



**Strategic Environmental Assessment
Screening Determination Statement
for
North Hertfordshire District Council
Design
Supplementary Planning Document**

A large, semi-transparent watermark reading 'DRAFT' is positioned diagonally across the page.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out a Screening Determination for the North Hertfordshire District Council Design Supplementary Planning Document (hereafter Design SPD), and has been prepared by North Hertfordshire District Council. The purpose of the screening is to assess if the Design SPD will require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). More detail is given in the following sections on SEA (section 2), Supplementary Planning Documents (section 3) and the Design SPD specifically (section 4).
- 1.2 The assessment of the Design SPD and the Determination is included in sections 5, 6 and 7.

2. Strategic Environmental Assessment Context

- 2.1 European Union Directive 2001/42/EC requires SEA to be undertaken for certain types of plans or programmes that could have significant environmental effects. The Directive has been transposed into law for England and Wales in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the Regulations). The purpose of Strategic Environmental Assessment is to promote sustainable development through assessing the extent to which the plan will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives.
- 2.2 Under Regulation 9 of the Regulations, the responsible body (local parish or town council or neighbourhood forum) is required to determine whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant environmental effects, and therefore whether SEA is required. This process is called screening. It is undertaken using a specified set of criteria (set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations). The Regulations require that the results of this process are set out in a Screening Determination (this document), which must be publicly available.
- 2.3 Before the responsible body makes a formal determination, there is a requirement to consult three statutory consultation bodies designated in the Regulations (Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England) on whether an environmental assessment is required. This consultation will take place alongside consultation on the draft SPD.

3. Supplementary Planning Documents and Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.1 Planning Practice Guidance states that:
 - 3.1.1 Supplementary planning documents do not require a sustainability appraisal but may in exceptional circumstances require a strategic environmental assessment if they are likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already have been assessed during the preparation of the Local Plan.

- 3.1.2. A strategic environmental assessment is unlikely to be required where a supplementary planning document deals only with a small area at a local level (see regulation 5(6) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004), unless it is considered that there are likely to be significant environmental effects.
- 3.1.3. Before deciding whether significant environment effects are likely, the local planning authority should take into account the criteria specified in schedule 1 to the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and consult the consultation bodies¹.

3.2. This Screening Determination has taken account of this Guidance in reaching its conclusions.

4. Design SPD

- 4.1. The Design SPD sets out the aspirations for North Hertfordshire, setting out the local context in terms of landscape and built environment and what measures can be taken to create high quality development in a sustainable way which addresses climate changes. Paragraph 126 of the NPPF identifies visual tools such as design guides to provide clarity about design expectations.
- 4.2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)² defines Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) as documents which add further detail to the policies in the development plan. SPDs are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the statutory Development Plan.
- 4.3. SPDs do not have the same status as the policies within the Development Plan (in North Hertfordshire's case, the Local Plan) and are not subject to an independent Examination. However, SPDs must undergo public consultation and are considered as material considerations when determining planning applications.
- 4.4. A review of the Council's current planning guidance was undertaken in 2017. This identified that the Council's Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) dating from 2011 should be prioritised for updating. This review of current Council planning guidance, and the identification of documents to be produced in the future, was considered and approved by Cabinet on 25th July 2017.
- 4.5. The Council has previously considered whether some contributions from new development might instead be secured by introducing a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). CIL effectively operates as a flat-rate 'tax' levied upon qualifying development based on the amount of floorspace being provided. It is collected on an authority-wide basis. CIL can be spent on any matters or projects defined by the Council on its 'Regulation 123' list. However, unlike site-specific legal agreements, there is no guarantee at the point of determining applications that monies will be spent on any particular matter or project.

¹ Planning Practice Guidance: Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal, Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 11-008-20140306, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal>

² Annex 2: Glossary

4.6. In December 2018, Cabinet reaffirmed its resolution of 30th July 2013: “That a Community Infrastructure Levy for North Hertfordshire be not pursued for the time being”, and that developer contributions would continue to be collected using Section 106 legal agreements. In the Cabinet report it was also recommended that work would be expedited on the review and adoption of a revised Planning Obligations SPD to reflect the Governments’ recent strengthening of viability matters in Planning Practice Guidance; and, to address the full range of potential contributions that might be sought through s106 in the absence of CIL.

4.7. Subsequent to that Cabinet decision, the Government laid draft regulations confirming that all pooling restrictions are to be lifted so that multiple Section 106 agreements can be collected towards a single piece of infrastructure. This restriction has been in place since 2015 and presently means that no more than five Section 106 contributions may be made towards any single infrastructure scheme. This has been a notable barrier to the funding and delivery of infrastructure, particularly for larger projects.

4.8. In June 2019, the Cabinet approved the Council’s Housing Delivery Test Action Plan for publication. This contains a range of measures to boost the delivery of new homes in the District. The Action Plan reiterates this Council’s intention to prepare a Developer Contributions SPD to be adopted alongside, or shortly after, any adoption of the new Local Plan.

5. Screening Assessment

5.1. As noted above, the Regulations specify a set of criteria which must be used to assess whether any plan covered by the Regulation is likely to have a significant environmental effect and therefore require a SEA. The table below considers each of these criteria in turn.

Table 1: Assessment of likelihood of significant effects on the environment

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects	Likely to have significant effects?	Justification for assessment
1 (a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	No	The SPD provides greater detail on the policy and principles established in the emerging North Hertfordshire Local Plan. The emerging Plan has been subject to a comprehensive Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The purpose of the SPD is to provide guidance on the design of development policies (principally Policy SP9 and Policy D1

		which has been subject to SA / SEA through the process above).
1 (b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans or programmes including those in a hierarchy.	No	The SPD is intended to supplement Local Plan policies and sits below the Local Plan in terms of the planning hierarchy. The SPD must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan.
1 (c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	No	The SPD is highly relevant in terms of promoting sustainable development as it seeks to ensure the effective and consistent implementation of the design and sustainability policies. The aim of these policies is to ensure that development proposals create high quality sustainable development.
1(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan	No	There are no environmental problems relevant to the SPD. The policies within the North Hertfordshire Local Plan that the SPD supplement are not expected to have any significant effects on the environment.
1 (e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)	No	The SPD is not relevant to the implementation of EC legislation such as waste management or water protection.
2 (a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	No	The anticipated effects on the sustainability of North Hertfordshire are expected to be positive by providing guidance to support policies designed to create sustainable, high quality new development.

		The duration of the effects is difficult to define; the effects will be linked to a planning permission which is (usually) permanent unless superseded by a subsequent permission on the same site.
2 (b) the cumulative nature of the effects	No	The District Plan SA/SEA expects overall positive benefits to arise from the specific policies related to design of development that the SPD relates to.
2 (c) the trans-boundary nature of the effects	No	Design implications will be local to North Hertfordshire district and only indirect effects are expected cross-boundary, for example, where sites straddle a boundary or are located adjoining another authority.
2 (d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	No	No significant effects have been identified.
2 (e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	No	The SPD will be applied to all planning applications in the district, regardless of scale.
2 (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 (iii) intensive land-use	No	The SPD is not be able to set policy related to specific land uses. The SPD will only affect the way in which the development is designed and functions.
2 (g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status	No	None identified. Any applications for development will be required to satisfy the relevant policies for protection of the character of the area before permission is granted.

6. Consultation Responses

6.1. This screening determination has been produced alongside the consultation on the draft Design Supplementary Planning Document. The Council will consult the three statutory consultation bodies designated in the Regulations (English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England) on whether an environmental assessment is required. An updated version of this statement will be produced prior to any future adoption of the SPD. This will report any responses received from the three statutory consultees.

7. Screening Determination

7.1. In summary, it is the Council's opinion that at this time the Design SPD is not likely to have significant environmental effects and therefore a SEA is not required. The principal reasons for this opinion are that:

- The development plan policies supplemented by this SPD have themselves been subjected to SA and SEA. The SA conclusion on Policy SP9 states that the policy should help to ensure that the Plan delivers against a number of the SA framework objectives and is particularly important given the new scale of development proposed by the Plan. The appraisal of proposed main modifications to the emerging Local Plan did not indicate any change to this.
- The SPD is only entitled to provide guidance to existing policies, it is not expected that they would alter the conclusions reached in the District Plan SA/SEA. The SPD cannot set new policy. It has been prepared to build upon the District Plan policies and provide guidance to applicants regarding infrastructure provision (in accordance with the NPPF).

7.2. On the basis of the above, and considering the SE/SEA undertaken at a higher level through the preparation of the District Plan, and the effects expected, North Hertfordshire District Council concludes that the Design Supplementary Planning Document does not require a full SEA to be undertaken.