

# Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan

Habitat Regulations Screening Report

December 2024

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## Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan Habitat Regulations Screening Report



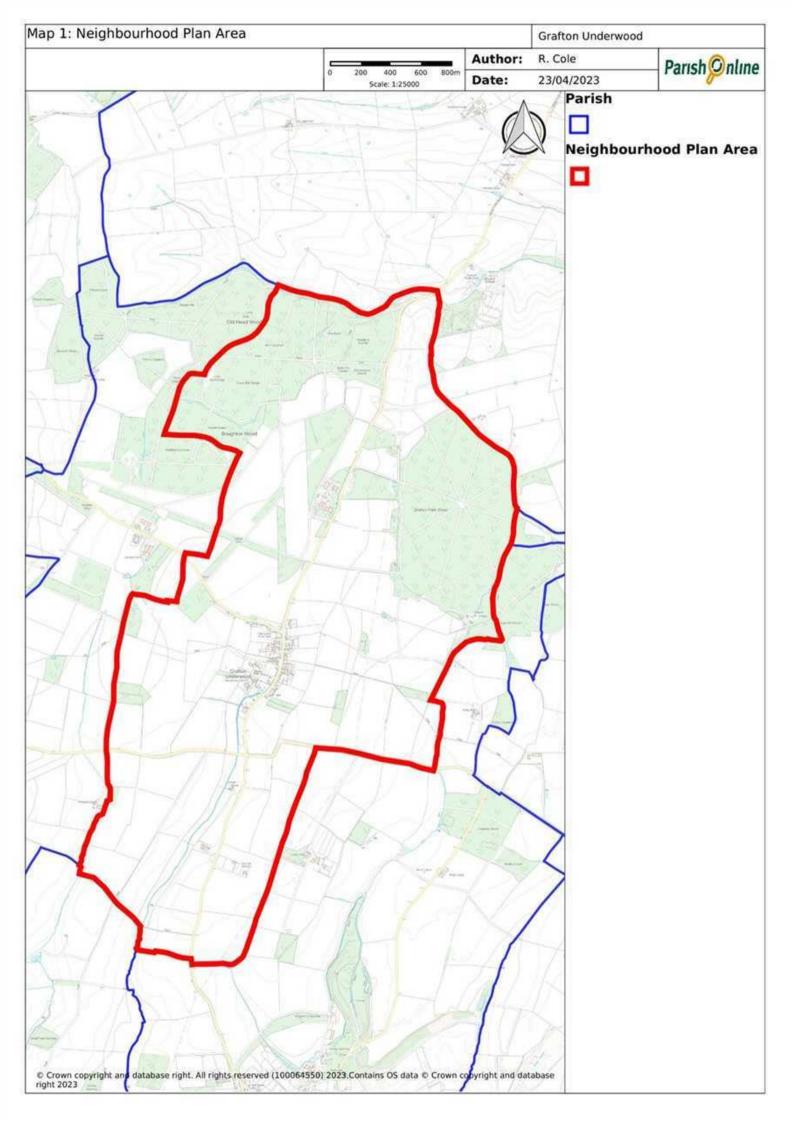
## Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Details of the Neighbourhood Plan	5
	Title of the plan:	5
	Name of Qualifying Body and Local Planning Authority:	5
	Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan contact point:	5
	Location and spatial extent of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan:	5
	Timeframe of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan:	5
	Main aims of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan:	6
	Relationship with the Local Plan:	6
	Will the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan propose allocations? And if so, w these be over and above those likely to be included in the Local Plan?	
3.	Legislative Background	8
4.	North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Habitat Regulations Assessment	10
	The Kettering Site Specific Part 2 (SSP2) Local Plan	10
5.	Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA	12
6.	Screening Assessment	13
7.	Conclusion	18
Αŗ	opendix 1: Responses from the Consultation Bodies	20



## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Habitat Regulations Screening Report has been undertaken to support the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan which is being produced by the Grafton Underwood Parish Council in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- 1.2 The aim of this Screening Report is to assess whether there are likely to be significant effects on European Sites as a result of the emerging policies set out in the pre-submission draft Neighbourhood Plan that would necessitate the production of a full Habitat Regulations Assessment.
- 1.3 This report assesses, as far as practical, whether there are likely to be any significant effects on the qualifying features of European Designated Sites within or relatively proximate to the approved Neighbourhood Plan area, which comprises the civil parish of Grafton Underwood.





## 2. Details of the Neighbourhood Plan

#### Title of the plan:

2.1 Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan.

### Name of Qualifying Body and Local Planning Authority:

- 2.2 The qualifying body preparing the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan is Grafton Underwood Parish Council. The Local Planning Authority is North Northamptonshire Council.
- 2.3 From 1 April 2021, North Northamptonshire Council became the single unitary council responsible for providing a range of public services to residents and businesses in the areas of Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough. It has replaced Corby Borough Council, East Northamptonshire Council, Kettering Borough Council and the Borough Council of Wellingborough, and now delivers all the services which were previously provided by these councils.

### Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan contact point:

Parish Clerk Rosedale. Old Kettering Road Twywell Kettering NN14 3AL

Email: clerkgupc@gmail.com

# Location and spatial extent of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan:

2.4 The Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan covers the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Area, comprising the parish of Grafton Underwood which is located within North Northamptonshire. The parish is a rural area (737 hectares) with a population of 130 and comprising 60 homes (2021 Census). The only settlement is Grafton Underwood, a village located centrally within the Neighbourhood Area. It has developed as an estate village associated with the Duke of Buccleugh's Estate of Boughton.

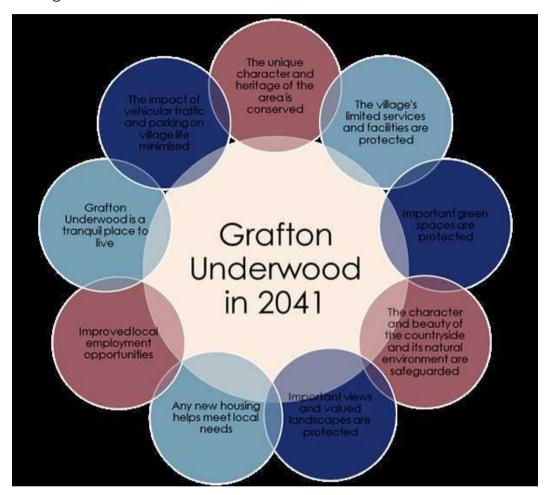
## Timeframe of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan:

2.5 To 2041.



## Main aims of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan:

2.6 The following vision statement for the Plan makes it clear what the Plan is aiming to achieve:



### Relationship with the Local Plan:

- 2.7 The Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared in the context of the North Northamptonshire Development Plan. For the purposes of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan, the relevant parts are the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031 (Adopted July 2016) and the Kettering Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan 2011-2031 (Adopted December 2021).
- 2.8 The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) was adopted in July 2016. It is the overall strategic plan for North Northamptonshire setting out the spatial strategy. It is strategic Part 1 Local Plan for Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough. Kettering is the focus for the majority of growth.



- 2.9 The Kettering Site Specific Part 2 (SSP2) Local Plan develops in more detail the strategy outlined in the JCS and identifies sites for uses such as housing, employment and open space. It also contains development management policies which will be used to assess planning applications over the plan period. The SSP2 Local Plan defines the Settlement Boundary for Grafton Underwood and identifies Grafton Underwood as a 'Category B Village', a location where very limited development within the settlement boundary is supported.
- 1.1 Work has started on the North Northamptonshire Local Plan Review, to take into account changes since 2016 and extend the plan period to 2041. The Plan will cover both strategic and non-strategic matters. An initial consultation on its scope and issues was undertaken in March 2022. The Local Plan is due to be sent to the Secretary Sate for examination in 2024 and its adoption is anticipated for 2026.

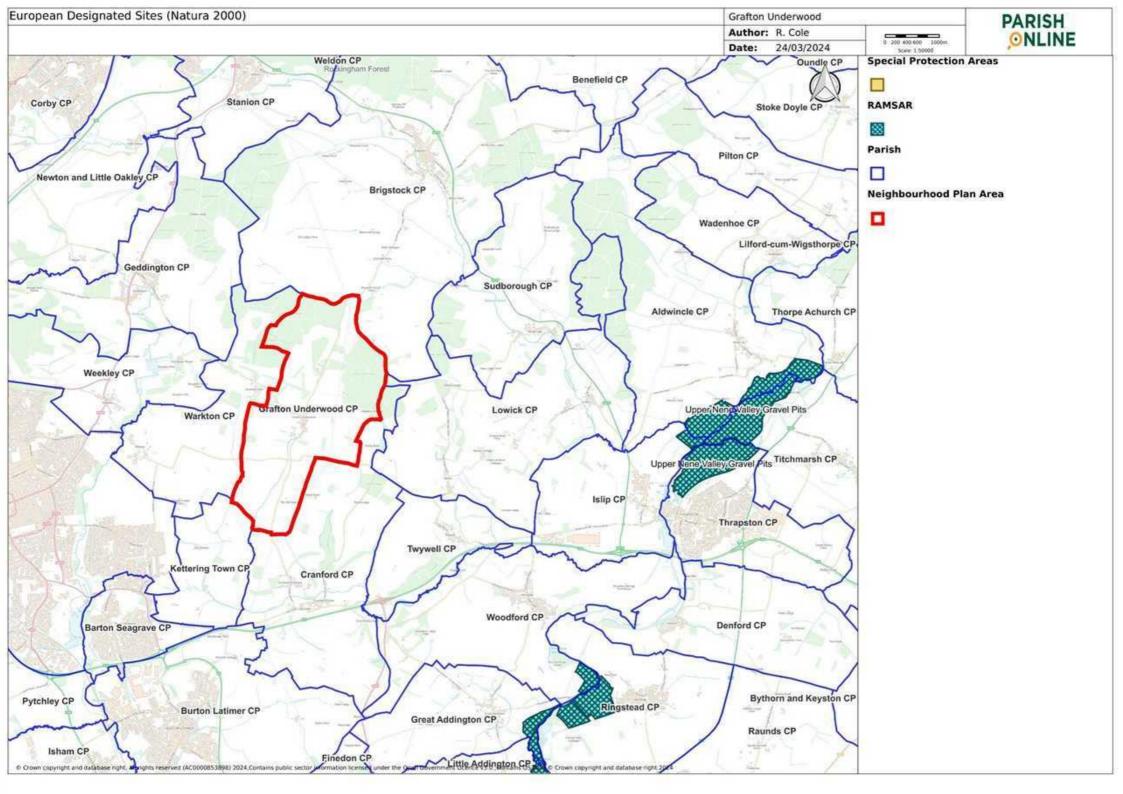
Will the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan propose allocations? And if so, will these be over and above those likely to be included in the Local Plan?

- 2.10 The Joint Core Strategy housing requirement for Kettering Borough equates to 10,400 dwellings (520 dwellings per year) over the period 2011-2031. Of this requirement, 480 dwellings are to be provided in the rural area over the plan period. The Kettering Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan demonstrates overall that through allocations and a windfall allowance, sufficient land will be provided to exceed the rural housing requirement. Grafton Underwood is not a suitable place for large scale housing development and the JCS requires the scale of housing growth in Grafton Underwood to be led by locally identified housing needs taking account of the general from and character of the village. There is no specific housing requirement identified for Grafton Underwood.
- 1.2 Furthermore, results from a village wide consultation identified only very limited support for new housing development in Grafton Underwood. There was however some support for the conversion of rural buildings as a means to meet local housing needs. Therefore, there are no proposed housing allocations in the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan.



## 3. Legislative Background

- 3.1 A European site is protected by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended (known as the Habitats Regulations).
- 3.2 The following European sites are protected by the Habitats Regulations and any proposals that could affect them will require an HRA:
  - Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
  - Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- 3.3 Any proposals affecting the following sites would also require an HRA because these are protected by government policy:
  - proposed SACs
  - potential SPAs
  - Ramsar sites wetlands of international importance (both listed and proposed)
  - areas secured as sites compensating for damage to a European site
- 3.4 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, state that submitted Plans need to be accompanied by a statement explaining how the proposed Plan meets the 'basic conditions' set out in Schedule 4B of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act. These basic conditions include a requirement to demonstrate how the Plan is compatible with EU obligations, which include the need to undertake a Habitat Regulations Assessment.
- 3.5 The HRA process should be taken at a level of detail that is appropriate and proportional and the first stage in the process in known as 'screening'. This is a risk assessment to decide whether the subsequent stage, known as 'Appropriate Assessment', is required. The essential question is: "Is the plan, either alone or in combination with other relevant projects and plans, likely to result in a significant effect upon European sites?"
- 3.6 The objective of screening is to identify those policies that can, without any detailed proposal, be said to be unlikely to result in significant adverse effects upon European sites, usually because there is no mechanism for an adverse interaction with such a site. Only if a significant effect is likely would the need for an Appropriate Assessment of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan be triggered.





# 4. North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Habitat Regulations Assessment

- 4.1 The Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area.
- The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) was adopted in July 2016. It is the strategic Part 1 Local Plan for Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough. It outlines a big picture to be developed in more detail through the Part 2 Local Plans prepared by the District and Borough Councils and by Neighbourhood Plans prepared by Neighbourhood Planning Groups.
- In 2013 a Habitat Regulations Appropriate Assessment (Likely Significant Effects) exercise for the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy was undertaken. A further Habitat Regulations Assessment was prepared in January 2015 to accompany the JCS public consultation.
- The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) concluded that mechanisms to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA had been incorporated into the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) and the planning application determination process. The JCS Inspector's report indicates that the HRA was satisfactory and taking into account advice from relevant consultees, notably Natural England, the Inspector concluded that the JCS was sound and consistent with Government policy.

## The Kettering Site Specific Part 2 (SSP2) Local Plan

- The Habitat Regulations Assessment of the Kettering Site Specific Part 2 Local Plan (2019) concluded that all residential site allocations lie beyond the 3km screening distance defined by the JCS HRA meaning that the SSP2 will not result in likely significant effects to the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA/Ramsar. In addition, all residential and employment site allocations lies further than 4km from the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA/Ramsar, the distance that golden plover from the SPA/Ramsar are considered to travel from the designated site to feed on parcels of agricultural land. It concludes the SSP2 will not result in likely significant effects regarding the loss of functionally linked land.
- 4.6 Likely significant effects are not anticipated with respect to the impact pathway water quality and resources. This is because the growth allocated through the SPP2 will not require an additional abstraction of water from the River Nene; the resource zone is predicted to remain in surplus throughout the Plan period and the Wastewater Treatment Works are being upgraded in line with the delivered development in the Report.

#### Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan Habitat Regulations Screening Report



Finally, the JCS HRA already assessed the potential in-combination effects of growth in the region at a more strategic level finding no adverse effects, which when considered in tandem with the SPP2 HRA it is concluded that there will be no in-combination effects arising from the implementation of the SPP2.

It should be noted that Natural England advised in their representation on the SPP2, that golden plover can fly up to 15-20km away from the SPA. An update to the HRA was prepared to address this representation, the updated HRA (May 2020) was submitted with the plan, this update uses a 10km buffer for the assessment of functionally linked land. Following a further representation from Natural England additional information was provided to Natural England in relation to the sites allocated in the plan. With this additional information Natural England was satisfied that the SPP2 will have no likely significant effect on the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA and Ramsar Site. The Inspector's Report concluded (para 92) that;

"The Habitats Regulation Assessment (May 2020) meets the necessary requirements and concludes that the Plan will have no likely significant effects on the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site. Based on additional information provided by the Council (letter dated 39 June 2020) Natural England are satisfied with this conclusion."



## 5. Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA

- 5.1 Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA covers 1,358 hectares in total and is located along the River Nene between Northampton and Thorpe Waterville to the east. The SPA consists of 20 separate blocks of land and water fragmented by roads and other features and located adjacent and / or close to urban areas. A map illustrating the extent of the SPA can be viewed here.
- The SPA comprises a chain of extant and extinct gravel pits that follow alluvial deposits along the River Nene. It is dominated by a mix of shallow and deeper inland waterbodies, with associated marginal vegetation, improved grassland and nationally scarce wet broad-leaved deciduous woodland dominated by white willow (Salix alba) with crack willow (S. fragilis) and occasionally ash (Fraxinus excelsior), Osier (S. viminalis) and grey willow (S. cinereal). The site contains internationally important populations of nonbreeding wintering waterbirds that have been found in numbers in excess of 20,000 individuals.
- 5.3 The site's conservation objectives have been taken into account including consideration of the citation for the site and information supplied by Natural England. The potential significant effects of the proposals on the international nature conservation interests for which the site was designated may be summarised as:
  - Changes in water quality related to increased levels of sewerage outfall (increased phosphate loading) and diffuse pollution sources.
  - Indirect disturbance and environmental nuisance (air quality, noise, lighting, visitor pressure) leading to a decrease in key species populations over time.
- The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Special Protection Area (SPA) is located to the east and south east of the Neighbourhood Area. The nearest block is located approximately 5.5km from the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Area at its nearest point.



## 6. Screening Assessment

6.1 The table below provides an assessment of any likely significant effect of each Neighbourhood Plan policy on the European Designated Sites. For the purposes of this assessment the policies appraised are those that were approved by Grafton Underwood Parish Council for inclusion in the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan Draft Plan for Regulation 14 Consultation (May 2024).

#### Key

- No likely significant effect (NLSE) on the site's qualifying features
- Likely significant effect (LSE) on the site's qualifying features
- Uncertain whether it is NSLE or LSE

Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan Policy	Comments	Likely effect in identified sites – Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA
Policy GU1: Landscape Character and Locally Important Views Development should be sensitive to its landscape setting and protect identified views.	The policy itself will not lead to development. Its purpose is to protect landscape setting and important views.	NLSE
Policy GU2: Public Rights of Way Network Seeks to protect the Rights of Way network and the creation of new links to the network.	The policy itself will not lead to development. Its purpose is to improve footways and cycle links within the Neighbourhood Area.  Due to the distance between the Neighbourhood Area and the SPA, it is considered that this policy approach would not facilitate improved access to the SPA and therefore not result in a negative impact on the qualifying features of the SPA.	NLSE
Policy GU3: Dark Night Skies	The policy itself will not lead to development. Its purpose	NLSE



Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan Policy	Comments	Likely effect in identified sites – Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA
Seeks to reduce light pollution and manage any adverse impacts.	is to restrict lighting and protect the quality of dark night skies.	
Policy GU4: Renewable Energy Supports appropriate forms of renewable energy development, respecting local character and amenity.	This policy supports small- scale forms of renewable energy development whilst protecting the natural environment and amenity. The policy is criteria based and does not outline sites for development.	NLSE
Policy GU5: Local Green Spaces Designates 7 sites as Local Green Space and seeks the protection of their openness and special character.	This policy itself will not lead to development. Its purpose is to protect Local Green Spaces.	NLSE
Policy GU6: Ecology and Biodiversity Seeks to protect local ecological features and habitats, and biodiversity improvements.	The policy itself does not seek to deliver new development. Its purpose is to protects habitats and species.	NLSE
Policy GU7: Ancient Woodland Seeks to resist the loss and deterioration of irreplaceable habitats. Supports their restoration.	The policy itself does not seek to deliver new development. Its purpose is to protect and enhance habitats.	NLSE
Policy GU8: Trees and Hedgerows	This policy itself does not seek to deliver new	NLSE



Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan Policy	Comments	Likely effect in identified sites – Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA
Seeks to resist the loss of these natural habitats. Seeks appropriate replacements where loss does occurs.	development. Its purpose is to protect and enhance habitats and the natural environment.	
Policy GU9: Local Heritage Assets The determination of proposals will balance the need for, or public benefit, of the proposal against the significance of the asset and the extent to which it will be harmed.	This policy itself does not seek to deliver new development. Its purpose is to protect historic features.	NLSE
Policy GU10: Design Development should reflect the local characteristics of the neighbourhood area, satisfy design requirements and protect amenity.	The policy itself does not seek to deliver new development. Its purpose is to facilitate appropriate design and protect residential amenity.	NLSE
Policy GU11: Retention of Services and Facilities Identified the local services and facilities to be protected from loss.	The policy itself will not lead to development. Its purpose is to protect community facilities.	NLSE
Policy GU12: Housing Mix Seeks a mix of housing types to meet the need of older households	This policy itself does not seek deliver new development. The ambition of this policy is to address the imbalance in the existing housing stock and to enable dwellings to be built in	NLSE



Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan Policy	Comments	Likely effect in identified sites – Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA
and the need for smaller homes.	Grafton Underwood to meet local housing needs.	
Policy GU13: Rural Housing Supports limited housing within the countryside, including the subdivision of existing dwellings, the re-use and adaptation of rural buildings, rural worker accommodation and replacement dwellings.	This policy does not outline sites for development. It seeks to support housing that is appropriate to the character of the Neighbourhood Area. Any development will be of a small scale. In addition, given the distance between the Parish and the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA, it is considered unlikely to have a significant negative effect on its qualifying features or any in combination effects, with other projects and plans.	NLSE
Policy GU14: Rural Worker Accommodation Details the circumstances when rural worker accommodation will be supported.	This policy supports appropriate rural worker accommodation, It is criteria based and does not outline sites for development.	NLSE
Policy GU15: Business Conversion of Rural Buildings. Supports the sustainable growth and diversity of the rural economy through the re-use, adaptation or extension of existing rural buildings.	The ambition of this policy is to see the continuation of a thriving local community, supporting local business and employment. Any development will be in keeping and of small scale. It is a criteria-based policy and does not outline sites for development. It is, therefore, unlikely to have a significant negative effect on any of the qualifying features or any in combination effects.	NLSE



Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan Policy	Comments	Likely effect in identified sites – Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA
Policy GU16: Working from Home Supports appropriate development that facilitates home working.	This policy supports the development of residential buildings for home working, subject to a number of criteria. The policy does not outline sites for development.	NLSE
Policy GU17: Former Grafton Underwood Airfield Supports the conservation, enhancement and positive management of this heritage site.	This policy supports the appropriate development of this this historical site and is criteria based.  Given the distance between the Parish and the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA, it is considered unlikely to have a significant negative effect on its qualifying features or any in combination effects, with other projects and plans	
Policy GU18: Timber Yard, Former Grafton Underwood Airfield Allows for appropriate and forestry development.	This policy supports new development on this existing employment site. The policy is criteria based and does not allocate a new site for development. Any development will be of a small scale. In addition, given the distance between the Parish and the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA, it is considered unlikely to have a significant negative effect on its qualifying features or any in combination effects, with other projects and plans.	NLSE
Policy GU19: Parking New development should be supported by appropriate parking provision.	This policy itself will not lead to development. It aims to avoid exacerbating existing parking problems experienced in the village.	NLSE



## 7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The HRA of the JCS has resulted in policy amendments and mechanisms to avoid likely significant effects upon the Upper New Valley Gravel Pits SPA arising from the implementation of its adopted planning policies, The HRA of the SSP2 concluded there will be no significant effects arising from the implementation of its policies.
- 7.2 The HRA screening of the Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan has been undertaken in accordance with the currently available guidance as required under the Habitat Regulations. The Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan. This assessment suggests that there are unlikely to be significant negative effects on a European Designated Site resulting from the policies detailed within the draft Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan. There are also considered to be no in-combination effects.
- 7.3 Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency have been consulted during the preparation of this Habitat Regulations Screening Report. Their responses are summarised below:
  - Natural England Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development. It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that, significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely and significant effects on Habitat Sites, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.
  - Historic England Historic England does not disagree with your conclusions but would defer to the opinions of the other statutory consultees.
  - Environment Agency We aim to reduce flood risk, while protecting and enhancing the water environment. Our comments on this matter are therefore made solely from these points of view. From the point of view of these topics outlined, we agree with the conclusions the neither a SEA nor an HRA is needed.

A full copy of the responses are attached as Appendix 1.

7.4 Given the distance between the Neighbourhood Area and the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA, the plan does not include policies that allocate land for development, and the likely scale of future



development, a full Habitat Regulations Assessment is not required, as the plan is considered unlikely to have significant adverse effects on the Natura 2000 network of protected sites.



## Appendix 1: Responses from the Consultation Bodies

Date: 22 August 2024

Our ref: 482779

Your ref: Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan

**Grafton Underwood Parish Council** 

BY EMAIL ONLY



Hornbeam House Crewe Business Park Electra Way Crewe Cheshire CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Sir/Madam

#### Grafton Underwood Neighbourhood Plan - SEA & Appropriate Assessment Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 19 July 2024.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

## Screening Request: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that:

- significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and,
- significant effects on Habitats sites<sup>1</sup>, either alone or in combination, are unlikely.

The proposed neighbourhood plan is unlikely to significantly affect any Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection areas (SPA), Ramsar wetland or sites in the process of becoming SACs or SPAs ('candidate SACs', 'possible SACs', 'potential SPAs') or a Ramsar wetland. The plan area is unlikely to have a significant effect on a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Heritage Coast, and is unlikely to impact upon the purposes for which these areas are designated or defined.

Guidance on the assessment of Neighbourhood Plans, in line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 is contained within the <u>Planning Practice Guidance</u>. This identifies three triggers that may require the production of an SEA:

- a neighbourhood plan allocates sites for development
- the neighbourhood area contains sensitive natural or heritage assets that may be affected by the proposals in the plan
- the neighbourhood plan may have significant environmental effects that have not already been considered and dealt with through a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan.

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Habitats sites are those referred to in the <u>National Planning Policy Framework</u> (Annex 2 - glossary) as "any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites".

species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's <u>standing advice</u> on protected species.

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission standing advice.

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a SEA is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If a SEA is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

Please send any new consultations, or further information on this consultation to <a href="mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk">consultations@naturalengland.org.uk</a>

Yours sincerely

Sally Wintle Consultations Team