

Stevenage Borough Council

Stevenage Station Gateway Area Action Plan – Preferred Options

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Statement

January 2023

1. The Purpose of this Statement

- 1.1. This screening statement has been prepared to determine whether the Station Gateway Area Action Plan - Preferred Options should be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive) and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations).
- 1.2. The purpose of the Station Gateway AAP is to aid the effective implementation of policies in the Stevenage Borough Local Plan, adopted May 2019. Specifically, the AAP is being introduced to support:
 - Policy TC4 – Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area
- 1.3. The AAP will be used as a material consideration in determining planning applications and will provide the basis for development to be taken forward, giving developers and stakeholders certainty as to detailed proposals for the area.

2. Strategic Environmental Assessment – Regulatory requirements

- 2.1. The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC. This was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations). Detailed guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication [‘A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’](#) (ODPM, 2005) and [Paragraph 11- 008 of the Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\)](#), which states that “a sustainability appraisal should be prepared for any of the documents that can form part of a local plan, including core strategies site allocation documents and area action plans”.
- 2.2. Under the requirements of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004), certain types of plans that set the framework for the consent of future development projects, must be subject to an environmental assessment.
- 2.3. The objective of Strategic Environmental Assessment is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 2.4. The 2001 Directive has been updated a number of times, with the most recent Directive issued in April 2014. While Article numbers cited in the 2005 guidance have been updated/removed, the principle of determining whether a Plan or Programme will have likely significant effects on the environment remain the same. Therefore, this screening statement uses the only Government guidance available.

3. The Strategic Environmental Appraisal Process

- 3.1. The first stage of the process is for the Council to determine whether or not the AAP is likely to have significant effects on the environment. This screening process includes assessing the AAP against a set of criteria (as set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations). The results of this are set out in Appendix 1 of this statement. The aim of

this statement is therefore to provide sufficient information to demonstrate whether the AAP is likely to have significant environmental effects.

- 3.2. The Council also has to consult the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England on this screening statement. A final determination cannot be made until the three statutory consultation bodies have been consulted.
- 3.3. Where the Council determines that a SEA is not required, Regulation 9(3) of the SEA Regulations states that the Council must prepare a statement setting out the reasons for this determination. This statement is the draft statement produced by the Council.

4. Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment?

- 4.1. There is a statutory requirement to undertake a SA appraisal of AAPs. The Council has considered whether an SA might be required. The AAP does not create new policies and verifies existing requirements to help support policies in the Local Plan. The AAP is therefore unlikely to have significant environmental, social or economic effects beyond those of the Local Plan policies which were subject to a comprehensive SA process, incorporating SEA, as part of the Local Plan production requirements.
- 4.2. The Council is required to consider Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). HRA is the process used to determine whether a plan or project would have significant adverse effects on the integrity of internationally designated site of nature conservation importance, known as European sites. The need for a HRA is set out within the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010](#), which transposed EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC into UK law. A HRA Appropriate Assessment Screening Document was produced during Local Plan preparation and concluded that no policies in the Local Plan would have a likely significant effect of the closest SPA at the Lee Valley, nor it's associated SSSI at Rye Meads.
- 4.3. Copies of the SA and HRA documents for the Local Plan are available here:

[Local Plan SA documents](#)

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 On the basis of the screening process, the Council believes that the Stevenage Station Gateway AAP – Preferred Options, does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (or Sustainability Appraisal or Habitats Regulations Assessment). This is due to the lack of significant environmental, social or economic effects arising from its implementation above and beyond those of the Local Plan policies which have already been appropriately assessed.

Appendix 1
A Practical Guide to the SEA Directive, ODPM 2005

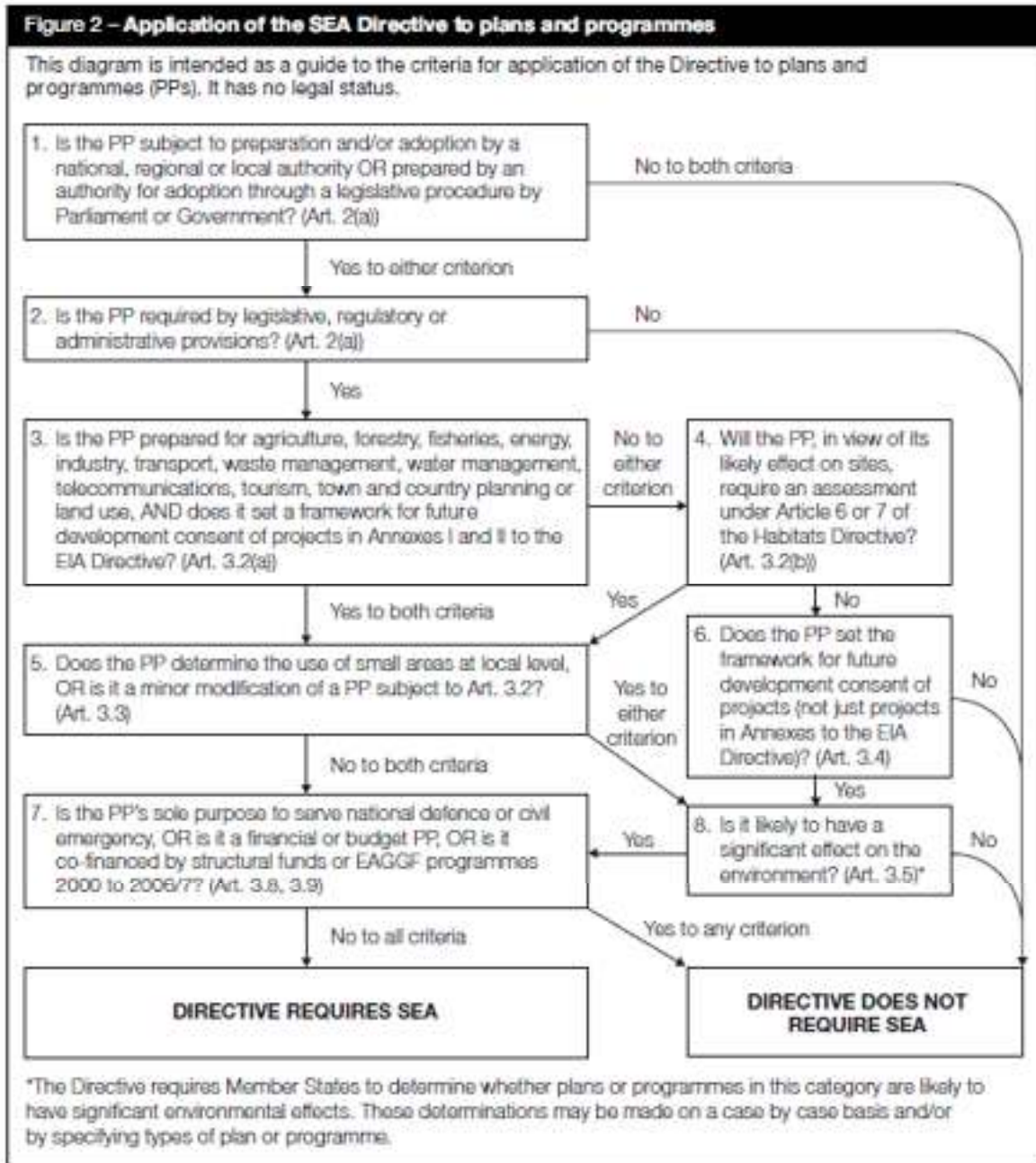


Table 1: Establishing whether there is a need for SEA

| Establishing whether there is a need for SEA Stage | Yes/No | Assessment |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Is the PP (plan or programme) 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 to either criterion: proceed to question 2 | Yes, the AAP has been prepared by SBC to provide additional detail to policies contained in the adopted Local Plan (2019) |
| 2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a)) | Yes: proceed to question 3 | Yes, the AAP will become a material consideration upon adoption and is referred to in the adopted Local Plan (2019) |
| 3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, 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 to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a)) | Yes to both criterion: proceed to question 5 | <p>The AAP is prepared for the purpose of Town and Country Planning, to supplement policies in the adopted Local Plan (2019).</p> <p>Yes, the AAP sets a framework for developments that may require EIA although this AAP does not create new policy.</p> |
| 5. Does the PP 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) | Yes to first criterion: proceed to question 8 | The AAP supplements Local Plan policies relating to parking provision which can be a form of land use. |
| 8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5) | No | <p>The AAP is not considered to have a significant effect on the environment.</p> <p>DIRECTIVE DOES NOT REQUIRE THE AAP TO UNDERGO SEA</p> |

| SEA Directive Criteria (Schedule of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) | Potential effects of AAP |
|---|---|
| 1. Characteristic of the AAP having particular regard to: | |
| (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; | The AAP provides guidance on the requirement for development within the Town Centre boundary. |
| (b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy; | The AAP sits alongside the Local Plan (adopted 2019) which was subject to SA incorporating SEA. It will influence plans for the Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area in an urban locations due to the underbound nature of Stevenage Borough. |
| (c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development; | The AAP provides additional guidance for meeting the development objectives of the adopted Local Plan (2019). |
| (d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and | The SA (inc. SEA) of the Local Plan identified a number of benefits arising from the Station gateway Major Opportunity Area policy. The AAP helps support the implementation of these policies. |
| (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). | The AAP does not influence the implementation of community legislation on the environment. |
| 2. Characteristics of the effect and area likely to be affected having particular regard to: | |
| (a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects; | The AAP is not expected to give rise to any significant environmental effects. |
| (b) the cumulative nature of the effects; | There are no anticipated negative cumulative effects of the AAP. |
| (c) the trans-boundary nature of the effects; | The AAP is not expected to give rise to any significant cross-boundary environmental effects. |
| (d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents); | There are no anticipated negative effects of the AAP on human health. |
| (e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected) | The AAP is not expected to give rise to any significant effects on population or geographical area. |
| (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 AAP is not expected to affect any local natural characteristics or cultural heritage, and is not expected to lead to the exceedance of environmental standards or promote intensive land-use. |
| (g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status. | The AAP is not expected to have an effect on landscapes of national, community or international protection status. |

Table 2: Summarised Consultation Responses from Statutory Consultees - January 2021 for ‘Stevenage Gateway AAP – Issues and Options’

| Organisation | Summarised Comments |
|---------------------|---|
| Historic England | Historic England has reviewed the draft SEA Screening Statement and agrees with the Council’s conclusion that Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required in this instance. |
| Natural England | Natural England does not consider that this Area Action Plan – SEA screening opinion poses any likely risk or opportunity in relation to our statutory purpose, and so does not wish to comment on this consultation. |
| Environment Agency | Based on our review of the draft screening statement, we agree with the environmental issues that have been included and do not have any further comments to make. |

Table 3: Summarised Consultation Responses from Statutory Consultees – January 2023 for ‘Stevenage Gateway AAP – ‘Preferred Options’

| Organisation | Summarised Comments |
|---------------------|--|
| Historic England | Thank you for consulting us on the Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Station Gateway Area Action Plan - Preferred Options. As the Government’s adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process, and therefore welcome the opportunity to comment on this document. I can confirm that Historic England has reviewed the SEA Screening alongside the Preferred Options Report and agrees with the Council’s conclusion that the report does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (or Sustainability Appraisal or Habitats Regulations Assessment). |
| Natural England | Awaiting response. |
| Environment Agency | Thank you for consulting us on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Statement for the Stevenage Gateway Area Action Plan. Based on our review of the screening statement, we agree that a SEA is not required in this instance. |