

Cotherstone Parish Neighbourhood Plan: Screening Opinion Report Outcomes (July 2021)

Introduction

The development of Neighbourhood Plans gives communities the opportunity to shape the place where they live and establish policies by which new development will be determined alongside those adopted within the County Durham Plan. A screening assessment was necessary to determine whether Cotherstone's Neighbourhood Plan was likely to:

- Have significant effects on the environment and therefore require Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); and/or
- Have likely significant effects on important wildlife sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and/or Special Protection Areas (SPA) and therefore require further, 'Appropriate' assessment as part of a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

The screening assessment was undertaken by officers within Durham County Council's Environment and Design section and verified by both the Senior Ecologist and the Principal Low Carbon Economy Officer. The opinions of Natural England, The Environment Agency and Historic England have also been sought on the SEA assessment outcome. Natural England are also required to comment on the HRA screening assessment.

The assessment was first undertaken in December 2020 on a draft version of the Neighbourhood Plan and was further reviewed in July 2021 following changes made to the Plan following consultation. The review did not alter the original assessment outcomes.

This paper provides a summary of the assessment outcomes. For further detail, please see the full screening Assessment Report

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

- **Conclusion:** SEA is not needed
- **Reason:** Cotherstone Parish Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate land for development and its policies seek to provide protection of rural character and setting, local green spaces, valued views and non-designated heritage assets along with ensuring that the design of new development contributes positively toward local character, and that appropriate business and employment development is supported. Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan is not considered likely to have a significant adverse effect on the environment.
- Natural England: agree with the conclusion of the SEA screening.
- Environment Agency: agree with the conclusion of the SEA screening
- Historic England: No specific response on the SEA screening opinion in their letter dated 12th March 2021. However, in their comments, Historic England welcome

Cotherstone's Neighbourhood Plan and its approach taken to protecting and enhancing the Historic Environment. No concerns in relation to the impact of the Plan on the environment are raised.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

- **Conclusion:** The Neighbourhood Plan will not incur likely significant effects to sites (SAC's or SPA's) forming part of the UK's national site network. Appropriate Assessment is not required.
- **Reason:** The policies within the Plan set development limits and criteria for testing proposals only.
- **Natural England:** agree with the conclusion of the HRA screening