

Halton-with-Aughton Draft Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Environmental (SEA) Screening Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Lancaster City Council has prepared this screening report to support Halton-with-Aughton Parish Council in determining whether the contents of the draft Halton-with Aughton Neighbourhood Plan are 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 2024 Draft Version of the Neighbourhood Plan, the Halton-with-Aughton 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 Arnside 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 Halton-with-Aughton was formally designated on the 26th October 2015. This confirmed the Parish Council’s commitment to preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and identified the proposed Neighbourhood Plan area.

2.6 Following this Halton-with-Aughton Parish Council commenced preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan with a Draft Neighbourhood Plan Document prepared in April 2024. A Submission Plan has now been prepared. Lancaster City Council have used this information to undertake initial SEA screening of the Neighbourhood Plan.

2 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 Halton-with-Aughton 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.
(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 7 year plan period and seeks to conserve the rural setting of the parish recognising both natural and heritage assets in the Neighbourhood Plan area.

	<p>It aims to deliver high quality development with development restricted to the settlement boundary and strong policies limiting opportunities for significant growth.</p> <p>The need to maintain the historic fabric and landscape of the Parish is given a strong focus. Very limited levels of development are promoted within the document.</p> <p>The need to protect the natural environment as well as the promotion of net gain is well recognised within the Plan.</p> <p>The Plan does not contain any development allocations.</p> <p>The strong environmental and historic focus of the Neighbourhood Plan together with policies within the District wide Local Plan make it unlikely that significant effects will occur.</p> <p>A monitoring framework is including detailing how the Neighbourhood Plan will be monitored.</p>
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	<p>The absence of large 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. The Plan must also be in conformity with the Lancaster District Local Plan. This will ensure the protection of environmental assets.</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>The Plan is located in close proximity to a number of environmental designations and is partially within the Forest of Bowland National Landscape area. Whilst there is potential for impacts to this designation the wording of the policy and strong focus on protection make this unlikely. The Plan is very much focussed on ensuring that the special qualities of this area are protected.</p>

	<p>The plan area is also home to a number of designated and non-designated heritage assets. The plan contains specific policies for the protection of these assets including their setting. The protection of heritage assets is also continued throughout the rest of the plan.</p>
<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	<p>The Plan is very much focussed on ensuring that the special qualities of this area are protected.</p>

3 Screening Outcome

- 3.3 Initial internal screening of the Neighbourhood Plan concludes that it is 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, its National Landscape focus and lack of allocations make it unlikely to result in significant effects.
- 3.4 The council is satisfied that the Plan is unlikely to result in significant effects.
- 3.5 The three statutory bodies have confirmed this conclusion.