

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DRAFT SCREENING REPORT

INCLUDING SCREENING WITH REGARD TO THE HABITATS REGULATIONS

Prepared on behalf of Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council

DECEMBER 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to determine whether or not the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (under the Habitats Regulations) through a process known as screening.

1.2 The report was drafted by Jo Witherden BSc (Hons) DipTP DipUD MRTPI of Dorset Planning Consultant Ltd, based on similar reports used in conjunction with the Local Planning Authorities in the area.

1.3 This report provides an outline of the policies proposed for the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan and explains the legislative background to SEA and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening, before providing an account of the screening exercise for the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan.

1.4 This report meets the requirements of European Directive 2001/42/EC on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment and the Environmental Assessment of Plan and Programmes Regulations (2004).

1.5 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) to provide clarification on the related documents which must be submitted alongside neighbourhood planning proposals (including modifications to a Neighbourhood Plan). These state that a either an environmental report, should an SEA be required, or a statement of reasons why an environmental assessment is not required.

2. THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREA

2.1 The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood plan area occupies the whole of the civil parish of Highcliffe and Walkford, covering an area of approximately 647 hectares and a population in excess of 12,000 people (2011 Census). The Neighbourhood Plan and surrounding areas include a number of nationally-determined environmental designations, particularly relating to wildlife, heritage assets, and flooding (Map 1).

2.2 The wildlife designations within the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan area include the Highcliffe to Milford Cliffs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are also further designations in the surrounding area, as described in Table 1.

Map 1: Environmental designations within the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan area

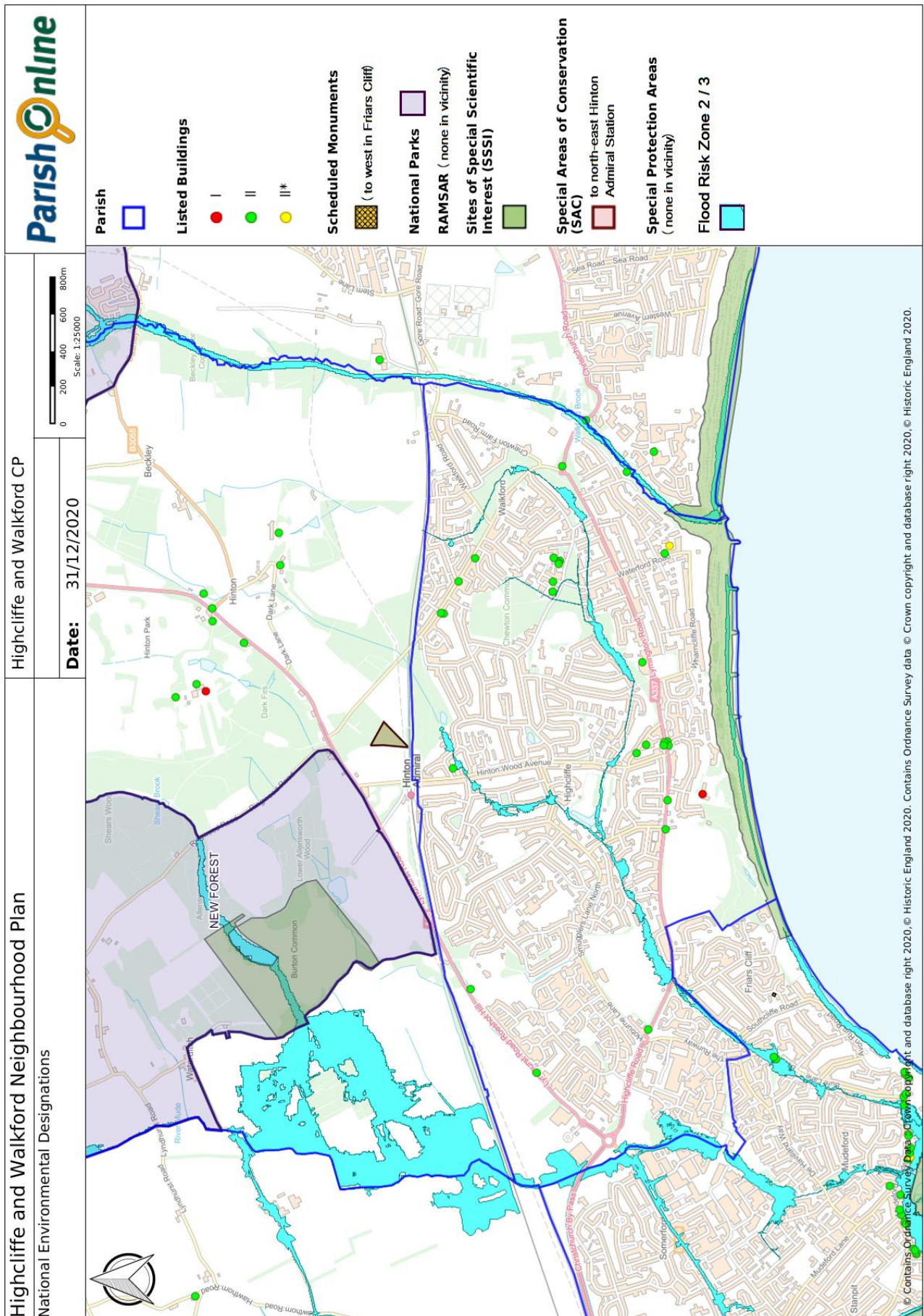


Table 1: The Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within and in the areas surrounding the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan area.

Name of SSSI	Approx. size and distance from area	Reason for designation
Highcliffe to Milford Cliffs SSSI ¹	647ha On south coastal strip within and extending beyond	Primarily designated for its geological interest (its exposures of fossil rich Barton Beds and Headon Beds), but the cliffs and coastal slopes of this site are of contemporary biological interest. The section within the parish is in unfavourable condition as the majority of the frontage is affected by inappropriate engineering works. Rock groynes prevent natural coastal processes and restrict erosion of the cliff face whilst landscaped hard footpaths and drainage channels obscure the exposures of interest. Vegetation is also obscuring ~80% of the frontage.
The New Forest SSSI ² and part of the New Forest SAC (Special Area of Conservation)	290km ² Small section (approx 1.3ha) immediately to the north (across the railway line), the rest is approx 3.6km to the north	The New Forest embraces the largest area of “unsown” vegetation in lowland England and includes the representation on a large scale of habitat formations formerly common but now fragmented and rare in lowland western Europe. They include lowland heath, valley and seepage step mire, or fen, and ancient pasture woodland, including riparian and bog woodland. Nowhere else do these habitats occur in combination and on so large a scale. The fragment of this habitat in close proximity to the NP area (Cranemoor Common) is of importance as a mosaic of heath and short acid grassland that supports Heath Lobelia. The main recorded threat is in terms of undergrazing, but scrub clearance work was carried out in winter 2018/19 has put this unit back into favourable condition. There is no direct public access to this site, but there are many residential properties within 400m.
Burton Common SSSI ³	39ha Approx 370m to the north (across the railway line)	A substantial tract of mature dry heath on relatively free-draining soils. Both in its age structure and in the absence of grazing, the site provides a sharp ecological contrast with the nearby New Forest. The Common also supports populations of sand lizards and smooth snakes. The site is in unfavourable but recovering condition and continues to be grazed under Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme.
Purewell Meadows SSSI ⁴	13ha Approx 1.2km to the west (adjoining Stoney Lane roundabout / Christchurch bypass)	A complex system of fields and ditches presents a range of plant habitats including wet acidic grassland over peat and more neutral damp grassland which are an integral component of the meadows of the Avon Valley. Mature hedgerows, often with broad scrub margins, add to the interest and diversity of flowering plants of which 160 species have been recorded. The

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<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/sitedetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1000971&SiteName=&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&unitId=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

² <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=s1003036>

³ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=s1004481>

⁴ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=s1004238>

Name of SSSI	Approx. size and distance from area	Reason for designation
	<i>NB beyond map limit</i>	site is in unfavourable but recovering condition, and requires grazing and possibly scrub / bramble clearance.
Christchurch Harbour SSSI ⁵	352ha Approx 1km to the south-west <i>NB beyond map limit</i>	The drowned estuary of the rivers Stour and Avon and the peninsula of Hengistbury Head. The varied habitats include saltmarsh, wet meadows, drier grassland, heath, sand dune, woodland and scrub and the site is of great ornithological interest. The units closest to the NP area are in favourable condition.
River Avon System SSSI and Avon Valley (Bickton to Christchurch) SSSI ⁶ and part of the Avon Valley SPA (Special Protection Area) and AVON Valley RAMSAR site	Avon Valley SSSI extends over 14km ² Approx 2.1km to the north-west <i>NB beyond map limit</i>	The River Avon shows a greater range of habitats and a more diverse flora and fauna than any other chalk river valley in Britain. The flood plain and associated river terraces within the SSSI contain a variety of habitats ranging from herb-rich hay meadows and pastures, through a range of fens and mires to riparian woods, dune grassland and heathland. These habitats support nationally and internationally important assemblages of breeding and wintering birds and an outstanding flora including several nationally rare and scarce species. The invertebrate fauna reflects the diversity of the habitat and includes many notable species, including dragonflies, grasshoppers and snails. The units closest to the NP area are in favourable condition. The River Avon System on its lowest sections is in unfavourable recovering condition.

2.3 The heritage assets in the plan area include the Grade I listed Highcliffe Castle, and the Grade II* listed Greystones, together with over 20 other Listed buildings and structures (including a number of milestones). These are listed in Table 2. The Neighbourhood Plan area also contains two locally designated Conservation Area (Verno and Bramble Lane).

2.4 There are no Scheduled Monuments within the area (the closest being the Round barrow E of Southcliffe Road, in Friars Cliff, approximately 400m to the south-west) and no registered Historic Parks or Gardens. None of the heritage assets are on the national at risk register.

Table 2: Listing entries⁷

Name	Grade	List Ref
Highcliffe Castle	I	1110077
Greystones	II*	1324690
144, Ringwood Road	II	1324699
35, Chewton Common Road	II	1324647
35a, Chewton Common Road	II	1153243
3-7, Cranemoor Avenue	II	1304310
Chewton Bridge	II	1268295
Cranemoor United Reform Church	II	1110075
Former Boundary Wall Of Highcliffe Castle	II	1110117

⁵ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=s1004238>

⁶ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1006622&SiteName=avon&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAra=>

⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

Former Lodge To Highcliffe Castle	II	1304191
Heath Cottage	II	1110131
Ivy Cottage	II	1154175
Little Thatch	II	1110132
Lodge To Greystones	II	1110056
Lychgate At Parish Church Of St Mark's	II	1324683
Milestone at East Side Of Junction With Hoburne Lane	II	1110113
Milestone at Junction With Chewton Farm Road	II	1110120
Milestone at Junction of Drive To St Mark's Church and Lymington Road	II	1324682
Milestone on Roadside Verge at northern boundary of Forest Barn Hotel	II	1110076
Mill House	II	1110083
No 181 and Gatepost & Railing (at former Lodge to Highcliffe Castle)	II	1110118
Parish Church Of St Mark	II	1153661
Pillar Box Outside Walkford Sub Post Office	II	1243703
St Mark's Church Of England Primary School	II	1304174
The Cottage	II	1110133
The Former Boundary Wall Of Highcliffe Castle Fronting Lymington Road; Sections Opposite Nea Road, Westwards To Public Footpath	II	1031540
The Thatch	II	1154214
War Memorial In Churchyard Of The Parish Church Of St Mark	II	1110119
Yew Cottage	II	1324646

2.5 Medium and high risk flood zones are associated with the local river system (primarily Bure Brook and the Clockhouse Stream), running in a westerly direction through the central part of the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan Area (eventually draining into Christchurch Harbour). This includes an area for flood storage at Nea Meadows. There are also flood risk areas associated with the Walkford Brook (that runs north south along the eastern edge of the Plan area) and the River Mude (which crosses through the strategic allocation at Roeshot). Further information on localised flood risk is described in the 2019 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment⁸.

2.6 These are the main environmental considerations within the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan Area which will need to be given consideration during the Plan's preparation. In addition, other local factors and constraints will also need to be considered.

THE OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE HIGHCLIFFE AND WALKFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

2.7 The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan (pre-submission draft) includes 6 priorities as follows:

- Revitalise the High Street – in particular improving the outdoor areas, traffic management and encouraging a better range of shops and services
- Look after our green spaces – in particular, enhancing wildlife / natural areas and connecting corridors areas and having good access to the beach.
- Encourage walking and cycling as a way of getting about - through the provision of safe cycle routes (and cycle rack locations) and improved pavements.
- Retain and improve our community facilities
- Encourage a more appropriate mix of housing types, not just flats.
- Encourage new building designs to be carbon-neutral

⁸ <https://www.christchurch.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/christchurch/evidence-base-studies/strategic-flood-risk-assessment/2019s0057-level-1-sfra-report-christchurch-v7.0.pdf>

2.8 It does not include any specific land-use designations for new building, or seek to change the settlement boundary as established through the adopted Local Plan. Its proposed policies and their scope are described in Table 3:

Table 3: Draft Neighbourhood Plan Policies and their scope

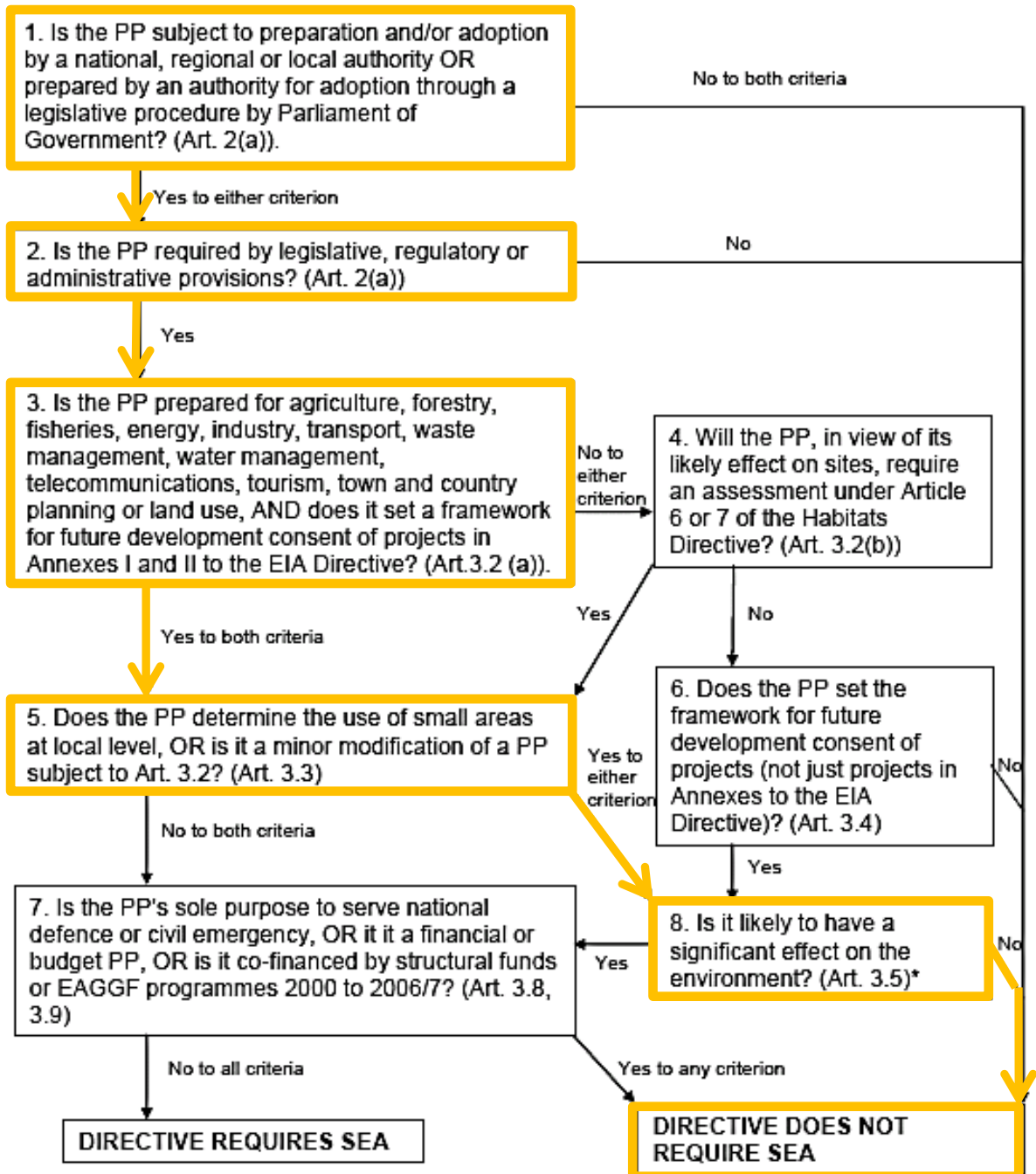
Policy	Scope
HWNP1. High Street Environment – the Public Realm	Supports proposals to create or improve the public realm within the High Street
HWNP2. High Street Uses	Reaffirms the town centre type uses that will be permitted within the established High Street area (as modified to reflect the current spread of uses)
HWNP3. Local Centres	Reaffirms the town centre type uses that will be permitted within the established local centres in Walkford (Ringwood Road) and at Saufland Road
HWNP4. Local Green Spaces	Designates existing Local Green Spaces for protection
HWNP5. Green Corridors	Seeks to protect and enhance the recreational, landscape and ecological functions of the existing green corridors
HWNP6. Proposed Green Spaces	Identifies area for additional publicly accessible green spaces to be managed to both allow recreational access and support and enhance the area's tree cover and biodiversity
HWNP7. Walking and cycle routes	Encourages improvements to the safety and / or connectivity of the pedestrian and cycle networks. Their design should look to make them more accessible and also landscaped to enhance biodiversity through the provision of wildlife corridors.
HWNP8. Parking Standards	Highlights the need for greater scrutiny of parking requirements in key areas to avoid exacerbating the known problems
HWNP9. Locally Important Community Facilities	Looks to retain and support existing community facilities to continue to meet the community's needs for social wellbeing / healthcare / education / culture, sports and leisure. Steers any new community facilities to locations within or adjoining the district or local centres, or on sites close to existing facilities
HWNP10. House Types	Seeks to ensure that the type and size of housing permitted meets local needs for 1 and 2-bedroom affordable homes, 2 and 3-bedroom family homes, and homes specifically designed for residents with more limited mobility or requiring an element of care
HWNP11. Housing design for practical living	Seeks to ensure that the design of housing promotes a healthy living environment, through adequate spaces standards, opportunities for social interactions, good levels of daylight etc.. and aims to achieve the highest level of carbon reduction and energy efficiency through design
HWNP12. Retaining and Reinforcing Local Character	Provides design guidelines to ensure that new buildings reflect and enhance the areas' local distinctiveness, including that of the two Conservation Areas.

3. SEA SCREENING OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

3.1 This Chapter provides an account of the SEA screening exercise for the Neighbourhood Plan. Articles 2 and 3 of the SEA Directive provide the legislative framework for defining the types of plan and programme that require SEA.

3.2 The SEA screening process is summarised in diagrammatic form in the flowchart shown in Figure 1⁹. The screening for the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan is highlighted in orange, and justification for the decisions made at each stage in the SEA screening process is given in Table 4.

Figure 1: A diagram summarising the SEA screening process with the SEA screening for the Neighbourhood Plan outlined in orange.



⁹ Diagram taken from the Government guidance on the Strategic Environmental Assessment regulations titled 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive', published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2005

Table 4. a summary of the justification for the decisions on the SEA screening.

Question in SEA screening flow chart (Figure 4.1)	Response
<p>Q1. Is the PP 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 of Government?</p>	<p>YES The preparation and adoption of the NP is provided for under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The NP will be prepared by Highcliffe and Walkford Parish Council as the 'relevant qualifying body' and will be 'made' by Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council as the Local Planning Authority. The preparation of NPs is subject to the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and The Neighbourhood Planning (referendums) Regulations 2012 (as amended)..</p>
<p>Q2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions?</p>	<p>Whilst the NP is not strictly a requirement (as it is optional under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act as amended by the Localism Act 2011), it will when 'made', form part of the Development Plan for the area. It is therefore considered reasonable that the answer to this question is deemed to be 'yes', so that the screening process can consider whether it is likely to have significant environmental effects and hence whether SEA is required under the Directive.</p>
<p>Q3. 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?</p>	<p>YES The NP is a document prepared for town and country planning purposes, and can (used alongside the adopted Local Plan) set a framework for future development consent of urban development projects which falls under paragraph 10(b) of Annex II of the EIA Directive.</p>
<p>Q5. 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?</p>	<p>YES The NP determines the use of small areas at a local level (used alongside the adopted Local Plan). Neighbourhood plans cannot contain strategic policies or allocate the sites necessary to deliver the strategic priorities of the area (NPPF paras 18 - 23)</p>
<p>Q8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment (Article 3.5)?</p>	<p>NO Justification for this decision is given later in this chapter.</p>

IS THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN LIKELY TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE ENVIRONMENT?

3.3 The final question in the SEA screening process presented in Figures 1 and Table 4 for the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan was question 8: Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?

3.4 In asking this question, the SEA Directive refers to Article 3.5, which states that the relevant criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive shall be taken into account when determining whether there are likely to be significant effects. Therefore, the criteria in Article 3.5 have been taken into consideration when determining whether the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan requires SEA, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: The assessment of the likely significance of effects of the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan (Taken from Annex II of the SEA Directive)

Criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive	Response	Is there a significant effect?
Characteristics of the plan and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:		
The degree to which it will set a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size, and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	The adopted Local Plan will continue to provide the overarching policy for the location and amount of new development in this area. The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan will influence the details of development projects within this area, but does not seek to allocate additional land for built development.	No
The degree to which it will influence other plans or programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan will be 'made' part of the development plan alongside the Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan will expand upon the policies in the Local Plan, influencing the nature of development at the local scale.	No
The relevance for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	Any development which comes forward through the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan will be subject to the environmental considerations of the Local Plan. The aim of both plans is to achieve sustainable development.	No
Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	The environmental problems within the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood plan area are not considered exclusive to the area, and are similar to those considered and addressed in the Local Plan.	No
The relevance for the implementation of community legislation on the environment	The implementation of community legislation is unlikely to be significantly compromised by the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan.	No
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:		
The probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the effects.	The plan period is to 2028 (aligning with the adopted Local plan). Whilst some effects of the plan may be irreversible, it is not considered probable that the plan will have significant effect since it is not allocating new sites or advocating additional development above that which already has consent, or could come forward through the adopted Local Plan policies or permitted development rights.	No
The cumulative nature of the effects.	The major development proposals within the adopted Local Plan have been subject to an SEA and HRA, and it is considered unlikely that the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan, when considered in combination with the Local Plan, will introduce any further significant environmental effects.	No
The transboundary nature of the effects.	The transboundary impacts, beyond the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan area, are unlikely to be significant in light of the proposed scope of the Plan.	No
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g due	The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to introduce significant risks to human	No

to accidents).	health and the environment, for example due to accidents, in light of the proposed scope of the Plan.	
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).	The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan area occupies approximately 647 hectares and a population in excess of 12,000 people (2011 Census). Given that the plan is not promoting strategic scale development, the magnitude of the population affected are not considered of a significant scale for the purposes of SEA.	No
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:		
Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage And The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan area includes the Highcliffe to Milford Cliffs Site of Special Scientific Interest and is in proximity to a number of other SSSIs including the Cranemoor Common section of the New Forest SSSI, which is also designated as part of the New Forest SAC. The main threat to the Highcliffe to Milford Cliffs Site of Special Scientific Interest have been related to the engineering measures associated with coastal management. The main threat to the segment of heathland at Cranemoor Common to the north (part of the New Forest SAC) is in terms of undergrazing, although it is also recognised that the heathland habitats can also be threatened through disturbance (including predation by domestic pets and recreational pressure), human induced changes in hydraulic conditions, and loss of functionally linked supporting habitat. Such recreational pressures are also relevant to the heathlands in the wider area within a 5km range. The cultural and heritage designations within the plan area include over 20 Listed Buildings and two Conservation Areas, with the immediate surrounding area containing a Scheduled Monument on land to the west. None of these heritage assets are noted to be under threat, but could be vulnerable to insensitive development harming their fabric or wider setting. Given the absence of any proposals for additional development, and proposed scope of the Plan, it is considered unlikely that the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan will significantly impact on these features.	No
Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values	The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to result in the exceedance of environmental quality standards, such as those relating to air, water and soil quality, in light of the proposed scope of the Plan.	No
Intensive land-use	The Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to bring forward development of an extent which would result in a significant intensification of land use in light of the proposed design guidance.	No

4. HRA SCREENING OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

4.1 Based on the above assessment, it follows that the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan would not be likely to result in a significant effect on any European Site, either alone or in combination and therefore further assessment under the Habitats Regulations is not required.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Having considered the environmental designations and constraints outlined in this screening report, it is considered that the scope of the proposed Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan (and the absence of any land-use allocations) is unlikely to have significant effects on the environment.

5.2 The purpose of this consultation is to seek confirmation from the statutory environmental consultees that the conclusion that the full SEA and HRA AA process is not necessary to support the production of the Highcliffe and Walkford Neighbourhood Plan.

DRAFT