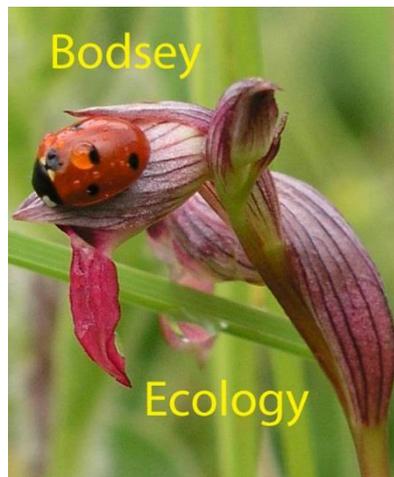


# Habitat Regulations Assessment for the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan

**Bodsey Ecology Limited**

**16 January 2019**

[www.bodseyecology.co.uk](http://www.bodseyecology.co.uk)



**Contact: Dr.P.D.Carey, Bodsey Ecology Limited, 4 Bodsey Cottages, Bodsey Toll Road, Ramsey, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE26 2XH. Tel 01487 813432. Mobile 0786 7618141. E-mail [bodsey.ecology@btinternet.co.uk](mailto:bodsey.ecology@btinternet.co.uk)**



Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan – Habitats Regulations Assessment 2019

Issue 1 – Draft Report on August 2018 Draft Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan (5<sup>th</sup> October 2018)

Issue 2 – Updated report addressing procedural difficulties (16<sup>th</sup> January 2019)

Prepared by: Pete Carey

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## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- 1.1.1 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 [the Habitats Regulations] require that Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) is applied to all statutory land use plans in England and Wales. HRA is achieved by carrying out an Appropriate Assessment.
- 1.1.2 Neighbourhood plans are nested within Local Plans. A HRA must determine whether significant effects on a European site can be ruled out on the basis of objective information and best scientific knowledge.
- 1.1.3 Appropriate Assessment for any development plan is a three stage process: screening, appropriate assessment itself that identifies whether the integrity of European sites could be compromised; and alternative solutions that include avoidance and mitigation measures. Until a ruling by the European Court of justice in 2018 it was assumed that existing planned mitigation measures against likely significant effects to European sites could allow those European sites to be 'screened out' at the first stage of the appropriate assessment process. The "People Over Wind" ruling has changed that assumption. It is no longer possible to screen out predicted adverse impacts on European sites where they are avoided or mitigated against without appropriate assessment. It is possible to screen out threats that are neither likely nor significant during the screening stage. HRA allows for a fourth stage that only applies in cases where adverse impacts are predicted even after alternative solutions have been tried and where there are imperative reasons of overriding national interest that the project should go ahead. It would be extremely unlikely that a Neighbourhood Plan could ever reach this fourth stage.
- 1.1.4 The HRA for the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 (Bodsey Ecology, 2018) identified likely significant effects on two European sites, The Ouse Washes (SAC/SPA/Ramsar) and Portholme (SAC), downstream of Bedford. Although the policies within the Local Plan should protect the European sites if followed, detail was not available from the emerging Neighbourhood Plans to confirm this for all developments. Further screening of the Neighbourhood Plans will ensure that there were no unforeseen likely significant effects whilst undertaking the HRA for the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030. The HRA of Neighbourhood Plans will also ensure that they all avoid or mitigate against likely significant effects identified in the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030. The HRA for the Neighbourhood Plans are also necessary because the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 has yet to be adopted and the policies within it are not yet in force.
- 1.1.5 Screening of the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan identified the same likely significant effects on the two European sites as the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 but at a reduced scale. Appropriate assessment (AA Stage 2) showed that the policies of the Draft Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan did not offer protection to the European sites. Rewording of the policies does provide the framework to avoid or mitigate against the likely significant effects and their subsequent adverse impact on the qualifying features and site integrity.
- 1.1.6 This HRA has to assume that water quantity and quality in the River Great Ouse will not be compromised because the future strategic plans of Anglian Water will prevent this from happening. The safeguard that these future plans will protect the River Great Ouse and consequently the European sites along it is that those plans will have their own HRA.
- 1.1.7 This HRA concludes that the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan can proceed as it will not have adverse impacts on any European sites, the qualifying features and/or the integrity of those sites itself or in combination with other plans that have currently been adopted.



## 2 THE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

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- 2.1.1 The National Policy Planning Framework (July 2018)<sup>1</sup> (NPPF) states that to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:
- a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and
  - b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.
- 2.1.2 In addition to the requirements of the NPPF, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 [the Habitats Regulations] require that Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) is applied to all statutory land use plans in England and Wales, including Neighbourhood Plans. The Parish Council, as the 'plan-making' or 'relevant competent' authority, must before the plan is given effect, make a HRA through Appropriate Assessment (AA) of the implications for the site in view of that site's conservation objectives where (a) the plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and (b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (Paragraph 102 of the Habitats Regulations 2017).
- 2.1.3 The aim of the HRA process is to assess the potential effects arising from a plan against the conservation objectives of any European site designated for its nature conservation importance.
- 2.1.4 The Habitats Regulations transpose the requirements of the European Directive (92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna [The Habitats Directive] which aims to protect the habitats and species of European nature conservation importance. The Directive establishes a network of internationally important sites designated for their ecological status. These are referred to as Natura 2000 sites or European sites, and comprise Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which are designated under European Directive (2009/147/EC) on the conservation of wild birds [the Birds Directive].
- 2.1.5 SACs and SPAs were included as designations referred to in the NPPF (paragraph 2.11 above). In addition, the NPPF<sup>1</sup> also requires that Ramsar sites (which support internationally important wetland habitats and are listed under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance [Ramsar Convention]) are included within the HRA process as required by the Regulations.
- 2.1.6 The process of HRA is based on the precautionary principle and evidence should be presented to allow a determination of whether the impacts of a land-use plan, when considered in combination with the effects of other plans and projects against the conservation objectives of a European site; would adversely affect the integrity of that site. Where effects are considered uncertain, the potential for adverse impacts should be assumed. Whether those effects reach a threshold where they can be considered 'significant' has to be interpreted using objective information and best ecological knowledge. Neighbourhood plans are nested within Local Plans. HRA identifies whether a plan is likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of a European site's conservation objectives because it may adversely impact the qualifying features listed, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This assessment must determine whether significant effects on a European site can be ruled out on the basis of objective information<sup>2</sup>. Neighbourhood Plans must therefore be considered in combination with the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030.
- 2.1.7 It is important to recognise that this HRA deals exclusively with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations 2017, which in turn are concerned only with sites designated for their importance at

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<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/740441/National\\_Planning\\_Policy\\_Framework\\_web\\_accessible\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/740441/National_Planning_Policy_Framework_web_accessible_version.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal#neighbourhood-plan-require-sustainability-appraisal>  
Paragraph: 047 Reference ID: 11-046-20150209



the European level. It is not a comprehensive review of interactions of the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 with biodiversity and important components such as SSSIs, Local Wildlife Sites, Green Infrastructure and Protected Species and Habitats of Principal Importance that are included within the Sustainability Appraisal for that plan.

### 3 AA STAGE 1 – SCREENING METHODOLOGY

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- 3.1.1 The methodology for this Appropriate Assessment (AA) stage 1 of the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan is an extension of that used for the HRA for the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 (Bodsey Ecology 2018).
- 3.1.2 The HRA for the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 considered the following possible threats:
- Increased public recreation, causing disturbance to birds, damage to vegetation, increased littering / flytipping or leading to management compromises (e.g. grazing being restricted).
  - Air pollution, air-borne pollutants
  - Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions
  - Invasive non-native species
  - Pollution to groundwater (point sources and diffuse sources)
  - Reduction in water quality, from increased discharges of sewage and surface water drainage, or from pollution incidents, either during or after construction.
  - Disruption to the flight paths of birds and mammals.
- 3.1.3 The threats were assessed for a number of European sites that are geographically connected by environmental pathways to Bedford Borough. The site objectives of each European site were considered at this stage (Appendix 1) in order to determine if there were ecological pathways that could connect the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan to the European sites. The seven European sites were: Portholme SAC; The Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar; The Wash SPA/Ramsar; Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA/Ramsar; The Nene Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar; Eversden and Wimpole Woods SAC; Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. The AA stage 1 for the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 demonstrated that there would be no likely significant effects on all but Portholme SAC and The Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar.
- 3.1.4 The threat from “Air pollution, air borne pollutants” was screened out of the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 because none of the European sites were close enough to Bedford Borough for there to be an effect and extra road-use would mostly avoid the main routes passing close by the Upper Nene Gravel Pits SPA because there are more direct routes from Bedford to major national routes. Therefore, this threat will not be considered in any Appropriate Assessment for Neighbourhood Plans within Bedford Borough.



- 3.1.5 The conclusions of the full appropriate assessment for the HRA of the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 were:

*Climate change impacts on flows and therefore flooding in the River Great Ouse catchment are predicted to be much larger than impacts from urban developments in the long-term. However, protection from urbanisation should not be omitted because of this as it is still a likely significant effect. It is assumed policies in The Local Plan will be followed and permission will only be given to development by the consenting bodies on the understanding that there will not be increased output of pollutants from water recycling centres into the River Great Ouse.*

*The Local Plan in isolation or in combination with the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and Central Bedfordshire "Shaping where you live 2035"<sup>1</sup> should not have adverse effects on the two identified European sites on the River Great Ouse assuming policies are followed, although it should be stated that there are not HRA tasks 2 and 3 available from other Local Authorities in the catchment.*

*This HRA finds that as it stands The Local Plan could have significant effects on two of the sites, Portholme (SAC) and The Ouse Washes (SAC/SPA/Ramsar). Portholme (SAC) and The Ouse Washes (SAC) could be affected by a reduction in the quality of flood water. The Ouse Washes (SPA/Ramsar) could be affected by increased flooding. The effects could be avoided by rewording and subsequent adherence to policies and with Anglian Water following its commitments and any findings of future HRA of its Asset Management Plans or other plans.*

*The HRA concludes that, if policies identified as key in this report are retained, and/or the wording changes recommended for policies highlighted are adopted, The Local Plan will not have adverse effects on site integrity of any European site. Therefore, Bedford Borough Council can proceed with The Local Plan to 2030 in the context of Habitats Regulations 2017.*

## 4 AA STAGE 1 - RESULTS

- 4.1.1 The screening matrix between the threats listed in paragraph 3.1.2 and the European sites listed in paragraph 3.1.3 for the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan is shown in Table 1.
- 4.1.2 The results of the screening showed that there are possible likely significant effects on the Portholme SAC and The Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar. Subsequent analysis showed which of the qualifying features of those European sites might be affected by the threats and whether these adverse effects would lead to a loss of site integrity (these are summarised in Table 2) and are based on the site objectives (Appendix 1). Non-native invasive species are a likely effect because seeds and vegetative parts of plants capable of regeneration could escape from gardens and be transported down the River Great Ouse. Cumulatively across the whole of the River Great Ouse catchment the threat that non-native invasive species (some as yet unidentified or even present in the UK) remains very small and unquantifiable using evidence or with best ecological knowledge. Arguably, the escape of non-native invasive species cannot be discounted for any plan anywhere in England, UK or even the European Union below the threshold of 1 in 500,000 per year (as suggested by DTA Publications Limited, 2018 as being *de minimis*). However, this author believes in his expert opinion that the statement from the Advocate General in Sweetman '48 the requirement that the effect in question should be significant exists to lay down a *de minimis* threshold. Plans or projects that have no appreciable effect on the site are thereby excluded. If all plans or projects capable of having any effect whatsoever on the site were to be



caught by Article 6(3), activities on or near the site would risk being impossible by reason of legislative overkill’.

is pertinent because no development anywhere could take place with the threshold of 1 in 500,000 per year for the spread of invasive non-native species. This author suggests that the criteria for a causal link between plans or projects and European sites should be based on the presence of existing invasive non-native species in the plan or project area and/or projects that suggest non-native planting will take place as part of the project.

- 4.1.3 Pollution of groundwater and Reduction in water quality could have likely significant effects from pollution incidents emanating from new housing before, during or after construction.
- 4.1.4 In determining the likelihood of significant impacts, and hence the need for an appropriate assessment, mitigation measures (i.e. measures to avoid or reduce negative effects) cannot be taken into account. This is confirmed by the European Court of Justice in its ruling in case C-323/17 (commonly known as “People Over Wind”): ‘Article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora must be interpreted as meaning that, in order to determine whether it is necessary to carry out, subsequently, an appropriate assessment of the implications, for a site concerned, of a plan or project, it is not appropriate, at the screening stage, to take account of the measures intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of the plan or project on that site’<sup>3</sup> Reversing the logic of this statement, a consequence of “People Over Wind” is that no European site can be screened out at AA stage 1 if there are likely significant effects identified from the perceived threats that come from an analysis of the plan in question, even if there are avoidance or mitigation steps put in place. However, perceived threats can be screened out if there is, on inspection, no chance of a likely significant effect on any European site because there is not actually a causal link. An example of this would be the potential threat from water pollution to the European sites on the River Nene, as the catchment is partly within Bedford Borough. On inspection, there is no development proposed in that part of Bedford Borough and so there is no causal link between the threat and the European sites and therefore no likely significant effect. That threat can be screened out for the European sites along the River Nene. “The People Over Wind” ruling means that although the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 policies will be reworded to mitigate against the likely significant effects (identified in the HRA (Bodsey Ecology,2018)) at the scale of Bedford Borough it is assumed that they cannot be screened out at the finer scale of the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan. Furthermore, the Bedford Borough Local Plan has yet to be adopted and the policies in the emerging plan are not yet in force at the time of writing.

## 4.1 REASONING FOR TABLE 1 RESULTS

1. The Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan is too small to have a noticeable effect on the number of visitors to any of the European sites and can be considered *de minimis*. Furthermore, the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 in its entirety is predicted to have no adverse impact on the integrity of the European sites in question for this threat (Bodsey Ecology, 2018).
2. The Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan is too small (11-15 dwellings) to have a measurable effect on the hydrology of the River Great Ouse and therefore will not significantly affect any of the European sites. The in combination impacts of all developments in the River Great Ouse catchment are dependant on the plans of Anglian Water which are themselves subject to an HRA. It can only be assumed for this HRA that the plans of Anglian Water will prevent effects on the European sites in question.
3. It is possible that non-native species could escape from new gardens and be dispersed along the River Great Ouse to Portholme and/or The Ouse Washes. Although the risk is small and almost

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<sup>3</sup><http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=200970&pageIndex=0&doclang=en&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1>

unmeasurable it is still a possible significant effect that requires further attention. The Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan is not connected by river to the Nene Washes or the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits and so there is no threat. There is no tangible connection between the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan and Eversden and Wimpole Woods or the Chilterns Beechwoods that would allow the dispersal of propagules and therefore there is no threat.

4. The same connections (or lack of them) between Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan and the River Great Ouse as for reason “3” apply for pollution incidents to ground water.
5. The same connections (or lack of them) between Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan and the River Great Ouse as for reason “3” apply for pollution incidents.
6. No dwelling in Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan will be tall enough or close enough to have an effect on flyways for birds or mammals and therefore there is no threat.

Table 1. Screening of European sites for likely significant effects from threats identified from the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan.

European Site	Public Recreation	Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions	Non-native invasive Species	Pollution of Ground Water	Reduction in water Quality	Disruption to flight paths of animals
Portholme SAC	No	No - too small	Possible	Possible	Possible	No
Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/RAMSAR	No	No - too small	Possible	Possible	Possible	No
Nene Washes (SAC/SPA/RAMSAR)	No	No - too small	No - not connected	No - not connected	No - not connected	No
Eversden and Wimpole Woods (SAC)	No	No - too small	No - not connected	No - not connected	No - not connected	No
The Wash (SPA/RAMSAR)	No	No - too small	No	No	No	No
Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits (SPA/RAMSAR)	No	No - too small	No - not connected	No - not connected	No - not connected	No
Chilterns Beechwoods	No	No - too small	No	No	No	No
Reason	1	2	3	4	5	6

## 5 AA STAGE 1 - CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 The Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan will have no unforeseen likely significant effects on the qualifying features of the two European sites identified in addition to those in the HRA of the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 (Bodsey Ecology, 2018).
- 5.1.2 The developments included in this Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan could contribute to the likely significant effects on qualifying features of the European sites already identified as possible in the HRA of the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030. All sites close to the River Great Ouse require an appropriate assessment to ascertain that avoidance and mitigation measures are sufficient to prevent any significant effects.



**Table 2. Summary of impacts on European site integrity of the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 with additional information relating to the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan..**

European Site	Qualifying Feature	Impacted negatively with potential loss of site integrity	Relevant to Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan	Likely impact on site integrity in combination with other plans	Suggested Mitigation Measure in Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030
Portholme SAC	H6510 Lowland hay Meadow	Reduction in water quality	Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes	Add enhanced use of SUDS and water storage. Include importance of preventing spring/summer flooding to Policy 97. Assumes Water Recycling Centres have capacity and pass their own HRA and/or upgraded as necessary upgraded.
		Increased spring/ summer flooding	Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes	Add enhanced use of SUDS and water storage. Include importance of preventing spring/summer flooding to protect European sites to Policy 97
Ouse Washes SPA/ RAMSAR	A051 <i>Anas strepera</i> , Gadwal (breeding)	Increased spring/ summer flooding  Increased winter flooding	Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes	Add enhanced use of SUDS and water storage. Include importance of preventing spring/summer flooding to protect European sites to Policy 97. Enhanced use of SUDS and water storage. Include importance of preventing spring/summer flooding to protect European sites to Policy 97
	A056 <i>Anas querquedula</i> , Garganey (breeding)		Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes	
	A119 <i>Porzana porzana</i> , Spotted Crake (breeding)	Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes		
	A156a <i>Limosa limosa</i> , Black-tailed Godwit (breeding)	Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes		
	Breeding Bird Assemblage (breeding)	Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes		
	A082 <i>Circus cyaneus</i> , Hen Harrier (non-breeding)	Reduction in water quality	Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes	
Ouse Washes SAC	S1149 <i>Cobitis taenia</i> (Spined Loach)	Reduction in water quality	Yes – make reference to BBC Local Plan Policy 97	yes	As for SPA/Ramsar



## 6 AA STAGE 2 - APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

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Screening (Table 1) has determined that the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan could add to the likely significant effects of the Bedford Borough Local Plan to 2030 and those of other district councils in the River Great Ouse catchment on the European sites at Portholme and The Ouse Washes.

- 6.1.2 Each of the policies in the document “Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan” (draft version August 2018) were reviewed. Secondly, the impact of the policies on the threats listed above in paragraph 3.1.2 were evaluated. The following criteria were used in the evaluation:
- 1 Could the policy possibly cause or alter likely significant effects of any of the threats to the European sites.
  - 2 Would the significant effects be positive or negative
  - 3 Does the wording of the policy mean that the significant effects will be either avoided or mitigated against if the policy is followed. Noting that at this stage a likely significant effect or European site can be ‘discounted and removed’ from the Appropriate Assessment if the current policy will mitigate or avoid the adverse impacts on the qualifying features, and there will be no loss of site integrity.
  - 4 Does rewording of the policy allow for significant effects on site integrity of the European sites to be avoided or mitigated against. If the answer is “no” then adverse impacts on site integrity might be a result of the plan if it went ahead (which it should not).
- 6.1.3 Using these criteria the following pathway was followed:
- The answer to criterion 1 could be “yes” or “no”.
  - If the answer to criterion 1 was “yes” then the answer to criterion 2 could be “positive” or “negative”.
  - If the answer to criterion 2 was “negative” the answer to criterion 3 could be “yes” or “no”.
  - If the answer to criterion 3 was “no” then the answer to criterion 4 could be “yes” or “no”.
- 6.1.4 For each policy a written reason for the conclusion was added. The results are presented in full in Appendix 2.
- 6.1.5 Note that if any policy or aspect of a plan could lead to adverse impacts on European site integrity the plan should not go forward to adoption. In this rare circumstance, If the plan is to go ahead it would have to have ‘imperative reasons of overriding national interest’ and compensatory projects would have to be put in place.

## 7 AA STAGE 2 - RESULTS

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- 7.1.1 There are no policies (including those relating to the housing developments themselves) that have likely significant effects on any of the qualifying features of the European sites (Appendix 2). The site objectives will not be compromised and there will be no loss of site integrity if the avoidance steps that are recommended in the next section are followed.

## 8 AA STAGE 3 – AVOIDANCE AND MITIGATION

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- 8.1.1 Although the draft assessed here is very clear and well written, the following rewording of the text and policies of the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan are recommended to ensure that the examiner is made aware that the potential for likely significant effects on European sites has been evaluated and that avoidance or mitigation measures are in place.



- 8.1.2 On page 4, if it is permissible, add a sentence to the second bullet point or create a new bullet point that reads “The plan will ensure that there are no negative likely significant effects relating to the Water Framework Directive nor to European sites designated under European Directive (92/43/EEC).”

## 8.1 POLICY H01 – DEVELOPMENT SITES

8.1.3 Policy H01 in the draft assessed here read:

New dwellings will be considered for approval where they are located within the village Settlement Policy Area (see Plan \*\* H01 BBC Policies Map). This is subject to:

1. being proportionate in scale and number to the site and its setting;
2. having no significant adverse impact on the amenities of existing dwellings in terms of light, overlooking and privacy;
3. incorporating garden spaces for both existing and new dwellings.

- 8.1.4 Interpretation could be added to the supporting text that says... “Although there are no European sites designated under European Directive (92/43/EEC) within the Parish or within Bedford Borough there are European sites downstream on the River Great Ouse (Portholme SAC, The Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar) that are vulnerable and these sites should not be compromised” and cite this HRA.

## 8.2 POLICY H03 – CHANGE OF USE TO DWELLINGS & POLICY H04 - SUBDIVISION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS, REDEVELOPMENT FOLLOWING DEMOLITION

8.2.1 Policy H03 in the draft assessed read:

The conversion of existing, redundant agricultural and commercial buildings to new dwellings will be considered for approval, subject to:

1. the proposal involving a permanent structure;
2. suitable infrastructure being in place to support the new residential use;
3. the proposed residential use not compromising or restricting nearby commercial or agricultural uses.

Policy H04 in the draft assessed read:

The subdivision of existing buildings to new dwellings, and the redevelopment following demolition will be considered for approval, subject to:

1. sites are of sufficient size to support more than one dwelling;
2. having no significant adverse impact on the amenities of existing dwellings in terms of light, overlooking and privacy;
3. suitable infrastructure being in place to support the new residential dwellings;
4. incorporating garden spaces for both existing and new dwellings.



Although, not related to the HRA itself these policies could be strengthened by adding to the explanatory text stating that “Care should be taken to protect species living within the buildings to be converted or demolished”. These words will emphasise the point even though developers should already be aware of their responsibilities.

### 8.3 POLICY DH01 – DESIGN AND CHARACTER

8.3.1 Policy DH01 in the draft assessed read:

New development must complement the local surroundings and demonstrate high standards of design, including:

- Designing buildings, spaces and landscape to respond to the specific site and context to create a safe and well functioning environment with a sense of place;
- Complementing the distinctive character of Stevington in terms of scale, massing, height, degree of set-back from streets and spaces;
- Complementing the context in terms of the proportion of any site developed and left open as garden space;
- Incorporating high quality and durable materials to complement those used in the surrounding area;
- Creating attractive, safe and convenient environments for pedestrians, overlooked by active frontages;
- Retaining trees and hedgerows and providing high quality planting;
- Ensuring that car-parking does not dominate the streets;
- Providing convenient, well-screened storage space for bins and recycling;
- Ensuring new dwellings have suitable access for people of all abilities.

8.3.2 This policy could be strengthened by adding “and new parking provision does not lead to surface run-off to water courses” to the seventh bullet point. The accompanying text could then explain that surface run-off should be prevented in order to prevent additional water or polluted water reaching the River Great Ouse via its tributaries or directly.

8.3.3 The threat from invasive non-native species is impossible to quantify but can be eliminated if all householders refrain from planting such species in their gardens and/or dispose of garden waste appropriately ensuring seeds and propagules do not enter the River Great Ouse directly or via smaller water courses. There is no legislation to prevent householders growing what they like, with the exception of notifiable species (Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed). To minimise the impact of the threat from invasive non-native species add some explanatory text explaining that “high quality planting” uses native species or garden species that are known to be non-invasive and explaining that invasive non-native species should be prevented from entering the wider countryside where they could have adverse impacts on designated species and habitats.



## 8.4 POLICY EN01

8.4.1 Policy EN01 in the draft assessed read:

New development must preserve or enhance and have no significant adverse impact on Stevington's natural environment. This includes:

- respecting the natural contours of any site and protecting natural features such as hedges, ponds, ancient trees and trees of arboricultural value in or around the site;
- maintaining the biodiversity of any site and prioritising the retention of native species, particularly in locations adjacent to wildlife corridors;
- incorporating appropriate measures to safeguard ecological networks.

Particular regard will be made to impacts on designated and protected landscapes, including those listed above.

8.4.2 The last portion of this policy should be rewritten: "Particular regard will be made to impacts on designated and protected landscapes, including those listed above. The European sites, Portholme SAC and The Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar are connected to Stevington in the wider landscape and their integrity will not be compromised."

## 9 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1.1 There are likely significant effects to the European sites of Portholme SAC and The Ouse Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar from the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan, but only in combination with other plans.
- 9.1.2 With alterations to the current policy on the natural environment (EN01) in the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan, the likely significant effects can be avoided or mitigated against meaning there are no adverse impacts on qualifying features or site integrity assuming other local plans and neighbourhood plans (adopted and emerging) in the catchment of The River Great Ouse similarly avoid or mitigate against the same likely significant effects.
- 9.1.3 The avoidance of the impacts of increased flooding and pollution in the River Great Ouse depends on the efficacy of Anglian Water's Water Recycling Centres. The assumption has to be made that future HRAs for strategic plans of Anglian Water show that flooding and pollution are avoided or mitigated against.
- 9.1.4 There is no reason arising from this Habitat Regulations Assessment to prevent the Stevington Neighbourhood Development Plan from being adopted in the context of the Habitat Regulations 2017.

## 10 REFERENCE

Bodsey Ecology (2018). *Bedford Borough Local Plan Habitat Regulations Assessment 2018*. Accessed on 4/10/2018 at <http://edrms.bedford.gov.uk/OpenDocument.aspx?id=mWdUC1eYtKneHtAkS7KPeQ%3d%3d&name=26%20-%20Habitats%20Regulations%20Assessment%202018.pdf>



## APPENDIX 1 – EUROPEAN SITE OBJECTIVES

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### EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR PORTHOLME SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION SITE CODE: UK0030054

With regard to the SAC and the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, and
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely

#### Qualifying Features:

H6510. Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*)

### EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR OUSE WASHES SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION SITE CODE: UK0013011

With regard to the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

#### Qualifying Features:

S1149. *Cobitis taenia*; Spined loach

### EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR OUSE WASHES SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA SITE CODE: UK9008041

With regard to the SPA and the individual species and/or assemblage of species for which the site has been classified (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features



- The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely
- The population of each of the qualifying features, and,
- The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

### Qualifying Features:

A037 *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*; Bewick's swan (Non-breeding)

A038 *Cygnus cygnus*; Whooper swan (Non-breeding)

A050 *Anas penelope*; Eurasian wigeon (Non-breeding)

A051 *Anas strepera*; Gadwall (Breeding)

A052 *Anas crecca*; Eurasian teal (Non-breeding)

A053 *Anas platyrhynchos*; Mallard (Breeding)

A054 *Anas acuta*; Northern pintail (Non-breeding)

A055 *Anas querquedula*; Garganey (Breeding)

A056 *Anas clypeata*; Northern shoveler (Non-breeding)

A056 *Anas clypeata*; Northern shoveler (Breeding)

A082 *Circus cyaneus*; Hen harrier (Non-breeding)

A151 *Philomachus pugnax*; Ruff (Breeding)

A156a *Limosa limosa limosa*; Black-tailed godwit (Breeding)

Waterbird assemblage

Breeding bird assemblage

## EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR THE WASH AND NORTH NORFOLK COAST SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION SITE CODE: UK0017075

With regard to the SAC and the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

### Qualifying Features:

H1110. Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time; Subtidal sandbanks



H1140. Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide; Intertidal mudflats and sandflats

H1150. Coastal lagoons\*

H1160. Large shallow inlets and bays

H1170. Reefs

H1310. Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand; Glasswort and other annuals colonising mud and sand

H1330. Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)

H1420. Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (*Sarcocornetea fruticosi*); Mediterranean saltmarsh scrub

S1355. *Lutra lutra*; Otter

S1365. *Phoca vitulina*; Common seal

## EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR THE WASH SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA SITE CODE: UK9008021

With regard to the SPA and the individual species and/or assemblage of species for which the site has been classified (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features ☒ The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely
- The population of each of the qualifying features, and,
- The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

### Qualifying Features:

A037 *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*; Bewick's swan (Non-breeding)

A040 *Anser brachyrhynchus*; Pink-footed goose (Non-breeding)

A046a *Branta bernicla bernicla*; Dark-bellied brent goose (Non-breeding)

A048 *Tadorna tadorna*; Common shelduck (Non-breeding)

A050 *Anas penelope*; Eurasian wigeon (Non-breeding)

A051 *Anas strepera*; Gadwall (Non-breeding)

A054 *Anas acuta*; Northern pintail (Non-breeding)

A065 *Melanitta nigra*; Black (common) scoter (Non-breeding)

A067 *Bucephala clangula*; Common goldeneye (Non-breeding)

A130 *Haematopus ostralegus*; Eurasian oystercatcher (Non-breeding)

A141 *Pluvialis squatarola*; Grey plover (Non-breeding)

A143 *Calidris canutus*; Red knot (Non-breeding)

A144 *Calidris alba*; Sanderling (Non-breeding)

A149 *Calidris alpina alpina*; Dunlin (Non-breeding)



- A156 *Limosa limosa islandica*; Black-tailed godwit (Non-breeding)  
A157 *Limosa lapponica*; Bar-tailed godwit (Non-breeding)  
A160 *Numenius arquata*; Eurasian curlew (Non-breeding)  
A162 *Tringa totanus*; Common redshank (Non-breeding)  
A169 *Arenaria interpres*; Ruddy turnstone (Non-breeding)  
A193 *Sterna hirundo*; Common tern (Breeding)  
A195 *Sterna albifrons*; Little tern (Breeding)  
Waterbird assemblage

### **EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR EVERS DEN AND WIMPOLE WOODS SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION SITE CODE: UK0030331**

With regard to the SAC and the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

This document should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Supplementary Advice document, which provides more detailed advice and information to enable the application and achievement of the Objectives set out above and is found at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6736081810620416>.

#### **Qualifying Features:**

S1308. *Barbastella barbastellus*; Barbastelle bat

### **EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR UPPER NENE VALLEY GRAVEL PITS SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA SITE CODE: UK9020296**

With regard to the SPA and the individual species and/or assemblage of species for which the site has been classified (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely



- The population of each of the qualifying features, and, 2 The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

This document should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Supplementary Advice document, which provides more detailed advice and information to enable the application and achievement of the Objectives set out above. It is available at

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5495529882517504>

### Qualifying Features:

A021 Botaurus stellaris; Great bittern (Non-breeding)

A051 Anas strepera; Gadwall (Non-breeding)

A140 Pluvialis apricaria; European golden plover (Non-breeding)

Waterbird assemblage

## EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR NENE WASHES SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA SITE CODE: UK9008031

With regard to the SPA and the individual species and/or assemblage of species for which the site has been classified (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely
- The population of each of the qualifying features, and,
- The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

### Qualifying Features:

A037 Cygnus columbianus bewickii; Bewick's swan (Non-breeding)

A050 Anas penelope; Eurasian wigeon (Non-breeding)

A051 Anas strepera; Gadwall (Breeding)

A051 Anas strepera; Gadwall (Non-breeding)

A052 Anas crecca; Eurasian teal (Non-breeding)

A054 Anas acuta; Northern pintail (Non-breeding)

A055 Anas querquedula; Garganey (Breeding)

A056 Anas clypeata; Northern shoveler (Non-breeding)

A056 Anas clypeata; Northern shoveler (Breeding)

A156a Limosa limosa limosa; Black-tailed godwit (Breeding)



## **EUROPEAN SITE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR CHILTERN BEECHWOODS SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION SITE CODE: UK0012724**

With regard to the SAC and the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated (the 'Qualifying Features' listed below), and subject to natural change

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

This document should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Supplementary Advice document, which provides more detailed advice and information to enable the application and achievement of the Objectives set out above. This is available at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4808896162037760>

### **Qualifying Features:**

H6210. Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (FestucoBrometalia); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone

H9130. Asperulo-Fagetum beech forests; Beech forests on neutral to rich soils

S1083. *Lucanus cervus*; Stag beetle



## APPENDIX 2 – RESULTS OF THE ASSESSMENT OF POLICIES

Criteria 1 and 2 of the appropriate assessment (AA Stage 2)

Policy Number	Policy Title	Increased Public Recreation	Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions	Invasive non-native species	Pollution to groundwater	Reduction in water quality	Disruption to flight paths	Reason
H01	Development Sites	No	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	No	
H02	Housing Need	No	No	No	No	No	No	Although there will be only 11-15 new dwellings they should be considered in combination with other plans in the Great Ouse catchment
H03	Change of Use to Dwellings	No	No	Negative	Negative	Negative	No	
H04	Subdivision of existing buildings, redevelopment following demolition	No	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	No	
DH01	Design and Character	No	Positive	Negative	No	No	No	The threat from invasive non-native species comes from the possible escape from gardens and so thought must be given on how to prevent this. The threat is almost impossible to measure and cannot be eliminated entirely - anywhere
DH02	Undesignated Heritage	No	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Protection of any sort is always beneficial
DH03	Windmill Wind Corridor	No	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	This policy is particularly good for flying wildlife. No development will prevent any likely significant effects downstream
EN01		No	Positive	Negative	No	Negative	No	This policy is only negative because the words need strengthening
ONP LE2	Open Green Space	No	Positive	No	Positive	Positive	Positive	This policy is particularly good for flying wildlife. No development will prevent any likely significant effects downstream.
CF01	Community Policies	No	No	No	No	No	No	Not relevant to European sites



Criteria 1 and 2 of the appropriate assessment (AA Stage 2) - continued

Policy Number	Policy Title	Increased Public Recreation	Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions	Invasive non-native species	Pollution to groundwater	Reduction in water quality	Disruption to flight paths	Reason
TI01	Traffic Impact	No	No	No	No	No	No	Not relevant to European sites because they are too far away
TI02	Cycling and Walking	No	No	No	No	No	No	
TI03	Sustainable Urban Drainage	No	Negative	Negative	Positive	Negative	No	Only negative because wording needs strengthening
BE01	Business, Employment and Tourism	No	No	No	No	No	No	Not relevant to European sites because they are too far away
BE02	Broadband	No	No	No	No	No	No	Not relevant to European sites



Criterion 3: Does the current wording of the policy address the negative likely significant effect?					
Policy Number	Policy Title	Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions	Invasive non-native species	Pollution to groundwater	Reduction in water quality
H01	Development Sites	No	No	No	No
H03	Change of Use to Dwellings		No	No	No
H04	Subdivision of existing buildings, redevelopment following demolition	No	No	No	No
DH01	Design and Character		No		
EN01			No		No
TI03	Sustainable Urban Drainage	No	No		No

Criterion 4: Does rewording of a policy remove the negative likely significant effect?					
Policy Number	Policy Title	Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions	Invasive non-native species	Pollution to groundwater	Reduction in water quality
H01	Development Sites	Yes	Probably	Yes	Yes
H03	Change of Use to Dwellings		Probably	Yes	Yes
H04	Subdivision of existing buildings, redevelopment following demolition	Yes	Probably	Yes	Yes
DH01	Design and Character		Probably		
EN01			Probably		Yes
TI03	Sustainable Urban Drainage	Yes	Probably		Yes