

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Semington Neighbourhood Plan

**Environmental Report to accompany the submission version
of the Neighbourhood Plan**

Semington Parish Council

June 2024

Quality information

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Revision	Revision date	Details	Name	Position
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Non-Technical Summary

Introduction

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Semington Neighbourhood Plan (NP).

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects. SEA of the Semington NP is a legal requirement¹.

The Semington NP is being prepared by the Parish Council in the context of the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) and the emerging Local Plan Review (LPR). Once 'made', the Semington NP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications alongside the WCS and LPR.

This Environmental Report, which accompanies the submission version of the Semington NP, is the latest document to be produced as part of the SEA process. It has been updated to reflect the minor changes made to neighbourhood plan following consultation on the Regulation 14 'pre-submission' version of the Semington NP undertaken from 1st February to 15th March 2024.

Structure of the Environmental Report / NTS

SEA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:

1. Assessment of reasonable alternatives
2. What are the SEA findings at this stage?
 - i.e., in relation to the draft plan.
3. What happens next?

Each of these questions is answered in turn within a discrete 'part' of the Environmental Report and summarised within this NTS. However, firstly there is a need to set the scene further by answering the questions 'What is the Plan seeking to achieve?' and 'What's the scope of the SEA?'

What is the Semington NP seeking to achieve?

The Semington NP has a clear vision, which is summarised as follows:

"It's 2038. Semington is a great place to live, with its character and rural surroundings preserved. Small scale and sympathetic development has met a local need for facilities, housing and employment. Community life is flourishing, with facilities and services maintained or improved and precious buildings, landscapes and wildlife protected. "

¹ Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: a) an environmental report; or b) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations ('the SEA Regulations'). The Semington NP was subject to screening by Wiltshire Council in September 2023 and Scoping consultation in November-December 2023 sought the wider opinions of statutory consultees.

A total of eight objectives have been identified to support the delivery of the vision, which are:

1. To maintain the parish's wildlife-rich open countryside and support farming and other businesses that determine and protect the unique setting, character and identity of Semington.
2. To provide the housing the community wants and needs in developments of appropriate size in the locations it approves and in a range of housing tenures and types, to meet the needs of young people, growing families and older residents.
3. To ensure any development is low carbon, built to a high quality and a locally distinctive design, to maintain the essential character of the settlements.
4. To celebrate and protect the Kennet & Avon Canal and Semington Brook, and the parish's significant landscapes, wildlife habitats, biodiversity, green space and cultural and heritage artifacts.
5. To retain and enhance the rights of way network and local green spaces in the parish that are of significant community value.
6. To protect and improve the recreational, sporting, social, educational and service facilities in the parish for all ages.
7. To sustain and encourage a broad range of community facilities and business.
8. To improve digital connectivity, retain the post office, and enable communications within the parish providing for all age groups.

What is the scope of the SEA?

The scope of the SEA is summarised in a list of topics, objectives, and assessment questions, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological 'framework' for assessment. A summary framework is presented below, and a full framework which includes assessment questions is provided within the main Environmental Report (see **Table 3.2**).

SEA topic	SEA objective
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.
Climate change and flood risk	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area and increase resilience to the potential effects of climate change.
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Land, soil and water resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.

SEA topic SEA objective

Transportation Promote sustainable transport use and active travel opportunities and reduce the need to travel.

Plan-making / SEA up to this point

An important element of the SEA process involves assessing ‘reasonable alternatives’ in time to inform development of the draft proposals, and then publishing information on reasonable alternatives for consultation alongside the draft proposals.

As such, **Part 1** of the Environmental Report explains how work was undertaken to develop and assess a ‘reasonable’ range of alternative approaches to the allocation of land for housing, including alternative sites.

Specifically, **Part 1** of the report:

1. Presents an assessment of four sites in Semington against the SEA framework.
2. Explains reasons for establishing the preferred option, in light of the assessment.

Site options

Details of the four sites assessed through the SEA process are presented in the table below.

Site Reference	Site Name	Area (ha)	Capacity (number of homes)
328 / Site 2	Pound Lane	5.21	35 (based on a developable area of 1.2ha)
724 / Site 4	Semington Turnpike	2.64	78
3330 / Site 1	Land adjoining Church Street and High Street	1.57	46
Site 6	Land at High Street	3.26	90

Appraisal of reasonable alternatives

The table below provides a summary of the results of the site assessment, and the conclusions are summarised below this. Full appraisal findings are presented in **Chapter 5** of the main body of the Environmental Report.

SA theme		Option 1 – 328 / Site 2	Option 2 – 724 / Site 4	Option 3 – 3330 / Site 1	Option 4 – Site 6
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Significant effects?	No	No	No	No
	Rank	=2	1	=2	=2
Climate change and flood risk	Significant effects?	No	No	No	No
	Rank	=	=	=	=
Community wellbeing	Significant effects?	Yes – positive	Yes – positive	Yes – positive	Yes – positive

SA theme		Option 1 – 328 / Site 2	Option 2 – 724 / Site 4	Option 3 – 3330 / Site 1	Option 4 – Site 6
	Rank	4	2	3	1
Historic environment	Significant effects?	Uncertain	No	Yes – negative	Uncertain
	Rank	=2	1	3	=2
Land, soil and water resources	Significant effects?	Yes – negative	Yes – negative	Yes – negative	Yes – negative
	Rank	=	=	=	=
Landscape	Significant effects?	Yes – negative	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain
	Rank	3	=1	=1	2
Transportation and movement	Significant effects?	Yes – negative	Yes – negative	Yes – negative	Yes – negative
	Rank	=	=	=	=

All of the options rank equally under three SEA topics. These are climate change and flood risk; land, soil and water resources; and transportation and movement. Significant negative effects are predicted under land, soil and water resources and transportation and movement SEA topics.

Of the remaining four SEA topics – biodiversity and geodiversity; community wellbeing; historic environment; and landscape – Option 2 performs most favourably, ranking either first, joint first or second under each SEA topic. This is followed by Option 4, which ranks either first, second or joint second. Finally, Options 1 and 3 perform least favourably, with Option 1 predicted to lead to significant negative effects under the landscape SEA topic, and Option 3 predicted to lead to significant negative effects under the historic environment SEA topic.

Development of the preferred approach

The group have provided the following reasoning as to why the preferred site was chosen for allocation through the Semington NP:

“AECOM were commissioned to produce a Site Options and Assessment (SOA) Report for Semington, which was published in February 2023.

Of the 15 sites that were assessed through this report, only one was considered appropriate for allocation (given a green ‘traffic light’ rating). A further eight were ‘traffic light’ rated amber as they were found to be appropriate for development or suitable for partial allocation, provided identified issues could be resolved or constraints mitigated. Six sites were ‘traffic light’ rated red, indicating that the site is not appropriate for allocation.

Of these eight amber rated sites, four were withdrawn by the landowner from the neighbourhood planning process, and one was taken out of consideration as it had been granted planning permissions, leaving three to be considered further. These, together with the green site, are the ones analysed in this SEA Environmental Report.

All four sites (three amber and one green) were presented to villagers during a Spring 2023 community consultation alongside all the data available from AECOM.

The neighbourhood plan steering group was careful not to make any recommendations at this stage.

The outcomes of the consultation showed a clear preference for the site locally known as Turnpike or the Auction Field (referred to in this report as Option 2), numbered site 4 / 724. The SOA report had concluded this site was suitable for allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan, shown with a 'traffic light' rating of green.

From the village point of view, the Turnpike site had a number of positive features, whilst having none of the negative points associated with the other sites. The prime positive feature was that it included a shop. The provision of a shop has been a persistent wish of the village since the previous shop / post office closed following the by-passing of the village by the A350 in 2003. Another positive feature was the site's adjacency to the A361 which was felt to increase a shop's likely viability whilst ensuring that traffic associated with it did not come through the village. This site did not have the landscape and heritage issues variously associated with the other sites.

When the neighbourhood plan steering group considered the feedback from the consultation, it saw no reason not to endorse its conclusions."

Assessment findings at this stage

Part 2 of the Environmental Report presents an assessment of the draft version of the Semington NP. Assessment findings are presented as a series of narratives under the 'SEA framework' topic headings. The following conclusions are reached:

Long-term **significant positive effects** are considered likely with regards to the community wellbeing SEA topic. This is because the draft Semington NP will help meet the local housing need, and seeks to protect and enhance community facilities, employment opportunities, and local green spaces and the countryside. It will also deliver a new village shop. Combined, this will positively contribute to the quality of life and wellbeing of residents in the neighbourhood area.

Long-term **significant negative effects** are considered likely under the land, soil and water resources SEA topic. This is due to the loss of greenfield land and the potential loss of productive (i.e. BMV) agricultural land.

Uncertainty is noted under the biodiversity and geodiversity and landscape SEA topics. With regards to biodiversity and geodiversity, this is because the HRA concluded that the Semington NP has the potential to lead to likely significant effects on the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC, with nine policies needing to be taken forward for appropriate assessment. With regards to landscape, this is because the impact of the site allocation on the local landscape is largely dependent on the design, layout and landscaping of the development.

No significant effects are predicted under the climate change and flood risk; historic environment; and transportation and movement SEA topics. With regards to climate change and flood risk, this is because the scale of development proposed through the plan is limited and avoids areas of medium-high flood risk. With regards to the historic environment, this is because the site allocation does not contain or lie adjacent to any designated or non-designated heritage assets. In addition, the policy framework sufficiently considers the impact of development on both SEA topics. With regards to transportation and movement, this is given the relatively small scale of growth proposed through the plan and the site allocation's location close to bus stops.

Next steps

This Environmental Report accompanies the Semington NP for Regulation 14 consultation.

Following consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Semington NP Steering Group, and the Semington NP and Environmental Report will be updated as necessary. The updated Environmental Report will then accompany the Semington NP for submission to the Local Planning Authority, Wiltshire Council, for subsequent Independent Examination.

Following submission, the plan and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the Semington NP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.

Assuming that the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the Semington NP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Wiltshire Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Semington NP, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the Semington NP will become part of the Development Plan for Wiltshire Council, covering the defined neighbourhood area.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 AECOM is commissioned to lead on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Semington Neighbourhood Plan (NP).
- 1.2 The Semington NP is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and in the context of the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) and the emerging Local Plan Review (LPR). Once 'made', the Semington NP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications alongside the WCS and LPR.
- 1.3 SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects. SEA of the Semington NP is a legal requirement².

SEA explained

- 1.4 It is a requirement that SEA is undertaken in line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which transposed into national law EU Directive 2001/42/EC on SEA.
- 1.5 In line with the Regulations, a report (known as the Environmental Report) must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan that "*identifies, describes and evaluates*" the likely significant effects of implementing "*the plan, and reasonable alternatives*"³. The report must then be considered, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.6 More specifically, the Report must answer the following three questions:
 1. Assessment of reasonable alternatives.
 2. What are the SEA findings at this stage?
 - i.e., in relation to the draft plan.
 3. What happens next?

² Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that each Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: a) an environmental report; or b) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a 'screening' process completed in accordance with Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations ('the SEA Regulations'). The Semington NP was subject to screening by Wiltshire Council in September 2023 and Scoping consultation in November-December 2023 sought the wider opinions of statutory consultees.

³ Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

This Environmental Report

- 1.7 This report is the Environmental Report for the Semington NP and accompanies the submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan. It has been updated to reflect changes made to the Semington NP subsequent to Regulation 14 consultation undertaken on the pre-submission version of the neighbourhood plan between 1st February and 15th March 2024.
- 1.8 This report essentially answers questions 1, 2 and 3 in turn, to provide the required information⁴. Each question is answered within a discrete 'part' of the report.
- 1.9 However, before answering question 1, two initial questions are answered to further set the scene; what is the plan seeking to achieve? And what is the scope of the SEA?

⁴ See **Appendix A** for further explanation of the regulatory basis for answering certain questions within the Environmental Report, and a 'checklist' explaining more precisely the regulatory basis for presenting certain information.

2. What is the Semington NP seeking to achieve?

Introduction

2.1 This section considers the strategic planning policy context provided by the adopted WCS and emerging LPR, before then presenting the vision and objectives of the Semington NP. **Figure 2.1** below presents the neighbourhood area.

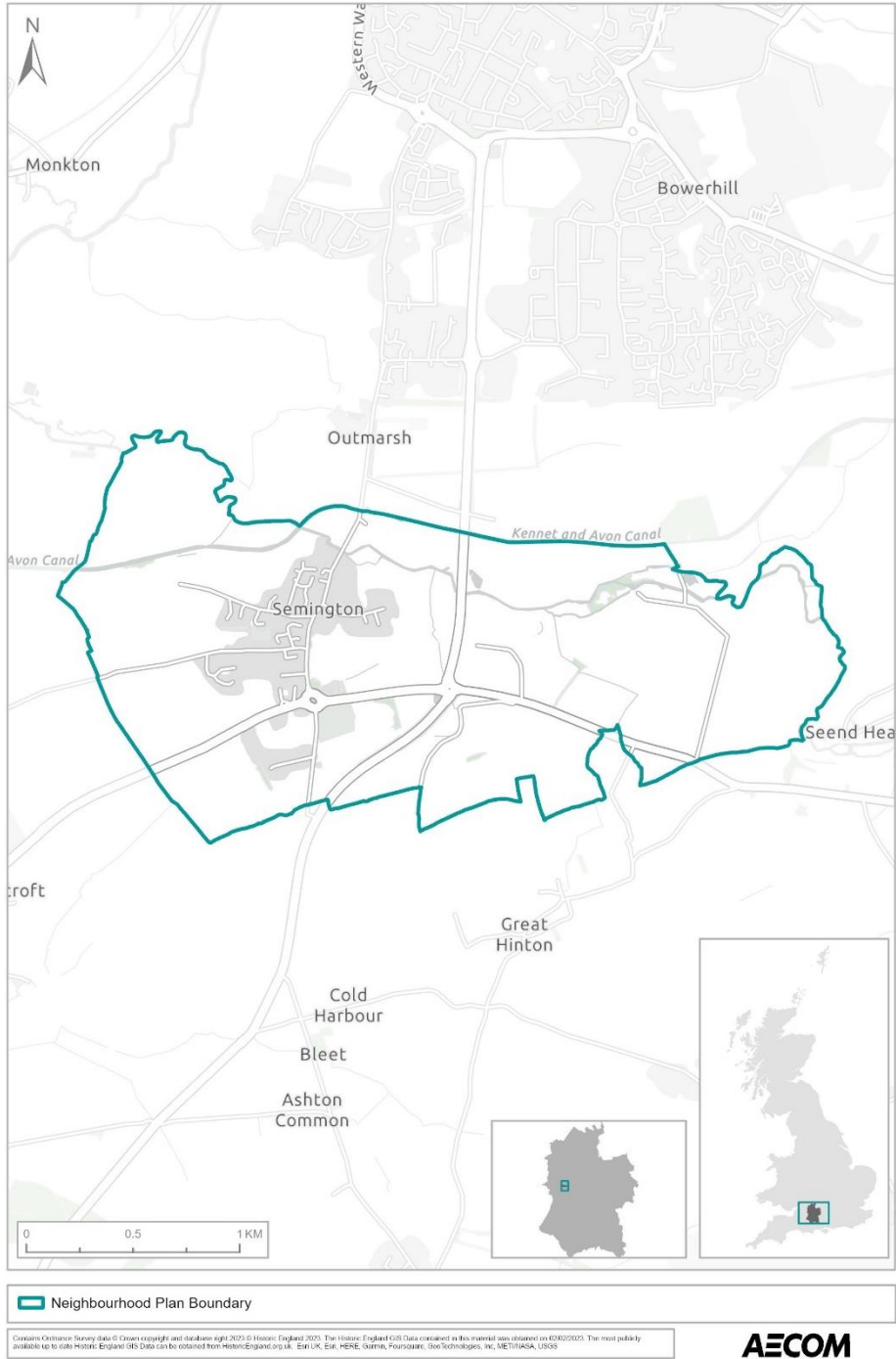


Figure 2.1 The Semington neighbourhood area

Strategic planning policy context

- 2.2 The WCS forms part of the local development framework for Wiltshire. Core Policy 15 (Spatial Strategy: Melksham Community Area) defines Semington as a 'Large Village' within the Melksham Community Area.
- 2.3 Wiltshire Council are currently undertaking an LPR. Regulation 19 consultation ran between 27th September and 22nd November 2023. The Council received more than 8,000 comments from the public, Wiltshire Council members, businesses, community groups, and town and parish councils. The outcome of the consultation will be reported to Cabinet and Council prior to submission to the Secretary of State. The new Local Plan is due to be adopted in late 2024.
- 2.4 The LPR defines Semington as a 'Large Village' within the Trowbridge rural area. At present, the LPR sets out an overall requirement for 53 homes in Semington during the plan period up to 2038. At the time of writing this report, in the current period (2006 to 2038) 40 new homes have been built and occupied; there is full planning permission for 19 homes and outline planning permission for a further 26 homes in the neighbourhood area. This is a total of 85 homes, therefore exceeding the overall requirement for 53 homes.

Semington NP vision and objectives

- 2.5 The Semington NP has a clear vision, which is:

"The distinctive rural setting of Semington parish provides a wildlife-rich buffer between neighbouring settlements in West Wiltshire. The Kennet & Avon Canal and Semington Brook wildlife corridors and the biodiversity within them are key elements in this. In 2038, the integrity of this buffer will continue to be maintained as an asset for both people and nature.

Any development of the settlements of Semington, Little Marsh and Littleton will be responsive to the economic, environmental and social needs of the people living and working here. There will be minimal housing development, all within walking distance of a range of community facilities and built to the highest environmental standards, in sympathy with the existing settlements and with minimum impact on landscape settings, ecology and heritage. New housing will reflect the prime need for affordable homes and for people wishing to downsize.

The significant landscape perspectives within the parish along the Kennet & Avon Canal and the Brook, towards the iconic Roundway Down, and through the fields to Hilperton will be protected, being key contributors to settlement character. Green space, natural features and heritage sites will be protected and maintained, and infrastructure changes will have minimal impact on the actively rural character of the parish. The use and generation of renewable energy will increase and our community carbon footprint will be reduced.

In 2038, Semington will remain a place where people can move around easily and safely. Its many footpaths will have been improved, with easier access for older people and those with disabilities. Cycling access to local towns will be upgraded. The old A350 road lengths will remain restricted routes.

By 2038, the parish's play areas will be enhanced, the tennis court remain freely open to residents and visitors, the football pitch stay in use and the allotments will be flourishing.

The parish will continue to welcome a wide range of small businesses from farming (which underpins our actively rural character) to light engineering, tourism and services. More home working and businesses will be enabled through enhanced IT infrastructure. Existing community facilities – including the pub, church, school, village hall and post office – will be maintained and where possible enhanced.

The wide range of social groups in the parish will continue to build its community spirit, assisted by effective communications, both electronic and magazine-based. “

2.6 A total of eight objectives have been identified to support the delivery of the vision, which are:

1. To maintain the parish's wildlife-rich open countryside and support farming and other businesses that determine and protect the unique setting, character and identity of Semington.
2. To provide the housing the community wants and needs in developments of appropriate size in the locations it approves and in a range of housing tenures and types, to meet the needs of young people, growing families and older residents.
3. To ensure any development is low carbon, built to a high quality and a locally distinctive design, to maintain the essential character of the settlements.
4. To celebrate and protect the Kennet & Avon Canal and Semington Brook, and the parish's significant landscapes, wildlife habitats, biodiversity, green space and cultural and heritage artifacts.
5. To retain and enhance the rights of way network and local green spaces in the parish that are of significant community value.
6. To protect and improve the recreational, sporting, social, educational and service facilities in the parish for all ages.
7. To sustain and encourage a broad range of community facilities and business.
8. To improve digital connectivity, retain the post office, and enable communications within the parish providing for all age groups.

3. What is the scope of the SEA?

Introduction

3.1 The aim here is to introduce the reader to the scope of the SEA, i.e., the sustainability topics and objectives that should be a focus of the assessment of the plan and reasonable alternatives. Further information, including the policy review and baseline information that has supported the development of key sustainability issues and objectives, is presented in **Appendix B**.

Consultation

3.2 The SEA Regulations require that “*when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies*”. In England, the consultation bodies are the Environment Agency, Historic England, and Natural England⁵. Hence, these authorities were consulted in November 2023. One main comment was provided by Historic England, which is detailed in **Table 3.1** below. The Environment Agency and Natural England did not provide responses.

Table 3.1 Scoping consultation responses

Consultation response	How the response was considered and addressed
<p>Historic England <i>Historic Places Advisor, response received 21st December 2023</i></p> <p>“...we would recommend adding our guidance on site allocations as we have previously noted the intention to allocate a site for development within the Plan (see attached). While the title of this guidance refers to its application in Local Plan preparation it is just as applicable to Neighbourhood Plans”</p>	<p>The guidance (The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans Historic Environment Advice Note 3) has been referred to when undertaking the assessments through the SEA.</p>

Key sustainability issues

3.3 The key sustainability issues for the neighbourhood area, identified through scoping, are presented below under each SEA topic.

Air quality

- The neighbourhood area is approximately 5.9km east of the Bradford-upon-Avon AQMA and 8km west of the Devizes AQMA, designated due to high NO₂ emissions. It is possible that these AQMAs could be impacted as a result of Bradford-upon-Avon and Devizes, increasing vehicular emissions. However, given Melksham and Trowbridge are the nearest towns to the neighbourhood area, it is likely that most residents will access key services and facilities in these towns. **Due to this, the air quality theme has been scoped out for the purposes of the SEA process.**

⁵ These consultation bodies were selected “by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programmes” (SEA Directive, Article 6(3)).

Biodiversity and geodiversity

- Semington is near designated buffer zones for the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats SAC. While not part of the SAC, key habitats around Semington are vital for bat species. Conservation opportunities exist but require careful development to avoid harm to these species and habitats.
- There are areas within the neighbourhood area that present an opportunity to enhance biodiversity value and connectivity. The Semington NP should take advantage of these opportunities where possible to secure biodiversity net gain in line with national policy.

Climate change and flood risk

- It is likely CO₂ emissions originating from the neighbourhood area will increase as the population grows. It will be important for new development to adopt best building practices to limit the increase in emissions, such as using sustainable materials and incorporating renewable energy infrastructure.
- New development in the neighbourhood area has the potential to exacerbate flood risk if it is built within and in proximity to areas at higher risk of fluvial and surface water flooding. Development should be focused away from these areas where possible.
- CO₂ emissions associated with the transport sector remain higher than other sectors in Wiltshire. This highlights the importance of accessible development and the delivery of sustainable transport infrastructure.

Community wellbeing

- The neighbourhood area experiences higher levels of deprivation with regards to the barriers to housing and services deprivation domain. The Semington NP presents an opportunity to reduce this type of deprivation by encouraging housing development in more accessible locations and more affordable housing.
- New housing development in the neighbourhood area has the potential to increase pressure on existing community infrastructure if this is not improved alongside development. This could lead to negative impacts, especially on the health of residents if the capacity of health facilities is not increased to cater for the growing population. This could be exacerbated by the ageing population.

Historic environment

- There are several designated heritage assets in the neighbourhood area, all of which present a constraint to future development due to the need to avoid impacts to the features and their settings. The Semington NP can help maintain and enhance the historic environment by ensuring that development is sensitive to the historic setting of these assets in terms of design and layout.
- The Semington NP presents an opportunity to provide policy and guidance that protects the key historic characteristics of the neighbourhood area, which could extend to protecting non-designated assets and their settings.

Land, soil and water resources

- Allocating land for development could influence changes to land, soil and water resources. It will be important for development to be focused away from BMV land and consider potential impacts on the overlapping waterbody catchments

and water quality. This could include implementing mitigation measures to ensure water pollution does not occur throughout the development phases.

Landscape

- There are some Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) in the neighbourhood area, which are important features that likely to contribute to landscape and villagescape character. New development through the Semington NP should avoid visual impacts to and from these TPOs where possible to maintain the character and quality of more built-up areas in the neighbourhood area.
- The Semington Character Statement outlines the significance of specific features within the neighbourhood area, which the Semington NP should seek to protect and enhance. The Semington NP should steer development away from these areas where possible to ensure landscape quality is maintained in these parts of the neighbourhood area.
- It will be important for the Semington NP to protect the local landscape, including its coherence and characteristics. This will bring benefits to other SEA themes, including biodiversity and climate change, by maintaining features which support wildlife and natural processes, such as gardens and groups of trees.

Transport and movement

- Future development in the neighbourhood area has the potential to increase the number of private vehicles on local roads, given the limited public transportation opportunities within the neighbourhood area. This could exacerbate existing traffic and congestion during peak periods and potentially lead to parking issues in the neighbourhood area.
- A greater level of development within the neighbourhood area could encourage improvements to public transportation infrastructure and services. This could include an increase in the number of bus services.

The SEA framework

3.4 The SEA scope is summarised in a list of topics, objectives, and assessment questions, known as the SEA framework. These draw on the key sustainability issues identified through scoping. **Table 3.2** below presents the SEA framework as broadly agreed in 2023.

Table 3.2 SEA framework

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the proposal help to...)
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance nationally and locally designated sites, including supporting habitats and mobile species that are important to the integrity of these sites? • Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats as well as priority habitats and species, including ancient woodland? • Achieve biodiversity and environmental net gains and support the delivery of ecosystem services and multifunctional green infrastructure networks? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the area to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity?

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the proposal help to...)
Climate change and flood risk	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within the neighbourhood area and increase resilience to the potential effects of climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of journeys made and reduce the need to travel? • Promote the use of more sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling, public transport, and electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure? • Increase the number of new developments meeting or exceeding sustainable design criteria? • Generate energy from low or zero carbon sources, or reduce energy consumption from non-renewable resources? • Improve and extend green infrastructure networks in the neighbourhood area? • Sustainably manage water run-off, and reduce runoff where possible? • Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the area to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks?
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing? • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes? • Meet the needs of all sectors of the community? • Provide flexible and adaptable homes that meet people's needs, particularly the needs of an ageing population? • Improve the availability and accessibility of key local facilities, including health infrastructure? • Encourage and promote social cohesion and active involvement of local people in community activities? • Facilitate green infrastructure enhancements, including improved access to open space? • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of existing residents?
Historic environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and enhance buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest, both designated and non-designated, and their settings? • Protect the integrity of the historic setting of key monuments of cultural heritage interest as listed in the Wiltshire and Swindon HER? • Protect the integrity of WWII relics in the area? • Support the undertaking of early archaeological investigations and, where appropriate, recommend mitigation strategies? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic evolution and character of the neighbourhood area?
Land, soil and water resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of previously developed land wherever possible? • Identify and avoid the development of the BMV land? • Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste? • Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water quality?

SEA topic	SEA objective	Assessment questions (will the proposal help to...)
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development? • Protect waterbodies from pollution? • Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water harvesting and/or water recycling? • Avoid any negative impacts on mineral and waste infrastructure? <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and / or enhance local landscape character and quality of place? • Conserve and enhance local identity, diversity, and settlement character? • Identify and protect locally important viewpoints which contribute to character and sense of place? • Retain and enhance landscape features that contribute to the water setting, or rural setting, including trees and hedgerows?
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and active travel opportunities and reduce the need to travel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the objectives within the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan to encourage the use of more sustainable transport modes? • Encourage a shift to more sustainable forms of travel and enable sustainable transport infrastructure enhancements? • Improve local connectivity and pedestrian and cyclist movement? • Facilitate working from home to reduce the use of private vehicles to access workplaces outside of the neighbourhood area? • Reduce the impact of the transport sector on climate change? • Improve road safety and reduce pollution from vehicles?

Part 1: Assessment of reasonable alternatives

4. Introduction (to part 1)

Overview

- 4.1 Whilst work on the Semington NP has been underway for some time, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of all the work carried out to date, but rather to explain work undertaken to develop and appraise reasonable alternatives through the SEA process.
- 4.2 More specifically, this part of the report presents information on the consideration given to reasonable alternative approaches to addressing a particular issue that is of central importance to the Semington NP, namely the allocation of land for housing, or alternative sites.

Why focus on sites?

- 4.3 The decision was taken to develop and assess reasonable alternatives in relation to the matter of allocating land for housing, given the following considerations:
- Semington NP objectives, particularly housing objectives to provide sufficient and appropriate high-quality housing to meet local needs.
 - Housing growth is known to be a matter of key interest amongst residents and other stakeholders; and
 - The delivery of new homes is most likely to have a significant effect compared to the other proposals within the Semington NP. National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that SEA should focus on matters likely to give rise to significant effects.

Structure of this part of the report

- 4.4 This part of the report is structured as follows:
- **Chapter 5 and Chapter 6** – discuss the options appraised as reasonable alternatives, and the findings of the appraisal of these options.
 - **Chapter 7** – explains reasons for selecting the preferred option, considering the appraisal.

5. Establishing reasonable alternatives

Introduction

- 5.1 This chapter describes the options assessed as reasonable alternatives through the SEA process, and assessment findings. The assessment comprises an appraisal of site options and an appraisal of spatial strategy options.

Strategic parameters

- 5.2 As discussed in **Section 2.1**, the Semington NP is being prepared in the context of the adopted WCS and emerging LPR.
- 5.3 The WCS forms part of the local development framework for Wiltshire. Core Policy 15 (Spatial Strategy: Melksham Community Area) defines Semington as a 'Large Village' within the Melksham Community Area.
- 5.4 Wiltshire Council are currently undertaking an LPR. Regulation 19 consultation ran between 27th September and 22nd November 2023. The Council received more than 8,000 comments from the public, Wiltshire Council members, businesses, community groups, and town and parish councils. The outcome of the consultation will be reported to Cabinet and Council prior to submission to the Secretary of State. The new Local Plan is due to be adopted in late 2024.
- 5.5 The LPR defines Semington as a 'Large Village' within the Trowbridge rural area. At present, the LPR sets out an overall requirement for 53 homes in Semington during the plan period up to 2038. At the time of writing this report, in the current period (2006 to 2038) 40 new homes have been built and occupied; there is full planning permission for 19 homes and outline planning permission for a further 26 homes in the neighbourhood area. This is a total of 85 homes, therefore exceeding the overall requirement for 53 homes.
- 5.6 Despite the above, the LPR makes it clear that additional homes may be allocated through Neighbourhood Plans should a local need be identified. The Steering Group have identified a need for a village shop, and to enable this, they support the delivery of a number of homes at one site in Semington.

Appraisal of site options

- 5.7 To further support the development of a spatial strategy to deliver an appropriate number of homes in Semington through the NP, the Steering Group has considered alternative locations for delivering housing in the parish.
- 5.8 AECOM were commissioned to produce a Site Options and Assessment (SOA) Report for Semington, which was published in February 2023. Of the 15 sites that were assessed through this report, only one was considered appropriate for allocation, whilst a further eight were considered potentially appropriate for development if the identified issues can be resolved or constraints mitigated. These eight sites are outlined in **Table 5.1** overleaf.

Table 5.1 Sites assessed through the SOA Report with a green or amber rating

Site Reference	Site Name	Area (ha)	Capacity (number of homes)	Rating
328 / Site 2	Pound Lane	5.21	35 (based on a developable area of 1.2ha)	Amber
331	Land off St Georges Road (2)	4.14	20-26 (based on existing permissions)	Greyed out
333	Manor Farm 2	1.76	38 (based on a developable area of 1.3ha)	Amber
335	Manor Farm 4	0.26	8	Amber
336	Manor Farm 5	1.76	7	Amber
724 / Site 4	Semington Turnpike	2.64	78	Green
1042 / Site 5	St Georges Road	2.99	18 (based on undetermined planning application)	Greyed out
3330 / Site 1	Land adjoining Church Street and High Street	1.57	46	Amber
Site 6	Land at High Street	3.26	90	Amber

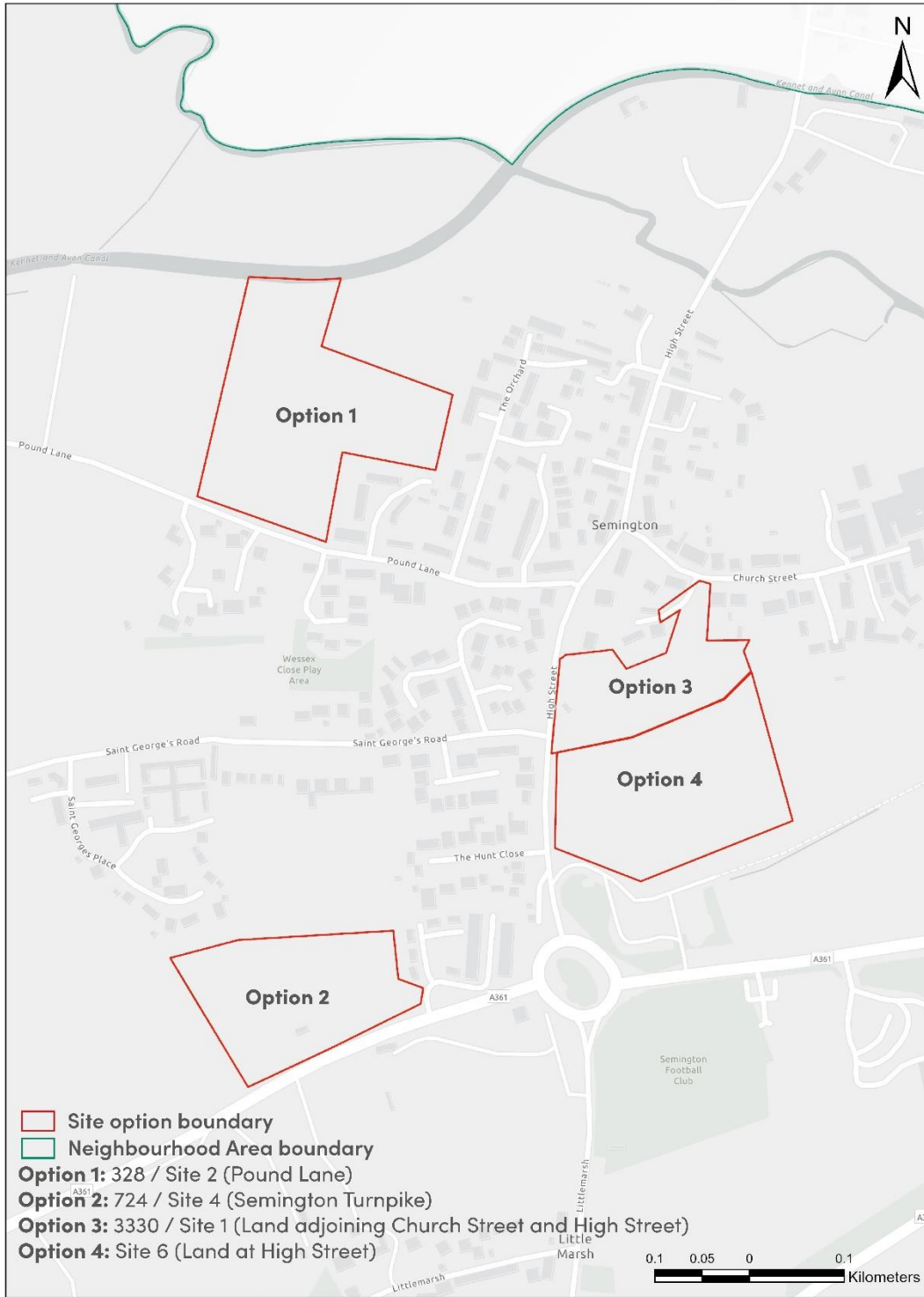
5.9 Sites 331, 333, 335 and 336 in **Table 5.1** above are all owned by the same landowner, who has informed the Steering Group that they are no longer available for development through the Semington NP. Additionally, site 331 already has extant planning permission. In addition, site 1042 / Site 5 has since received planning permission and is now under construction. Given these considerations, it is not appropriate for these five sites, which are greyed out in the table above, to be considered through the SEA process.

5.10 This leaves four sites which will be assessed as reasonable alternatives for the purpose of the SEA. These are listed below and shown in **Figure 5.1** overleaf.

- **Option 1** – 328 / Site 2 (Pound Lane)
- **Option 2** – 724 / Site 4 (Semington Turnpike)
- **Option 3** – 3330 / Site 1 (Land adjoining Church Street and High Street)
- **Option 4** – Site 6 (Land at High Street)

5.11 Each site would individually, if allocated, deliver growth which is over and above the housing requirement for the neighbourhood area. However, the NP Steering Group wish to allocate one site through the Semington NP to provide certainty over the future direction of growth in the neighbourhood area.

Reasonable alternatives considered through the SEA



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Figure 5.1 Reasonable alternatives

Appraisal of reasonable alternatives

5.12 The reasonable alternatives, as outlined above, have been assessed under each of the seven SEA topics screened in through SEA scoping. A summary of the appraisal findings is presented in **Table 5.2** below, followed by detailed appraisal findings.

Methodology

5.13 For each of the options, the assessment examines likely significant effects on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability themes and objectives identified through SEA scoping as a methodological framework. Green is used to indicate significant positive effects, whilst red is used to indicate significant negative effects. Where appropriate, uncertainty will also be noted.

5.14 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, where there is a need to rely on assumptions in order to reach a conclusion on a 'significant effect' this is made explicit in the appraisal text.

5.15 Where it is not possible to predict likely significant effects based on reasonable assumptions, efforts are made to comment on the relative merits of the alternatives in more general terms and to indicate a rank of preference. This is helpful, as it enables a distinction to be made between the alternatives even where it is not possible to distinguish between them in terms of 'significant effects'. Numbers are used to highlight the option or options that are preferred from an SEA perspective with 1 performing the best.

5.16 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted considering the criteria presented within Regulations.⁶ So, for example, account is taken of the duration, frequency and reversibility of effects.

Table 5.2 Summary of findings

SA theme		Option 1 – 328 / Site 2	Option 2 – 724 / Site 4	Option 3 – 3330 / Site 1	Option 4 – Site 6
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Significant effects?	No	No	No	No
	Rank	=2	1	=2	=2
Climate change and flood risk	Significant effects?	No	No	No	No
	Rank	=	=	=	=
Community wellbeing	Significant effects?	Yes – positive	Yes – positive	Yes – positive	Yes – positive
	Rank	4	2	3	1
Historic environment	Significant effects?	Uncertain	No	Yes – negative	Uncertain
	Rank	=2	1	3	=2
Land, soil and water resources	Significant effects?	Yes – negative	Yes – negative	Yes – negative	Yes – negative
	Rank	=	=	=	=

⁶ Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

SA theme		Option 1 – 328 / Site 2	Option 2 – 724 / Site 4	Option 3 – 3330 / Site 1	Option 4 – Site 6
Landscape	Significant effects?	Yes – negative	Uncertain	Uncertain	Uncertain
	Rank	3	=1	=1	2
Transportation and movement	Significant effects?	Yes – negative	Yes – negative	Yes – negative	Yes – negative
	Rank	=	=	=	=

Biodiversity and geodiversity

- 5.17 Semington does not contain any internationally, nationally or locally designated sites for biodiversity or geodiversity. Whilst all the options overlap with a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zone (IRZ), this does not concern the types of development likely to come forward through the Semington NP (i.e. residential / rural residential development).
- 5.18 The Semington NP was screened in by Wiltshire Council as requiring a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) due to its proximity to the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is approximately 8.8km northwest of the neighbourhood area. The HRA concluded that the Semington NP has the potential to lead to likely significant effects on one European site alone and/or in-combination with other plans and projects. This is due to the site allocation policy (SEM10), alongside eight other policies in the draft Semington NP, which have the potential to impact on the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC. The HRA states that it is therefore necessary for these nine policies to be taken forward to appropriate assessment under Regulation 105 of the Habitats Regulations.
- 5.19 There are a number of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats scattered throughout the neighbourhood area; however, none of these overlap with any of the options. Nevertheless, all the options are within 200m of a BAP priority habitat, and therefore there is potential for development to disturb these habitats, particularly during the construction phase.
- 5.20 In terms of the National Habitat Network⁷, all of the options overlap, to varying degrees, with Network Enhancement Zone 1, which is land connecting existing patches of primary and associated habitats which is likely to be suitable for creation of the primary habitat. Options 1, 3 and 4 are the most constrained in this respect, as only the northern boundary of Option 2 overlaps with this zone.
- 5.21 The northeastern part of the neighbourhood area is a priority area for Countryside Stewardship (CS) measures addressing Lapwing habitat issues. However, none of the options overlap with this area.
- 5.22 Overall, none of the options are considered particularly constrained from a biodiversity and geodiversity perspective. Nevertheless, it is noted that the loss of greenfield land will likely have some impact on biodiversity locally. However, the requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG), which recently came into force in January 2024 under the Environment Act 2021, is likely to mitigate this to some degree. Whilst no significant effects are considered likely under any of

⁷ data.gov.uk (2023): 'Habitat Networks (England)', [online] available to access via [this link](#)

the options, Option 2 is ranked slightly more favourably than Options 1, 3 and 4 as only a small part of the site overlaps with Network Enhancement Zone 1.

Climate change and flood risk

- 5.23 The area immediately around the path of the Semington Brook (Milebourne Stream to confluence with River Avon (Bristol)) has a medium-high risk of fluvial flooding. However, none of the options fall within this area. Surface water flood risk is more widespread across the neighbourhood area, and all the options have isolated areas at either low (Options 2 and 3) or medium-high (Options 1 and 4) risk of surface water flooding. Nevertheless, it is assumed that these areas will be avoided in line with national policy, and mitigation measures such as sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) utilised where necessary.
- 5.24 In terms of climate change mitigation, it is assumed that all options will lead to an increase in emissions within the neighbourhood area due to an increase in the local population. Two of the largest contributors to emissions will likely be the construction and operation of new homes, as well as an uptake in private car usage. However, this is unlikely to be significant given the scale of development proposed. Notably, strategic-scale interventions, such as decentralised energy schemes, are unlikely at the scale of development proposed through the options.
- 5.25 Overall, given that climate change is a global issue, and the scale of growth being considered in the neighbourhood area is relatively low, no significant effects are considered likely under any of the options. Moreover, it is considered that national policy will help mitigate the effects of development in terms of both climate change mitigation and adaptation. As the options are difficult to differentiate, they are ranked equally.

Community wellbeing

- 5.26 The neighbourhood area has limited services and facilities. These include a primary school (St George's C of E Primary School), a village hall (Semington Village Hall), a church and grounds (St George's Church), a football club and playing fields (Semington Football Club), a crematorium (West Wiltshire Crematorium), areas of wide grassed verge with benches, tennis courts, and the Wessex Close play area. Therefore, it is likely that residents in the neighbourhood area will travel further afield (i.e. Melksham and Trowbridge) to access a wider range of services and facilities, including secondary schools, health facilities, supermarkets and retail, as well as employment opportunities.
- 5.27 Whilst all of the options are within walking distance of St George's C of E Primary School, Option 1 is the closest. Similarly, whilst all the options are within walking distance of the village centre, Option 3 is the closest. All of the options have good access to bus stops, but particularly Options 2, 3 and 4. As the neighbourhood area is a rural area, all options have good access to the countryside.
- 5.28 It is noted that whilst there is a Wiltshire Council highways depot immediately south of Option 4, Wiltshire Council have announced the closure of the associated salt tip. As there are no published plans for further use of the land, mitigation linked to noise management is unlikely to be required.

- 5.29 In terms of deprivation, the neighbourhood area is amongst the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country under the 'barriers to housing and services' deprivation domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). It is noted that the neighbourhood area, a rural area, is grouped with Hilperton and Staverton parish, an urban area, in the LSOA data. Therefore, this data does not provide a picture of Semington alone. Nevertheless, growth under all the options will perform positively in this respect by delivering new homes in the neighbourhood area, including affordable housing.
- 5.30 Overall, the options are ranked according to their capacity, as the higher-capacity sites will deliver a higher number of homes, including affordable homes, and significant positive effects are predicted under all the options. This is because they will all deliver new homes, including affordable housing and are all within walking distance to the local primary school, village centre and bus stops, with good access to green space. They also have the potential to deliver community facilities, including, potentially, a village shop.

Historic environment

- 5.31 The neighbourhood area contains numerous grade II listed buildings, including a particularly sizable cluster in the northeastern part of the village of Semington, along the High Street and Church Street. In this respect, Option 3 is the most constrained from a heritage perspective, with several listed buildings adjacent to its northern boundary. It has a high degree of intervisibility with these buildings, including the grade II listed Old Coach House. Development is also likely to have adverse impacts on non-designated heritage assets, as a draft heritage assessment for the Semington NP has identified WWII pillboxes and anti-tank defences on the site as important local heritage features.
- 5.32 Option 4 has the potential, particularly towards its eastern boundary, to affect the setting of grade II listed St George's Church to the northeast of the site. Development could also affect non-designated heritage assets, as a draft heritage assessment for the Semington NP has identified a ridge and furrow system covering the whole site as an important local heritage feature.
- 5.33 Options 1 and 2 are relatively unconstrained in comparison to Options 3 and 4. Whilst there are listed buildings within 200m of these sites, they are largely screening by existing development. However, it is noted that Option 1 is approximately 200m southwest of grade II listed Semington Aqueduct, which is not screened by existing development. Therefore, development at Option 1 has the potential to affect the setting of this listed building.
- 5.34 Overall, it is considered that Option 3 has the potential to lead to significant negative effects on the historic environment. Whilst Options 1 and 4 also have the potential to lead to significant negative effects, uncertainty is noted at this stage. Option 2 is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects. Ultimately, all options would require sensitive design to minimise impact on the setting of nearby listed buildings and other non-designated heritage assets.

Land, soil and water resources

- 5.35 All of the options will result in the loss of greenfield land. Whilst the sites could be ranked according to their size, this is not considered appropriate as the

developable area of each site varies, and development could be limited to only part of each site, with some greenfield land being retained.

- 5.36 The provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) classifies agricultural land into five grades, from grade 1 (excellent) to grade 5 (very poor). Notably, grade 3 (good to moderate) is subdivided into two further grades: grades 3a and 3b. Grades 1-3a are considered 'best and most versatile' (BMV). All of the options are underlain by Grade 3 agricultural land; however, it is not possible to determine at this stage whether this is grade 3a (BMV) or 3b. Therefore, development taken forward under each option has the potential to result in the loss of the BMV agricultural land.
- 5.37 In terms of water resources, the neighbourhood area falls within the Avon Bristol Rural Operational Catchment. The Semington Brook (Milebourne Stream to confluence with River Avon (Bristol)) runs through the northern part of the neighbourhood area. However, none of the sites intersect with, or lie adjacent to, this waterbody. Whilst Option 1 lies adjacent to the Kennet and Avon Canal to the north, it is assumed that mitigation will be put in place, in line with national policy, to ensure that diffuse pollution does not enter the canal.
- 5.38 Overall, all options are considered likely to lead to significant negative effects due to the loss of greenfield land (and potentially BMV land). It is difficult to differentiate the options and therefore they are all ranked equally.

Landscape

- 5.39 Option 1 is a large greenfield site to the northwest of the built-up area. Previous applications for development (75 homes covering the majority of the site) have been refused on the basis of the potential impact on the landscape and setting of the Kennet and Avon Canal, which borders the site's northern boundary. The site is visually open and has a high degree of intervisibility with the surrounding landscape, including the towpath on the northern side of the canal, and it is likely that any development would have an adverse impact on visual amenity. It may be possible to limit this impact through smaller-scale development along the southern boundary of the site, continuing the existing building line north of Pound Lane (circa 1.2ha). A substantial green buffer between any new development and the canal is likely to be required.
- 5.40 Option 2 is a large greenfield site to the southwest of the built-up area. It is adjacent to the settlement boundary, and there is existing residential development to the east and north, including the new development which is taking place on 1042 / Site 5 (see **Table 5.1** above). In addition, the site is contained by the A361 to the south. There is mature vegetation on the site's southern and western boundaries which limit intervisibility and potential impact on the wider landscape. However, it is noted that the site sits at a slightly higher elevation than the village of Semington. Therefore, development at this site has the potential to be more prominent in the landscape and could overlook nearby dwellings to the northeast.
- 5.41 Option 3 is a medium-sized greenfield site to the southeast of the built-up area. It is adjacent to the settlement boundary and is relatively well-enclosed along its southern and western boundaries. There are, however, limited views across the site from the High Street to the west, and from the public footpath which runs just outside the site's eastern boundary. In addition, there are two trees

with Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) along the sites northern boundary, which will need to be retained.

- 5.42 Option 4 is a large greenfield site to the southeast of the built-up area. It is adjacent and connected to the settlement boundary to the west. There are long-range views eastwards across the site, and development is likely to have adverse impacts on visual amenity, including for those using the public right of way (PRoW) which pass through the site.
- 5.43 Overall, it is considered that Option 1 is the most constrained from a landscape perspective, with significant negative effects considered likely, and this is reflected in the rankings. Option 4 is also considered likely to lead to significant negative effects due to its potential to adversely impact visual amenity. It is also noted that this option will be relatively disconnected from the existing settlement boundary, with the exception of its western boundary. Options 2 and 3 are considered to perform most favourably. However, all options have their own constraints, and as the design and layout of development is so crucial to landscape implications, uncertainty is noted under Options 2, 3 and 4.

Transportation and movement

- 5.44 All of the options are considered likely to lead to an increase in the number of private cars on local roads, despite the relatively good bus service in Semington, which provides connections to Melksham, Trowbridge and Devizes. This has the potential to lead to increased traffic and congestion, both locally and in the towns of Melksham and Trowbridge.
- 5.45 It is not known where access to Option 1 would be at this stage; however, it will likely be via Pound Lane to the south. PRoW SEMI1 runs along the site's northern boundary, whilst SEMI6 connects with the site to the west. Whilst Option 1 is not immediately near any bus stops, the Somerset Arms bus stops on the High Street could be accessed via PRoW SEMI41 if this were to be extended west to connect with the site's eastern boundary.
- 5.46 Option 2 has existing vehicular access via the A361 to the south. In addition, the site boundary includes sufficient land for the footway to be extended from Turnpike Close to the site entrance. Alternatively, access could be taken from Turnpike Close, although this may lead to conflict with vehicles accessing the existing residential development and the light industrial units at Semington Turnpike. Therefore, the inclusion of a second access at this location should be discussed with the highways authority. Option 2 is close to the Turnpike bus stops on the A361.
- 5.47 Option 3 can be accessed directly from Church Street, although this is a narrow road. Therefore, discussion with the highways authority is recommended to determine whether it has sufficient capacity to serve additional development. Alternatively it may be possible to establish access directly from the High Street, although this would involve the removal of mature trees. PRoW SEMI16 runs along the site's southern boundary, whilst SEMI17 runs along the site's eastern boundary. Option 3 is close to the St George's Road bus stops on the High Street.
- 5.48 It is not known where access to Option 4 will be at this stage; however, it will likely be via the High Street to the west. Option 4 intersect with PRoW SEMI15

SEMI16 lies along the site's northern boundary. Option 4 is close to the St George's Road bus stops on the High Street.

- 5.49 Overall, all options have the potential to lead to significant localised negative effects due to an inevitable increase in private cars on local roads. However, it is recognised that all of the options have good access to bus stops, which has the potential to reduce car trips to a degree. Where PRoWs intersect with or lie adjacent to sites, it is assumed that these will be retained / extended where possible. As the options are difficult to differentiate, they are ranked equally.

Conclusions

- 5.50 All of the options rank equally under three SEA topics. These are climate change and flood risk; land, soil and water resources; and transportation and movement. Significant negative effects are predicted under land, soil and water resources and transportation and movement SEA topics.
- 5.51 Of the remaining four SEA topics – biodiversity and geodiversity; community wellbeing; historic environment; and landscape – Option 2 performs most favourably, ranking either first, joint first or second under each SEA topic. This is followed by Option 4, which ranks either first, second or joint second. Finally, Options 1 and 3 perform least favourably, with Option 1 predicted to lead to significant negative effects under the landscape SEA topic, and Option 3 predicted to lead to significant negative effects under the historic environment SEA topic.

6. Preferred approach for the Neighbourhood Plan

6.1 The group have provided the following reasoning as to why the preferred site was chosen for allocation through the Semington NP:

“AECOM were commissioned to produce a Site Options and Assessment (SOA) Report for Semington, which was published in February 2023.

Of the 15 sites that were assessed through this report, only one was considered appropriate for allocation (given a green ‘traffic light’ rating). A further eight were ‘traffic light’ rated amber as they were found to be appropriate for development or suitable for partial allocation, provided identified issues could be resolved or constraints mitigated. Six sites were ‘traffic light’ rated red, indicating that the site is not appropriate for allocation.

Of these eight amber rated sites, four were withdrawn by the landowner from the neighbourhood planning process, and one was taken out of consideration as it had been granted planning permissions, leaving three to be considered further. These, together with the green site, are the ones analysed in this SEA Environmental Report.

All four sites (three amber and one green) were presented to villagers during a Spring 2023 community consultation alongside all the data available from AECOM. The neighbourhood plan steering group was careful not to make any recommendations at this stage.

The outcomes of the consultation showed a clear preference for the site locally known as Turnpike or the Auction Field (referred to in this report as Option 2), numbered site 4 / 724. The SOA report had concluded this site was suitable for allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan, shown with a ‘traffic light’ rating of green.

From the village point of view, the Turnpike site had a number of positive features, whilst having none of the negative points associated with the other sites. The prime positive feature was that it included a shop. The provision of a shop has been a persistent wish of the village since the previous shop / post office closed following the by-passing of the village by the A350 in 2003. Another positive feature was the site’s adjacency to the A361 which was felt to increase a shop’s likely viability whilst ensuring that traffic associated with it did not come through the village. This site did not have the landscape and heritage issues variously associated with the other sites.

When the neighbourhood plan steering group considered the feedback from the consultation, it saw no reason not to endorse its conclusions.”

Part 2: What are the SEA findings at this stage?

7. Introduction (to Part 2)

Overview

7.1 The aim of this part of the Environmental Report is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the submission version of the Semington NP. This chapter presents:

- An appraisal of the current version of the Semington NP under the seven SEA topic headings; and
- The overall conclusions at this current stage and recommendations for the next stage of plan-making.

Semington NP policies

7.2 The 13 policies within the Semington NP are outlined in **Table 7.1** below.

Table 7.1 Semington NP policies

Policy Reference	Policy Name
SEM1	Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC
SEM2	Support for Rural Businesses and Workspace
SEM3	Communications Infrastructure
SEM4	Local Green Space Designation
SEM5	Public Rights of Way and Cycle Network
SEM6	Green Blue Infrastructure and Nature Recovery
SEM7	Protecting Semington's Actively Rural Landscape
SEM8	Design and Local Distinctiveness
SEM9	Pre-application Community Engagement
SEM10	Land to the west of Turnpike Close (the Auction Field)
SEM11	Community Facilities
SEM12	Sustainable Construction
SEM13	Standalone Renewable Energy Generation

Methodology

7.3 The assessment identifies and evaluates 'likely significant effects' on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability objectives identified through scoping (see **Table 3.2**) as a methodological framework.

7.4 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the strategic nature of the policies under consideration and understanding of the baseline (now and in the future under a 'no plan' scenario) that is inevitably limited. Given uncertainties there is a need to make assumptions, e.g., in relation to plan implementation and aspects of the baseline that might be impacted. Assumptions are made cautiously and explained within the text (with the aim of striking a balance between

comprehensiveness and conciseness). In many instances, given reasonable assumptions, it is not possible to predict 'significant effects', but it is possible to comment on merits (or otherwise) of the draft plan in more general terms.

- 7.5 Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. So, for example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of effects as far as possible. Cumulative effects are also considered, i.e., the potential for the Semington NP to impact an aspect of the baseline when implemented alongside other plans, programmes and projects. These effect 'characteristics' are described within the assessment as appropriate.

8. Assessment of the plan

Introduction

- 8.1 The assessment is presented below under eight topic headings, reflecting the established assessment framework (see **Section 3**). A final section (**Chapter 9**) then presents overall conclusions.
- 8.2 The Environmental Report accompanying Regulation 14 consultation presented an assessment of the earlier iteration of the Semington NP.

Plan contents, aims and objectives

- 8.3 The draft Semington NP's spatial strategy is addressed through policy SEM10 (Land to the west of Turnpike Close (the Auction Field)), which allocates 'Land to the west of Turnpike Close' (known locally as the Auction Field) for the development of a village shop. To facilitate the provision of the village shop, the policy supports up to 40 dwellings on the site. The merits and constraints of the site, alongside how the draft Semington NP seeks to avoid adverse impacts of development, is explored under each of the seven SEA topics below.
- 8.4 The draft Semington NP splits policies up into six themes. The first is land use planning, which includes policy SEM1 (Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC). This policy will be used to help determine planning applications within the neighbourhood area. Other policy matters have been left to the adopted WCS and emerging LPR.
- 8.5 The next theme is rural living and working, which includes policies SEM2 (Support for Rural Businesses and Workspace) and SEM3 (Communications Infrastructure). These policies seek to maintain the neighbourhood area's countryside and support farming and other businesses; protect and enhance community facilities; and improve digital connectivity and protect the post office.
- 8.6 This is followed by the environment and wellbeing theme, which includes policies SEM4 (Local Green Space Designation), SEM5 (Public Rights of Way and Cycle Network), SEM6 (Green Blue Infrastructure and Nature Recovery), and SEM7 (Protecting Semington's Actively Rural Landscape). These policies seek to maintain the neighbourhood area's countryside and support farming and other businesses; protect the Kennet and Avon Canal and Semington Brook, as well as the neighbourhood area's landscapes, biodiversity, green spaces and cultural artifacts; and protect and enhance the neighbourhood area's Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network and Local Green Spaces (LGS).
- 8.7 Policies under the housing and development theme include SEM8 (Design and Local Distinctiveness), SEM9 (Pre-application Community Engagement) and SEM10 (Land to the west of Turnpike Close (the Auction Field)). These policies seek to meet the local housing need; deliver low-carbon development with a locally distinctive design; protect the Kennet and Avon Canal and Semington Brook, as well as the neighbourhood area's landscapes, biodiversity, green spaces and cultural artifacts; protect and enhance the neighbourhood area's PRoW network and LGS; protect and enhance recreational and educational facilities; and protect and enhance community facilities.

- 8.8 Policy SEM11 (Community Facilities) falls under the community facilities theme. This policy seeks to protect and enhance recreational and educational facilities and protect and enhance community facilities.
- 8.9 Finally, policies SEM12 (Sustainable Construction) and SEM13 (Standalone Renewable Energy Generation) fall under the sustainability and climate change theme. These policies seek to deliver low-carbon development with a locally distinctive design and protect the Kennet and Avon Canal and Semington Brook, as well as the neighbourhood area's landscapes, biodiversity, green spaces and cultural artifacts.

Biodiversity and geodiversity

- 8.10 With regards to the site allocation, the northern boundary of the site overlaps with Network Enhancement Zone 1 of the National Habitat Network. This is not considered to be a significant constraint. Policy SEM6 (Green and Blue Infrastructure and Nature Recovery) outlines that proposals must secure biodiversity net gain (BNG) that meets the latest local or national policy and advice through planning conditions or planning obligations. The policy encourages proposals to go beyond the minimum BNG requirement.
- 8.11 The draft Semington NP was screened in by Wiltshire Council as requiring a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) due to its proximity to the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The HRA concluded that the Semington NP has the potential to lead to likely significant effects on one European site alone and/or in-combination with other plans and projects. This is due to the site allocation policy (SEM10), alongside eight other policies in the draft Semington NP, which have the potential to impact on the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC. The HRA states that it is therefore necessary for these nine policies to be taken forward to appropriate assessment under Regulation 105 of the Habitats Regulations
- 8.12 In relation to the above, Policy SEM1 (Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC) states that all development proposals must demonstrate compliance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. This is in addition to demonstrating how the Bat SAC Planning Guidance for Wiltshire (2015) and the Trowbridge Bat Mitigation Strategy (2020) Supplementary Planning Document, or any subsequent iterations, have informed proposals. Notably, proposals must avoid or reduce the potential adverse impact of development on the SAC. Several other policies reiterate that proposals must demonstrate compliance with Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and policy SEM1.
- 8.13 Also of relevance to biodiversity and geodiversity is policy SEM6 (Green Blue Infrastructure and Nature Recovery), which identifies a green and blue infrastructure (GBI) network to promote nature protection and recovery. The network encompasses significant assets including Semington Brook and associated floodplain, the corridor of the Avon and Kennet Canal, and the local network of hedgerows and trees. The policy states that development proposals must maintain and improve the GBI network in their design, layout and landscaping, linking into and extending the network where possible.
- 8.14 More broadly, policy SEM7 (Protecting Semington's Actively Rural Landscape) states that new development will, where appropriate, be expected to maintain

and enhance the overall green and blue infrastructure network. In addition, and with a focus on employment development, policy SEM2 (Support for Rural Businesses and Workspace) outlines that sites that are particularly sensitive due to biodiversity should be avoided.

- 8.15 Finally, policy SEM13 (Standalone Renewable Energy Generation) sets out the criteria that proposals for standalone renewable energy developments, including renewable energy storage, must meet in order to be supported. This includes, but is not limited to, avoiding adverse impacts on features of natural or biodiversity importance.
- 8.16 Overall, the draft Semington NP is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects with regards to biodiversity and geodiversity. This is because the site allocation avoids areas of high biodiversity value (i.e. internationally and nationally designated sites for biodiversity and BAP priority habitats), and the policy framework sufficiently addresses biodiversity. Nevertheless, as the HRA concluded that the Semington NP has the potential to lead to likely significant effects on the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC, with nine policies needing to be taken forward for appropriate assessment, a degree of **uncertainty** is noted at this stage.

Climate change and flood risk

- 8.17 With regards to the site allocation, only isolated areas of the site are at risk of surface water flooding, and that risk is low. Nevertheless, in line with nationally planning policy, these areas will likely be avoided. In relation to this, policy SEM10 (Land to the west of Turnpike Close (the Auction Field)) states that proposals for the site should include a site-specific flood risk assessment. In addition, all proposed development will need to pass the sequential test from all sources of flooding. Moreover, when preparing flood risk assessments, local flood risk sources must be considered, not only information available from the Environment Agency. Strengthening this, policy SEM6 (Green Blue Infrastructure and Nature Recovery) identifies a green and blue infrastructure (GBI) network which will support climate change adaptation by reducing flood risk across the neighbourhood area.
- 8.18 Also of relevance to climate change adaptation, policy SEM12 (Sustainable Construction) states that developments should incorporate measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change such as overheating, flood risk and water scarcity. The policy encourages the use of nature-based solutions as these offer co-benefits with improved GBI and biodiversity enhancements.
- 8.19 With a focus on climate change mitigation, policy SEM12 (Sustainable Construction) outlines that development should be designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their operation through the Energy Hierarchy (i.e. reducing demand for energy, utilising fabric first measures, encouraging the use of low-carbon, electrified solutions for space and water heating, and utilising renewable energy technologies).
- 8.20 The policy also outlines that development proposals should consider the impact of embodied carbon from the demolition and construction processes. The policy supports and encourages the re-use and re-purposing of existing buildings. In addition, the policy highlights that applicants should demonstrate consideration of how the substructure, superstructure and external materials

have been designed so as to target low-carbon solutions. Finally, the policy encourages benchmarking proposals against respected industry standards such as the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge.

- 8.21 Policy SEM12 also supports the retrofitting of low-carbon and renewable technologies, as well as energy efficiency measures, in existing buildings. Notably, significant weight will be given to the benefits of development resulting in improvements to energy efficiency and reduction in carbon emissions in existing buildings.
- 8.22 Finally, policy SEM12 encourages major development applications to submit a Sustainable Energy Statement to demonstrate compliance with the policy, as well as with the regional and national objectives of meeting climate change targets.. The Statement should include sections on operational energy / carbon embodied carbon, climate change adaptation and sustainable transport.
- 8.23 The draft Semington NP supports renewable energy generation. Policy SEM13 (Standalone Renewable Energy Generation) sets out the criteria that proposals for standalone renewable energy development, including renewable energy storage, must meet. This includes, but is not limited to, avoiding unacceptable impacts on local amenity and gaining support from the local community.
- 8.24 Overall, the draft Semington NP is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects with regards to climate change and flood risk. The level of development proposed through the plan is small, particularly given the global nature of climate change, and avoids areas of medium-high flood risk. In addition, the policy framework sufficiently addresses climate change.

Community wellbeing

- 8.25 The site allocation is within walking distance of the village centre, a bus stop, green space, St George's C of E Primary School, and the Wessex Close play area. Therefore, able-bodied residents are likely to walk to access these amenities, services and facilities.
- 8.26 As noted above, policy SEM10 (Land to the west of Turnpike Close (the Auction Field) allocates 'Land to the west of Turnpike Close (Auction Field)' for the development of a village shop and supports up to 40 dwellings on the site to facilitate the village shop. The policy outlines that the housing development should meet local needs, as identified in the Semington Parish Housing Needs Survey (2021), the Swindon and Wiltshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2017), and any subsequent updates. This should include at least 30% affordable homes, which will be beneficial to both first time buyers and those on lower incomes.
- 8.27 Policy SEM10 also states that the development proposal must be informed by robust and meaningful community engagement, in accordance with the Semington Pre-Application Engagement Protocol. The overall development of the site should be informed by the site design principles and concept masterplanning framework set out in the Semington Design Codes and Masterplanning Report and include, amongst other considerations, high quality open space.
- 8.28 Policy SEM11 (Community Facilities) identifies four buildings as community facilities. The policy states that proposals that will harm or result in the loss of

any of these community facilities will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the site / building is no longer required or no longer economically viable for an equivalent or alternative community use, or where an equivalent facility is available. In addition, the policy supports development proposals for new, replacement, extended and/or improved community facilities and open space, including, but not limited to, a village shop.

- 8.29 With a focus on the economy, policy SEM2 (Support for Rural Businesses and Workspace) supports proposals for the expansion or diversification of existing small-scale economic enterprises. The policy outlines that new employment development should avoid harming the inherent qualities of the surrounding area by including appropriate mitigation against excessive noise and light pollution, and safeguard residential amenity and road safety. Also of relevance, policy SEM3 (Communications Infrastructure) outlines that all new dwellings and business premises in the parish should be enabled to ensure a superfast broadband connection can be installed on an open access basis.
- 8.30 Five local green spaces (LGS) are designated through policy SEM4 (Local Green Space Designation) of the draft Semington NP. The policy states that development that would positively enhance the beneficial use of these spaces, such as to provide improved access or to allow opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity, will be supported, provided their openness is preserved.
- 8.31 Also with a focus on green spaces and their contribution to wellbeing, policy SEM7 (Protecting Semington's Actively Rural Landscape) states that development in the area of high landscape sensitivity will only be supported where it does not adversely impact the recreational value of the countryside.
- 8.32 More broadly, policy SEM8 (Design and Local Distinctiveness) states that development proposals for 10 dwellings or more should also use the 'Building for a Healthy Life 12' design assessment tool (or equivalent methodology) to inform the design proposals. In addition, policy SEM9 (Pre-application Community Engagement) outlines that applications should demonstrate proportionate, proactive and effective engagement with the community at the pre-submission stage. This is particularly with regard to design issues, drawing on the Semington Parish Character and Design Statement.
- 8.33 Overall, the draft Semington NP is considered likely to lead to long-term **significant positive effects**. This is because it supports the delivery of up to 40 dwellings, which will help meet the local housing need, and seeks to protect and enhance community facilities, employment opportunities, and local green spaces and the countryside. Combined, this will positively contribute to the quality of life and wellbeing of residents in the neighbourhood area.

Historic environment

- 8.34 Whilst there are listed buildings within 200m of the site allocation, these are screened by existing development. Nevertheless, policy SEM8 (Design and Local Distinctiveness) is in place with a view to ensuring that the setting and significance of both designated and non-designated heritage assets are protected. Specifically, the policy states that, in addition to demonstrating regard to national design guides and requirements in the Wiltshire Design Guide, applicants should demonstrate that they have properly understood and

- responded to the recorded key design characteristics / heritage and development cues of the relevant character area in the design of their proposals as set out in the Semington Parish Character and Design Statement.
- 8.35 In addition to the above, policy SEM10 (Land to the west of Turnpike Close (the Auction Field)) states that proposals for the site allocation should meet the requirements of the Semington Character and Design Statement in terms of the design, layout, form, heights and materials. Moreover, the development should reflect the existing low-medium density character of the wider area.
- 8.36 Policy SEM7 (Protecting Semington's Actively Rural Landscape) identifies 22 key views within the neighbourhood area which must be protected. The policy outlines that development proposals that affect a key view will be permitted provided they will not cause undue harm to the natural or historic landscape features that contribute to its acknowledged value.
- 8.37 More broadly, and with a focus on employment development, policy SEM2 (Support for Rural Businesses and Workspace) outlines that sites that are particularly sensitive due to their heritage should be avoided. In addition, policy SEM3 (Communications Infrastructure) outlines that proposals for new or improved mobile phone infrastructure will be permitted providing that the proposals do not adversely affect the surrounding built or natural environment. This includes the setting of heritage assets.
- 8.38 Finally, policy SEM12 (Sustainable Construction) states that proposals for energy efficient measures in listed buildings should consider advice from Historic England (Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings: How to Improve Energy Efficiency) and demonstrate that the maximum level of energy efficiency, energy generation and reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) impacts have been achieved whilst conserving the historical significance of the building and/or its setting.
- 8.39 Overall, the draft Semington NP is not considered likely to lead to any significant effects with regards to the historic environment. This is because the site allocation does not contain or lie adjacent to any designated or non-designated heritage assets. In addition, the policy framework sufficiently considers the impact of development on the historic environment.

Land, soil and water resources

- 8.40 With regards to land and soil resources, the site allocation is greenfield and underlain by Grade 3 agricultural land. However, it is not possible to determine at this stage whether this is grade 3a (BMV) or 3b. Therefore, development will result in the loss of greenfield land and also has the potential to result in the loss of BMV agricultural land.
- 8.41 In terms of water resources, the neighbourhood area falls within the Avon Bristol Rural Operational Catchment. The Semington Brook (Milebourne Stream to confluence with River Avon (Bristol)) runs through the northern part of the neighbourhood area. However, the site allocation is on the other side of the village to this waterbody. In addition, it is considered that national planning policy will ensure that water is used efficiently and wastewater sufficiently disposed of, avoiding runoff into nearby drains and waterbodies.

- 8.42 The draft Semington NP does not contain any policies that focus on land, soil and water resources.
- 8.43 Overall, the draft Semington NP is considered likely to lead to long-term **significant negative effects** due to the loss of greenfield land. However, it is recognised that this is largely unavoidable given the limited availability of brownfield land in the neighbourhood area. Uncertainty is also noted with regards to the potential loss of BMV agricultural land.

Landscape

- 8.44 The site allocation is a large greenfield site to the southwest of the built-up area. It is adjacent to the settlement boundary, and there is existing residential development to the east and new development being built to the north. In addition, the site is contained by the A361 to the south. There is mature vegetation on the site's southern and western boundaries which limit intervisibility and potential impact on the wider landscape. However, it is noted that the site sits at a slightly higher elevation than the village of Semington. Therefore, development at this site has the potential to be more prominent in the landscape and could overlook nearby dwellings to the northeast.
- 8.45 In response to the above, policy SEM10 (Land to the west of Turnpike Close (the Auction Field)) states that the development should, amongst other criteria, retain trees and hedgerows with the provision of new areas of landscaping to provide an appropriate buffer from the A361 and existing development.
- 8.46 A key policy for landscape is SEM7 (Protecting Semington's Actively Rural Landscape), which outlines that development proposals outside the settlement boundary, that accord with local and national policies for development in the countryside, will be supported where proposals maintain the actively rural landscape and a sensitive settlement edge. The policy states that new development will, where appropriate and amongst other considerations, be expected to respect and respond to the landscape character sensitivities of the area as identified in the Semington Landscape and Visual Appraisal.
- 8.47 Policy SEM7 also highlights that the neighbourhood area contains an area of high landscape sensitivity; development within this area must meet the criteria set out within the policy. This includes maintaining the actively rural landscape. The policy also states that the nationally promoted and recognised route of the Kennet & Avon Canal, and its setting, is a key feature in this area of high landscape sensitivity and must be protected. The site allocated through the plan is not within this area; rather, it is in an area of low to medium landscape sensitivity. In addition, the policy identifies 22 key views within the neighbourhood area which must be protected. Notably, none of these key view are near, or directly overlook, the site allocation.
- 8.48 Policy SEM6 (Green Blue Infrastructure and Nature Recovery) identifies a GBI network. The network encompasses significant assets including Semington Brook and associated floodplain, the corridor of the Avon and Kennet Canal, and the local network of hedgerows and trees. The policy states that development proposals must maintain and improve the GBI network in their design, layout and landscaping, linking into and extending the network where possible.

- 8.49 The settlement boundary of Semington is defined under policy SEM8 (Design and Local Distinctiveness). The policy states that, in accordance with the WCS, support will be given to appropriate limited housing development within the settlement boundary which respects the character and local distinctiveness of Semington, and which would help to maintain the vitality of the village. In this respect, the plan supports infill development.
- 8.50 More broadly, policy SEM2 (Support for Rural Businesses and Workspace) outlines that all new employment development should respect the character of its surroundings in terms of scale, massing, design and landscaping. The policy also states that sites that are particularly sensitive due to landscape sensitivity should be avoided when it comes to new employment development. In addition, policy SEM3 (Communications Infrastructure) outlines that proposals for new or improved mobile phone infrastructure will be permitted, providing that the proposals do not adversely affect the surrounding built or natural environment. This includes key views. Finally, policy SEM13 (Standalone Renewable Energy Generations) sets out the criteria that proposals for standalone renewable energy development, including renewable energy storage, must meet. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that the siting and scale of the proposal is appropriate to its setting.
- 8.51 Overall, the draft Semington NP is not considered likely to lead to significant effects. The site allocation is in an area of low to medium landscape sensitivity and the policy framework sufficiently considers the impact of development on the local landscape. However, given that the impact of the site allocation is largely dependent on the design, layout and landscaping of the development, a degree of **uncertainty** is noted at this stage.

Transportation and movement

- 8.52 The site allocation has existing vehicular access via the A361 to the south. In addition, the site boundary includes sufficient land for the footway to be extended from Turnpike Close to the site entrance. Alternatively, access could be taken from Turnpike Close, although this may lead to conflict with vehicles accessing the existing residential development and the light industrial units at Semington Turnpike. Therefore, the inclusion of a second access at this location should be discussed with the highways authority. The site is close to the Turnpike bus stops on the A361, which will likely encourage the use of the bus service to reach wider services and facilities further afield.
- 8.53 In relation to the above, policy SEM10 (Land to the west of Turnpike Close (the Auction Field)) states that the development should, amongst other considerations, include safe access, including vehicular, and the provision of sufficient car and cycle parking which is appropriately sited within the development. In addition, development should include pedestrian and cycle linkages through the site, particularly linking into the existing Public Right of Way (PRoW) network and to facilitate access to key facilities in the village.
- 8.54 Adding on to the above, policy SEM5 (Public Rights of Way and Cycle Network) seeks to protect, and where possible enhance, PRoW and the cycle network by setting out criteria for development proposals on adjacent land. The policy outlines that all development proposals will be expected to integrate routeways for walking or cycling connections into the wider village and parish network. In

addition, development proposals should make an appropriate contribution to the improvement and/or extension of the network where appropriate.

- 8.55 Focusing on sustainable construction, policy SEM12 states that development should include space for working from home as part of building design, as well as secure cycle storage and electric vehicle (EV) charge points at every home.
- 8.56 More broadly, policy SEM2 (Support for Rural Businesses and Workspace) supports proposals for the expansion or diversification of existing small-scale economic enterprises, providing the proposals have no detrimental impact on the rural highway network. In addition, policy SEM7 (Protecting Semington's Actively Rural Landscape) states that development in the area of high landscape sensitivity will only be supported where it minimises urbanising effects, artificial lighting and traffic movements.
- 8.57 Overall, the draft Semington NP is not considered likely to lead any significant effect given the relatively small scale of growth proposed through the plan. Whilst Semington is in a rural location with limited services and facilities, the site allocation is close to bus stops with relatively regular services to Melksham, Trowbridge and Devizes.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- 9.1 Long-term **significant positive effects** are considered likely with regards to the community wellbeing SEA topic. This is because the draft Semington NP will help meet the local housing need, and seeks to protect and enhance community facilities, employment opportunities, and local green spaces and the countryside. It will also deliver a new village shop. Combined, this will positively contribute to the quality of life and wellbeing of residents in the neighbourhood area.
- 9.2 Long-term **significant negative effects** are considered likely under the land, soil and water resources SEA topic. This is due to the loss of greenfield land and the potential loss of productive (i.e. BMV) agricultural land.
- 9.3 **Uncertainty** is noted under the biodiversity and geodiversity and landscape SEA topics. With regards to biodiversity and geodiversity, this is because the HRA concluded that the Semington NP has the potential to lead to likely significant effects on the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC, with nine policies needing to be taken forward for appropriate assessment. With regards to landscape, this is because the impact of the site allocation on the local landscape is largely dependent on the design, layout and landscaping of the development.
- 9.4 **No significant effects** are predicted under the climate change and flood risk; historic environment; and transportation and movement SEA topics. With regards to climate change and flood risk, this is because the scale of development proposed through the plan is limited and avoids areas of medium-high flood risk. With regards to the historic environment, this is because the site allocation does not contain or lie adjacent to any designated or non-designated heritage assets. In addition, the policy framework sufficiently considers the impact of development on both SEA topics. With regards to transportation and movement, this is given the relatively small scale of growth proposed through the plan and the site allocation's location close to bus stops.

Part 3: What are the next steps?

10. Next steps

Overview

10.1 This part of the report explains the next steps that will be taken as part of plan-making and SEA.

Plan finalisation

10.2 This Environmental Report accompanies the Semington NP for submission to the Local Planning Authority, Wiltshire Council, for subsequent Independent Examination.

10.3 At Independent Examination, the Semington NP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.

10.4 Assuming that the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the Semington NP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Wiltshire Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Semington NP, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the Semington NP will become part of the Development Plan for Wiltshire Council, covering the defined neighbourhood area.

Monitoring

10.5 The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in this report. This refers to the monitoring of likely significant effects of the Semington NP to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.

10.6 It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the Semington NP will be undertaken by Wiltshire Council as part of the process of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). No significant negative effects are considered likely in the implementation of the Semington NP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Wiltshire Council.

Appendix A Regulatory requirements

As discussed in **Chapter 1**, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans Regulations 2004 (the Regulations) explains the information that must be contained in the Environmental Report. However, interpretation of Schedule 2 is not straightforward. **Table AA.1** overleaf links the structure of this report to an interpretation of Schedule 2 requirements, whilst **Table AA.2** explains this interpretation. Finally, **Table AA.3** identifies how and where within the Environmental Report the regulatory requirements have / will be met.

Table AA.1 Questions answered by this Environmental Report in-line with an interpretation of regulatory requirements

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... ⁸
What is the plan seeking to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan.
What is the sustainability 'context'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship with other relevant plans and programmes. The relevant environmental protection objectives established at international or national level. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.
What's the scope of the SEA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.
What is the sustainability 'baseline'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.
What are the key issues and objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key problems/issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e., provide a 'framework' for) assessment.
What has plan-making / SEA involved up to this point?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with. The likely significant effects associated with alternatives. Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives appraisal/a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the current version of the plan.
What are the assessment findings at this stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The likely significant effects associated with the Regulation 14 version of the plan. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the Regulation 14 version of the plan.
What happens next?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The next steps for the plan making /SEA process.

⁸ NB this column does not quote directly from Schedule II of the Regulations. Rather, it reflects a degree of interpretation.

Table AA.2 Questions answered by this Environmental Report, in-line with regulatory requirements

<u>Schedule 2</u>	<u>Interpretation of Schedule 2</u>	
<i>The report must include...</i>	<i>The report must include...</i>	
(a) an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes	i.e. answer - <i>What's the plan seeking to achieve?</i>
(b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'context'?</i>
(c) the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;		
(d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;	The relevant environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level	i.e. answer - <i>What's the 'baseline'?</i>
(e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan'	
(f) the likely significant effects on the environment including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;	The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	
(g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan;	Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance	i.e. answer - <i>What are the key issues & objectives?</i>
(h) an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information	Key environmental problems / issues and objectives that should be a focus of appraisal	
(i) a description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring.	An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (i.e. an explanation of the 'reasonableness of the approach')	i.e. answer - <i>What has Plan-making / SA involved up to this point?</i> [Part 1 of the Report]
	The likely significant effects associated with alternatives, including on issues such as... ... and an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of the alternatives considered / a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the draft plan.	
	The likely significant effects associated with the draft plan	i.e. answer - <i>What are the assessment findings at this current stage?</i> [Part 2 of the Report]
	The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the draft plan	
	A description of the measures envisaged concerning monitoring	i.e. answer - <i>What happens next?</i> [Part 3 of the Report]

Table AA.3 ‘Checklist’ of how (throughout the SEA process) and where (within this report) regulatory requirements have been, are and will be met

Regulatory requirement	Discussion of how requirement is met
Schedule 2 of the regulations lists the information to be provided within the SA Report	
1. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	Chapter 2 (‘What is the plan seeking to achieve’) presents this information.
2. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;	These matters have been considered in detail through scoping work, which has involved dedicated consultation on a Scoping Report. The ‘SEA framework’ – the outcome of scoping – is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What is the scope of the SEA?’). More detailed messages, established through a context and baseline review are also presented in Appendix B of this Environmental Report.
3. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	
4. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.;	
5. The environmental protection, objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been considered during its preparation;	The SEA framework is presented within Chapter 3 (‘What is the scope of the SEA’). Also, Appendix B presents key messages from the context review. With regards to explaining “how...considerations have been taken into account”, Chapter 7 explains the Steering Group’s ‘reasons for supporting the preferred approach’, i.e., explains how/ why the preferred approach is justified in light of alternatives appraisal.
6. The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);	Chapter 6 presents alternatives appraisal findings (in relation to housing growth, which is a ‘stand-out’ plan policy area). Chapters 9 presents an appraisal of the plan. With regards to assessment methodology, Chapter 8 explains the role of the SEA framework/scope, and the need to consider the potential for various effect characteristics/ dimensions, e.g., timescale.
7. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	The assessment highlights certain tensions between competing objectives, which might potentially be actioned by the Examiner, when finalising the plan. Also, specific recommendations are made in Chapter 10.
8. An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	Chapters 4 and 5 deal with ‘Reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with’, in that there is an explanation of the reasons for focusing on particular issues and options. Also, Chapter 7 explains the Parish Council’s ‘reasons for selecting the preferred option’ (in-light of alternatives assessment).

9. Description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10;	Chapter 11 presents measures envisaged concerning monitoring.
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10.A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings	The NTS is provided at the beginning of this Environmental Report.
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The SA Report must be published alongside the Draft Plan, in accordance with the following regulations

authorities with environmental responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the Draft Plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2)	At the current time, this Environmental Report is published alongside the 'submission' version of the Bentley Neighbourhood Plan, with a view to informing Regulation 16 consultation.
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The SA must be considered, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.

The environmental report prepared pursuant to Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of any transboundary consultations entered into pursuant to Article 7 shall be considered during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its adoption or submission to the legislative procedure.	Assessment findings presented within this Environmental Report, and consultation responses received, have been fed back to the Steering Group and have informed plan finalisation.
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Appendix B Scoping information

This appendix provides a summary of the information that was presented in the Scoping Report. The Scoping Report, which can be accessed on the Semington NP website, provides the information in full, alongside a number of figures.

B.1 Air quality

Key statistics

- There are no AQMAs within the neighbourhood area.
- The neighbourhood area is approximately 6km from the Bradford-upon-Avon AQMA to the west, designated by Wiltshire Council.

Commentary

Wiltshire Council monitor (and are primarily concerned with) nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and fine particulate matter (PM₁₀), linked to traffic volume, road layout and topography. The most recent Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR), published in 2022, indicates that there were no exceedances of the air quality objectives in Semington for both NO₂ and PM₁₀.

There are no AQMAs within the neighbourhood area, however there are two AQMAs within proximity. The first is the Bradford-upon-Avon AQMA, which is approximately 6km to the west of Semington. Originally declared in 2001 by Wiltshire Council for exceedances of both NO₂ and PM₁₀ air quality objectives, the AQMA was amended to only NO₂ in 2021. The AQMA covers Masons Lane, Market Street, Silver Street, St Margarets Street. The second is the Devizes Shanes Castle AQMA, located 8km east of the neighbourhood area. Declared in 2001 by Wiltshire Council for exceedances of NO₂ air quality objectives, the AQMA covers the junction of the A342 and A361.

B.2 Biodiversity and geodiversity

Key statistics

- The neighbourhood area is in proximity to three bat roost buffer zones to the south (1.8km, 2.4km and 2.9km) associated with the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats SAC.

Commentary

Whilst there are no internationally designated sites for biodiversity in the neighbourhood area, the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located approximately 8.8km from the neighbourhood area. This site comprises a network of significant sites in both the Wiltshire and Bath and North East Somerset (BNES) administrative areas.

The grassland, watercourses, scrub and woodland surrounding the SAC are used by bats for feeding. Although these habitats are not included in the SAC designation, they are vital to support the bats which are a feature of the SAC. The network of significant roosts includes sites that are not covered by any statutory designation,

such as the breeding colonies of Bechstein's bats at Biss Wood and Green Lane Wood, 75ha of ancient woodlands that are 2.9km and 1.8km respectively to the southwest of Semington. The neighbourhood area sits within proximity of three buffer zones (two being those noted already, and a Lesser Horseshoe roost located 2.4km to the south) of core roosts that are to the south of the area.

These core roosts provide an opportunity for conservation efforts to extend beyond the current designated area. However, the core roost buffer zones surrounding Semington pose a threat, as development or habitat degradation in these zones could harm these bat species.

There are no nationally designated sites for biodiversity or geodiversity within the neighbourhood area. However, there are two SSSIs within proximity to the neighbourhood area; however, it does not fall within Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) for these SSSIs. These are Seend Cleeve Quarry SSSI, located 1.1km to the east of the neighbourhood area and in an unfavourable-declining condition, and Seend Ironstone Quarry and Road Cutting SSSI, also located 1.6km to the east of the neighbourhood area and in a favourable condition.

In terms of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats, the neighbourhood area contains relatively small areas of deciduous woodland and traditional orchard. With regards to the National Habitat Network., the area including and surrounding the BAP priority habitats in the neighbourhood area is within Network Enhancement Zone 1. This is land that can be used to expand and join existing habitat patches and improve connectivity.

B.3 Climate change and flood risk

Key statistics

- The biggest contributor to carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in Wiltshire over the past 14 years has been the transport sector. However, it is noted this sector has experienced an overall decrease in emissions between 2005 and 2019.
- Wiltshire produces more CO₂ emissions per capita compared to the regional and national averages. However, it has experienced a greater decrease in emissions between 2005 and 2019.
- Total emissions in Wiltshire have decreased from 4,231.2 kilotons (kt) CO₂ in 2005 to 2,586.9 kt CO₂ in 2019 – a 1,644.3 kt CO₂ reduction over 14 years.

Commentary

Areas of Flood Zone 2 and Flood Zone 3 are associated with Semington Brook in the northern half of the neighbourhood area. The presence of this watercourse causes a higher risk of fluvial flooding due to its floodplain reach, mostly to the south and east of Semington and Littleton. The Semington Brook also impacts upon surface water flood risk along its course – with areas directly adjacent to the watercourse at a higher risk. Additionally, due to the drainage pattern in the neighbourhood area, it is likely that the area surrounding the section of the A350 to the east of Semington, where the roundabout is, is at a medium to high risk of surface water flood risk.

Domestic electricity consumption in the neighbourhood area is broadly in line with the national average.

In line with the UK Government's target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, a climate emergency was declared by Wiltshire Council in February of 2019. The Climate Change Strategy identifies the need to reduce carbon emissions and reduce the dependence on fossil fuels and sets out actions and opportunities that should be engaged with.

B.4 Community wellbeing

Key statistics

- The largest age group in the neighbourhood area is 50 to 79. This indicates the neighbourhood area is experiencing an ageing population.
- Residents in the neighbourhood area experience greater levels of good and fair health in comparison to South West and England trends. However, a lower percentage of residents report very good health in comparison to the rest of the South West and England.
- A small majority of households (46%) in the Semington neighbourhood area are owned, either outright or with a mortgage. Shared ownership accounts for 30% of the households in the neighbourhood area – socially rented houses total 7%, and privately rented 18%.

Commentary

The neighbourhood area has some community services and facilities. These include a primary school (St George's C of E Primary School), a village hall (Semington Village Hall), a church and grounds (St George's Church), a football club and playing fields (Semington Football Club), a crematorium (West Wiltshire Crematorium), areas of wide grassed verge with benches, and tennis courts. However, due to its rural nature, these services and facilities are limited. Therefore, it is likely that residents in the neighbourhood area will travel further afield (for example to Melksham to the north, or Trowbridge to the southwest) for a greater range of services and facilities (these include, but are not exclusive to, secondary schools, medical facilities such as GPs and hospitals, supermarkets and a wider range of pubs and restaurants).

The neighbourhood area contains three open greenspaces in and around the village of Semington.

The Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) that Semington falls in (Wiltshire 030A) is ranked 231 out of 317 local authorities with regards to the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), where 1 is the most deprived. This is amongst the 40% least deprived neighbourhoods in England as of 2019. This marks an increase in deprivation since 2015, when it was amongst the 30% least deprived neighbourhoods in England.

Broadly speaking, the Wiltshire 030A LSOA does not experience a notable level of deprivation, however, it does rank slightly higher (more deprived) for the employment; education, skills and training; and living environment deprivation domains. Crucially, the neighbourhood area is within the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods for the barriers to housing and services deprivation domain. It is important to note that the neighbourhood area, a rural area, is grouped with Hilperton and Staverton parish, an urban area, in the LSOA data and therefore does not provide a picture of Semington alone.

B.5 Historic environment

Key statistics

- There are 33 Grade II listed buildings within the neighbourhood area.
- None of the nationally designated heritage assets within the neighbourhood area are on the Heritage at Risk Register 2023.
- The Wiltshire Historic Environment Record (HER) returns 61 results for the neighbourhood area.

Commentary

There are 33 Grade II listed buildings in the neighbourhood area. These notably include [St George's Hospital](#) (former Victorian Poor Law Workhouse, since converted to residential use), [Church of St George](#) (16th Century church, restored in 1860), [the Somerset Arms](#) (18th Century public house) and [the Semington Aqueduct](#) (Late 18th Century to early 19th Century, carrying the Kennet and Avon Canal over Semington Brook). However, these heritage assets are not covered by a conservation area.

Locally important, non-designated heritage assets are also an important part of the historic environment of Semington. The Wiltshire and Swindon HER returns 61 results in the neighbourhood area. Non-designated assets include (but are not limited to): pill boxes and other WWII relics, Georgian and earlier stone houses, and an early 18th Century packhorse bridge.

B.6 Land, soil and water resources

Key statistics

- The neighbourhood area falls into the Avon Bristol Rural Operational Catchment.
- The neighbourhood area is not in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) but is 727m to the west of the Summerham Brook NVZ.
- The ecological status of the Semington Brook (Milebourne Stream to confluence with River Avon (Bristol)) that runs through the neighbourhood area has been moderate since 2014 (and was poor from 2009 until 2014). The chemical status was not tested in 2022.

Commentary

The provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) dataset provided by Natural England indicates the majority of the neighbourhood area comprises Grade 3 'Good to Moderate' agricultural land. Some of the land in the north of the neighbourhood area is considered to be Grade 4 'Poor', whilst a small section of Grade 2 'Very Good' land can be found in the southwest of the neighbourhood area. It is not possible to determine whether the Grade 3 land is Grade 3a (better quality) or Grade 3b (poorer quality).

In terms of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land, the majority of the neighbourhood area has a low likelihood (<20%) of being underlain by BMV land.

However, there are areas in the west of the neighbourhood area with a moderate (20-60%) and high (>60%) of being underlain by BMV land.

Water is supplied to the neighbourhood area by Wessex Water, who are also responsible for sewerage services in this area. Their Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) identifies how they expect to balance the demand for water with available supplies over a 25-year plan period. The WRMP indicates that there is adequate supply over this period without a need to develop new sources of water.

The neighbourhood area is located within the Avon Bristol Rural Operational Catchment. The Semington Brook (Milebourne Stream to confluence with River Avon (Bristol)) waterbody runs through the north segment of the neighbourhood area and down to the east. This waterbody has a moderate ecological status.

The neighbourhood area is not in a NVZ but is 727m to the west of the Summerham Brook NVZ.

B.7 Landscape

Key statistics

- The latest available brownfield register for Wiltshire indicates there are no brownfield sites within the neighbourhood area.
- There are some tree preservation orders (TPOs) within the neighbourhood area – however all affected trees are situated in the centre of Semington village.
- The neighbourhood area sits within the Avon Vales National Character Area (NCA).

Commentary

Whilst the neighbourhood area does not overlap with an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), it is located approximately 6.1km east of the Cotswolds AONB and approximately 10.7km west of the North Wessex Downs AONB. However, due to the distance of the neighbourhood area to these AONBs, future development is unlikely to impact their setting.

The neighbourhood area is within NCA 117: Avon Vales. This area features a low-lying landscape with mixed agriculture, small towns along the River Avon, and higher surrounding land. It's predominantly agricultural (over 80%) with limited urban development (less than 10%). Historical traces include Saxon place names, prehistoric hill forts, and medieval arable cultivation. The region's history is reflected in late medieval churches, merchant houses, and stream-side mills. Smaller settlements are connected by narrow lanes, and flood meadows, drainage ditches, and wetlands dominate valley floors. Key characteristics of the NCA include (but are not limited to):

- An undulating clay vale with a mix of arable and pasture.
- Small and medium-sized fields with mostly hedgerow boundaries with few hedgerow trees, varying in shape from irregular piecemeal enclosure to rectilinear planned enclosure.
- Numerous low ridges with local views over towns and villages.

- Transport corridors along roads and watercourses, heavily influential on all development in the NCA.

The neighbourhood area falls within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 12B: Avon Open Clay Vale. The majority of its identified key characteristics are exhibited within the neighbourhood area. These key characteristics are listed below (but are not limited to):

- Level landform with wide open skies and views to ridges and downs.
- Pastoral land use with some arable.
- Large scale geometric fields with hedgerows or open drainage channels defining boundaries.
- Presence of rivers, tributaries, drainage channels and open water bodies.
- Watercourses lined with riparian vegetation with prominent lines of willows (some pollarded).
- Floristically rich hay meadows.
- Settlement pattern varies from large towns and small scattered villages to sparse farmsteads.
- Buildings in varied materials of brick, render and stone.
- Crossed by major transport corridors, and a network of minor roads linking settlements.
- Historic use for transport evident in canals.

Key sensitivities and values for this LCA include (but are not limited to):

- Rural tranquillity.
- Hedgerow pattern.
- Water bodies and water ways of varied character and ecological value.
- Streamside willows and other riparian vegetation.
- Remnant hay meadows.
- Wide open views.
- Settlement pattern of nucleated villages with variety of vernacular building materials.

The broad management objectives for this LCA include:

- Retain and manage the hedgerow network and nurture new hedgerow trees.
- Promote appropriate management of arable land including retaining areas of fallow land and maintaining an unploughed margin around fields to encourage wildlife, particularly farmland birds.
- Retain and manage hay meadows.
- Introduce new tree planting along watercourses using typical riparian species such as alder and willow.

- Take opportunities to extend and enhance the varied wetland habitats (reed beds, wet grassland, and wet woodland) of the Cotswold Water Park through appropriate restoration of mineral workings.
- Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the rural peaceful character of the landscape.

The neighbourhood area was examined in the 2023 Semington Parish Character Statement. The Character Statement highlighted the locally distinctive features of the parish:

- **Rural Landscape:** The expansive and open landscape that simultaneously connects and sub-divides the distinct parish settlements and those beyond.
- **Semington Historic Core:** The linear core reflecting Semington's historic economic relationship with the Kennet and Avon and Wilts and Berks Canals. Also, with nucleated pattern of mediaeval villages and ancient meadows and grazing patterns.
- **Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Semington:** The distinct twentieth and twenty-first century housing growth largely to the west, reflecting the village's changing role and attractiveness as a place to live and changed approaches to house building.
- **Semington Industrial Area:** A distinct employment focus to the south of the village characterised by single storey industrial units and depot at the southern gateway to Semington.
- **Littleton:** A historic rural hamlet set within a level landscape of mature hedgerow and trees-lined lanes with dispersed farms and large houses in substantial plots.
- **Little Marsh:** A small community to the south of Semington village focused on a single cul-de-sac lane set within a level rural landscape.

The Bristol and Bath Green Belt, whilst not a landscape designation, is located approximately 2.8km west of the neighbourhood area. However, given this distance – and given the rural nature of the neighbourhood area – this is unlikely to be contribute to development pressures in Semington.

B.8 Transportation and movement

Key statistics

- The majority of people aged 16 years and over in employment in Semington work mainly from home.
- The majority of people aged 16 years and over in employment in Semington drive a car or van to work.

Commentary

There are no railway stations within the neighbourhood area. The closest railway station is located in Melksham, located approximately 3.3km north of the neighbourhood area, followed by Trowbridge, located approximately 4.2km to the southwest of the neighbourhood area. Trowbridge Railway Station provides regular services to several locations (including but not limited to): Bristol Temple Meads,

Bath Spa, Cardiff Central, Gloucester and Swindon. Melksham Railway Station provides a less frequent service to Swindon and Westbury (including other stops). However, trains from this railway station do link to the wider network, which allows access to London, Wales and other locations in the South West.

According to Bus Times and local bus timetables, there are four services that run through the neighbourhood area. The Stagecoach service, the 49, runs every hour with reduced service on Sundays from Swindon through Devizes to Trowbridge and vice versa. The Faresaver X34 runs every half hour from Frome through Trowbridge to Chippenham and vice versa, Monday through Saturday. The Libra Travels X84 runs on Fridays and X85 on Tuesdays from Semington, through Staverton to Bath at 0940 and return at 1255. These are 'shoppers trips' buses and so only run at these times on these days. It is also noted that these buses only run during the day.

There are two primary roads in the neighbourhood area. These are:

- The A361 runs south of the village of Semington and links the neighbourhood area with Trowbridge, Devizes, Frome and Shepton Mallet.
- The A350 runs north to south through the centre of the neighbourhood area, from the M4 to the north of Chippenham to Poole in Dorset. It is considered a significant corridor through west Wiltshire and links the neighbourhood area with Westbury and Melksham. Given the high volume of traffic, the A350 is of concern as it passes through residential areas, severs access to retail and the rail station, and crosses several busy junctions. It can also suffer from slow moving traffic as a result of various speed limits, capacity constraints, road conditions and layout, and access requirements for adjacent commercial and retail uses.

The Public Right of Way (PRoW) map provided by Wiltshire Council indicates that the neighbourhood area contains a number of public footpaths, bridleways and byways within its boundary. The majority of these connect Semington village to other locations in the neighbourhood area such as Littleton, but also to locations outside of the neighbourhood area, such as Hilperton. Some of the central roads, such as the High Street in Semington, are also paved on at least one side for pedestrians.

