

# **Screening Statement on the determination of the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and European Directive 2001/42/EC for the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan**

**May 2024**

## **Introduction**

1. This screening report is used to determine if the contents of the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC (hereafter 'the Directive') and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (hereafter 'the Regulations'). These require an SEA to be undertaken on any land use plan or programme 'which sets the framework for future development or for future development consent of projects'.
2. However, there are exceptions to this requirement for plans 'which determine the use of a small area at a local level', or which only propose 'minor modifications to a plan', if it is determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects'.
3. The National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 167, advises that assessments should be proportionate, and should not repeat policy assessments that have already taken place.
4. To assess whether an SEA is required a screening process must be undertaken based on a standard set of criteria. This must be subject to consultation with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England. The results of the process must be documented in a Screening Statement, available to the public.
5. This report also contains a Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening as required under the Habitats Directive.

## **Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan**

6. The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan contains policies to guide the development of the Littlemore Area<sup>1</sup>. The policies cover five different areas:
  - Health and Community (spatial planning and community policies)
  - Business and Retail (spatial planning and community policies)
  - Transport (spatial planning and community policies)
  - Housing (spatial planning and community policies)
  - Environment (spatial planning and community policies)
7. It is worth noting that it is only the spatial planning policies that are the subject of this assessment.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Littlemore Area Map is shown at Appendix 1

8. The plan also proposes a series of development guidelines through character assessments. The plan does not allocate any sites for development.

### **The Screening Process**

9. The key to the screening decision is the determination of whether the Plan is likely to have any significant environmental effects on the environment, using the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive and Schedule 1 of the Regulations. These criteria are set out in the table at Appendix 3.
10. An extract from 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment' (set out at Appendix 2) provides a flow diagram to demonstrate the SEA screening process. This flow diagram sets out the process to be undertaken to ascertain whether or not an SEA is required for the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan.
11. Part of the screening process is a requirement to consider whether the Plan requires a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). An HRA Screening has been undertaken and can be found at Appendix 4. An assessment of likely significance of effects on the environment has also been undertaken, which can be found at Appendix 5. These two assessments feed into Table 1 and the SEA Screening Assessment.

### **Statutory Consultees**

12. The initial Screening Opinion was sent to the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England for comment on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024.
13. The Environment Agency did not provide any comments.
14. Historic England stated:

*The information supplied indicates that the plan will not have any significant effects on the historic environment. We note there are no site allocations.*

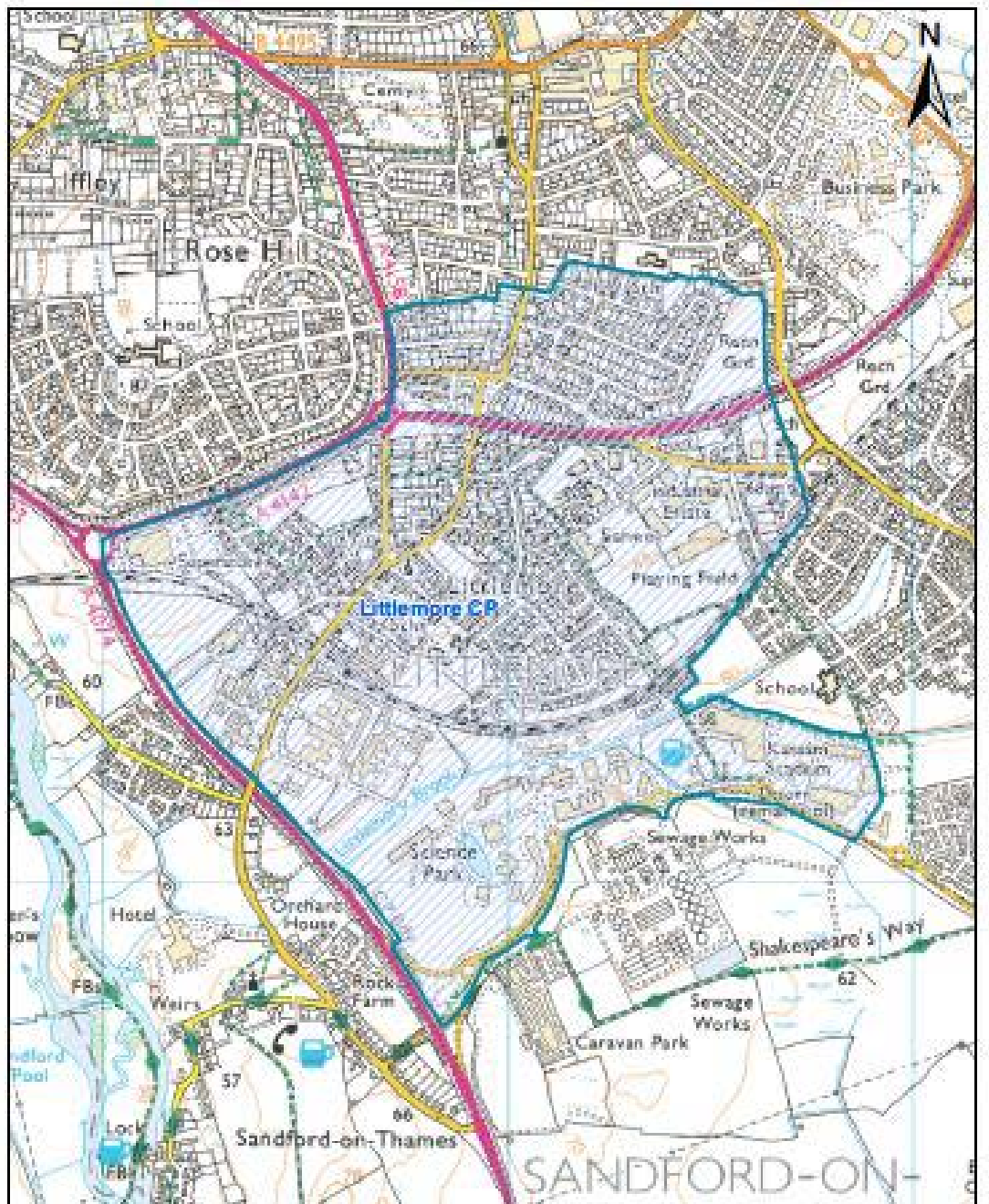
*On the basis of the information supplied, and in the context of the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations [Annex II of 'SEA' Directive], Historic England concurs with the Council that the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.*

15. Natural England did not have any specific comments on the draft neighbourhood plan.

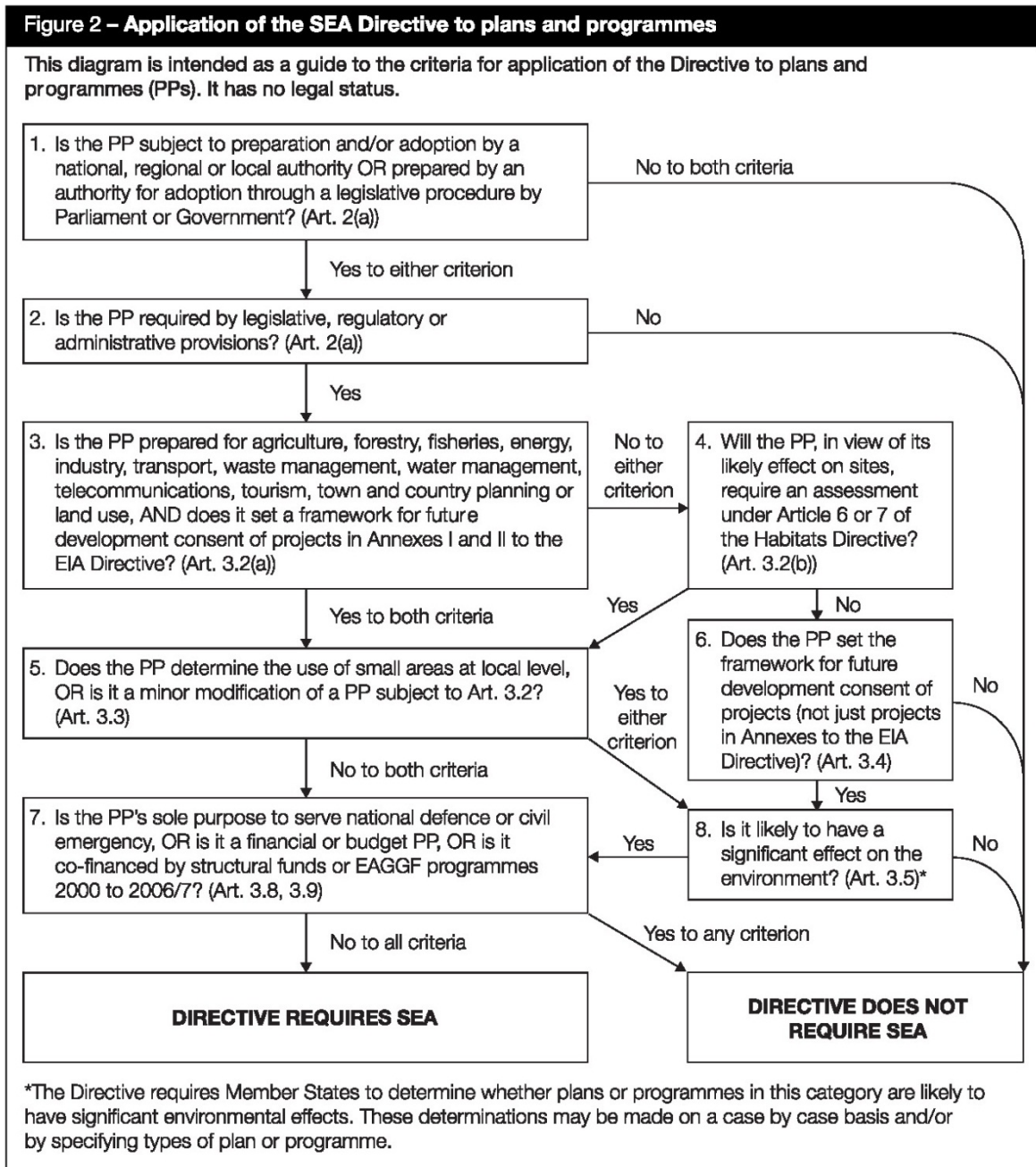
### **Conclusion**

16. Oxford City Council considers that the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan will not have any significant impacts on the environment and as such does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as required by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

## Appendix 1: Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan Area



**Appendix 2 – Extract from ‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’, DCLG, 2005.**



### Appendix 3: Application of the SEA Directive as shown in Appendix 2.

Stage	Yes/ No	Explanation
1. Is the Neighbourhood Plan subject to preparation and/ or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	<p>The preparation and adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan is allowed under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Neighbourhood Plan will be prepared by the Littlemore Neighbourhood Forum (as the ‘relevant body’) and be “made” by Oxford City Council as the Local Authority. The preparation of Neighbourhood Plans is subject to the following regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012</li> <li>• The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012</li> <li>• The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015</li> <li>• The Neighbourhood Planning (General) and Development Management Procedure (Amendment) Regulations 2016</li> <li>• The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) (Amendment) Regulations 2016</li> </ul>
2. Is the Neighbourhood Plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	No	<p>Whilst Neighbourhood Planning is not a requirement, it is optional under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. It will, if “made”, form part of the Development Plan for the City. It is therefore important that the screening process considers whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.</p>
3. Is the Neighbourhood Plan prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecoms, 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 (see Appendix 5) of the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	Yes	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan is prepared for town and country planning and land use. The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan does not set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive.</p>
4. Will the Neighbourhood Plan,	No	See Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Littlemore

<p>in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art 3.2(b))</p>		<p>Neighbourhood Plan at Appendix 4. If No, go to Step 6 of the Flow Chart</p>
<p>5. Does the Neighbourhood Plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art 3.2? (Art 3.3)</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>6. Does the Neighbourhood Plan set the future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.4)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan will be used to determine future planning applications. If Yes, go to Step 8 of the Flow Chart</p>
<p>7. Is the Neighbourhood Plan's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds by EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>8. Is it likely to have significant effects on the environment?</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>See Assessment of Significant Effects on the Environment Likely (Appendix 5)</p>

## Appendix 4 – Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Opinion for the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan

### Introduction

1. Oxford City Council has undertaken this Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) “in-house”. This report discusses Stage 1 – Screening.
2. This Screening Assessment relates to a Neighbourhood Development Plan (Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan) that will be in general conformity with the higher level strategic plan (Oxford’s Local Plan). This Screening Assessment uses the emerging 2040 Local Plan HRA as its basis for assessment. From this, the Local Authority will determine whether the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan is likely to result in significant impacts on ‘European’ sites and therefore whether an ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is required.

### Requirements of the Habitats Directive

3. Appropriate Assessment of plans that could affect Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites (jointly called ‘European sites’) is required by Article 6(3) of the European Habitats Directive<sup>2</sup>, which states:

*“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [European] site but likely to have significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions in paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate having obtained the opinion of the general public.”*

4. Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive discusses alternative solutions, the test of “imperative reasons of over-riding public interest” (IROPI) and compensatory measures.

*“If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of social and economic nature, the Member State shall take compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.”*

---

<sup>2</sup> Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna

5. The Habitats Directive applies the precautionary principle to European sites. Plans and projects can only be permitted if it can be shown that they will have no significant adverse effect on the integrity of any European site, or if there are no alternatives to them and there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest as to why they should go ahead. In such cases, compensation will be necessary to ensure the overall integrity of the site network.
6. The Habitat Directive was implemented into UK legislation through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended<sup>3</sup>). This piece of legislation is generally known as the Habitats Regulations.

### **Methodology used for this assessment**

7. Habitat Regulations Assessment can involve up to a four-stage process.
  1. **Screening:** Determining whether a plan 'alone, or in combination' is likely to have a significant effect on a European site
  2. **Appropriate Assessment:** Determining whether, in view of the site's conservation objectives, the plan 'alone or in combination' would have an adverse effect (or risk of this) on the integrity of the site. If not, the plan can proceed
  3. **Assessment of Alternative Solutions:** Where a plan is assessed as having an adverse effect (or risk of this) on the integrity of a site, there should be an examination of alternatives.
  4. **Assessment where no alternative solutions remain and where adverse impacts remain**
8. This report discusses Stage 1 (screening) only. Broadly, the HRA process involves:
  - Identification of European sites that could possibly be affected by the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan, qualifying features of those sites and, where available, key environmental conditions to support the sites' integrity. This process relied on information used in the HRA prepared for the Local Plan 2036 and emerging Local Plan 2040 which is at examination stage;
  - Identification of possible impacts arising from the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan;
  - Identification of impacts and policies that could be screened out, and those that were likely to require more detailed appropriate assessment;
  - Consultation with Natural England to confirm that the proposed approach for the Habitat Regulations Assessment was acceptable, and what additional information (if any) was required to complete the analysis.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 as amended by The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) Regulations 2012.



## Screening

### European Sites

9. Table 1 lists all European sites that area within 20km of the boundary of Oxford City Council.

Name of site	Distance from boundary	Reason for designation <sup>4</sup>
Oxford Meadows SAC	Within the City Boundary, extending into administrative area for Cherwell District Council and into the administrative boundary of West Oxfordshire District Council.	<p><b>Annex I habitats that area primary reason for selection of this site</b>            Oxford Meadows represents lowland meadows in the Thames Valley centre of distribution. The site includes vegetation communities that are perhaps unique in the world reflecting the influence of long-term grazing and hay-cutting on lowland meadows. The site has benefited from the survival of traditional management, which has been undertaken for several centuries, and so exhibits good conservation of structure and function.</p> <p><b>Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site</b>            Oxford Meadows is selected because Port Meadow is the larger of only two known sites in the UK for creeping marshwort <i>Apium repens</i>.</p>
Cothill Fen SAC	Located 7km from the City boundary	<p><b>Annex I habitats that area primary reason for selection of this site</b>            This lowland valley mire contains one of the largest surviving examples of alkaline fen vegetation in central England, a region where fen vegetation is rare. The M13 Schoenus nigricans – Juncus subnodulosus vegetation found here occurs under a wide range of hydrological conditions, with frequent bottle sedge <i>Carex rostrata</i>, grass-of-Parnassus <i>Parnassia palustris</i>, common butterwort <i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i> and marsh helleborine <i>Epipactis palustris</i>. The alkaline fen vegetation forms transitions to other vegetation types that are similar to M24 <i>Molinia caerulea</i> – <i>Cirsium dissectum</i> fen-meadow and S25 <i>Phragmites australis</i> – <i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i> tall-herb fen and wet alder <i>Alnus</i> spp. Wood</p>
Little Wittenham SAC	Located 19km from the City Boundary	<p><b>Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site</b>            One of the best-studied great crested newt sites in the UK, Little Wittenham comprises two main ponds set in a predominantly woodland context (broad-leaved and conifer woodland is present). There are also areas of grassland, with sheep grazing and arable bordering the woodland to the south and west. The River Thames is just to the north of the site, and a hill fort to the south. Large numbers of great crested newts <i>Triturus cristatus</i> have been recorded in the two main ponds, and research has revealed that they range several hundred metres into the woodland blocks.</p>

<sup>4</sup> Source: [www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk)

### **Oxford Local Plan 2036 and Emerging Oxford Local Plan 2040**

10. An HRA was carried out for the Local Plan 2036 and emerging Local Plan 2040 which is at examination stage. Both the 2036 Local Plan and emerging 2040 Local Plan set a capacity-based housing target aimed at meeting as much housing need as possible. They also contain a range of other policies including support for the redevelopment of redundant employment sites for other uses such as housing, and general policies on protecting and enhancing green infrastructure, increasing biodiversity, and achieving net zero carbon emissions.
11. The HRA for both the current and emerging Plans examined whether the policies within them would adversely affect the integrity of any European Sites within 20km of the City. Of the three sites that were within 20km of the Oxford, two were screened out, and an Appropriate Assessment was undertaken on the Oxford Meadows SAC.
12. The HRA concluded that none of the policies contained in the Plans had any adverse impacts on the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC with regard to the following environmental requirements of the site:
  - Maintenance of traditional hay cut and light aftermath grazing
  - Absence of direct fertilisation
  - Minimal air pollution
  - Absence of nutrient enrichment of waters; good water quality
  - Balanced hydrological regime
  - Recreational pressures

### **Content of the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan**

13. Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan provides a series of policies to:
  - Conserve and enhance public open spaces and biodiversity within Littlemore Neighbourhood Area;
  - Protecting Community Assets and Infrastructure
  - Reduce impacts of traffic and parking pressure in the area
14. No development sites have been proposed as allocations in the Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Other Plans and Projects**

15. In compliance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the City Council must consider the implications of the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan for relevant sites 'in combination' with other plans or projects that might have significant impacts for these sites. The HRA for the emerging 2040 Local Plan considered many of these documents, although some projects may have progressed since those assessments were made. The following list updates those projects set out in the HRA for the emerging 2040 Local Plan.

Table 2: Other plans and programmes with potential 'in-combination' impacts

Policy, Plan, Strategy/ Initiative	Proposals	Potential 'in combination' impacts?
<p>Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Part 1 Core Strategy Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report August 2015.</p> <p>In 2022, a timetable for the production of a new Minerals and Waste Local Plan was agreed. A call for sites was undertaken in 2023 and an initial consultation was scheduled to take place in 2023 as well.</p>	<p>It provides a policy framework for identifying sites for new minerals and waste development and for making decisions on planning applications.</p>	<p>The HRA concluded that the Core Strategy would not have a likely significant effect on air quality, water resources, recreation, hazardous and radioactive materials.</p>
<p>Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (adopted 2022) including Core Schemes (e.g., Traffic Filters)</p>	<p>LTP4 sets out proposed transport solutions for the county up to 2031.</p>	<p>Stage 2 HRA for Traffic Filters found that the only screening threshold that was exceeded was for NO<sub>x</sub> concentrations. The largest change at any receptor point was found to be 0.8µg/m<sup>3</sup>. Reductions in the background NO<sub>x</sub> levels were found to be significantly larger than the largest changes found to be associated with the scheme itself (smallest background change was 4.4µg/m<sup>3</sup>). The Stage 2 HRA therefore concluded no likely significant effects as a result of the Traffic Filters.</p>
<p>Cherwell Local Plan 2040</p>	<p>The Plan will set out policies for the development of land for housing, employment and other uses.</p>	<p>Plan production at an early stage. Reg. 18 consultation not yet undertaken. HRA Screening Assessment not publicly available at time of writing. Impacts of Local Plan 2031 and Partial Review Plan both considered as part of previous HRA work.</p>
<p>South and Vale Joint Local Plan 2041</p>	<p>This plan will set out policies for the development of land for housing, employment and other uses.</p>	<p>Plan production at an early stage. Reg. 18 consultation not yet undertaken. HRA Screening Assessment not publicly available at time of writing. Impacts of previous Local Plans for South and Vale considered as part of previous HRA work.</p>

West Oxfordshire Draft Local Plan 2041	This plan will set out policies for the development of land for housing, employment and other uses.	Plan production at an early stage. Reg. 18 consultation not yet undertaken. HRA Screening Assessment not publicly available at time of writing. Impacts of previous Local Plan considered as part of previous HRA work.
East West Rail	Rail project	<p>East West Rail is a nationally significant railway project which aims to deliver much-needed transport connections for communities between Oxford and Cambridge by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Upgrading an existing section of railway between Oxford and Bicester;</li> <li>- Bringing back a section of railway between Bicester and Bletchley;</li> <li>- Refurbishing existing railway between Bletchley and Bedford; and</li> <li>- Building brand new railway infrastructure between Bedford and Cambridge.</li> </ul> <p>Air emissions may affect habitats including those with the Oxford Meadows. An approach involving the monitoring of vegetation has been agreed with Natural England, to identify any habitat changes, and to ensure that timely measures can be taken, if necessary to prevent adverse effects on the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC<sup>12</sup></p>
Thames Water Utilities Ltd Drought Plan (2022)	Water Management Plan	The HRA Screening concluded that the Drought Plan 2022 will not in any way result in any significant effect on the Oxford Meadows SAC and therefore there is no potential for in-combination effects.

Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS)	Flood Defence Scheme to reduce impact of flooding in certain areas of Oxford at the highest risk from flooding.	Natural England responded to the planning application consultation for the proposed scheme. In their public response dated 09 May 2022, Natural England stated that: "As set out in our letter of 22nd January 2019, based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have likely significant effects on the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation and has no objection to the proposed development. We do not consider the amendments subject to this current consultation to alter this."
Oxford Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership	The Pan-Regional Partnership area covers the Oxford-Cambridge Region. Government backing for the partnership unlocks access to up to £2.5m of government funding to support its priorities in delivering sustainable growth and environmental enhancements for the region.	The Pan-Regional Partnership area includes Oxford City and a number of local authorities across the UK including Cambridge City Council. While there is significant growth anticipated in this region, it is also being backed by rail infrastructure connections such as East West Rail. Last mile interventions in Oxford City include Cowley Branch Line, which is anticipated will come forward in the plan period and is likely to help with a modal shift away from private car use. It is not anticipated that the growth across the region will significantly impact the conservation objectives for the Oxford Meadows SAC.

### Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan

16. The planning policies in the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan have been assessed in Table 3. The table shows that there are no policies within the Neighbourhood Plan which are likely to have an adverse impact on the Oxford Meadows SAC.

17. Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan

A – Policies or proposals cannot have any negative impact

- B – Effects will be addressed in assessments “down the line”, including project assessment under Regulation 48
- C – Could have an effect, but would not be likely to have a significant (negative) effect (alone or in combination with other plans or projects)
- D – Likely to have a significant effect alone and would require an Appropriate Assessment
- E – Likely to have a significant effect in combination with other plans or projects and which require Appropriate Assessment of those combinations
- F – Likely to have a significant effect, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, but which would not adversely affect the integrity of a European site
- G – Likely to have a significant effect, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, and for which it cannot be ascertained that they would not adversely affect the integrity of a European site

Table 3 showing the likely key environmental considerations that have the potential for likely significant environmental effects as a result of the policies in the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Littlemore NP</b>	<b>If policy has no effect, then reasons why</b>	<b>Key environmental considerations likely to give rise to significant effects</b>
BES1 Encouraging improved and new infrastructure	A	Policy seeking to enhance existing community facilities and encourage the provision of new community infrastructure. Impacts of resulting additional development are expected to be minimal, and are expected to be mitigated by the normal planning process.	
BES1 Sheltered and supported housing	A	Policy seeking to expand the provision of sheltered and supported housing. Impacts of resulting additional development are expected to be minimal and are expected to be mitigated by the normal planning process.	
BES3 Parking pressure	A	Policy seeking to mitigate the impact of parking pressure, particularly the limitation of on streetcar parking.	
BES4 Resisting large HMOs and avoiding family houses becoming short-term letting properties	A	Policy seeking to resist the expansion of large HMOs and the net loss of residential floor space and family sized housing.	
BES5 Enhancing historic buildings	A	Policy seeking to preserve and enhance buildings that positively contribute to the historic character and identity of Littlemore.	
BES6 Encouraging energy efficiency retrofit	A	Policy seeking to encourage the retrofit for energy efficiency of existing buildings and mitigating the impact of such measures on buildings of historic significance.	
CIS1 Replacement of community facilities	A	Policy seeking the replacement of community facilities that are lost as a result of development.	

Policy	Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Littlemore NP	If policy has no effect, then reasons why	Key environmental considerations likely to give rise to significant effects
CIS2 Improvement of existing community assets	A	Policy seeking the enhancement and improvement of identified sports, leisure and recreation facilities. Impacts of resulting additional development are expected to be minimal, and are expected to be mitigated by the normal planning process.	
CIS3 Infrastructure needs and cooperation	A	Policy seeking to encourage cooperation between the parish council and districts in the delivery of new infrastructure and infrastructure enhancements.	
CIC1 Improvements to the range and quality of local shops and eating places	A	Policy seeking to improve the offer of local retail, particularly food.	
CIC2 Improved range of and access to recreation opportunities especially for young people	A	Policy seeking to encourage of additional and improved recreational facilities particularly for younger people.	
CIC3 Working with businesses and others to promote lifelong learning	A	Policy seeking to enhance lifelong learning and access to education and skills to local residents.	
NES1 Protection of, and access to, green and blue spaces	A	Policy seeking to enhance and safeguard access to key green and blue spaces in neighbourhood plan area, particularly where there is heritage significance.	
NES2 Protection of wildlife	A	Policy seeks to safeguard natural habitats and secure biodiversity net gain from development	



Policy	Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Littlemore NP	If policy has no effect, then reasons why	Key environmental considerations likely to give rise to significant effects
habitats/biodiversity		schemes, where possible beyond minimum targets set by government.	
NES3 Tree cover and protection	A	Policy seeks to maintain and increase levels of overall tree cover in neighbourhood area, and replacing trees lost due to development onsite or within neighbourhood area.	
NES4 Protection of allotments	A	Policy seeks to resist the loss of existing allotments in neighbourhood plan area, and encourage the establishment of new ones.	
NEC1 Protecting and enhancing local parks and green spaces	A	Policy seeks to secure continued maintenance, improvements and enhancements to local parks and recreational greenspaces.	
NEC2 Provision of, and safe access to, green spaces	A	Policy seeks to enhance provision of improved signage, footpaths, wheelchair access, benches and equipment to promote access and enjoyment of green spaces.	
NEC3 Community support to protect the Natural Environment	A	Policy seeks to promote community engagement efforts to encourage civic/community pride in physical environment	
NEC4 Increasing biodiversity and wildlife	A	Policy seeks to specifically protect green features such as trees, hedgerows and verges for their environmental and ecological benefits.	
TCS1 Reducing additional car journeys	A	Policy seeks to encourage development that promotes active and sustainable modes of travel	
TCS2 Net improvements in connectivity	A	Policy seeks to encourage development proposals that promote the enhancement of existing routes for walking, cycling and community transport and opportunities for new connections between key routes and the	

Policy	Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Littlemore NP	If policy has no effect, then reasons why	Key environmental considerations likely to give rise to significant effects
		neighbourhood plan area.	
TCC1 Safe Travel	A	Policy seeks the provision of infrastructure enhancements to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety on the road network in neighbourhood plan area.	
TCC2 Cowley Branch Line	A	Policy supports the reopening of Cowley Branch Line to passenger traffic and encourages adequate provision of allied infrastructure to facilitate connectivity and onward travel. Mitigation of potential adverse impacts are expected to be addressed as part of overall transport strategies and through the normal planning process.	
TCC3 Access to Cowley Centre	A	Policy seeks to encourage development that enhance connectivity to Cowley Centre including infrastructure to enhance safety of routes for pedestrians and cyclists, measures to improve bus services and accessibility for vulnerable road users.	
TCC4 Air and Noise Pollution	A	Policy seeks to encourage the monitoring of air and noise pollution levels and measures to mitigate and improvement their impacts as part of development proposals.	
TCC5 Improved Bus Services	A	Policy supports measures to enhance connectivity across the eastern side of the city, integrating the neighbourhood plan area with proposed transport hubs and the Cowley Centre, and the improvement of local bus services through the introduction of new routes and the enhancement of existing ones.	
TCC6 Discouraging through traffic	A	Plan supports measures and infrastructure schemes to reduce through-traffic in residential streets, including Park and Ride sites and access prohibitions on certain routes.	

Policy	Categorisation of the effects of elements of the Littlemore NP	If policy has no effect, then reasons why	Key environmental considerations likely to give rise to significant effects
HWS1 Primary health care facilities	A	Plan supports development proposals that deliver local primary health care and dental care facilities, along with related infrastructure to enhance accessibility by residents in the plan area and by staff. Impacts of resulting additional development are expected to be minimal and are expected to be mitigated by the normal planning process.	
HWC1 Fostering community cohesion	A	Plan supports development schemes that will facilitate the delivery of new facilities that can function as community hubs, and improved access to existing community hubs and facilities. Impacts of resulting additional development are expected to be minimal, and are expected to be mitigated by the normal planning process.	
HWC2 Enhancing the safety of the community	A	Plan supports infrastructure to enhance community safety and discourage antisocial behaviour.	
HWC3 Addressing poverty and health inequality	A	Plan supports measures and initiatives to address child poverty, skills gaps, and facilitate links with major employers and institutions to enhance access to education and work experience for residents in neighbourhood plan area.	

## Environmental Requirements for European Sites

### Oxford Meadows SAC

18. The citation for the Oxford Meadows SAC states that:

Oxford Meadows includes vegetation communities that are perhaps unique in reflecting the influence of long-term grazing and hay-cutting on lowland hay meadows. The site has benefited from the survival of traditional management, which has been undertaken for several centuries, and so exhibits good conservation structure and function. Port Meadow is the largest of only two known sites in the UK for creeping marshwort *Apium repens*.

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under article 4(4) of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*)

Qualifying species: The site is designated under article 4(4) of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Creeping marshwort *Apium Repens*

19. In January 2019, Natural England produced the Oxford Meadows SAC Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice Note<sup>3</sup> which "brings together the findings of the best available scientific evidence relating to the site's qualifying features, which may be updated or supplemented in further publications from Natural England and other sources".

20. City Council Officers have had regard to the information provided within this document, which has been supplemented by discussions and meetings with Natural England colleagues. A HRA background paper was produced at Preferred Options (Regulation 18) stage of the emerging 2040 Local Plan setting out the proposed scope of works that was intended to inform the HRA workstream.

21. Broadly speaking, it was agreed that there was no change to the key requirements that have been assessed as part of previous HRA work undertaken by the Council. As such, the following key requirements form the basis of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 HRA Screening document:

- Minimal Air Pollution;
- Absence of nutrient enrichment of waters/ good water quality;
- Balanced hydrological regime – alteration to adjacent rivers may alter flooding and botanical diversity;
- Ensuring recreational impacts are managed at reasonable level (this relates to the impacts on creeping marshwort only as set out in the Natural England publication: Oxford Meadows SAC Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice Note);
- Absence of direct fertilisation;
- Maintenance of traditional hay cut and aftermath grazing.

22. At a meeting with Natural England on 08 June 2022, it was agreed that the following should be considered as forming the key elements of the Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening for the Oxford Local Plan 2040:

- Air Pollution;
- Water Quality;
- Balanced Hydrological Regime;
- Recreational Pressure.

23. In addition to the above requirements, this HRA considers the vulnerabilities listed in the Natura 2000 – Standard Data Form for the Oxford Meadows SAC submitted by DEFRA to the European Commission in December 2015<sup>4</sup>. This form states that the Oxford Meadows SAC is vulnerable to impacts from the following sources:

- Pollution to surface waters (limnic & terrestrial, marine & brackish);
- Invasive non-native species; and,
- Human induced changes in hydraulic conditions.

24. Requirements for the maintenance of traditional hay cut and light aftermath grazing; and the absence of direct fertilisation are related only to the management of the SAC. They are not affected by the location of, for example, housing or employment development.

25. Also, the control of invasive species cannot be easily influenced by the planning regime. A Site Improvement Plan for the Oxford Meadows SAC<sup>5</sup> issued by Natural England in December 2014 highlights that the rare *Apium repens* could be affected by *Crassula* and other invasive species. However, the Plan does not indicate that the concern of *Crassula* spreading to the lower areas of Port Meadow could be dealt by control mechanisms directly linked to, or facilitated by new development. Instead, the Plan suggests that these mechanisms need to be identified at the national level. The other requirements are the subject of this report.

## Screening Conclusions

26. Previous HRAs for the Local Plan screened out the two other European sites within 20km of Oxford. These sites are Cothill Fen SAC and Little Wittenham SAC. The screening conclusions have been summarised below for completeness.

### Cothill Fen SAC

27. Cothill Fen SAC is over 7km from the Oxford city boundary and lies within a different river catchment. The site itself is in a relatively remote location and can be accessed by private car or by local residents on foot. The site has four conservation objectives – high water table; calcareous, base-rich water supply; minimal air pollution; and recreational impacts. Given that the city is in a different river catchment, there is unlikely to be a significant impact on the water-related conservation objectives as a result of policies in the Oxford Local Plan 2040. Air pollution impacts are highly localised. Given the distance from the site, it is unlikely that there will be significant air quality impacts. Finally

recreational impacts are unlikely to be significant (as result of proposed development in the Oxford Local Plan 2040. This is due to a number of factors including the remote location of Cothill Fen, its limited accessibility by modes other than private car and the fact that Oxford city has a number of alternative recreation opportunities for residents to enjoy within the city itself (e.g., University Parks, Christchurch Meadow, South Park, Bury Knowle Park, Cutteslowe Park, etc.).

### **Little Wittenham SAC**

28. Little Wittenham SAC is located 19km away and only has two conservation objectives which do not relate to site management (the Oxford Local Plan 2040 does not propose policies that will alter the way the site is managed). As such the two remaining conservation objectives for this site relate to the maintenance of water quality and levels to support the ponds suitability as breeding ponds; and potential impacts of increased recreational pressure.

29. In relation to water, levels are managed along the river Thames, and controlled through a series of locks and weirs to ensure a balanced flow, as such impacts resulting from the Oxford Local Plan 2040 are unlikely to be significant. With regard to potential recreational pressure from the increased population as a result of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 is also unlikely to be significant. This is due to the relatively remote location (access only by private car) and the fact that Oxford city has a number of alternative opportunities for residents to enjoy within the city itself (e.g., University Parks, Christchurch Meadow, South Park, Bury Knowle Park, Cutteslowe Park, etc.).

### **Oxford Meadows SAC**

30. In the case of the HRA for the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan it has been possible to screen out all of the impacts on the Oxford Meadows SAC.

- Air Quality;
- Water Quality;
- Balanced Hydrological Regime;
- Increased Recreational Pressure;
- Maintenance of traditional hay cut and light aftermath grazing\*
- Absence of direct fertilisation\*

\* These conservation objectives have been screened out as they are related to activities directly at the site which the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan will not affect

### **Air Quality**

31. In June 2018, Natural England published an internal operational guidance note entitled, *Natural England's approach to advising competent authorities on the assessment of road traffic emissions under the Habitat Regulations*<sup>6</sup>. Section 4 of the note provides, "Advice on Screening for Likely Significant Effects". Paragraph 4.10 of the note sets out that, "with regard to potential risks from road traffic emissions, Natural England and Highways England are in agreement that protected sites falling within 200m of the edge of a road affected by a plan or project need to be considered further."

32. Oxford City Council has undertaken transport modelling to understand the impact of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 alone and in-combination with other relevant plans and projects, on the road network close to the Oxford Meadows SAC.
33. Natural England Guidance suggests that only sites within 200m of a road sensitive to air pollution need to be considered. There are two roads which could have a potential impact on air quality at the Oxford Meadows SAC. These are the A34 and the A40.
34. The closest boundary of the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan area is greater than 200m away from the Oxford Meadows SAC. The Neighbourhood Plan also does not include any additional development that was not assessed as part of the HRA for the Oxford Local Plan 2036 and emerging Oxford Local Plan 2040. The Plan will not result in a significant change in air quality and the effects of change in air quality on the Oxford Meadow SAC can be assumed to be negligible.
35. Given this, the air quality objective has been screened out of the assessment.

### **Water Quality**

36. Previous HRA work recognised that pollution of groundwater could occur through the development of site allocations in locations (e.g., North Oxford Gravel Terrace), which showed a degree of hydrogeological connectivity with the Oxford Meadows SAC. As the neighbourhood plan does not involve any site allocations and the plan area is outside of the catchment area for the SAC, the water quality objective has been screened out of the assessment.

### **Balanced Hydrological Regime**

- ~~37.~~ The Oxford Meadows SAC straddles the north western boundary of Oxford. Most of it is therefore upstream of the large urban areas of Oxford. HRAs for previous Plans in Oxford ruled out the likelihood of impacts on the SAC from surface water and direct rainfall. Previous HRA work explained that the abstraction license for Farmoor Reservoir did not impact the SAC, and no increases to this abstraction licence are proposed. As such the amount of surface water is likely to remain the same throughout the Local Plan period.
- ~~38.~~ The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan area does not adjoin any part of the Oxford Meadows SAC and is well beyond its water catchment area. Given the above, these sites have been screened out of the assessment for Balanced Hydrological Regime.

### **Recreational Pressure**

39. Previous studies have shown that residents of Oxford are generally willing to walk approximately 1900m to large green spaces. As such, where a site is over 1900m away, the site has been screened out for recreational impacts. Non-residential sites within the 1900m buffer have also been screened out.

40. Given that the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan Area is well beyond this distance, this conservation objective has been screened out of the assessment.

### **Conclusion**

41. The Oxford Meadows SAC is currently judged by Natural England to be in favourable condition. As the scope of the Plan does not include site allocations or development proposals that are likely to have an adverse environmental impact, and the plan area is outside the immediate catchment area of the SAC, it is considered that the policies in the Plan alone are not likely to have adverse effects on the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC either 'alone or in combination' with other plans, projects or programmes.



**Appendix 5: Assessment of the likely significance of effects on the environment**

<b>1. Characteristics of the plan, having regard to:</b>	
(a) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan would, if adopted, form part of the Statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future development consent of projects. However, the Plan sits within the wider framework set by the National Planning Policy Framework, Oxford's Local Plan (including the extant 2036 Local Plan and the emerging 2040 Draft Local Plan). The projects for which the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan helps to set a framework are local in nature and have limited resource implications.
(b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans or programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan will be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework. The policies within the document will conform with the Council's strategic policies and compliment Oxford's Local Plan. The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to influence other plans or programmes within the within the Statutory Development Plan.
(c) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan contains policies relating to environmental considerations such as biodiversity, accessible green space, housing and sustainable transport. The Neighbourhood Plan will have to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development to be approved at examination and "made" by the City Council. Development would also be subject to the policies in Oxford's Local Plan and therefore all environmental considerations would be covered by planning policy.
(d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	<p>The Neighbourhood Plan area contains the Littlemore Conservation Area and several listed buildings.</p> <p>Most of the plan area is in Flood Zone 1, although areas directly adjoining the Littlemore Brook may be liable to localised flooding. The brook itself and its banks are designated Oxford City Wildlife Sites, as is Minchery Farm.</p> <p>The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan area contains one complete SSSI – Littlemore Railway Cutting SSSI). This SSSI is in "unfavourable – declining" condition according to the most recent assessment undertaken by Natural England in 2012.</p> <p>The plan area also contains two potential peaty soil</p>

	<p>deposit areas just off the course of Littlemore Brook. As the neighbourhood plan does not allocate sites it is unlikely that the policies in it will have a negative impact on any of the nature sites. As the plan contains a policies relating to improving biodiversity there may be small-scale positive local impacts as a result.</p> <p>Any impacts will be mitigated as part of normal planning processes.</p>
(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.	<p>The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan does not support new development proposals that are likely to have the potential for significant environmental effects. Any impacts will be addressed through normal planning processes.</p>
<b>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular to:</b>	
a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	<p>The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have some modest but enduring positive environmental effects, especially given its focus on green spaces, trees and biodiversity. Any negative effects of the plan are not likely to be reversible however they will all be all be of a local scale.</p>
b) The cumulative nature of the effects	<p>Any cumulative impacts will result from the application of policies with the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan and Oxford's Local Plan, as well projects such as the proposed Cowley Branch Line reopening and those being delivered through the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. It is likely that any cumulative effects will not be magnified in a negative manner given the positive and protective nature of the policies with Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan. What negative cumulative effects there are will be mitigated through normal planning processes.</p>
c) The transboundary nature of the effects	<p>It is unlikely that the plan will have any transboundary impacts as the plan does not allocate sites over and above those allocated through Oxford's Local Plan. Policies within the plan relate to the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan area only.</p>
d) The risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to	<p>There are no significant risks to human health or the environment. The plan is likely to improve human health through sustainable transport policies and its ambitions to improve the public access green space</p>

accidents)	network within the Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan area.
e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan relates to the area as shown in the map at Appendix 1. The magnitude and spatial extent of any effects of the plan are likely to be small and limited to within the neighbourhood plan area. As the plan does not allocate sites, it is not likely to attract additional development to the Littlemore area beyond that set out in Oxford's Local Plan.
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	The Littlemore Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites and it is unlikely that any of the policies in the plan will impact in a negative manner, special natural characteristics or cultural heritage in the area; cause environmental quality standards or limit values to be exceeded or intensify land-use. The majority of the policies are protection orientated and as such are likely to of benefit to such areas.
g) The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	There are no areas or landscapes with recognised national, Community or international protection status.