



Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan 2011-2031

***Strategic Environment Assessment Screening Opinion and
Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Report***

Prepared by the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan Working Group on behalf of the Okeford Fitzpaine
Parish Council

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1 SYNOPSIS

There is a legal requirement for plans and programmes to examine their impact on the environment. This UK law was implemented following a European Directive in 2001. This requires that all qualifying plans and programmes, such as a Local Plan or a Neighbourhood Plan complete a Strategic Environment Assessment. The only exception to the law is where a plan or programme can demonstrate that its impact is local and is unlikely to have a significant impact on the environment. This report examines the legislation and makes a recommendation on the need for a Strategic Environment Assessment for the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan (OFNP). The report will require consultation with North Dorset DC, Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency. Once agreed it will be publicised as part of the emerging OFNP

2 INTRODUCTION

In technical Neighbourhood Planning terms, to be ‘made’, a Neighbourhood plan must meet certain Basic Conditions and these are set out in the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan. These Basic Conditions include that the making of the plan “does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.” One of these obligations is Directive 2001/42/EC ‘on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment’.

This is often referred to as the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) Directive. The SEA Directive “seeks to provide a high level of protection of the environment by integrating environmental considerations into the process of preparing plans and programmes.” The SEA Directive is transposed into UK law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (the ‘SEA Regulations’) and it is these regulations that the plan will need to be compatible with.

A flowchart showing how the SEA process runs in parallel with Neighbourhood Planning is shown below in Diagram 1.

The Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) Regulations require the ‘responsible authority’ to ‘determine’ whether or not a plan is likely to have significant effects, and therefore whether SEA is needed. A screening determination will need to be produced by the qualifying body (QB), which in this case is the Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council.

The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, which were updated in January 2015, make clear that an environmental report should be prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations

2004 unless the need for such an environmental assessment has been screened because it is clear that it is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and a statement of reasons for this determination should then be prepared).

The purpose of this report is to provide the Screening Report that leads to a recommendation on whether a full Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) is required as part of the production of the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan.

The main issue in writing this report is in determining the criteria to be used in making the SEA recommendation. The criteria are documented at a high level in the SEA Directive, but this is at the level of 'Member States' of the EU, and guidance on how these criteria are to be implemented at Local Authority (North Dorset) level is not available. Interpretation of the criteria is dealt with in - section 3. The SEA Screening Process - of the report.

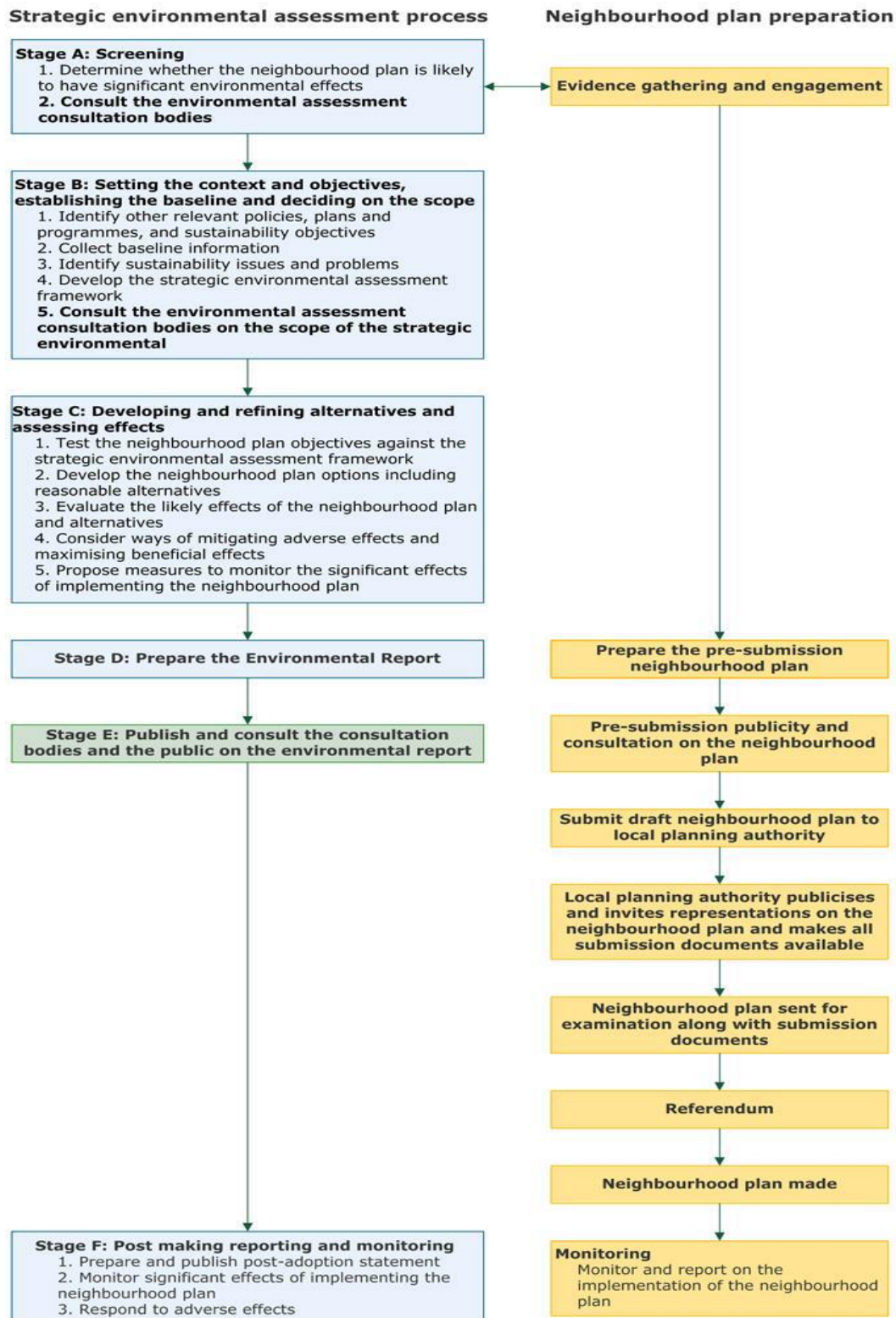


Diagram 1 The Strategic Environment Process and Neighbourhood Planning

3 THE OKEFORD FITZPAINE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – THE STORY SO FAR

3.1 Relationship with the Local Plan

The Local Plan for North Dorset was adopted in January 2016 (and its review has now commenced). The 2016 adopted Local Plan's spatial strategy (Policy 2) identifies Stalbridge and eighteen larger villages as the focus for growth to meet local needs outside of the four main towns of Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton. Okeford Fitzpaine is one of these villages.

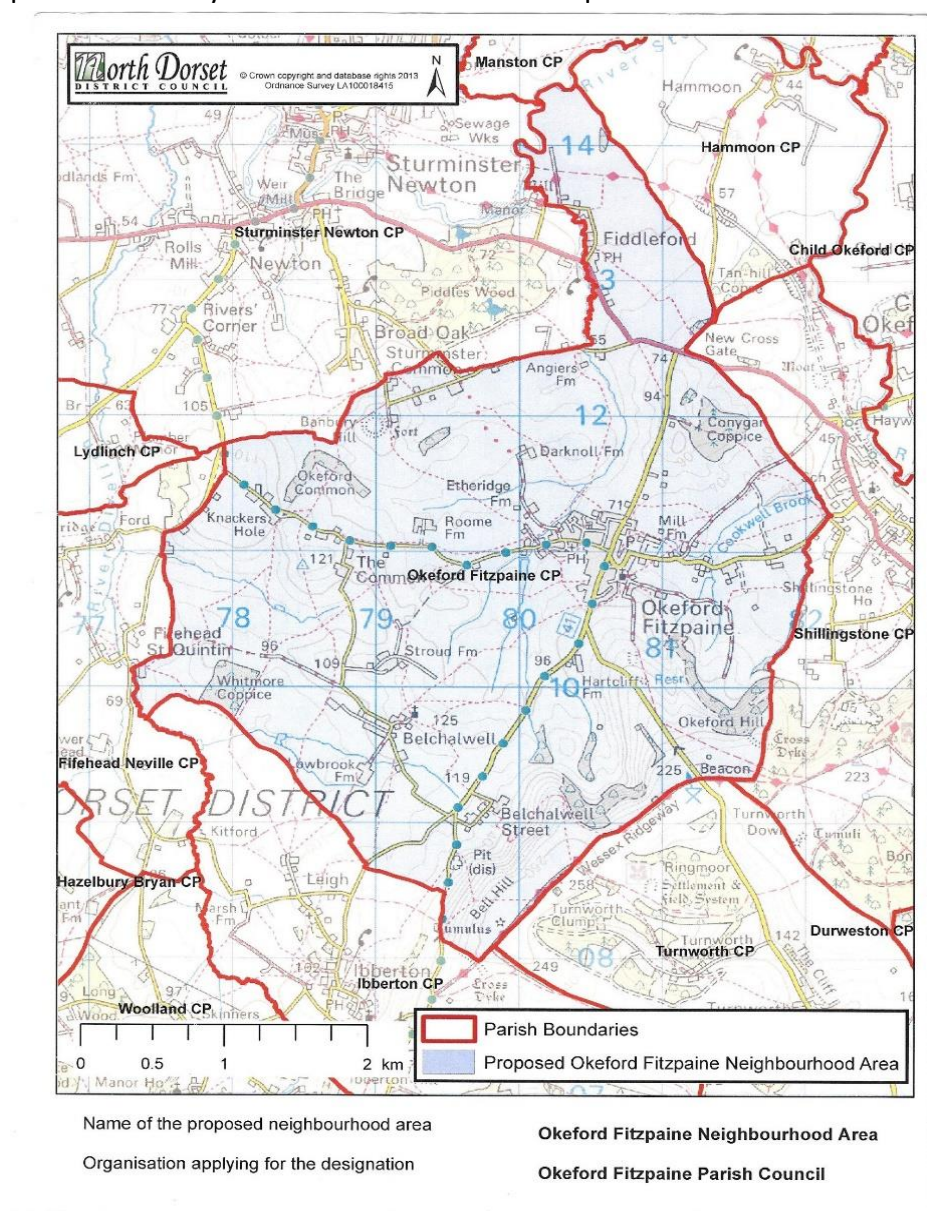
A **minimum** of 825 dwellings out of 5,700 dwellings District wide will be provided in the countryside (including Stalbridge and the villages) during the period 2011-2031.

The Local Plan makes clear that local communities can review settlement boundaries and allocate sites through their neighbourhood plans.

The Okeford Fitzpaine neighbourhood plan period is proposed to align with the adopted Local Plan (i.e. from 2011 to 2031).

3.2 The Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan Area

The Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan area was designated in April 2014 as the parish boundary and this is shown in the map below.



3.3 Vision and Objectives Shown in the Draft Plan

3.3.1 Vision

Okeford Fitzpaine is a thriving community led Parish, which seeks to grow progressively through planned sustainable development while offering residents and visitors alike a rural environment of outstanding beauty and remain an iconic conservation area of heritage buildings of the quintessential Dorset village, with both protected and safeguarded for future generations.

3.3.2 Strategic Objectives

- To progressively grow the village through sustainable housing development that meets the needs of all age and social groups, and promotes balance in the Parish demography.
- To ensure that new housing developments are on previously identified potential sites in or adjacent to the existing settlement boundary
- To evolve the Parish infrastructure to support the progressive growth in the community.
- To protect and where possible enhance the built heritage and its surroundings, for the benefit of current and future generations.
- To recognise that our rural environment and greenspaces are highly valued by all the community and to enhance them and protect them from inappropriate development.
- To invest in infrastructure that provides opportunities for more sustainable means of getting about in, around and beyond the Parish, and promotes better health and well-being of all.
- To strive to support the local economy through its existing businesses and encourage new enterprises and facilities, which enhance employment opportunities.

3.4 Assessment of Housing Need

After a period when the Neighbourhood Plan was in abeyance, the plan was restarted in Autumn 2015 with the main focus being to establish the housing need and how to meet this from the long list of available development sites. Local opinion was sought through a Parishioner survey in Quarter 4 2015 and this has been used to guide the evidence gathered from a wide range of factual sources.

The 2011 Census showed a 7% decline in the population of Okeford Fitzpaine, from 980 to 913. This coincided with the closure of 2 main employers and the loss of the majority of local employment (in excess of 150 jobs). This has threatened the sustainability of Okeford Fitzpaine Parish (and its status as one of the 18 larger villages in North Dorset, through the potential loss of some of the essential services that make a village self-sufficient. Each of the school, pub and shop have experienced difficulties which could have led to closure, and the church has had to plan for its re-generation from an average congregation in 2015 of only 15 and a dependency on a tiny number of generous benefactors.

The first step to arrest the decline within the Plan period has been the re-development of the Faccenda Chicken Factory brownfield site in the centre of the village, and within the conservation area. This development will complete in 2017 with the delivery of 37 dwellings, of which 15 (40%) are in the category of Affordable Housing.

But based on the average number of people per dwelling of 2.4 (Census 2011), this will only result in a population increase of 89, only a very slight increase on the 2001 population. In the same period of 2001-2011 the population of North Dorset grew by 10.8%, and if the parish had matched this its population in 2011 would have needed to be 1086 i.e. an additional 72 dwellings to match the growth of North Dorset.

With this background the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Planning team commissioned a Housing Needs Assessment through the AECOM Consultancy. This HNA drew on a number of factual sources, and reports commissioned by NDDC in the production of the Local Plan. The main source though was the Eastern Dorset Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which was produced for several Eastern Dorset local authorities including NDDC. This was published after the Local Plan part 1 was being finalised, and is now being used as an input to the update of the Local Plan Part 1.

The SHMA splits North Dorset into 2 markets, North and South (Okeford Fitzpaine is in the South) with a higher demand for housing in the South (approx. 60:40% South to North). Whereas the Local Plan Part 1 currently has 3 of its 4 main towns (where housing development is concentrated) in the North marketplace.

Against this background, the AECOM HNA recommended that up to 105 dwellings be built in Okeford Fitzpaine during the Plan period 2011-31. By the end of 2016, 42 were built (or in the latter stages of completion). The Neighbourhood Plan proposes a further 58 dwellings through defined site allocation, with additional in-fill development (which would be restricted to within the Settlement Boundary).

The 2012 NDDC Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (updated in 2017) showed a lengthy list of potential development sites for Okeford Fitzpaine (shown below in Draft Neighbourhood Plan Policies), with the potential for the delivery of many hundreds of dwellings. The Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan (OFNP) seeks to allocate sites to meet its local needs (as in the AECOM HNA) to maintain the sustainability of its larger village status.

The OFNP selects sites for development based upon a formal set of criteria which assesses the sustainability of each site. The results of this are documented in the revised OFNP and in summary allocates 2 further sites for development in the Plan period 2011-31:

- Pleydells Farm: Up to 27 (2020- 2025) at 38 DPH (site area comprises 0.78 hectares)
- Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine: Up to 31 (2026-2031) at 35 DPH (site area comprises 1.065 hectares)

These are shown on the map in Appendix 2.

The OFNP was revised following an initial Regulation 14 Consultation, which was held from September to November 2016. As a result of the comments received there has been a change to the selected sites, with Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine replacing the Faccenda Chicken Farm. The main environmental impact of this is to withdraw Infrastructure Policy IP1, which was concerned with the widening of Shillingstone Lane. Another important change was to produce this document to extract the Screening Opinion information into a separate stand-alone document.

The change to the status of Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine and the Faccenda Chicken Farm was based on:

- A correction to the classification of the land status of the Faccenda Chicken Farm from Brownfield to Greenfield (with agricultural buildings). It also currently retains its designation as an employment site.

- A correction to the archaeological status of the Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine. A search of archaeological records at the DCC Economy and Environment Directorate provided a nil response. Specifically 'There is nothing recorded in the Historic Environment Record (HER) within the site boundary shown on the map that you sent me.' In the letter from the Senior Archaeologist there were of course a number of caveats that would lead at some point in the development process for a more extensive HER consultation by a specialist archaeological contractor looking at a wider area around the site, and probably feeding in to further evaluation in the form of archaeological fieldwork of some sort (see also the ***Heritage Impact Assessment Report***).

A brief ecological survey of the 3 sites is shown below in Appendix 3. This concluded that the Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine had no potential value to protected and notable species, while the assessment of the Faccenda Chicken Farm showed it had potential value to a number of these species.

3.5 Draft Neighbourhood Plan Policies (Heritage)

Heritage Policy CP1:

Development within and adjacent to the Conservation Area should reflect the scale, massing, density and building materials of the heritage assets of that part of the Conservation Area in accordance with North Dorset Local Plan Policy 5 and the 'Guidance on alterations to historic buildings in North Dorset' October 2007.

Heritage Policy CP2

The regeneration of sites within or adjacent to the Okeford Fitzpaine Conservation area which enhance the existing character and appearance of the area through sensitive design will be encouraged.

Heritage Policy CP3-

No development will take place within the settlement boundary in areas designated as Local Green Spaces listed below except where such development demonstrably enhances the use of the space:

- (1) Playing Field to the rear of 34 Lower Street
- (2) Land to the rear of 29 Nether Mead
- (3) Land adjacent to 11 Mary Gardens

Local Green Spaces are shown in the map in Appendix 2, and a brief ecological appraisal of each site is shown in Appendix 3.

In addition to the areas designated as Local Green Space, a number of areas that were previously designated as Important Open/Wooded Areas have been retained. These are:

Retained IOWAs:

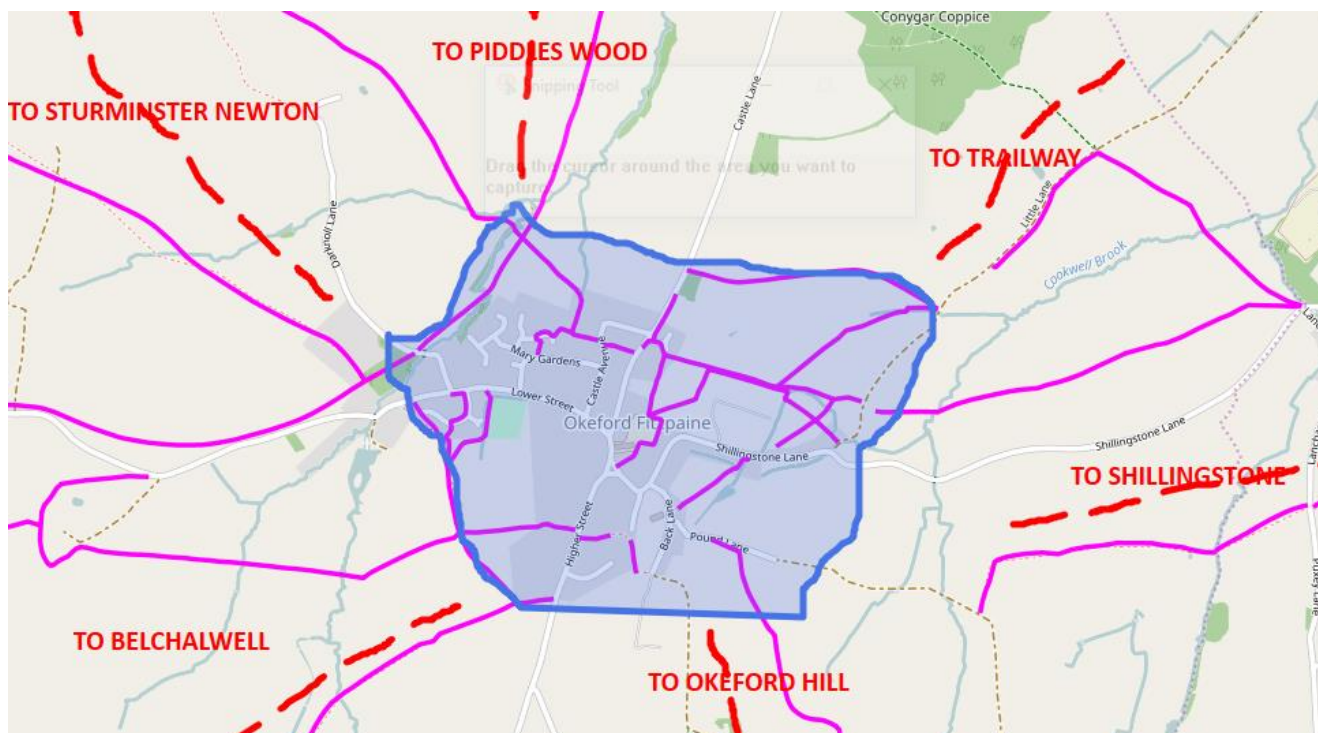
- Playing Field to the rear of Okeford Fitzpaine School
- St. Andrews Churchyard
- Land to the west of Back Lane

3.6 Types and Function of the Okeford Fitzpaine Green Infrastructure

The table below provides a brief description of each type of Green Infrastructure which provides important opportunities for outdoor recreation in support of the health and well-being of all residents.

Outdoor Recreation facilities	Recreation Ground	Okeford Fitzpaine Football Club, Children's play area, possible extension for further sports e.g. tennis courts and a Multiuse Games Area
Amenity Greenspace	Playing Field to the rear of 34 Lower Street (Bowey Field) Mary Gardens	Young children play area, outdoor play, informal sports, picnics etc. Informal play area for younger children in sight of parents
Green Corridors	Rights of Way	A circuit of easily accessible footpaths around the village. A network of footpaths and bridleways for access to the surrounding countryside and AONB (see map below)
Local Character Areas	St Andrews Churchyard	Provides the setting for the listed building church and the focal point of the village. It contains several listed monuments. A more detailed analysis of the Local Character Areas is contained in the OFNP Heritage Impact Assessment (November 2017)
Little Lane		Provides a linkage to the North Dorset Trailway (see map below)

In parallel to the production of the OFNP, the Parish Council is investing in the enhancement of the footpaths (subject to landowner agreement) that can be linked together to provide a circuit of footpaths around the village. The main improvements to the footpaths is to provide 'Kissing Gates' or equivalent, to improve the access to the footpaths and make them open to as wide a cross section of the parishioners as possible. In addition to providing opportunities for exercise on the 'doorstep' of parishioners, the circuit also links to footpaths that can take the walker further afield, to visit SSSIs, the AONB and the Wessex Way, the Trailway, and local towns and villages.



Key:

---- Footpaths

----- Circuit of local footpaths

----- General Direction of footpath

3.7 Draft Neighbourhood Plan Policies (Housing)

3.7.1 Housing Objectives

Objectives specifically relating to housing have also been developed to complement the main objectives of the plan and provide a basis for the housing policies:

1. To identify the location(s) for the progressive addition of housing stock within the Parish.
2. To utilise existing 'previously identified sites', in preference to any other sites.
3. To provide a circuit of easily accessible footpaths around the village and bridleways for access to the surrounding countryside.
4. To optimise the number of 'infill' developments within the Okeford Fitzpaine Village Settlement Boundary to preserve open space of amenity and heritage value.
5. To ensure that housing is built in keeping with the rural character of the Parish.
6. To ensure that local needs are fully considered, and given priority in the provision of affordable housing.
7. To ensure that the density of development of new housing reflects the rural character of the Parish and adequately accommodates the parking needs of residents and visitors.

8. While meeting a diverse range of market housing needs, priority should be given to housing that will be attractive to: younger families in order that a more sustainable demographic balance is facilitated within the Parish; older residents with bungalow style housing that will enable older residents to downsize without leaving the Parish.
9. To support the conversion of barns and redundant farm buildings into holiday accommodation and small business units to facilitate growth in the local economy and employment. (see also EN1)

3.7.2 Housing Policies

To meet these Housing Objectives a set of Housing Policies were developed based upon the research findings outlined above and a Site Selection process based on clear Sustainability Objectives which were used to assess each of the potential sites. The long list of sites was constructed from the NDDC Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) 2010/12, a Call for Sites by the OFNP Working Party (May 2016), and the NDDC Call for Sites (Q4 2016). As a result of the selection the following conclusions were reached:

- The local housing needs from the AECOM HNA for the Plan Period could entirely be met through the three most sustainable sites
 - Ref 1 Faccenda Chicken Factory;
 - Ref 2 Pleydells Farmyard (as redefined);
 - Ref 7 Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine

All of which are within the revised Okeford Fitzpaine Settlement Boundary.
- The following Potential Housing Sites will not be developed for housing during the Plan period.
 - Ref 4 Faccenda Chicken Farm, Shillingstone Lane
 - Ref 6 Wessex Park Homes , Shillingstone Lane
 - Ref 3 Land to the rear Pleydells Farm
 - Ref 5 Land at Castle Farm
 - ref 12 Land at the Cross Belchalwell
 - Ref 13 Land at Stroud Farm
 - Ref 14 Land at Small Acre

The following lists the Housing and supporting policies for Infrastructure, the Environment, Employment and Implementation. There is also a brief ecology appraisal for each of the future proposed development sites shown in Appendix 3

Housing Policy HP1:

The Okeford Fitzpaine Housing Needs Assessment confirms a need for 105 additional dwellings during the plan period between 2011- 2031. In order to facilitate sustainable phased growth, the following sites are allocated for development during the plan period:

- (Site 1) Faccenda Chicken Factory: 37 (2015-2020) at 47 Dwellings Per Hectare(DPH) [planning permission already granted and in build]
- (Site 2) Pleydells Farm: Up to 27 (2020- 2025) at 38 DPH (site area comprises 0.78 hectares)
- (Site 3) Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine : Up to 31 (2025-2031) at 35 DPH (site area comprises 1.065 hectares)

Housing Policy HP2:

All new housing development will provide an adequate mix of dwellings in terms of size, type and tenure in accordance with the findings of the Okeford Fitzpaine Housing Needs Assessment. Development will be expected to provide:

40% to be either one or two bedroom houses or one or two bedroom flats subject to the design of the flats being wholly in keeping with the character of the village

45% three bedroom houses OR two-bedroom bungalows

15% four-bedroom plus houses OR live-work unit OR three-bedroom bungalows

Affordable Housing in accordance with North Dorset Local Plan current Policy.

Housing Policy HP3:

New development within the settlement boundary of Okeford Fitzpaine should deliver high quality sustainable design in accordance with National and Local Plan Policy. In addition, it must adhere to the following development principles:

Contribute positively to the areas character, scale, layout, height and form and conform with national and local plan design and heritage policies as well as other policies in this neighbourhood plan;

Provide an adequate amount of car parking spaces within the site to ensure that will minimise additional on-street parking on the adjacent highway network, and be in accordance with The Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset Residential Car Parking Study, 2011 or any subsequent adopted policy documents;

Incorporate landscaping schemes with associated maintenance and management plans which include a net gain in native species of trees, and burying utility supplies underground;

Incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage System within each site which compare to green field rather than brown field surface run-off levels, and ensure their future maintenance is incorporated in the management plans;

Set aside areas for strategic landscaping and amenity space on any areas of the site which are greenfield, AONB or have never been built upon;

Any infilling within the settlement boundary must be in strict accordance with the layout and density of the immediately adjoining properties especially in relation to density, front, rear and side garden areas size and character and appearance and sufficient gaps should be left between buildings;

Full detailed planning applications will be encouraged in preference to outline planning applications due to the environmental and heritage significance of the parish and the need to consider detailed design and layout issues at an early stage;

Housing Policy HP4

The requirement for Rural Exception sites within the Plan period 2011-31 will be monitored against a nil requirement as at 2015.

3.7.3 Other Policies

Infrastructure Policy IP1:

The provision of a viable safe and direct route for pedestrian and cycles (all ages and abilities) to the North Dorset Trailway is a priority improvement project which may be funded from S106 money received from the Old Dairy Development together with grants from other organisations in order to mitigate against any potential impact on the existing highway network and ensure that the village is developed in a sustainable manner. The following issues should be addressed as a priority:

- The provision of a safe route to Little Lane
- Upgrading of Little Lane
- The provision of a safer crossing across the A357 at the junction with Little Lane

Environmental Policy EP1

The Parish will continue to adhere to the relevant European, national and local environmental policies.

Economy Policy EN1 –

The conversion of barns and redundant farm buildings for business and tourist related uses only, will be supported. Suitable uses include holiday-lets, office, light industrial (B1) and live-work units.

A further Environmental Policy EP2 has been included in the revised OFNP, and this will seek to mitigate the impact of increasing urbanisation on the local environment. Appendix 3 provides an ecological overview of the 2 future development sites, and the Local Green Space. EP2 will include:

- The requirement for a Bio Diversity Mitigation Plan as part of each application for planning permission.
- Use of the Natural Environment Team Species and Habitat Advice Notes to plan the sustainable promotion of species local to Dorset across the Local Green Spaces and

IOWAs (subject to landowner permission). The planting out of road verges with local species will also be considered.

Implementing the plan: IM1

In accordance with the Policies of the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan , Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council will work with North Dorset District Council and all relevant partners to ensure that Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy monies raised in the Parish are spent on priority improvements projects, as determined by the Parish Council in consultation with parishioners.

The Q4 2015 Parishioner Survey identified the creation of direct pedestrian and cycle access to the North Dorset Trailway at Shillingstone including any trail routes, as a priority project.

4 THE SEA SCREENING PROCESS

Articles 2 and 3 of the SEA Directive provide the legislative framework for deciding whether a plan or programme requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment, which is summarised in diagrammatic form in Appendix 1. The broad basis for the decision for development plans is whether significant environmental impacts are likely.

4.1 SEA SCREENING OF THE OKEFORD FITZPAINE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The SEA screening process, which is summarised in the flowchart shown in Appendix 1, was followed and the decisions are recorded for each stage in the following table (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 – a summary of the SEA screening process for the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan, following the procedure outlined in Appendix 1.

Question in SEA screening flow chart	Response
1. Is the 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? [Article 2(a)]	YES The Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan would be prepared by Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council and adopted by North Dorset District Council through a legislative procedure.
2. Is the plan required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? [Article 2(a)]	YES The Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan would be a Statutory document, prepared in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
3. Is the plan 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 consents or projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? [Article 3.2(a)]	YES The Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan is a document prepared for town and country planning purposes, and may allocate land for future development which falls under Annex II of the EIA Directive as an urban development project.
2 Does the plan determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor	YES

modification of a plan subject to Article 3.2? [Article 3.3]	The Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan would determine the use of small areas at a local level
8. Is the Plan Likely to have a significant effect on the Environment [Article 3.5]	NO

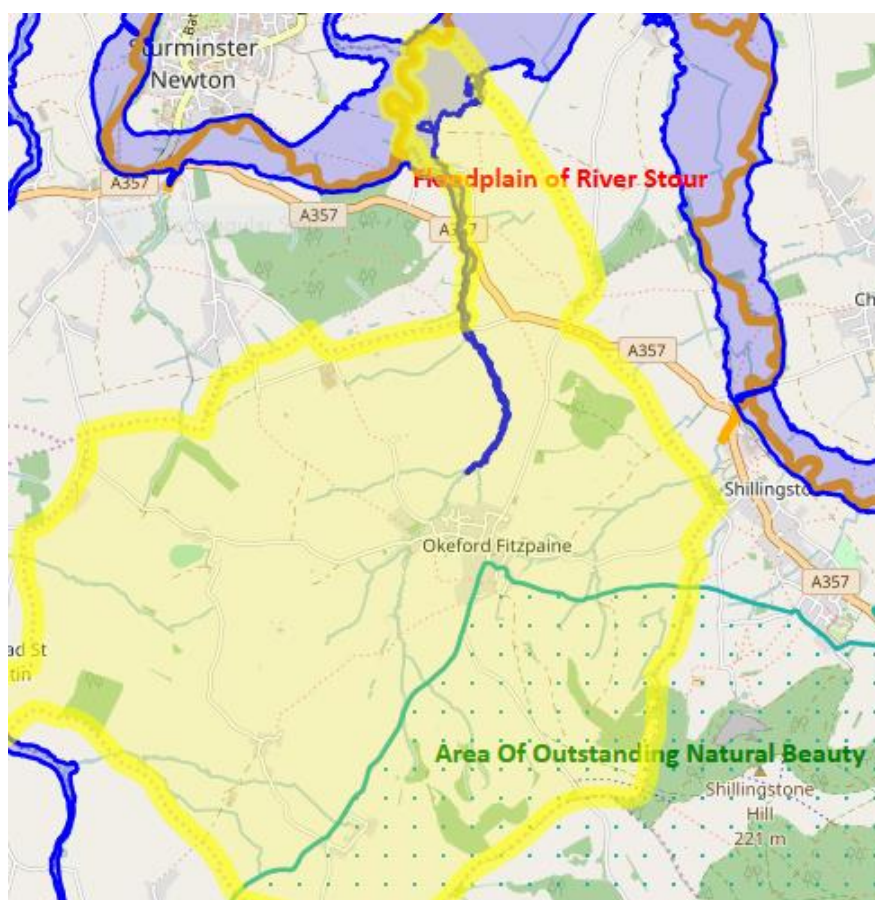
The remainder of the report examines the factors that lead to the conclusion that the OFNP will not have a significant effect on the environment. The conclusion will be subject to consultation with North Dorset DC, Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency. Subject to that agreement the document will be made available for public inspection on the Parish Council website <https://okefordfitzpaine-pc.gov.uk /neighbourhood-planning/>.

4.2 POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES – WHAT ARE THE ASSETS AT RISK

In appraising the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment, the environmental problems relevant to the plan area, together with the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

- the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, or higher levels of protection
- special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,
- exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, and intensive land-use

need to be taken into account. The following therefore provides an overview of the potential environmental issues relevant to Okeford Fitzpaine.



Map 1 The River Stour flood plan and AONB (source Dorset Explorer)

4.2.1 LANDSCAPE QUALITY

The South of the Parish lies in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which extends down from the height of Okeford Hill (246 metres) into the southern fringe of the village. The setting of the AONB is an important factor in the proposed developments with consideration in the selection criteria given to the views into the more urban settlement area. Care has been taken in the siting of the proposed development sites away from the AONB.

The landscape character of the area is chalk ridge / escarpment and chalk downland in the south, descending to rolling vales and valley pasture, which lead to the Stour floodplain in the North of the parish. These character types are described in detail in the 2008 Landscape Character Area Assessment (https://www.dorsetforyou.com/media/147860/Landscape-Character-Area-Assessment/pdf/DFY_landscape_character_assessment_evidence_base.pdf) and summarised below.

- **chalk ridge / escarpment** (part of the North Dorset Chalk Escarpment, wholly within the AONB) – noted as a dramatic and imposing landscape which dominates and provides a backdrop to the Blackmore Vale below. It has a steep, twisting and incised landform. There are some important views over the Vale from high places at the top of the chalk escarpment from the Wessex Ridgeway. From the top of Okeford and Bell Hill are views across the Blackmore Vale to the limestone ridges along the Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire county boundary. Shaftesbury and Duncliff Hill are clearly visible in the middle distance. And the height of Okeford Hill allows views over Hambledon and Hod Hill Iron Age settlements (National Trust) to the chalk escarpment in the east (SW Wiltshire Downs). These views are a consideration in the landscaping for proposed development sites.
- There are no settlements on the escarpment itself apart from a few isolated farms.
- **rolling vales** (part of the South Blackmore Rolling Vales, partly within the AONB) – noted as undulating and rolling farmland hills, with irregular shaped fields bounded by thick hedgerows, twisting hedge lined lanes with narrow verges. There are numerous scattered farmsteads. Settlements are either at the foot of the escarpment on the spring line (such as Okeford Fitzpaine and Belchalwell), or sit within the rolling vale hills (such as Okeford Common). Some small scale deciduous copses and woodlands, and isolated ‘stag headed’ oaks. Small bridged stream crossings are key features often with low parapets. Locally distinctive building materials, mainly stone, brick and thatch, adds to the character of the area (Okeford Fitzpaine historically had a brick factory at the Wessex Park Homes site). A number of *veteran trees* are noted in this landscape area.
- **valley pasture** (part of the Upper Stour Valley) – The River Stour forms the northern perimeter of the parish. It is a varied but generally flat, pastoral river valley landscape, intensively farmed with little marginal vegetation on the edges of the river channel apart from the occasional groups of trees or small copses of Willows and Alders. The hamlet of Fiddleford is in this north western corner of the parish, close to the A357. Darknoll Brook and Cookwell Brook are both tributaries of the

Stour and have their source from springs within the parish. These are considered under Flooding below.

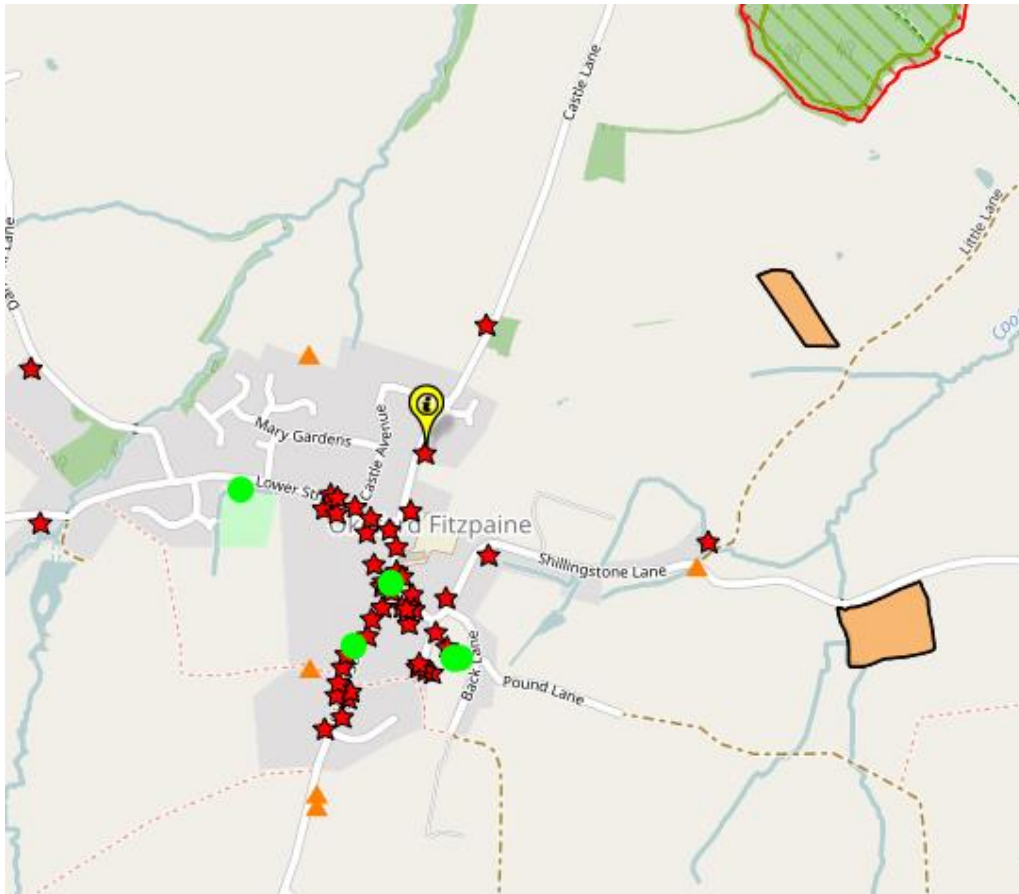
4.2.2 BIODIVERSITY AND GEODIVERSITY ASSETS

4.2.2.1

Other than the AONB, the Okeford Fitzpaine Parish has no areas or landscapes which have a recognized national, or higher levels of protection. Similarly, there are no sites of geological significance. There are however several examples of this type of site in the surrounding area, and these are discussed below.

Within the AONB at approx. ½ km south of the village is a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) known locally as *The Merridge*. An SCNI is a locally important wildlife site designated by the Dorset Wildlife Trust in partnership with the local authority, for the conservation of locally and nationally threatened species. The Merridge is designated for its assemblage of species associated with unimproved chalk downland, largely on the slopes where it has not been fertilised. These include plants that make up the particular downland community such as special grasses like sheep's fescue, sweet vernal grass, quaking oat grass, orchids such as bee orchid, common spotted orchid, pyramidal orchid and the occasional fragrant orchid. Many other plants are part of this community including cowslips, scabious, knapweed, agrimony, birdsfoot trefoil, common catsear, lady's bedstraw etc. In addition the habitat attracts downland butterflies such as marbled white, small, large and grizzled skippers and common blue as well as birds of open country such as skylark, stonechat and linnet.

Other notable habitats in the vicinity of the village are shown on the map 2 below showing ancient woodland, listed buildings and monuments. None of these overlaps with the proposed development sites.



Map 2 Okeford Fitzpaine and near environs Listed buildings and monuments (Source Dorset Explorer)

KEY:

MONUMENTS (BUILDING)



ANCIENT WOODLAND



LISTED BUILDINGS



OTHER MONUMENTS



ANCIENT ORCHARDS



The ancient woodlands include

- Conygar Coppice (at the north east point of the map)
- Coppice at the western perimeter of the parish (not shown)
- Coppice below Bell Hill at the south west perimeter of the parish (not shown)

In addition to the ancient woodlands the parish has a single Veteran Tree, which is to be found in the IOWA of the St. Andrews Churchyard, along with several other listed monuments. This will be unaffected by the proposed development sites.

There are also

- several sites of ancient orchards distributed around the parish and away from the main settlements

- lowland calcareous grasslands to the southern perimeter of the village, adjacent to Back Lane
- lowland calcareous grasslands and lowland meadows at the western perimeter of the settlement boundary, beyond Dark Knoll Lane .
- Okeford Common (maybe SCNI status but no data on Dorset Explorer) lying 1.5 km west of the Settlement Boundary) along the extension of Lower Street.

4.2.2.2

There are several sites of national or wider importance in the parishes surrounding Okeford Fitzpaine, these include

- Piddles Wood, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). On the north west border of the parish in Sturminster Newton Parish. This is broadleaved woodland, mainly oak and beech with some yew trees.
- Shillingstone Quarry SSSI. 1 km south east of the parish. This is the site of historic chalk quarrying, providing a source of local building materials.
- Hambledon and Hod Hills (SSSI). This is lowland calcareous grassland on the slopes of the ramparts of ancient forts. Now under the management of the National Trust. The hills lie to the east of the parish, 3.5/ 5kms from the eastern boundary of the parish with Shillingstone Parish.
- Blackmore Vale Commons and Moors SSSI – also part Rooksmoor SAC. Over 5kms from the western perimeter of the parish
- A prehistoric field system at Ringmoor Turnworth – this is immediately south of the southern perimeter of the parish

4.2.3 HERITAGE ASSETS

The unique character of Okeford Fitzpaine Parish is determined by its many individual ‘heritage assets’ reflecting the age and function of the village and the 3 hamlets, and the locally available building materials. The main concentration of these heritage assets can be found in the designated Conservation Area within Okeford Fitzpaine village whose boundary is focused around the centre of the village.

Okeford Fitzpaine Parish has a total of 57 listed buildings all of which are Grade II. In addition to the buildings are various listed barns, walls, tombs and a telephone box. Included in the total of 57 listed buildings are 2 churches, a shop, a pub and an inn.

The greater concentration of listed buildings is within Okeford Fitzpaine village Settlement Boundary and its immediate environs, where a total of 46 can be found.

The Conservation Area of Okeford Fitzpaine village is included in the above map 2. This pinpoints the location of the 37 listed buildings (and other listed assets) in the Conservation Area.

Also shown are the 5 listed building monuments:

- MD04517 Medieval Cross, at the centre of the village The Cross
- MD04518 Farmhouse, 50 metres south on Higher Street
- MD04512/4 Parish Church of St. Andrews, and internal wall

- MD04516 Methodist Church (outside the Conservation Area)

And additionally some monuments that represent the agricultural history of the village:

- MD04557 Pound, 100 metres south on Higher Street
- MD04554 Drove Road, adjacent to the Pound
- MD04521 Cultivation Remains

Beyond the village centre there is a sprinkling of medieval cultivation remains, chalk pits, the Okeford Brick and Tile Works (at Wessex Park Homes site) etc..

There are no registered historic parks or gardens in or close to the area.

A separate report OFNP Heritage Impact Assessment examines in detail the impact of the proposed developments on the heritage assets of the qualifying area.

4.2.4 AGRICULTURAL LAND VALUE

The farmland around Okeford Fitzpaine is a mix of agricultural grades, including a significant area of Grade 2 (very good) category land, adjoining an area poor quality (Grade 4) alongside the river (See DEFRA classifications available on-line).

Closer to the Chalk Escarpment and the area around the Okeford Fitzpaine village, the area is mainly Grade 3 (moderate) quality. This is characterized by soil with flint stone and chalk close to the surface, with clay soil. The result is soil that drains slowly and is hence waterlogged for part of the year.

According to British Geological Survey (BGS) mapping, Okeford Fitzpaine sits on bedrock of predominantly clay and mudstone, which has typically low permeability, which explains the waterlogged comment above.

4.2.5 MINERALS SAFEGUARDING ZONES

The Dorset County Council Minerals Strategy 2014 has been consulted to inform the Plan of any important minerals in the Neighbourhood Plan Area. The key mineral resources in the DCC plan area are aggregates (river terrace sand and gravel, Poole Formation sand and crushed rock), limestone (including Portland Stone, Purbeck Stone and other building stone), hydrocarbons and ball clay. The Poole Formation sand includes sand produced for non-construction purposes. Given its importance, the aggregate resource that can be extracted economically will be safeguarded, along with the limestone and ball clay resource.

While there is no active extraction of minerals within the parish, consideration must be given to the existence of any Mineral Safeguarding Areas (MSAs). Minerals are a key strategic resource and it is important that any Non-mineral development (such as housing) within the MSA must demonstrate that the sterilisation of proven mineral resources will not occur as a result of the proposed development, and that the development would not pose a serious hindrance to future extraction or processing in the vicinity.

Examination of the DCC Minerals Strategy has identified 2 areas of MSA that are either within or adjacent to the parish:

- Sand and gravel – there is an area of sand and gravel deposit at the northern end of the parish in the Fiddleford area and close to the River Stour. This is at the furthest point north in the parish and away from the Okeford Fitzpaine settlement area. It is also on the north side of the A357, which would be the service road for any mineral extraction, and this does not require mineral haulage traffic to use the main approach roads to the village.
- Other building stones – a band of Corallian Limestone runs from Wiltshire, through North Dorset and ends just beyond the western boundary of the parish. Again, this is away from the Okeford Fitzpaine settlement and serviced by a different network to that supporting the village.

In conclusion, there would be no sterilization of Mineral Safeguarding Areas caused by the proposed 2 development sites within the revised Okeford Fitzpaine Settlement Boundary (as shown in Appendix 2).

4.3 OTHER POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS

4.3.1 Flooding

The River Stour flows through the northern boundary of the parish and there is a flood plain to either side (flood zones 2 and 3) to a small section of this northern perimeter. There are 2 tributaries of the Stour that have their source in Okeford Fitzpaine Parish. Dark Knoll Brook has a narrow floodplain (as shown in map above of the floodzone 2 and 3 of the Stour) which extends from a few hundred metres north of the village due north to the Stour. Cookwell Brook has no floodzone 2 or 3 within the parish.

In addition there are areas subject to surface water flood risk, notably from off Okeford Hill and through the village and along Shillingstone Lane. Surface water run-off from Okeford Hill tends to join with Cookwell Brook at Mill Farm. The run-off also follows Castle Lane before joining drainage ditches at Castle Cottage.

Dorset County Council commented in their letter 06/11/16 'With respect to SW, hydraulic models indicate that the risk of pluvial flooding to the area encompassed by the NP is minimal. Ponding tends to follow field boundaries, where there are likely to be informal drainage ditches and existing Ordinary Watercourses. However, some theoretical flooding is expected near Castle Cottage along Castle Lane, along Shillingstone Lane to the south of the Poultry Houses and on Lower Street to the west of the main settlement.'

They also confirm they have records of flooding at Castle Cottage, which contributes to Housing Policy HP3 which requires that new development *"Incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) within each site which compare to greenfield rather than brownfield surface run-off levels"*. And add a further requirement for planning applicants to address

maintenance of any SuDS. This would be consistent with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidelines and are requirements as LLFA.

This is an important provision of the Neighbourhood Plan as the Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine site will need to follow these policies to avoid an increase of risk to Castle Cottage.

To summarise the risk, Dorset Explorer shows the village of Okeford Fitzpaine as 'green' in its 'green-amber-red' traffic-lighting, so the overall risk of groundwater flooding is low.

4.3.2 Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) are areas designated as being at risk from agricultural nitrate pollution. They include about 58% of land in England. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) reviews NVZs every 4 years to account for changes in water pollution.

These zones were originally set up under Council Directive 91/676/EEC and have been established in areas where nitrate from agricultural land is causing, or could cause, pollution of the water environment (and drinking water sources). Measures include a requirement for farmers to limit their applications of livestock manures and, in some circumstances, to observe closed periods for the application of organic manure to agricultural land. The NVZ in the parish is in the South, from Okeford Hill down the escarpment slopes to the south of the village. It almost co-incides with the AONB.

4.3.3 Waste management, re-cycling sites or sewage works

There are no waste management, re-cycling sites or sewage works within the parish. There is a sewage treatment works to the north of the railway within the adjacent parish of Sturminster Newton. Conygar Coppice is a historic landfill site from which a bio-degradable waste treatment facility is now run. There are no recorded incidents of pollution in the area.

4.3.4 Air Quality

There are no Air Quality Management Areas in the district.

4.3.5 Contaminated Land

A search of the Public Register of Particulars in Relation to Contaminated Land in North Dorset under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 revealed no entries.

4.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABILITY

The key to evaluating the use of land through a Neighbourhood Plan is the degree to which the Plan promotes sustainable development AND THIS MUST BE THE GOLDEN THREAD RUNNING THROUGH THE PLAN. In order to determine whether the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, the likely environmental effects of the proposals in the draft plan were first assessed using a sustainability checklist. The sustainability checklist was based on the sustainability framework developed through the original scoping exercise for the Sustainability Appraisal for the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 issued in January 2016 . Immediately this Plan was issued a review commenced, and one of the early tasks of the review was to produce a Scoping Report to produce a replacement set of Sustainability Objectives. The purpose of the scoping stage is to identify the key environmental, social and economic issues for North Dorset and use these to produce a new series of Sustainability Objectives. This is running in parallel to the OFNP and for this reason the earlier Sustainability Objectives have been used in the assessment below. The overall aims of the Scoping Objectives have been unchanged by the later work.

The sustainability objectives consider wider social and economic issues, in addition to the environmental considerations which are required through the SEA Directive. However the sustainability objectives that fall outside the environmental issues listed in Annex I(f) of the SEA Directive have been retained as they help show how the plan contributes to sustainable development (as required under Schedule 4B section 8(2)b of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990).

Figure 2.2: Assessment of the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan against North Dorset Local Plan Sustainability Objectives.

North Dorset Local Plan sustainability objectives	Impact	Justification
1.Social progress that recognises the needs of everyone		
1.1 Provide housing including affordable housing that meets the needs of the community	😊 😊	The implementation of the Housing Policies will mean that local housing need can be met fully in terms of number and type. By meeting the NDLP target for the proportion of Affordable Homes this will result in meeting the needs of all the community.
1.2 Create balanced communities where housing, employment and community facilities are delivered to meet needs, improving access to essential services.	😊	Building housing of the type in the Housing Policies will create the potential to re-balance the population, and the potential to address the decline in the <44 years age groups identified from the 2011 Census. An enlarged population will increase the probability of the continuation of essential services which maintain the larger village status. S106/CIL monies from development will enable improvement to local recreational amenities. There is currently no evidence to suggest there is any significant demand for additional new employment land in the parish as 2 major employment sites remain unused. Nevertheless, provision is made for live/work units and conversion of disused agricultural buildings for employment purposes.
1.3 Improve the health and wellbeing of the population through reducing poverty and encouraging healthy lifestyles	😊	The retention and further investment in recreation spaces, community facilities and Local Green Spaces , and the location of new development close to these facilities, should all help meet this objective. S106/CIL monies from

		development will enable improvement to local recreational amenities and enhance the ability to meet this objective. The connection to the Trailway would provide a substantial encouragement to healthy lifestyles.
1.4 Reduce barriers to individuals participating fully in their community promoting a strong, vibrant and inclusive way of life.	😊	The Parish is already a community led area, and any additional amenities (as above) will need to meet criteria for inclusiveness.
1.5 Improve quality of life through well designed inclusive developments.	😊	The design standards in the Housing Policies promote the positive aspects of local character. The types of housing in the Policies promote increased housing opportunities for most age groups and social background.
1.6 Reduce the impact of climate change, including flood risk and make best use of the opportunities that arise	😐	No development is proposed in areas at risk of flooding. SuDs are designed to maintain run off at greenfield levels.
1.7 Protect and where opportunities arise, enhance habitats and biodiversity	😐	No development is proposed in areas of known high biodiversity value. As with all planning applications, a biodiversity appraisal and mitigation plan will be required on greenfield sites greater than 0.1ha, or where there are known protected species or important habitats/habitat features.
1.8 Improve the quality of the built environment, protecting the district's heritage assets and distinct townscape.	😊	The Conservation Policies (CP1-3) and the design objectives in HP3 make a substantial contribution to meeting this objective.
1.9 Recognise the importance of the district's distinct rural landscapes beyond just the aesthetic value	😊	No significant development is proposed in the Dorset AONB or the more rural, undeveloped parts of the parish. The designation of Local Green Spaces, and retention of IOWAs has taken into account the contribution these make to the rural character of the area. The Conservation Policies (CP1-3) and the design objectives in HP3 make

		a substantial contribution to meeting this objective.
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2.Prudent use of Natural Resources		
2.1 Reduce impacts on the environment	☺	There are no notable impacts that require mitigation, and policies include mitigation where appropriate.
2.2 Reduce pressure on the district's natural resources, reducing waste and promoting the wise use, reuse and recycling of land and resources	☹	The only adverse impact identified was the potential loss of 1.065ha of Grade 3 farmland, which is not considered to be significant.
2.3 Promote energy and resource efficiency, encouraging clean energy production	☺	The plan relies on the strategic policies of the local plan and national policy for this objective

3.Maintenance of sustainable levels of economic growth and employment		
3.1 Improve the competitiveness of the district's economy through provision of the necessary infrastructure for a more sustainable economy	☺	The plan relies on the strategic policies of the local plan and national policy for this objective
3.2 Enable local needs to be met locally, encouraging more sustainable forms of travel	☺ ☺	The focus on of the OFNP is sustainable development. And each of the 3 development sites brought forward in the Plan Period 2011-31 are within relatively easy walking distance of the village centre. Ease of pedestrian access will promote sustainable access so that local needs can be met locally. The access to the Trailway will provide the capability for sustainable travel to local towns and villages, and access to a wider range of public transport services.
3.3 Encourage innovation, improve productivity, regenerate towns and villages creating a business environment in which new businesses start and existing businesses grow	☺	A mixed use site was originally planned for the Faccenda Chicken Factory, but at the time there wasn't demand for the work units. Unemployment in the area is low - Sturminster Newton (nearest

		town) < 2% - and the business park in that town has experienced slow take up. The OFNP encourages employment, noting the arrival of high speed broadband in the village. There is also policy EN1 which is pro the use of unused farm buildings for purposes of tourism or small business unit usage, and HP2 supporting Live/Work units. There are also 2 employment sites which lie vacant and the OFNP is pro the re-use of these for that purpose.
3.4 Improve skills and incomes of the lowest paid and provide satisfying work opportunities for all so that people can realise their full potential	☹️	The plan relies on the strategic policies of the local plan and national policy for this objective

Key

☹️	adverse impact likely	☹️ ☹️	significant adverse impact likely
😐	Negligible impact likely		
😊	positive impact likely	😊 😊	significant positive impact likely

4.5 CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE NEED FOR AN SEA

The criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive, Schedule 1 of the Regulations	How the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan satisfies the criteria
1.The characteristics of the plan, having regard to:	
1.1 The degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	The focus and scope of the Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan is local and modest in scale and will be in general conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework (which as a whole promotes sustainable development) and the strategic policies of the North Dorset Local Plan.
1.2 The degree to which the plan influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	See above
1.3 The relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	Sustainable development is the golden thread running through the OFNP. Meeting the Basic Conditions and how the Plan is pro sustainable development is set out in the OFNP and summarised in Figure 2.2 North Dorset Sustainability Objectives above.
1.4 Environmental problems relevant to the plan	The environmental problems relevant to the plan area relate primarily to the risk of groundwater flooding (low risk – Environment Agency), potential impact on Dorset AONB (minimised by location of development sites away from AONB), heritage assets (protected by policies), loss of agricultural land and biodiversity interests. The only likely adverse impact identified was the potential loss of 1.065ha of Grade 3 farmland, which is not considered to be significant, and limited impact to the setting of heritage assets.
1.5 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)	It cannot contain policies or proposals in respect of development that is a county matter (mineral extraction and waste development), nationally significant infrastructure or development that falls within Annex 1 to Council Directive 85/337/EEC.

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to	
2.1 The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	The scale of future development of the OFNP is modest and local (58 dwellings in 15 years) and will be monitored at each incremental stage.
2.2 The cumulative nature of the effects	The OFNP contributes to and is within the minimum of 825 dwellings in the Countryside including Stalbridge and the Large Villages. As such the cumulative effect will be managed within the Local Planning hierarchy.
2.3 The transboundary nature of the effects	The OFNP is a Plan for the sustainable development of the Parish and while growth will have some environmental impact outside the Parish this has been analysed in the HRA Screening Process.
2.4 The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	The quality of local air, and water and the history of environmental accidents leads to the conclusion that the risk to human health is minimal. Primary Health Care locally has been consulted on the Plan. See also the HRA process.
2.5 The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The scale of development is less than 5 ha, and leads to a modest growth of less than 2 ha to the village. Population growth since 2001 will be significantly lower than the average growth across North Dorset during the period 2001-31
2.6 The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: - special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, - exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, - intensive land-use,	The only adverse impact identified was the potential loss of 1.065ha of Grade 3 farmland, which is not considered to be significant. This is at 35 DPH which is not intensive land-use. The natural and cultural heritage is protected.
2.7 The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	The AONB has been protected by avoiding development there. The HRA screening is set out below. There are no other areas or landscapes that meet this definition.

KEY

Meets Criteria
Some Impact
Outside scope

4.6 THE HRA SCREENING PROCESS

The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the assessment required for any plan or project to assess the potential implications for European wildlife sites.

The HRA looks at whether the implementation of the plan or project would harm the habitats or species for which European wildlife sites are designated. European wildlife sites are:

- Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)

In addition to SPAs and SACs sites, Ramsar sites are designated under the Ramsar Convention (Iran 1971 as amended by the Paris Protocol 1992). Although they are not covered by the Habitats regulations, as a matter of Government policy, Ramsar sites should be treated in the same way as European wildlife sites. European wildlife sites and Ramsar sites are collectively known as internationally designated wildlife sites.

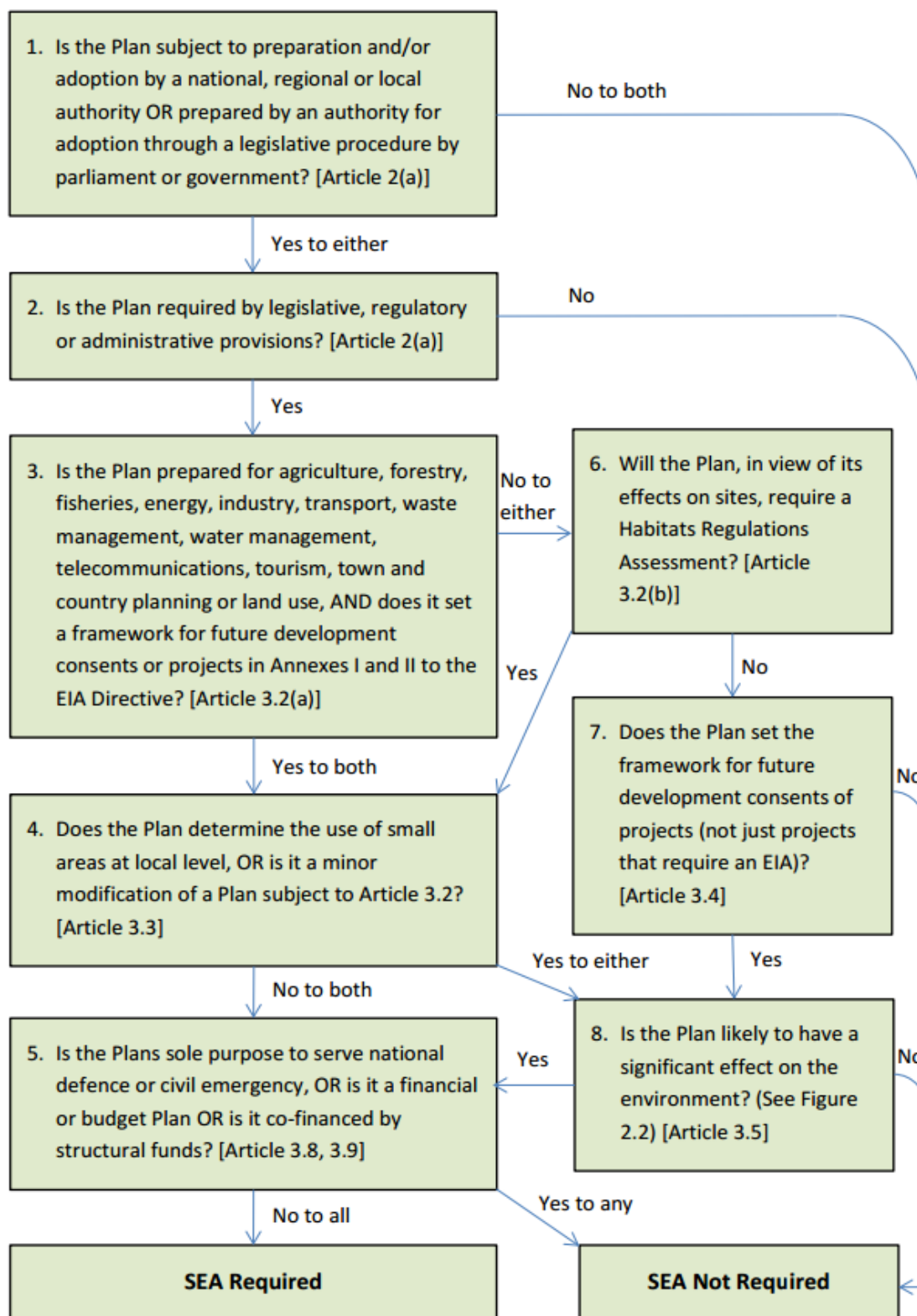
European wildlife sites and therefore internationally designated wildlife sites, are offered the highest level of protection under European legislation. This legislation sets out a process to assess the potential implications of a plan for internationally designated sites. The first stage of this process is a “screening” exercise where the details of nearby internationally designated sites are assessed to see if there is the potential for the implementation of the Plan to have an impact on the site.

The closest European sites are:

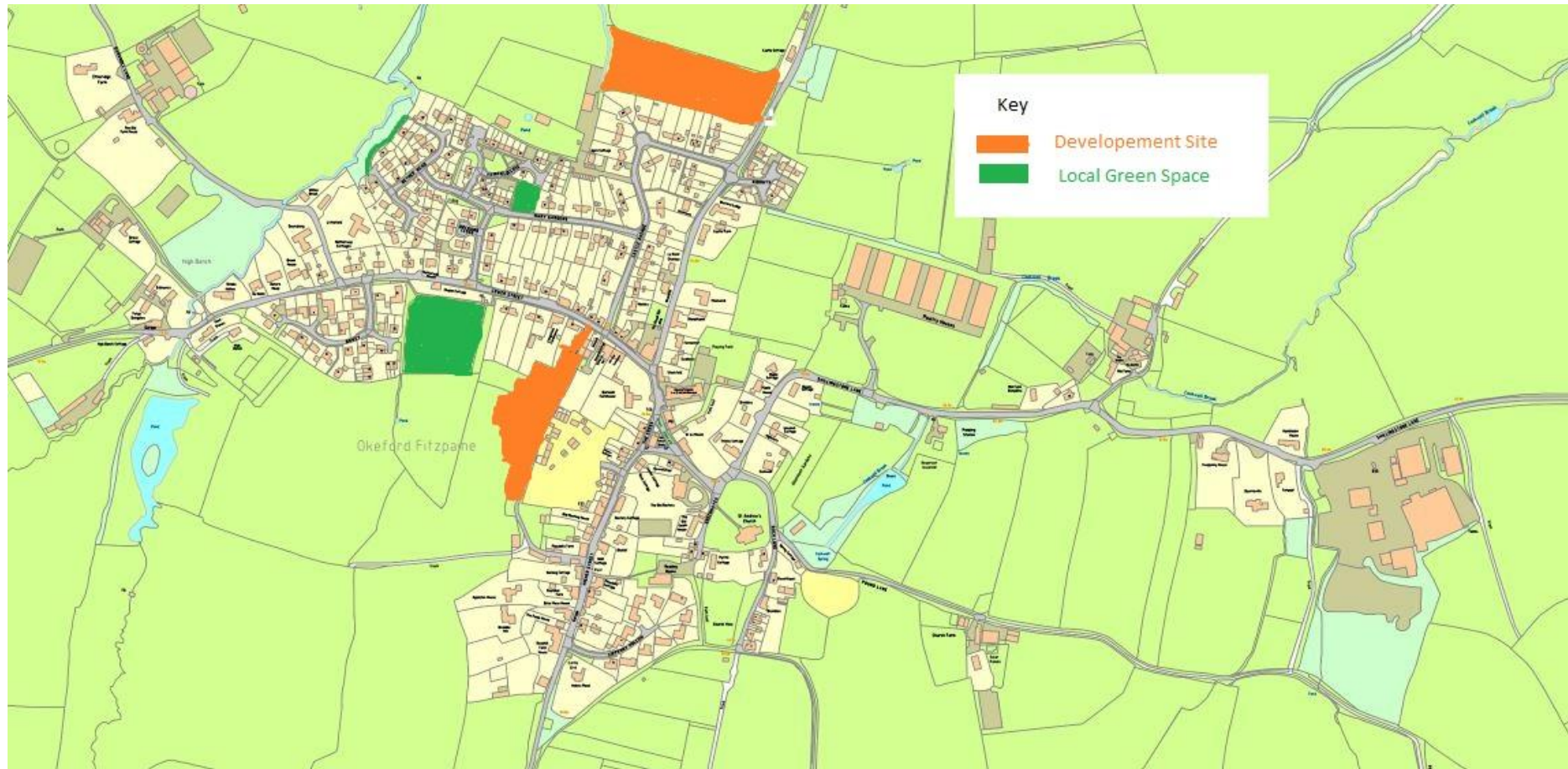
- Rooksmoor SAC (DT/A017) just over 5kms from the village
- Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC (DTA014), both about 7km
- Cerne and Sydling Downs (DT/A010) SAC over 11km
- Holnest SAC (DT/A023) over 11 km
- Other sites in the 20km search area (all of which are over 15km away) are the Dorset Heathlands SPA, the Dorset Heathlands Ramsar site, the Dorset Heaths SAC and Dorset Heaths (Purbeck and Wareham) and Studland SAC.

All of the nearest designated sites are over 5 km from the proposed development sites within the village centre, so given the distance from any European site, advice is sought from North Dorset and Natural England as to whether the plan will require a separate Habitats Regulation Assessment.

Appendix 1 The SEA Screening



Appendix 2 Proposals Map



Appendix 3 Ecological Report of Local Green Spaces and Development Sites

1. Potential Development Sites

For completeness, the Faccenda Chicken Farm site has been included with the 2 preferred development sites so that their respective ecological values can be compared. The evaluation of each site was based on a short walk around of each site, and is not intended to replace any of the detailed environmental impact study that would occur later in the planning process.

Summary Table

Site	Habitat	Value to biodiversity	Potential Value to Protected and notable species
Pleydells Farm	Farm buildings, hedges, ditches	Low	Owl roosts, bats, slow-worm
Faccenda Chicken Farm	Buildings with grassland, scrub, hedges and trees	Medium	Owl roosts, bats, watervole, slow-worm
Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine	Grazed pasture	Low	None

1.1 Pleydells Farm

This is a collection of farm buildings with areas of rough grassland, hedging and a ditch. The area includes a grazed improved pasture with little plant diversity. Any grassland within the area is coarse and tussocky mainly of cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* and false oat *Arrhenatherum elatius*. The farm buildings could have the potential, now or in the future, for owl roosts and bat roosts and should be surveyed before demolition. The ditch to the south has some hedgerow flora including harts tongue fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* and other common wayside plants. Suitable boundary hedging will be used by nesting birds and feeding bats. If developed offsite mitigation could potentially be achieved by creating areas of meadow and scrub in the nearby Bowey Field.

1.2 Faccenda Chicken Farm

This is one of the most diverse habitats within the village. The disused buildings have potential for use by bats, and, if further neglected by owls. The northern boundary has mature field maples *Acer campestre* with some hazel stools *Coryllus avellana* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. Around the buildings and mainly in the south are good sized areas of grassland, some on the former car park, and screening bunds and roadside access verge. These are tussocky neutral grassland, mainly cocksfoot and false oat grass with other common plants and with some scattered trees and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* scrub. The area will be used by common invertebrates including butterflies, small mammals and foraging foxes and badgers, feeding bats, slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* and grass snake *Natrix natrix*, and common amphibians that can feed in the tall grass. There are no signs of a badger sett currently but the bunds could be suitable in the future. Scrub and tall sward grassland attract feeding and nesting birds including buzzard *Buteo buteo*, tawny owl *Strix aluco* and roosting starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*. There is anecdotal evidence of water vole *Arvicola amphibius* in the area. The area has a natural link with the valley of Cookwell Brook and other natural areas to the east and south. There is good potential here for conservation mitigation land and the possibility of a small village nature reserve especially in the south and this should be an input to any future decision making on the use of this land.

1.3 Land to the North of Okeford Fitzpaine

This is an improved pasture. There is little of wildlife significance here apart from the boundary hedges and the potential for birds such as starlings feeding within the pasture.

2. Local Green Spaces

Most areas are improved grasslands currently managed by tight mowing as amenity grassland. The exception is a strip of land north of Nether Mead that forms the bank of the Dark Knoll Brook. The brooks, like Dark Knoll, that drain from the north side of the chalk hills to the south, have similarities: deeply cut and shaded by native trees with limited aquatic bank plants. They are good for hedgerow birds, including the less frequent marsh tit *Poecile palustris*, and will support a range of aquatic invertebrates, and possibly water vole, and also provide animals such as grass snakes with a corridor that provides access to the wider countryside.

3. Mitigation Potential

Most of the Local Green Spaces have potential for biodiversity enhancement particularly by leaving some areas as tall grassland (as buffer strips along hedges) that are only cut on rotation once a year. Some villages have areas of wild plants sown along the verges, including meadow plants and former farmland plants (such as corn cockle, poppy, marigold etc) that provide colourful displays before entering the village; this could be done in Okeford Fitzpaine. Areas of tall sward grassland are greatly beneficial to butterflies, small mammals and reptiles and therefore feeding birds including owls. Such areas could be sponsored by mitigation agreements from development proposals. This will be considered in the main OFNP The Natural Environment, as part of the mitigation of further urbanisation on local wildlife.