

# **Ropley Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2028**

## **Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment Report: Adoption Statement**

**September 2019**

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## 1. This Statement

1.1 Sustainability Appraisal (SA)/ Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) involves a series of procedural steps which are designed to meet the requirements of the SEA Regulations<sup>1</sup>. The final step in the process involves preparing a 'statement' at the time a Neighbourhood Plan is made. The SA (inc. SEA) Adoption Statement addresses the requirement to prepare a post-adoption 'statement' under Part 4 of the SEA Regulations.

1.2 The SA (inc. SEA) Adoption Statement includes information on:

- how sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Neighbourhood Plan;
- how the SA has been taken into account;
- how the results of public consultation have been taken into account;
- the reasons for choosing the made Neighbourhood Plan; and,
- how any significant sustainability effects of implementing the Neighbourhood Plan will be monitored.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 The Ropley Neighbourhood Plan (RNP) sets out the planning policy framework for Ropley Parish over the period 2015-2028. The RNP was prepared to be in conformity with the emerging East Hampshire District Council Local Plan and adopted Joint Core Strategy, and it sets out a vision, objectives and a range of policies for the Parish / Ropley neighbourhood area which follows the Parish boundary omitting the small areas inside the South Downs National Park Authority. Policies relate to a range of topics, including housing, landscape, the built environment, community services and open space.

2.2 The Vision for the RNP is as follows:

*"The parish of Ropley will continue to retain its character and identity comprising a central core community surrounded by a number of clusters of development set in a rural landscape.*

*New housing of a type and size to meet the needs of those who currently or have previously lived within the Parish will be supported by the careful siting of new homes and other facilities so that they are integrated sympathetically into the built environment and the landscape. Clusters of developments will continue to be separated from each other by areas of countryside where farming and other rural businesses will continue to thrive and evolve.*

*Furthermore, the cultural and community assets of the Parish, including St Peter's Church, shop, post office, village hall and sports facilities, that have been identified as being of value and importance, will have been maintained and further enhanced."*

2.3 Following extensive work and community involvement on the RNP by the Ropley Neighbourhood Planning Group (RPG) from March 2015, Ropley

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<sup>1</sup> The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Parish Council (RPC) submitted the RNP (2015-2028) and supporting documents to East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) in December 2018.

- 2.4 EHDC subsequently published the RNP for formal public consultation between 14 December 2018 – 25 January 2019 (Regulation 16) and all representations received were forwarded to an Independent Examiner Mr Andrew Ashcroft who was appointed by the Council, with the agreement of RPC, to examine the Plan.
- 2.5 On the 15 April 2019, the Examiner provided his Report to EHC and RPC which concluded that, subject to a number of modifications, the RNP meets the basic conditions and other statutory requirements. The Examiner also recommended that, subject to the modifications proposed, the RNP should proceed to a referendum.
- 2.6 Following a positive outcome at the referendum, the Ropley Neighbourhood Plan (RNP) was 'made' on 19 September 2019.
- 2.7 The stages of the Neighbourhood Plan and SA (Inc. SEA) are discussed below.

### **3. How sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Neighbourhood Plan**

- 3.1 In parallel with the development of the RNP, a SA process has been undertaken. This incorporated SEA, as required by the SEA Regulations. RPC commissioned consultants (AECOM) to undertake the SA (inc. SEA) of the RNP.
- 3.2 Neighbourhood Groups use SA/SEA to assess Neighbourhood Plans against a set of sustainability objectives developed in consultation with interested parties. The purpose of the appraisal is to avoid adverse environmental and socio-economic effects and identify opportunities to improve the environmental quality of the neighbourhood planning area, and the quality of life of residents through the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.3 The SA was integral to and has informed the plan making process at each stage.

### **4. How the SA has been taken into account**

#### Consultation on the Scope for the SA (inc. SEA)

- 4.1 In July 2017 EHDC determined that the RNP required a SEA, therefore a SA (inc. SEA) Scoping Report for the RNP, which presented the proposed scope of the SA, was prepared and provided to the three statutory bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) In October 2017. Consultation responses were received from the Environment Agency and Historic England. No comments were provided by Natural England.

## Regulation 14 Consultation

- 4.2 The SA consultants appraised an initial draft of the preferred RNP. The purpose of this process was to provide a sustainability perspective of the plan prior to its finalisation for 'Regulation 14' consultation. A series of recommendations were made by the SA consultants to the RNP Steering Group at this stage. The Steering Group for the RNP considered these recommendations and subsequently the RNP was updated prior to consultation. In January 2018 the SA consultant AECOM appraised the final Regulation 14 consultation version of the Neighbourhood Plan. The findings of the appraisal were subsequently presented in the SA Report accompanying the Regulation 14 version of the RNP as part of the consultation between February and March 2018.

## Submission version of the RNP

- 4.3 Following Regulation 14 consultation on the RNP, the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan were updated to take into account responses received during the six-week period of consultation.
- 4.4 An SA of the revised version of the RNP was then undertaken. A Submission version of the SA Report (October 2017) was subsequently prepared to accompany the Submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan. The purpose of this SA Report was to:
- Identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the current RNP and alternatives; and
  - Provide an opportunity for statutory consultees, interested parties and the public to offer views on any aspect of the SA process.
- 4.5 The SA Report contains:
- An outline of the contents and main objectives of the RNP and its relationship with other relevant policies, plans and programmes;
  - Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and key sustainability issues;
  - The SA Framework of objectives and appraisal questions against which the RNP has been assessed;
  - The appraisal of alternative approaches for the RNP;
  - The likely significant effects of the RNP in environmental terms;
  - The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and, as fully as possible, offset any significant adverse effects as a result of the RNP; and
  - The next steps for the RNP and accompanying SA process.

## Independent Examination and Referendum

- 4.6 Following the Submission of the RNP to East Hampshire District Council, the Neighbourhood Plan and accompanying SA Report underwent Regulation 16 consultation from 14 December 2018 – 25 January 2019.

- 4.7 Independent Examination was subsequently undertaken, with the Examiner's Report presented on 15 April 2019. Subject to a number of modifications being made, the Independent Examiner recommended that the RNP would meet the Basic Conditions and did not breach and was otherwise compatible with EU obligations and with Convention Rights.
- 4.8 The recommended modifications to the RNP were evaluated in relation to the findings of the SA Report accompanying the submission version of the RNP. It was considered that the proposed modifications would not affect the overall SA findings presented in the SA Report and would not have significant environmental effects.
- 4.9 The updated RNP was subject to a referendum on 11 July 2019, organised by East Hampshire District Council. To the question "Do you want East Hampshire District Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Ropley to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?", 87.7% of votes cast said yes out of a total 342 votes that were cast.
- 4.10 Reflecting the favourable outcome of the referendum, the RNP was subsequently 'made' on 19 September 2019.

## **5. How the results of public consultation have been taken into account**

- 5.1 Each version of the SA (inc. SEA) has been subject to public consultation. Comments from the statutory bodies at all stages of the SA (inc. SEA) process were taken into account. None of the statutory bodies raised any concerns with the SA (inc. SEA) or its conclusions.
- 5.2 Representations received on the SA (inc. SEA) consultation and the Parish Council's response, where appropriate, have been provided on the parish council website for public viewing.

## **6. The reasons for choosing the made Neighbourhood Plan**

- 6.1 The SA (inc. SEA) has considered reasonable alternatives and, for each iteration of the SA, a clear audit trail has been provided of the preferred options taken forward within the RNP. The SA (inc. SEA) concludes that the RNP is likely to lead to some significant positive effects and also some residual significant negative effects. To help address residual significant negative effects, the Submission version of the RNP presented a number of policy interventions to help limit potential effects and achieve enhancements where possible.

6.2A number of alternative approaches were considered in the SA and SEA in relation to the scale and form of new housing development to be taken forward through the Neighbourhood Plan. These were designed to deliver 27 dwellings in Ropley, four of those being Self Build. Alternative sites were appraised as part of the SA process.

6.3 Policies in the Local Plan have also been subject to a SA (inc. SEA) and they best achieve the dimensions of sustainable development in comparison to the reasonable alternative options. The SAs ensured that the refinement of policies did not themselves give rise to significant effects, and appropriate mitigation measures were integrated to ensure the policies chosen were the most sustainable.

## **7. How any significant sustainability effects of implementing the Neighbourhood Plan will be monitored**

7.1 The RNP will be subject to an on-going programme of monitoring as part of the Councils' Authority Monitoring Reports (AMR). This will demonstrate the on-going suitability of the Plan's policies/allocations and enable any unforeseen effects arising from their implementation to be identified. Monitoring will also provide information as to whether the predicted effects of the SA were accurate.

7.2 Monitoring plays an important role in assessing the actual effects of any plans, including the RNP. This can feed into more accurate future predictions of effects, and can also help identify where changes need to be made to promote more sustainable development within the Ropley Neighbourhood Area.

7.3 The SA (inc. SEA) process has continually assessed and identified predicted significant positive and negative effects from the Plan with mitigation and/or enhancement measures being integrated at appropriate stages in the evolution of the Plan. This has ensured that EHDC and RPC are able to appropriately address these effects and monitor the potential for unforeseen adverse impacts.

## **8. Further information**

8.1 A hard copy of the 'made' RNP and the SA (inc. SEA) documents, including this SA (inc. SEA) Adoption Statement can be inspected upon request at the council offices:

East Hampshire District Council, Penns Place, Petersfield, Hampshire, GU31 4EX (9am-5pm, Monday – Friday)

8.2 In addition, all of the documents can be viewed online on the council's website at: <https://www.easthants.gov.uk/ropley-neighbourhood-plan>