified housing need that is not being met by recent developments or where it would provide another specific community benefit identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. Policy BOX 1A allocates land for seven dwellings at Stone Street on the basis that this development would also provide a village car park which would address the issue of car parking at Boxford CEVC Primary School.

2.6 Policies BOX 2-19 address a range of topics including the landscape, flooding, biodiversity and the protection of the historic environment. Together these policies seek to ensure that new development in Boxford is high quality and sensitively designed so as not to have adverse impacts on the surroundings.

Baseline Information

2.7 This section summarises baseline information for the parish of Boxford, drawing from the information set out in the Pre-Submission Draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Context

2.8 Boxford is a village and civil parish in the Suffolk District of Babergh, eastern England. It is located around 6.5km to the south-east of Sudbury. The A1071 runs through the built-up area of the village, taking traffic to and from Sudbury, Hadleigh and Ipswich. The total area of the parish is around 538 hectares.

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

2.9 There are no internationally or nationally designated biodiversity sites within Boxford Parish. The closest is Edwardstone Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is located within 500m of the parish boundary to the north-west in Edwardstone Parish.

2.10 There are two County Wildlife Sites located in Boxford Parish - River Box Meadows in the south and The Goodlands in the north-west.

2.11 There are also several priority habitats found in the parish including good quality semi-improved grassland located in the south and north-west, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh in the south and pockets of deciduous woodlands and traditional orchards located primarily next to the village of Boxford.

Population

2.12 At the time of the 2011 Census, the population of Boxford was 1,221 and according to a 2019 estimate by Suffolk Observatory the total figure may have risen to 1,327. At the time of the 2011 Census the gender balance was approximately a 50/50 split of male and female. The parish has a relatively older population, with 26.6% of residents over the age of 65 compared to the Suffolk and England figures of 23.6% and 18.4% respectively.

2.13 The 2011 Census showed that there were 531 (62%) economically active residents aged 16 to 74 which was lower than both the Babergh average of 70.3% and the England average of 69.9%.

Human health

2.14 In terms of the health of Boxford residents, according to the 2011 Census 50.4% of people were classified as in very good health, 34.5% as good, 11.6% as fair, 2.9% as bad and 0.7% as very bad. These health statistics are similar to those for Babergh District and for England as a whole; however the 'very good' figure for Boxford Parish is slightly higher than the averages for Babergh District (46.6%) and England (47.2%).

Soil

2.15 Boxford Parish comprises primarily Grade 3 agricultural land, with pockets of Grade 2 agricultural land found to the west, north-east and south-east of the parish boundary.

Water

2.16 The majority of the parish does not lie in Flood Zones 2 or 3 and therefore has a low probability of flooding, with the exception of land associated with the River Box. This land is designated as Flood Zone 3 and is 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 and Climatic Factors

2.17 There are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) that have been declared within Boxford, the nearest being on the far side of Sudbury.

2.18 Climate data is not available at parish level, but within Babergh District as a whole, reductions in overall carbon emissions of 37% were achieved between 2005 and 2017. 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

2.19 For a village with a community of approximately 540 dwellings, Boxford benefits from a wide range of services and facilities and has been identified as a 'Core Village' in the Local Plan Settlement Hierarchy. The services and facilities in the parish include a primary school, nursery, village hall, public houses, café, a range of small shops, post office and medical facilities. There are also a range of small businesses which provide hair and beauty services, a local garage as well as public open spaces and sport pitches.

2.20 Public transport is limited in the parish, with only one bus service operating through Boxford between Ipswich and Sudbury approximately every two hours. The nearest railway station is located in Sudbury which provides access to London in 1 hour and 15 minutes.

2.21 There are a number of Public Rights of Ways distributed across the parish.

2.22 There is one GP practice located in the village of Boxford.

Landscape

2.23 Boxford Parish sits within an area classified in the Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment as Ancient Rolling Farmlands, described as rolling clayland landscapes dissected by small streams, and Rolling Valley Farmland which consists

of meadowland with gentle valley sides and an organic field pattern on the lower slopes.

2.24 There is one nationally designated landscape within Boxford, Dedham Vale AONB which extends within the south of the parish. Additionally, the entire valley of the River Box from the ford in Wash Lane northwards was designated a Special Landscape Area (SLA) in the Babergh District Council Local Plan 2006 due to its landscape sensitivity and scenic quality.

Cultural Heritage

2.25 There are a number of listed buildings within the village of Boxford including the Grade I listed Church of St Mary and the Grade II* public house (The Fleece). All other listed buildings within the parish are Grade II.

2.26 There is one Conservation Area within the parish known as The Boxford Conservation Area which was originally designated by West Suffolk County Council in 1973 and covers the main village as well as extending south of the settlement area to include Stone Street further down the Box valley and Calais Street.

SEA Screening

2.27 An assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the Regulation 14 Pre-Submission version of the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan requires SEA in accordance with the SEA Regulations.

2.28 **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 National Planning Practice Guidance; however, it still provides a useful and relevant guide to the process to use in making SEA screening decisions).

³https://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

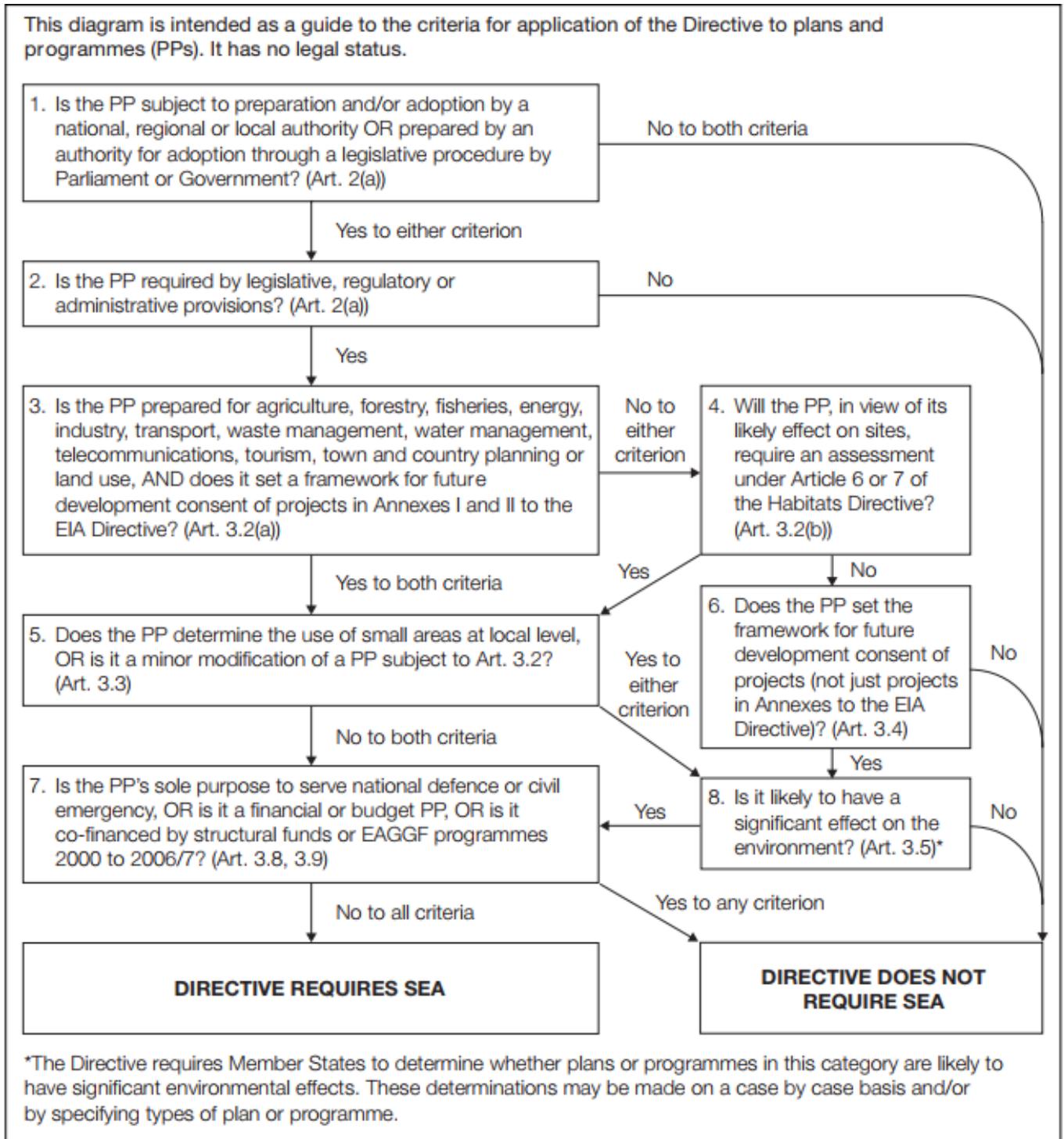


Table 2.1: Application of SEA Directive to the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan

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? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	The Boxford Neighbourhood Plan 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? (Art. 2(a))	No	The Neighbourhood Plan 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? (Art 3.2(a))	Yes and No	The Neighbourhood Plan 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? (Art. 3.2 (b))	Uncertain	HRA screening of the Neighbourhood Plan is being undertaken separately on behalf of Mid Suffolk District Council and the outcome of that work is unknown at the time of writing. Therefore, it is necessary at this stage to consider both scenarios under Q4. Yes: Move to Q5. No: Move to Q6.
5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art.3.2? (Art. 3.3)	Yes and No	The Neighbourhood Plan allocates one site for housing development and a new car park. This is in addition to 18 dwellings which have already received planning permission, one outstanding application for 64 dwellings at Land east of Sand Hill and five dwellings at Calais Street allocated through the Pre-Submission Version of the BMSJLP. It is not a minor modification of a PP. Move to Q8.
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 Neighbourhood Plan allocates one site for housing development and a new car park. This is in addition to 18 dwellings which have already received planning permission, one outstanding application for 64 dwellings at Land east of Sand Hill and five dwellings at Calais Street allocated through the Pre-Submission Version of the BMSJLP. This sets out the framework for future development consent. The Neighbourhood Plan also provides a framework for the development of small-scale affordable housing schemes on rural exception sites outside of the Settlement Boundary where certain criteria are met, although it does not allocate sites for this purpose.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	Yes	See Table 2.2. SEA IS REQUIRED

2.29 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 Boxford Neighbourhood Plan meets these criteria.

Table 2.2: Likely Significant Effects

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 Boxford Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the statutory development plan and will guide the delivery of development in Boxford Parish, including in terms of design. The Neighbourhood Plan allocates one site for housing development and a new car park. This is in addition to 18 dwellings which have already received planning permission but has not yet been implemented, one outstanding application which is subject to judicial review for 64 dwellings at Land east of Sand Hill and five dwellings at Calais Street allocated through the Pre-Submission Version of the BMSJLP. This sets out the framework for future development consent, although it is noted that the site allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan is very small scale, being for only seven dwellings. The Neighbourhood Plan also provides a framework for the development of small-scale affordable housing schemes on rural exception sites outside of the Settlement Boundary where certain criteria are met, although it does not allocate sites for this purpose.</p> <p>The adopted Babergh Core Strategy (2014) identifies Boxford as a Core Village in Policy CS2 – Settlement Pattern. This policy seeks to direct development to towns/urban areas and to the Core Villages and Hinterland Villages. The Core Strategy provides for a total of 1,050 dwellings at the Hinterland Villages over the Plan period to 2031.</p> <p>The emerging BMSJLP identifies Boxford as a Core Village. While the new Local Plan is unlikely to be adopted until later in 2021 or early 2022, it has been taken into consideration in the preparation of the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan. It is noted that the Regulation 19 (Pre-Submission) version of the Joint Local Plan makes provision for 9,611 new homes across Mid Suffolk between 2018 and 2037 and proposes that 28% of these will be in the Core Villages. For Boxford specifically, the emerging Joint Local Plan identifies a minimum figure of 13 new homes. As there are 18 units with planning permission, Boxford has already achieved its minimum requirement.</p>
2.the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	The Neighbourhood Plan has to be in general conformity with the local strategic framework (i.e. the adopted Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008, review 2012) and the emerging BMSJLP). The Neighbourhood Plan must also have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework. The Neighbourhood Plan does not have influence over other plans. Once made, the Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the statutory development plan for Boxford Parish and will be used in conjunction with the emerging BMSJLP (once adopted) to determine planning applications.
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 must meet is to contribute to sustainable development.
4. environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,	Baseline information relating to Boxford Parish was described earlier in this chapter. Key issues of relevance to the Neighbourhood Plan are the presence of high-quality agricultural land, land within Flood Zone 3, two County Wildlife Sites, Dedham Vale AONB and designated heritage assets including a Conservation Area and a number of listed buildings within the parish.
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:	

SEA Requirement	Comments
6. the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,	The Neighbourhood Plan allocates one site for housing development and a car park. This in addition to the 18 homes where planning consent has already been granted, one outstanding application which is subject to judicial review for 64 dwellings at land east of Sand Hill and five dwellings allocated at Calais Street through the Pre-Submission version of the BMSJLP. The Neighbourhood Plan covers the period 2018-2037 and the effects of housing development that occurs during the plan period are expected to be long-term and permanent. Any effects associated specifically with construction are likely to be short-term and temporary.
7. the cumulative nature of the effects,	<p>Cumulative effects could result from the Neighbourhood Plan in combination with development that takes place in the surrounding towns and villages – albeit the parish of Boxford is rural and the scale of development proposed is small (only seven dwellings).</p> <p>As the emerging BMSJLP is still in its development, it is not yet possible to assess with certainty the amount and location of development that may result from the Plan within and close to Boxford Parish. It is noted that the Neighbourhood Plan proposes allocating one new site for housing development and the provision of a car park, in addition to the 18 dwellings that already have planning consent. If that site were to come forward as well as the sites already allocated in the Local Plan, there could be cumulative effects on the parish.</p> <p>The Adopted Babergh Core Strategy (2014) identifies Boxford as a 'core village' in the settlement hierarchy, with the expectation that new development should meet local needs.</p>
8. the transboundary nature of the effects,	The Neighbourhood Plan focuses on Boxford Parish only. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers transboundary effects on other EU Member States; therefore they are not relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan.
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.
10. the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),	The Neighbourhood Plan covers all of Boxford Parish. According to the Government's most recent population estimates (2019) the population of the parish was 1,327.
11. the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, ■ exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, ■ intensive land-use, 	The majority of the built-up area of the village of Boxford is designated as a Conservation Area and there are numerous listed buildings within the parish, including the Grade I listed Church of St Mary. There is land within Flood Zone 3 within the parish, associated with the River Box which flows through the centre of the village, and there are also areas of high quality (Grade 2) agricultural land in the north-east, south-east and west of the parish in addition to two County Wildlife Sites.
12. the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	The southern part of the parish is located within Dedham Vale AONB. In addition, the entire valley of the River Box northwards of the ford in Wash Lane was designated as a Special Landscape Area by Babergh District Council in the Local Plan 2006.

SEA Screening Conclusion

2.30 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 Boxford Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental

effects when assessed against the topics listed in the SEA Regulations.

2.31 The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a vision, objectives and planning policies to shape development in the parish up to 2037. It allocates one site for residential development and a new car park at Stone Street that does not already have

planning permission. This in addition to the 18 homes where planning consent has already been granted, one outstanding application which is subject to judicial review for 64 dwellings at land east of Sand Hill and five dwellings allocated at Calais Street through the Pre-Submission version BMSJLP. The residential development allocated through the Neighbourhood Plan could have a range of environmental effects during the construction period and afterwards, in particular in relation to additional traffic generation and demand for water treatment. While the scale of the site allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan is small, there could be cumulative effects with the other development proposed in the parish.

2.32 The site allocated within the Neighbourhood Plan lies within a Special Landscape Area, is within the Boxford Conservation Area and contains land within Flood Zone 3. While it is outside of the AONB, it is within close proximity of the boundary and may contribute to the setting of the AONB.

2.33 There are policies in the Neighbourhood Plan and in the adopted Babergh Core Strategy that may provide mitigation, and mitigation may also be provided by the policies in the emerging BMSLJP although it is noted that, given its current stage of development, emerging policies may change.

2.34 However, given the sensitivity of the area in which the allocated site is are located, **it is considered that the Boxford Neighbourhood Plan has the potential to have significant environmental effects and that SEA is therefore required.**

Next Steps

2.35 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.