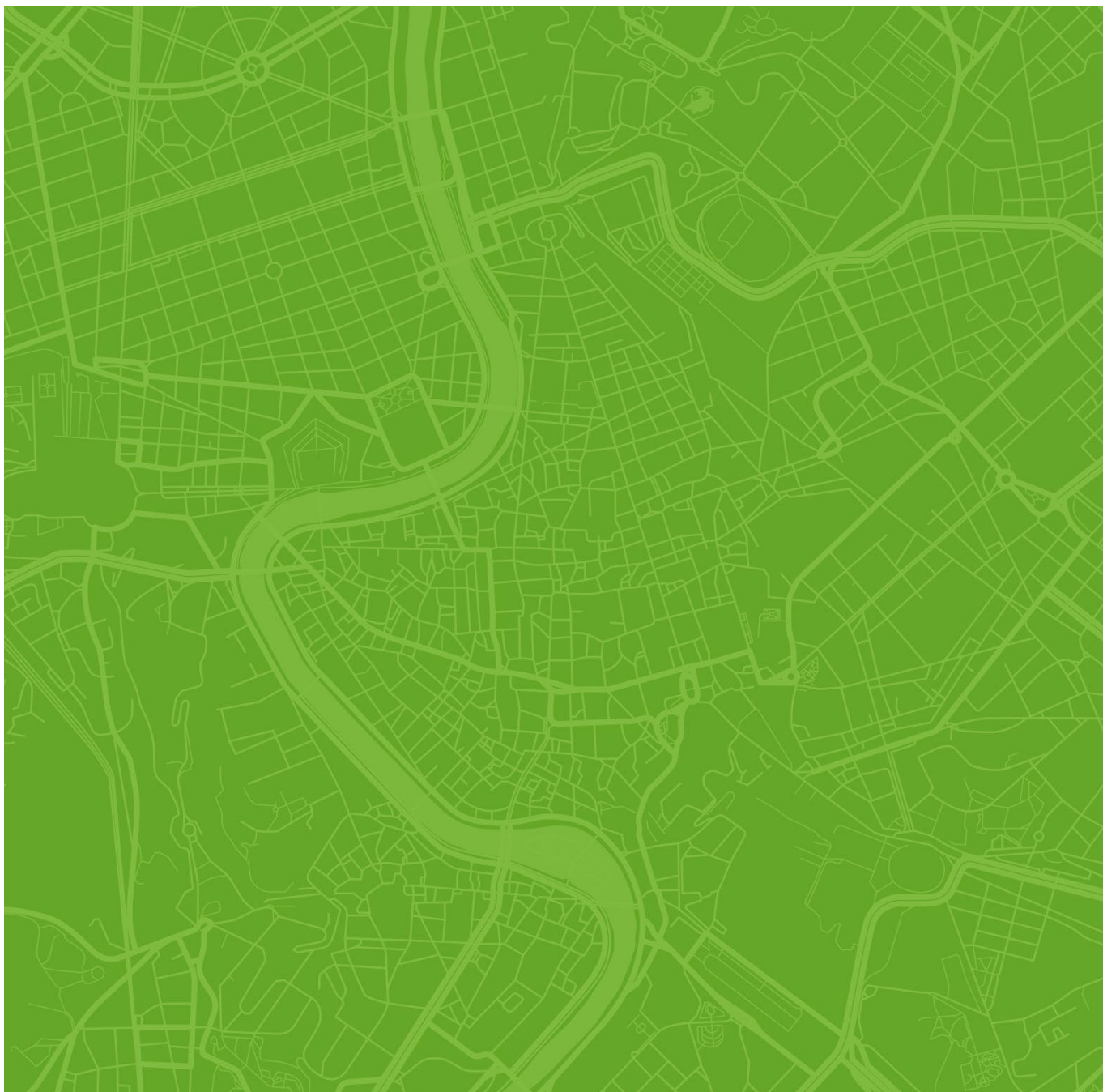


**Babergh & Mid Suffolk District
Councils**

Hartest Neighbourhood Plan 2024-2037 SEA Screening Opinion

Final report
Prepared by LUC
October 2024



Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

**Hartest Neighbourhood Plan 2024-2037
SEA Screening Opinion**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Hartest Parish Council is in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. Hartest is located in the north west of Babergh District, on the B1006 midway between Bury St Edmunds and 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 Hartest Neighbourhood Plan (October 2024) (hereafter referred to as the Neighbourhood Plan) 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 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.

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). 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 Hartest Neighbourhood Plan

2.1 Hartest Parish Council has prepared a Pre-Submission Draft version of the Neighbourhood Plan. This comprises a revised and updated version of the Neighbourhood Plan that was subject to Pre-Submission consultation in 2021. In response to comments made during the consultation and due to the adoption of new and up-to-date planning policies by Babergh District Council, the Parish Council has considered it necessary to make a number of changes to the 2021 Neighbourhood Plan and carry out further consultation.

2.2 The Neighbourhood Plan covers the entire Parish of Hartest. The October 2024 Pre-Submission Draft consultation document includes a vision for the long-term future of Hartest along with eight objectives, through which the vision will be achieved:

1. Protect and enhance the landscape, biodiversity and natural habitats.
2. Protect and enhance the historic environment.
3. Manage the provision of housing to meet identified local needs.
4. Preserve existing and promote an increase in green spaces and provide better access to them.
5. Improve movement to, from and around the Village.
6. Support and improve the provision of social, community, recreational and other leisure facilities.
7. Ensure that the level of services and infrastructure reasonably required to meet the day-to-day needs of the Village are available.
8. Increase opportunities for local economic investment and growth.

2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan then sets out 16 policies (HAR1-16) to realise and deliver the vision for Hartest, along with 10 Community Actions. These are matters which do not form part of the statutory Neighbourhood Plan but address matters of local concern.

2.4 The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any sites for new housing or other built development. Policy HAR 1 – Hartest’s Spatial Strategy states that the Neighbourhood Area will accommodate development commensurate with the

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan. The focus for new development will be within the defined settlement boundary where the principle of development is accepted. The policy outlines that proposals for development located outside the settlement boundary will only be permitted where they are in accordance with national, district and neighbourhood level policies and, additionally, where they would not have a detrimental impact on heritage and landscape designations.

2.5 Policy HAR 2 – Housing Development states that within the Settlement Boundary there is a general presumption in favour of housing development in the form of small brownfield ‘windfall’ sites and infill plots of one or two dwellings where proposals would not have a detrimental impact on the built and natural character of the site and its surroundings, the amenity of residents and infrastructure, including highways. Further to this, Policy HAR 3 – Housing Mix and Design states that proposals for new dwellings will be supported where they provide two or three bedroom dwellings designed to be adaptable for lifetime occupation.

2.6 Other policies in the Plan address topics including the natural environment, local economy, services and facilities and the historic environment.

Baseline Information

2.7 This section summarises baseline information for the Parish of Hartest, drawing from the information set out in the October 2024 Pre-Submission Draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Context

2.8 Hartest is a small village located in an area known as High Suffolk, which is situated at the north-western extremity of Babergh District, on the B1066. The village of Hartest is closely linked with the adjoining hamlets of Boxted and Somerton, and is within six miles of the larger villages of Glemsford and Long Melford.

Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

2.9 There are no internationally designated sites within the Parish. At the eastern edge of the Parish there are two ancient woodlands; Ashen Wood and Bavins Wood, which are designated Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs), recognised for their diverse ecosystems.

2.10 There are also two Country Wildlife Sites in the Parish. These are The Cemetery, located in the centre of the Parish, and a site adjacent to Stowe Hill, both valued for their wildlife species.

2.11 The following Priority Habitats are within the Parish: deciduous woodland, traditional orchards and good quality semi-improved grassland.

2.12 Lapwing, which is a Species of Principal Importance in England has been recorded within the Parish.

2.13 Additionally, there is a stream which is a tributary of the River Glem, which runs through the centre of the village, and is of high ecological value. The stream acts as a wildlife corridor for species such as otter, and it is therefore locally important, although it has no formal protection.

Population

2.14 At the time of the 2021 census, the population of Hartest was 477. The 45 to 64 age bracket makes up the largest group in the Parish, representing 32% of the population. Between 2011 and 2021 Hartest has seen a 22% increase in residents aged 65 and over, which reflects trends found in many villages and Babergh District as a whole, with an increasing proportion of elderly residents compared with 10 years ago. It also shows a smaller proportion of children living in the village.

Human Health

2.15 In terms of the health of Hartest residents, according to the 2021 Census, 56.6% of people classified themselves as in very good health, 30.8% as good, 10% as fair, 1.9% as bad and 1.0% as very bad. The health statistics show a higher proportion of residents in Hartest classified as in very good health compared to Babergh District and England as a whole, whilst health statistics for the other categories are comparable to those of Babergh and the national averages.

2.16 Hartest has an ageing population which is likely to lead to more cases of residents suffering from age-related conditions such as dementia.

Soil

2.17 The Parish is comprised of heavy loam and clay soils and is primarily classified as Grade 2 and Grade 3 agricultural land. It is not known whether the Grade 3 land is the high quality Grade 3a or lower quality Grade 3b.

Water

2.18 The centre of the village as well as the south western section of the Parish fall within Flood Zones 2 and 3 which is associated with a tributary of the River Glem.

Air Quality and Climatic Factors

2.19 There are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) that have been declared within Hartest, the nearest being approximately 13km away in Sudbury.

2.20 Climate data is not available at Parish level, but within Babergh District as a whole, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions of 41% were achieved between 2005 and 2022. 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

2.21 Hartest benefits from a number of services and facilities, which are largely focused within the central built-up area of the village. These include the village primary school, Crown public house, All Saints' Church, and the Boxted and Hartest Institute function rooms. However, there are ongoing concerns regarding the long-term security of these services and facilities, reflected in the recent closure of the GP surgery and butcher. Further to this, the village's location primarily in a rural valley means that mobile phone signals are poor despite the availability of high-speed broadband coverage.

2.22 The Parish contains a network of Public Rights of Way which run throughout the village, connecting also to the neighbouring parishes of Somerton, Brockley, Lawshall, Shimpling, and Boxted. The footpath network provides access to the countryside, with opportunities for extensive views across the landscape and into the village.

2.23 The Neighbourhood Plan has also identified three local green spaces, which consist of:

- The Green;
- The Crown Garden; and
- Hartest Wood.

2.24 Both the Green and the Crown Garden are located within the central part of the village, whilst Hartest Wood is located to the north west.

Cultural Heritage

2.25 There is evidence that Hartest has been occupied since the medieval periods, including the Anglo-Saxon period, through to the current day. The Suffolk Heritage Explorer website includes 77 records for Hartest, with finds dating back to the medieval (Anglo-Saxon) period, with evidence of a triangular bronze mount, and a fragment of spearhead, as well as evidence of medieval and post-medieval use of boundary ditches.

2.26 There are 52 listed buildings (51 according to supporting text in this draft plan) within the village of Hartest, one of which is Grade I listed, Church of All Saints, The Green, and the remaining buildings are Grade II listed. None of these buildings are on Historic England's 'Heritage at risk' register. The majority of the listed buildings are located within an area designated as a Conservation Area which covers the main built-up area of the village and the countryside surrounding it.

Landscape

2.27 The landscape setting of the central area of the Parish is unique in Suffolk settlements, with the oldest part of Hartest sitting in a distinct valley formed by the stream that runs through the Parish and forms a tributary to the River Glem. The Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment identifies that the valley running through the Parish is "Rolling Valley Farmland". The landscape around the valley is described as 'Undulating Ancient Farmland.'

2.28 Much of the Parish was identified as a Special Landscape Area in the former Babergh Local Plan. Although this designation was not carried forward in the Joint Local Plan, this area is designated as an 'Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity' in the Neighbourhood Plan. This is due to the local quality of the landscape which provides a distinct backdrop for the main built-up area of the village, and extends along the valleys converging on The Green, which have historically influenced development patterns within the Parish.

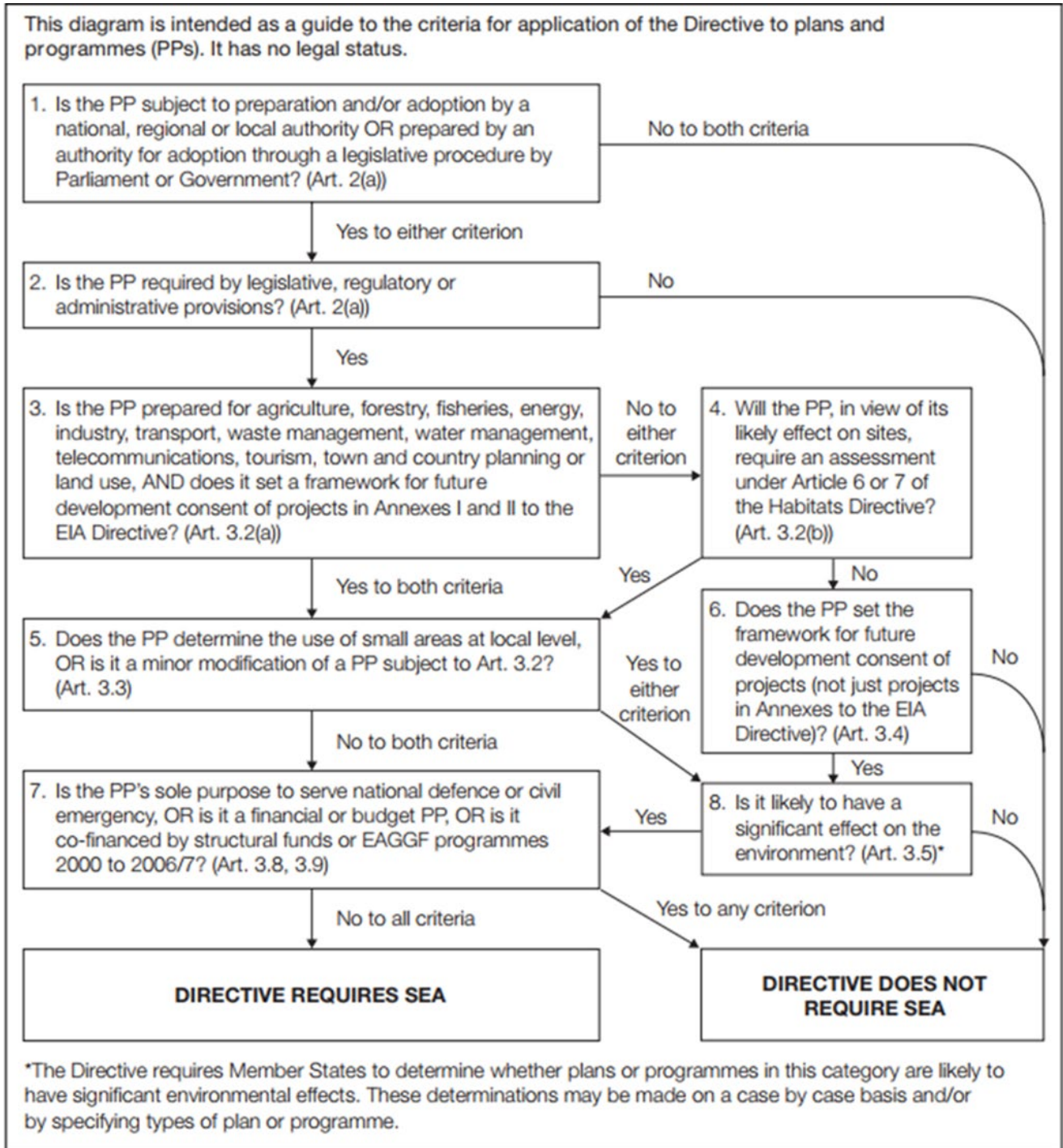
SEA Screening

2.1 An assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the Pre-Submission Draft Hartest Neighbourhood Plan (October 2024) requires SEA in accordance with the SEA Regulations.

2.2 **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](#)

Figure 2.1 Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes



2.3 Table 2.1 below presents the assessment of whether the Hartest Neighbourhood Plan 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 Hartest 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? (Article 2(a))	Yes	The 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? (Article 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? (Article 3.2(a))	Yes & 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? (Article 3.2 (b))	No	Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening of the Neighbourhood Plan has been undertaken separately on behalf of Babergh District Council and has concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan 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)? (Article 3.4)	Yes	Although the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for development, it includes policies which proposals for development within the Parish will be assessed against. Move to Q8.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Article 3.5)	No	See Table 2.2. SEA IS NOT REQUIRED.

2.4 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 Hartest Neighbourhood Plan meets these criteria.

Table 2.2 Likely Significant Effects of the Hartest Neighbourhood Plan

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 will become part of the statutory development plan and will guide the delivery of development in Hartest, including in terms of design. The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for residential or other forms of development.</p> <p>The previously adopted Babergh Core Strategy (2014) identified Hartest as a 'Hinterland Village' under Policy CS2: Settlement Pattern. The Policy stipulates that Hinterland Villages will accommodate some development to help meet the needs within them, although development will largely be direct to towns/urban areas (which includes the Ipswich Fringe) and then to the Core 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 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 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 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 Hartest 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>
3. The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	<p>One of the Basic Conditions which the Neighbourhood Plan must meet is to contribute to sustainable development.</p>
4. Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	<p>Baseline information relating to Hartest Parish was described earlier in this report. Key issues of relevance to the Neighbourhood Plan are the presence of high quality agricultural land in the Parish, an area of local landscape sensitivity, land within flood zones 2 and 3, biodiversity assets including designated Sites of Scientific Interest and County Wildlife Sites, and designated heritage assets.</p>
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

SEA Requirement	Comments
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 does not allocate sites for housing or other forms of development. The Neighbourhood Plan covers the period up to 2037. Any effects of the Neighbourhood Plan are expected to be indirect (due to not allocating sites) but would be long-term and permanent.
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, although the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites for housing or other forms of development.</p> <p>The previously adopted Babergh Core Strategy (2014) identified Hartest as a 'Hinterland Village' in the settlement hierarchy, anticipating that it will accommodate some development to help meet the needs within them. The adopted Part 1 Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan does not identify a minimum housing requirement for Hartest.</p>
8. The transboundary nature of the effects.	The Neighbourhood Plan focuses on Hartest 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.
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 the entirety of Hartest Parish. The population of the Parish at the time of the 2021 Census was 477 people.
<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; and ■ Intensive land-use. 	Hartest Parish is home to a number of Priority Habitats as well as ancient woodland and there are 52 listed buildings within the Parish. The Parish contains Grade 2 and Grade 3 agricultural land. There are no internationally designated nature conservation sites within the Parish although there are two Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and two County Wildlife sites within the Parish.
12. The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	There are no National Landscapes within or close to Hartest Parish, the closest being Dedham Vale National Landscape which is located around 18km to the south east.

SEA Screening Conclusion

2.5 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 Hartest Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects when assessed against the topics listed in the SEA Regulations.

2.6 The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a vision and detailed planning policies to shape development in the Parish up to 2037 and decision makers will need to consider the criteria of these policies when determining future applications in the village. The Neighbourhood Plan does not directly impact on land use through the allocation of sites for housing or other forms of development.

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

Next Steps

2.8 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
October 2024