



**Strategic Environmental Assessment
Screening Determination Statement
for
North Hertfordshire District Council
Developer Contributions
Supplementary Planning Document
2023 & 2026**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out a Screening Determination for the North Hertfordshire District Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and has been prepared by North Hertfordshire District Council. The purpose of the screening is to assess if the Developer Contributions 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 Sustainability SPD specifically (section 4).
- 1.2 The assessment of the Developer Contributions 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 (the Local Planning Authority) 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 & 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:
 - i. 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.

- ii. 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.
 - iii. 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. Developer Contributions SPD

- 4.1. Developer contributions can be used to make a development acceptable but should only be used where unacceptable impacts cannot be dealt with by planning conditions. Legal tests must be applied to any planning obligations sought, and this is outlined in Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) and in paragraph 58 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Any contributions must be:
- a. necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
 - b. directly related to the development; and
 - c. fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.
- 4.2. The NPPF 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 following submission of the proposed new Local Plan for examination. This identified that the Council's Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) dating from 2006 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

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>

- 4.5. A Draft Developer Contributions SPD was subsequently produced and consulted upon between February and March 2020.³ In July 2020, Cabinet resolved to adopt the Developer Contributions SPD subject to the adoption of the new Local Plan within 12 months of the Cabinet meeting. Further to this, in the interim it was agreed that the document would be published and used as a material consideration when considering planning applications.
- 4.6. In March 2021, a Cabinet decision was made to not pursue a Community Infrastructure Levy at this time, and also to commence work on a revised and updated suite of Supplementary Planning Documents (although the latter had no bearing on the Developer Contributions SPD).
- 4.7. Delays in the Local Plan Examination precipitated a need to obtain Cabinet approval in July 2021 to continue to use the draft SPD as a material consideration in decision making, and to review the SPD to determine whether any further work was needed prior to adoption and any associated Cabinet decision. It was additionally decided at the same Cabinet meeting to use the Fields in Trust standards for open space provision in new development.
- 4.8. It is proposed that this latest version of the SPD will be consulted upon starting in October 2022 to enable adoption at the same time as, or shortly after, any future decision to adopt the Council's emerging 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	No	The SPD provides greater detail on the policy and principles established in the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan. The 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 effective and constant

conditions or by allocating resources		implementation of the relevant requirements and sustainability related policies (principally Policy SP7 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 developer contributions policy. The aim of this policy is to ensure that development proposals make provision for infrastructure that is necessary in order to accommodate the additional demands resulting from the 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

		<p>providing guidance to support policies designed to create new development supported by the necessary infrastructure.</p> <p>The SPD will require contributions towards any mitigation measures for any development that requires environmental enhancement. 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.</p>
2 (b) the cumulative nature of the effects	No	The Local Plan SA/SEA expects overall positive benefits to arise from the specific policies related to infrastructure provision that the SPD relates to.
2 (c) the trans-boundary nature of the effects	No	Planning obligations/developer contributions will be local to North Hertfordshire district and only indirect effects are expected cross-boundary, for example, where the obligation secures a contribution towards infrastructure in an adjoining 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 relevant planning applications in the district, although the effects of the SPD will be more likely felt at a more local scale (i.e. site or neighbourhood).
<p>2 (f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <p>(i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage</p> <p>(ii) exceeded environmental quality standards</p> <p>(iii) intensive land-use</p>	No	The SPD is not able to set policy related to specific land uses. They will only affect the way in which infrastructure is funded or provided.

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 Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document. The Council will consult the three statutory consultation bodies designated in the Regulations (English Heritage, the Environment Agency & 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 concluded that at this time the Developer Contributions SPD is not likely to have significant environmental effects and therefore a SEA is not required. The principal reasons for this conclusion are that:
- The development plan policies supplemented by this SPD have themselves been subjected to SA and SEA. The SA conclusion on Policy SP7 states that the policy is critical in ensuring that the Plan delivers against a significant number of the sub-objectives in the sustainability appraisal framework, not only through ensuring the delivery of needed infrastructure but also through making provision for the mitigation of the adverse impacts of new development. 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 Local Plan SA/SEA. The SPD cannot set new policy. It has been prepared to build upon the Local 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 Local Plan, and the effects expected, North Hertfordshire District Council concludes that the Developer Contributions SPD does not require a full SEA to be undertaken.

8. Addendum for 2026 Developer Contributions SPD

- 8.1. The Developer Contributions SPD was adopted in February 2023 to support the implementation of the development and has been used to secure appropriate contributions arising from developments across the District.
- 8.2. There are a number of areas where updates to the Developer Contributions SPD 2023 were considered necessary. The significant changes included:
 - Deleting references throughout the document to developer contributions requested by Hertfordshire County Council;
 - Updating and providing additional details with regard to Biodiversity Net Gain;
 - Updating the open space standards to reflect the new guidance published by Fields in Trust; and
 - General updating of relevant strategies and guidance where those have been updated or new guidance has been published.
- 8.3. Consultation has taken place on the draft Developer Contributions SPD and a number of comments have been received which are summarised below:
 - Support to replace the references for HCC developer contributions with a link to the guide that the County Council have published;
 - A number of representations were made in respect of the delivery of infrastructure ahead of planned development. A minor change was made to reference 'expected timescales' that funding would apply to, however the overarching principle within the SPD remains unchanged; it is considered to be reasonable for large or multiple developments to pay for infrastructure that has been forward funded, enabling it to be delivered at the same time or ahead of development it supports. Statutory planning obligation tests will still apply.
 - A number of amendments were made to the section Vacant Building Credit to simplify the text;
 - Significant updates have been made to Section 7: Healthy Communities as the information and costs for healthcare facilities have been updated by the Central East Integrated Care Board;
 - Some further amendments have been made to update the Biodiversity Net Gain requirements;
 - A new section has been added to the SPD, "Open Space, Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities". This amendment has been made to ensure that all the relevant guidance is in one section of the SPD;
 - There were objections which related to the proposed introduction of open space provision in different scales of development, or "tiers". The objections stated that these changes made the SPD complicated. It is agreed that these changes should not be made in the Developer Contributions SPD as the District Design Code SPD can include the details of how open space is provided in new development; and
 - There were no objections to updating the Fields in Trust open space standards in the SPD.
- 8.4. The explanatory text in the Developer Contributions SPD has been amended in response to the representations made, but there are no substantive changes in the approach of the SPD and therefore it is considered that the SEA screening determination remains the same as for the 2023 version of the SPD.