

What is a Strategic Environmental Assessment, a Habitats Regulations Assessment and a Sustainability Appraisal?

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) looks at the positive and negative environmental issues that your Neighbourhood Plan might have on your local environmental assets. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) can be helpful in making sure that your Neighbourhood Plan promotes sustainable development. An SA and SEA can be undertaken at the same.

All Plans which may have a significant effect on designated European Sites are required to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

Does your Neighbourhood Plan require an SEA?

Establishing whether a neighbourhood plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in order to meet European legislation should form part of your neighbourhood plan preparation from the outset.

Screening to see whether an SEA is needed occurs when the initial work is carried out i.e. when developing your vision, objectives and priorities. This is so the SEA can influence your plan as it develops. A SEA is only likely to be required if:

- A Habitats Regulations Assessment is required
- A Neighbourhood Plan allocates sites for development (that have not been assessed as part of the Local Plan)
- A Neighbourhood Area contains sensitive environmental assets that may be affected by proposed policies

The initial screening will identify any significant environmental assets which are within or close to your Neighbourhood Area. This screening will take eight weeks so that Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency can be consulted.

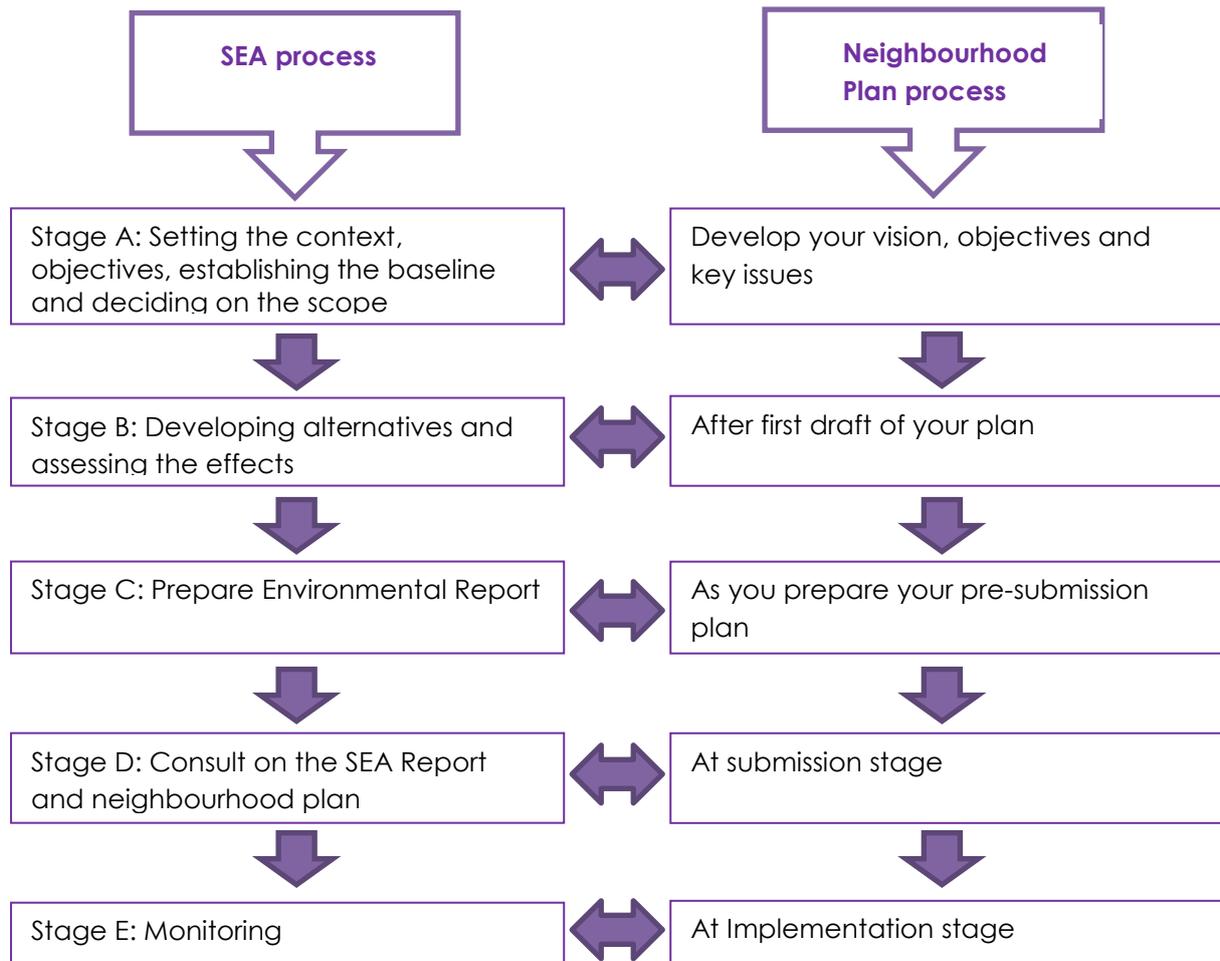
The Council will provide a Screening Statement to clarify and summarise comments made. This should be referred to in the Basic Conditions Statement when you submit your Neighbourhood Plan. As the Plan progresses, changes may mean another SEA screening is necessary. We will help to identify if this is needed.

Producing a SEA

A SEA is not a complex process and does not need to be done in any more detail, or using more resources, than is useful for its purpose. The SEA should only focus on the significant environmental effects of your neighbourhood plan and only consider alternatives that take into account the objectives and scope of your plan.

You may be able to do the assessment yourselves, as long as the need for one is built into your project plan. We suggest appointing someone in your steering group who can co-ordinate the SEA to ensure it is integrated with your neighbourhood plan.

We recommend that the SEA is carried out in a series of straightforward stages which follows government guidance. Each stage corresponds with a stage in the neighbourhood plan process.



You will also need to consider the wider sustainability effects (social and economic) of your neighbourhood plan. One way to do this is by a Sustainability Appraisal.

Why carry out a Sustainability Appraisal?

It is not a requirement to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA), but all neighbourhood plans must contribute to sustainable development. So, it makes sense to have some assessment of sustainability undertaken as part of the neighbourhood plan process. Considering the social, economic and environmental effects of your plan is also likely to lead to a more balanced and sustainable plan, one which is more likely to meet the needs of a wider cross-section of the local community. The South East Lincolnshire Local Plan is accompanied by a SA. Consulting it can help you with your own assessment.

What level of detail is required for a Sustainability Appraisal?

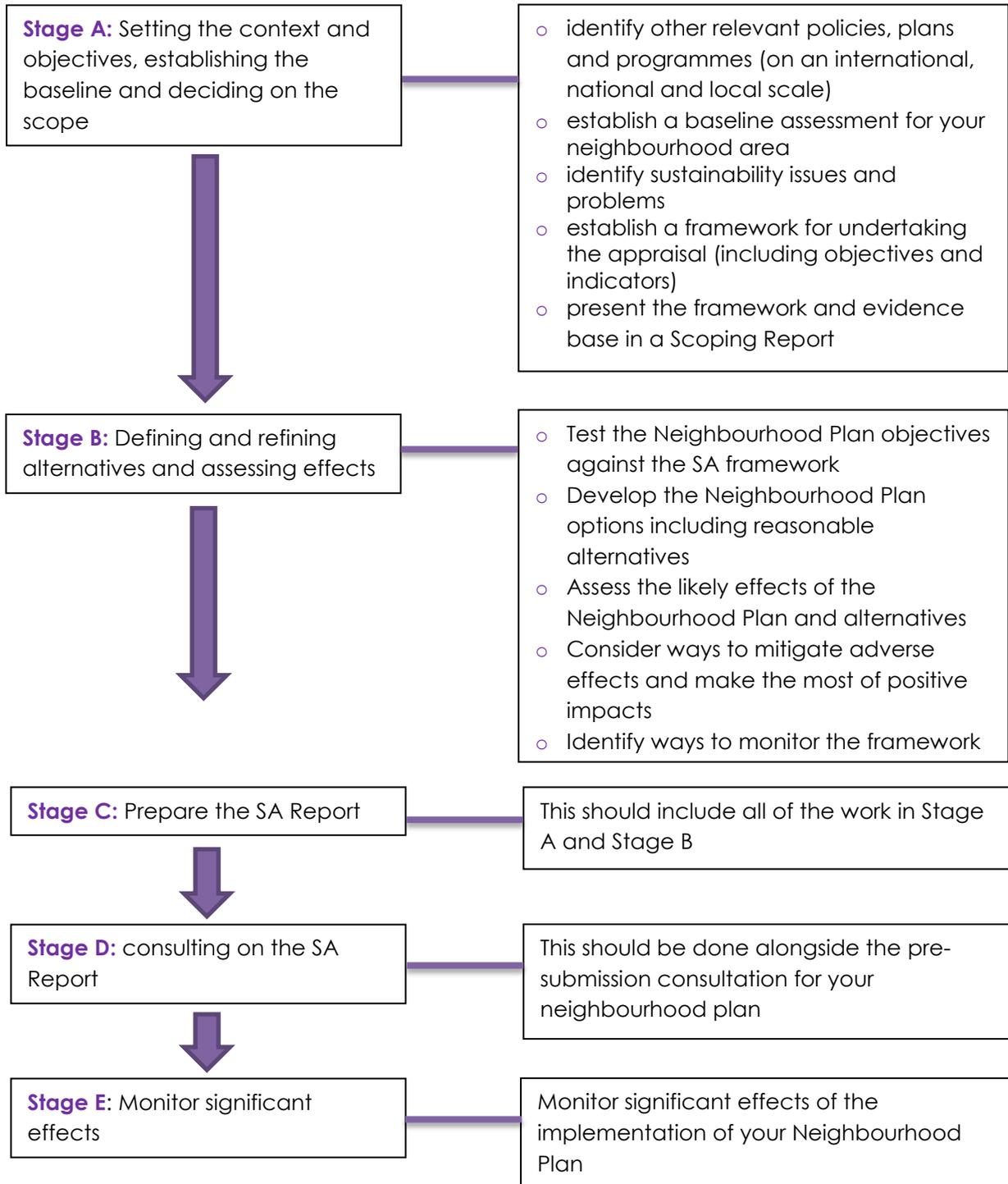
The SA should:

- focus on what is needed to assess the likely **significant** environmental, economic and social impacts of your Neighbourhood Plan
- reflect the context and level of detail in your Plan

- inform your Neighbourhood Plan so its production should run alongside the various stages of producing your Plan
- show how your plan offers **additional** environmental, social and economic benefits from those in national and local planning policies
- show that you have considered various options in preparing your plan and consulted with relevant organisations on these options

What are the stages of a Sustainability Appraisal?

The SA has five stages and should produce two documents: A Scoping Report and a Sustainability Appraisal Report.



Habitats Regulations Assessment

European sites recognised under the EU Habitats Directive, include Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Ramsar site and Special Protection Areas (SPA). There are several SACs and SPAs in South Holland and the purpose of Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is to ensure that a plan will not result in significant damage to these protected wildlife sites.

A Habitats Regulations Assessment is usually only required when the Plan designates sites for development that have not been assessed through the Local Plan process. But, as South Holland contains many European sites, every Plan will be screened.

An initial HRA screening will be carried out once a draft plan has been drawn up. Natural England is consulted as part of this process. If the screening identifies that there are European Sites within 15km upon which the Plan may have significant effects then a full Habitats Regulations Assessment will be required.

If further HRA work is required, it is advised that a qualified ecologist carries out this work. The HRA findings should then be taken into account and referred to in the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of your plan.