

Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan (Draft Plan) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report (January 2025)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Lancaster City Council has prepared this screening report to support Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan Working Group in determining whether the contents of the proposed Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan is likely to require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- 1.2 The requirement to undertake environmental assessment of plans and programmes was established in the EU Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive), transposed into English law in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations SEA is required where a plan or programme is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. The assessment provides the main mechanism for ensuring that the environmental implications of decisions are considered before decisions are made and should be an integral part of plan preparation where potential for significant effects on the environment have been identified.
- 1.3 Under its 'duty to support' Lancaster City Council has been requested to determine whether, based on the preparation of the December 2024 Draft Version of the Neighbourhood Plan, the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan requires a SEA.

2. Background

- 2.1 Neighbourhood Planning gives local communities the opportunity to prepare planning documents for their area, enabling them to shape the future of where they live and giving them greater ownership of the plans and policies that affect them. Introduced under the Localism Act in 2011 Neighbourhood Plans provide a new tier of planning policy.
- 2.2 Planning policy for the district is established in the Lancaster District Local Plan. This currently consists of policies contained in the adopted Strategic Policies and Land Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD), the Development Management DPD, The Arnsdale and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) DPD and the Morecambe Area Action Plan.
- 2.3 The City Council has undertaken a Climate Emergency Partial Review of the Local Plan aimed at strengthening its approach towards adapting to and mitigating against the impacts of Climate Change. This follows the declaration of a Climate Emergency by the City Council in January 2024. The Partial Review of the Local Plan has recently been found sound by an independent Planning Inspector and will shortly be adopted by the City Council. On adoption the policies will replace those currently contained within the current Local Plan.
- 2.4 Whilst only just completing the partial review the City Council has made the decision to undertake a full review of the Local Plan. The full review will cover all policy areas and will revisit issues including housing, employment, design, climate change and the natural environment. Initial scoping work has been undertaken and further consultation on issues and potential options is scheduled to take place early in 2025.

- 2.5 The Neighbourhood plan area for Scotforth Rural was formally designated on the 27th January 2023. This confirmed the Parish Council’s commitment to preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and identified the proposed Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 2.3 The Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan Working Group have prepared a Draft Neighbourhood Plan Document (December 2024)). Lancaster City Council have used this information to undertake initial SEA screening of the Neighbourhood Plan.

3 SEA Screening

- 3.1 The SEA regulations require the responsible authority to determine whether or not a plan is likely to have a significant effect and therefore whether SEA is needed. When determining whether a Neighbourhood Plan requires SEA, the SEA regulations require that the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations are considered. The City Council has undertaken this assessment for the Carnforth Neighbourhood Plan.

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

SEA Requirement	Comments
The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:	
(a) 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	The Neighbourhood Plan has potential to determine the use of small areas at a local level, whether that is through the application of detailed criteria or the allocation of land.
b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	The Plan sits in a hierarchy and must be in conformity with strategic policies in the development plan. It is unlikely to influence other plans and programmes.
(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to promote sustainable development. The plan has a strong focus on the protection of the natural and built environment with policies included which seek to protect the character and environmental value of the area.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	There are no environmental problems relevant to this plan.
(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	The Neighbourhood Plan has no relevance to the implementation of Community legislation.
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to	
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(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	The Neighbourhood Plan covers a short time period running to 2031 and seeks to create a prosperous, healthy and happy community in a high quality natural and built environment. It

	<p>aims to deliver sustainable patterns of development.</p> <p>Limited levels of growth are proposed, no specific allocations are identified.</p> <p>The Plan places a strong emphasis on protecting the natural and historic environment and local community of the area. The absence of allocations within the Plan and strong environmental focus and protection of the built environment make it unlikely that significant effects will occur. The Plan contains a monitoring section.</p> <p>Officers are confident that a framework is in place to ensure that the impacts of the Plan can be monitored and where necessary appropriate action can be taken.</p>
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	<p>Whilst some limited development may be supported, the absence of allocations and strong environmental focus together with protective criteria make it unlikely that negative significant environmental effects will occur either individually or cumulatively with other development and decisions.</p> <p>It is noted that the Plan must be in conformity with the Lancaster District Local Plan. This will also ensure that cumulative effects are considered.</p>
(c) the transboundary nature of the effects	<p>There are no transboundary effects. The Plan applies to the Neighbourhood Plan only.</p>
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	<p>The Plan poses no risk to human health.</p>
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	<p>Effects are considered to be limited to the Neighbourhood Plan area only.</p>
(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to - (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or (iii) intensive land-use; and	<p>Whilst some limited development may be supported, the absence of allocations and strong environmental focus together with protective criteria make it unlikely that negative significant environmental effects will occur either individually or cumulatively with other development and decisions.</p> <p>It is noted that the Plan must be in conformity with the Lancaster District Local Plan. This will also ensure that cumulative effects are considered.</p>

<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>The Plan area includes a small area of the Forest of Bowland National Landscape area. There is potential for development within the plan area to impact directly and indirectly on the National Landscape. The importance of this landscape is recognised within the plan both for development within the National Landscape and for development which might impact on its setting.</p>
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4 Screening Outcome

- 4.1 Initial internal screening of the Neighbourhood Plan has concluded that it was unlikely that the Neighbourhood Plan would result in a significant environmental effect. The strong focus of the Neighbourhood Plan on the protection of the environment, heritage assets and lack of allocations make it unlikely to result in significant effects.
- 4.2 The three statutory bodies have confirmed this opinion.