

Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Ash Neighbourhood Plan

Environmental Report to
accompany the Regulation 14
version of the Neighbourhood
Plan

Ash Parish Council

June 2025

Quality Information

Prepared by	Checked by	Verified by	Approved by
A.V.	R.P.	N.C.B.	N.C.B.
Environmental Consultant	Principal Planner	Technical Director	Technical Director

Revision History

Revision	Revision Date	Details	Name	Position
V1.0	June 2025	Initial version for Neighbourhood Group comment	L.C.	Planning and Development Manager
V2.0	June 2025	Consultation version	R.P.	Principal Planner

Prepared for:

Ash Parish Council

Prepared by:

3 Rivergate
Temple Quay
Bristol
BS1 6ER

aecom.com

© 2025 AECOM Limited. All Rights Reserved.

This document has been prepared by AECOM Limited ('AECOM') in accordance with its contract with the Client and in accordance with generally accepted consultancy principles, the budget for fees and the terms of reference agreed between AECOM and the Client. Any information provided by third parties and referred to herein has not been checked or verified by AECOM, unless otherwise expressly stated in the document. AECOM shall have no liability to any third party that makes use of or relies upon this document.

Cover image: [The Hog's Back near Aldershot, England, UK](#)

Table of Contents

Non-Technical Summary	i
1. Introduction	1
2. Local Plan Context and Vision for the Neighbourhood Plan	6
3. What is the Scope of the SEA?	9
4. Consideration of Reasonable Alternatives Through the SEA	14
5. Appraisal of the Regulation 14 Version of the Neighbourhood Plan...	25
6. Next Steps	34

Non-Technical Summary

Introduction

AECOM has been commissioned to undertake an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Ash Neighbourhood Plan (ANP).

SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the potential impacts of an emerging plan, and potential alternatives in terms of key environmental issues. The aim of SEA is to inform and influence the plan-making process with a view to avoiding and mitigating potential negative impacts and maximising the potential for positive effects. Through this approach, the SEA for the ANP seeks to maximise the emerging plan's contribution to sustainable development.

Two key procedural requirements of the SEA Regulations are that:

- I. When deciding on '*the scope and level of detail of the information*' which must be included in the Environmental Report there is a consultation with nationally designated authorities concerned with environmental issues; and
- II. A report (the 'Environmental Report') is published for consultation alongside the draft plan (i.e., the draft ANP) that presents outcomes from the environmental assessment (i.e., discusses 'likely significant effects' that would result from plan implementation) and reasonable alternatives.

This 'Environmental Report' is concerned with item 'ii' above.

Local Plan context

The relevant Local Plan for the neighbourhood area¹ is the Guildford Local Plan (GLP) (Parts 1 and 2). Ash has been given a housing allocation of 339 in the GLP - this includes 44 allocated to the neighbourhood area and a portion of the 885 to come forward across Ash and Tongham combined.

The housing position for the authority area is likely to be influenced by 1) the increased housing numbers for the borough as outlined by the revised standard method in the latest NPPF, and 2) the absence of a five-year housing land supply in the borough as outlined in the Council's latest position statement (dated 1st April 2025). This may lead to an increased number of housing allocations in Ash in the emerging Local Plan.

¹ Guildford Borough Council (no date). '*Guildford Local Plan*' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Consideration of reasonable alternatives

In accordance with the SEA Regulations the Environmental Report must include...

- I. An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with; and
- II. The likely significant effects on the environment associated with alternatives / an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of alternatives appraised.

Strategic factors

The ANP adopts a 'brownfield first' strategy, prioritising the redevelopment of previously developed land within the neighbourhood area. This approach reflects both a sustainable planning ethos and the practical constraints of site availability. While brownfield opportunities are limited, the ANP seeks to maximise their potential through policies that support demolition and redevelopment, ensuring that any new development is well-integrated into the existing built environment. To guide this process, a Design and Development Code (DDC) is being prepared, which will help shape the form, scale, and character of future proposals.

Much of the undeveloped land surrounding Ash is constrained by international and national biodiversity designations, as well as the Metropolitan Green Belt. Furthermore, a significant greenfield strategic allocation to the south of the neighbourhood area is already under construction and is expected to be retained in the Guildford Local Plan review. These constraints limit the scope for greenfield development and reinforce the need to protect the remaining open countryside.

Therefore, a key element of the ANP is the introduction of a 'local gap' policy. This policy aims to preserve the physical and visual separation between the three key settlements of Ash, Ash Green, and Tongham. The surrounding countryside has experienced considerable development pressure in recent years, particularly around Tongham, which lies just beyond the neighbourhood area boundary. This area, while not within the Green Belt or the Surrey Hills National Landscape, remains highly sensitive. Guildford Borough Council's Rural Urban Fringe Character Assessment² highlights the vulnerability of this landscape, supporting the case for a policy that maintains openness and prevents coalescence between settlements.

Options assessment

While the ANP does not propose to allocate specific sites, it must still consider the implications of key local issues which are of central importance to plan making.

In light of the strategic factors outlined above, the reasonable alternatives will focus on policy direction rather than site-specific growth scenarios. A particular area of interest is where to formally establish a 'local gap' policy. As such, the SEA has considered the relative sustainability merits of proposing a local gap at two potential locations within the neighbourhood area.

² Guildford Borough Council (2007). 'Guildford Landscape Character Assessment & Guidance' can be accessed through [this link](#).

They are as follows:

- I. Option A: Propose a local gap on land to the north of the disused railway.
- II. Option B: Propose a local gap on land to the south of the disused railway.

Figure 4-1 in the main body of the Environmental Report visually presents these two options, with the detailed assessment findings presented in **Table 4.1** to **Table 4.8**.

Summary of assessment findings

SEA Theme		Option A	Option B
Biodiversity	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No
Climate Change	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No
Community Wellbeing	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No
Historic Environment	Rank	1	2
	Significant?	Yes - beneficial	No
Landscape	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No
Land, Soil and Water Resources	Rank	=1	=1
	Significant?	No	No
Transportation	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No

Option A is assessed as performing more favourably in relation to the **Historic Environment** SEA theme. Its designation as a settlement gap offers potential for significant beneficial effects with regard to the protection of the setting of listed buildings, offering a more direct opportunity to support local heritage. Option B, by comparison, is considered to have lower sensitivity in this regard and does not provide the same level of heritage-related benefit.

Option B is considered to perform more favourably across the majority of SEA themes. In terms of the **Biodiversity** SEA theme, it presents greater potential for

ecological protection and enhancement, particularly if safeguarded from incompatible uses. For the **Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)** SEA theme, the presence of areas at higher risk of surface water flooding supports its role in natural flood management and climate mitigation. Regarding the **Community Wellbeing** SEA theme, Option B offers wider informal countryside access, which may support physical and mental health and help reduce pressure on more sensitive areas. In the context of the **Landscape** SEA theme, its size and location between settlements are seen as more effective in maintaining separation and reducing the risk of coalescence, with additional value due to its proximity to the AGLV. Finally, for the **Transport** SEA theme, Option B benefits from an existing network of public rights of way and footpaths, which supports sustainable travel and recreational use.

In relation to the **Land, Soil, and Water Resources** SEA theme, both options are assessed as performing similarly. Neither presents notable constraints or opportunities in terms of soil quality, contamination, or water resource management, but both contribute positively to maintaining soil functions and water-related features.

Developing the preferred approach for the ANP

The preferred Local Gap for the purposes of ANP policy is **Option A**, primarily due to the significant beneficial effects the local gap will have on conserving the historic setting of Ash Manor and other designated historic assets.

Although Option B performs more strongly across a broader range of SEA themes, the specific heritage value associated with Option A is a key consideration in this decision. The contribution of this area to the setting of Ash Manor is recognised as a locally important factor. Additionally, Option B has recently been designated as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to account for the significant growth coming forward at the strategic allocation in Tongham (to the south of the neighbourhood area). As the site already benefits from protection, it is less-suited for a local gap proposal through the ANP.

The preferred approach has been informed by the various surveys and evidence base documents prepared to support the Neighbourhood Plan, responses from community consultation events, and the SEA findings.

Appraisal of the Regulation 14 version of the Neighbourhood Plan

To support the implementation of the vision statement for the ANP, the Regulation 14 version of the plan puts forward 13 policies to guide new development within the neighbourhood area. Chapter 5 in the main body of the Environmental Report presents the detailed appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the Regulation 14 version of the ANP. A summary of the appraisal findings are presented below.

The ANP is anticipated to result in **beneficial effects across all SEA themes**, with significant beneficial effects anticipated for **Biodiversity, Community Wellbeing, Historic Environment, Landscape**, and **Transportation**. These benefits are supported by a combination of spatial planning, design-led policies, protection of local assets, and promotion of sustainable travel and infrastructure. No significant adverse effects are anticipated from policies in the ANP.

While the ANP policies are expected to lead to beneficial effects, the SEA identifies opportunities to further strengthen their effectiveness. The following recommendations are offered for consideration by plan makers to inform policy development:

- I. Supporting the provision of healthcare and social care facilities, to address the needs of an ageing population;
- II. Encouraging natural drainage solutions in all new developments would ensure effective management of surface water runoff, mitigating flood risk in the neighbourhood area;
- III. Encouraging the adoption of water efficiency measures, including rainwater harvesting and greywater reuse, are recommended to promote sustainable water resource management; and
- IV. Encouraging the use of low-emission and electric vehicles, alongside the provision of appropriate charging infrastructure in new developments, would support the transition to cleaner transportation and contribute to local and national emissions reduction targets.

Next steps

Plan finalisation

Following Regulation 14 consultation, responses will be considered in finalising the ANP and SEA for submission. Following submission, the ANP and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the ANP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.

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

Monitoring

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 Neighbourhood Plan to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.

It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the ANP will be undertaken by Guildford 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 ANP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Guildford Borough Council.

This page is intentionally blank

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

- 1.1.1. AECOM has been commissioned to undertake an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Ash Neighbourhood Plan (ANP).
- 1.1.2. The ANP is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011³ and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012,⁴ and in the context of the Guildford Local Plan.⁵
- 1.1.3. The Ash neighbourhood area (**Figure 1-1**) was designated in April 2024.

Table 1-1: Key information relating to the Ash Neighbourhood Plan

Name of Responsible Authority	Guildford Borough Council
Title of the Plan	Ash Neighbourhood Plan (“the ANP”)
Subject	Neighbourhood planning
Purpose	<p>The ANP is being prepared as a neighbourhood plan under the Localism Act 2011 and Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, and in the context of the Guildford Local Plan (2019 and 2023).</p> <p>The ANP will be used to guide and shape development within the neighbourhood area.</p>
Timescale	The plan period is expected to cover a period of at least 15 years (from adoption).
Area covered by the plan	The neighbourhood area covers the civil parish of Ash, located in Guildford (Surrey).
Summary of content	The ANP will set out a vision, strategy, and range of policies for the neighbourhood area.

³ UK Government (2011) ‘*Localism Act 2011*’ can be accessed through [this link](#).

⁴ UK Government (2012) ‘*The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012*’ can be accessed through [this link](#)

⁵ Guildford Borough Council Local Plan. Part 1 (2019) can be accessed through [this link](#). Part 2 (2023) can be accessed through [this link](#).

Figure 1-1: Ash Neighbourhood Area



1.2. SEA Screening

- 1.2.1. A Neighbourhood Plan requires SEA where it is likely to have significant environmental effects. In this respect, neighbourhood plans are more likely to be screened in as requiring an SEA if both the following apply:
- the neighbourhood plan is being prepared within a neighbourhood area with significant environmental constraints, such as, for example, sites of international or national importance for biodiversity conservation, or large concentrations of heritage assets; and
 - the neighbourhood plan is likely to allocate sites for development.⁶
- 1.2.2. The ANP was screened by Guildford Borough Council in 2024. The screening process is based upon consideration of standard criteria to determine whether the ANP is likely to have “*significant environmental effects*”, and subsequently whether there is a need for SEA. While the ANP is not intending to allocate sites for development, the screening concluded that an SEA (and Habitats Regulation Assessment [HRA]) is still required due to the presence of designated sites of international importance (including Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas).
- 1.2.3. In light of this outcome, an SEA process is being undertaken to meet the specific requirements prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations).⁷

1.3. SEA Explained

- 1.3.1. SEA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the potential impacts of an emerging plan, and potential alternatives in terms of key environmental issues. The aim of SEA is to inform and influence the plan-making process with a view to avoiding and mitigating potential negative impacts and maximising the potential for positive effects. Through this approach, the SEA for the ANP seeks to maximise the emerging plan’s contribution to sustainable development.

⁶ DLUHC (February 2022): Chief Planner’s Newsletter, February 2022. ‘*Strategic Environmental Assessment for Neighbourhood Plans: Timely and effective screening*’ is available through [this link](#).

⁷ UK Government (2004) ‘*The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*’ can be accessed [here](#).

- 1.3.2. Two key procedural requirements of the SEA Regulations are that:
- i. When deciding on ‘*the scope and level of detail of the information*’ which must be included in the Environmental Report there is a consultation with nationally designated authorities concerned with environmental issues; and
 - ii. A report (the ‘Environmental Report’) is published for consultation alongside the draft plan (i.e., the draft ANP) that presents outcomes from the environmental assessment (i.e., discusses ‘likely significant effects’ that would result from plan implementation) and reasonable alternatives.
- 1.3.3. This ‘Environmental Report’ is concerned with item ‘ii’ above.

1.4. Structure of this Environmental Report

- 1.4.1. This SEA Report incorporates the information required for Environmental Reports by the SEA Regulations. The information presented in this IIA Report is outlined in **Table 1-2**.

Table 1-2: Questions that Must be Answered by the SEA Environmental Report to Meet the Regulatory⁸ Requirements

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... ⁹
What is the plan seeking to achieve?	An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan.
What is the scope of the SEA?	Relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.
What is the sustainability ‘context’?	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.

⁸ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

⁹ NB this column does not quote directly from Schedule II of the Regulations. Rather, it reflects a degree of interpretation.

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... ⁹
What is the sustainability 'baseline'?	<p>The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan.</p> <p>The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.</p> <p>Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.</p>
What are the key issues and objectives?	<p>Key problems/issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e., provide a 'framework' for) assessment.</p>
What has plan-making/SEA involved up to this point?	<p>Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with.</p> <p>The likely significant effects associated with alternatives.</p> <p>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.</p>
What are the assessment findings at this stage?	<p>The likely significant effects associated with the Regulation 14 version of the plan.</p> <p>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.</p>
What happens next?	<p>The next steps for the plan making / SEA process.</p>

2. Local Plan Context and Vision for the Neighbourhood Plan

2.1. Local Plan Context for the Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.1.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides an overarching framework for development in England. It sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It is supported by planning practice guidance, which is a suite of policy papers covering a broad range of topics, including SEA.
- 2.1.2. The relevant Local Plan for the neighbourhood area¹⁰ is the Guildford Local Plan (GLP) (Parts 1 and 2). Ash has been given a housing allocation of 339 in the GLP - this includes 44 allocated to the neighbourhood area and a portion of the 885 to come forward across Ash and Tongham combined.
- 2.1.3. Guildford Borough Council are in the process of undertaking a review of the adopted Local Plan, however progress is in the early stages. An updated Local Development Scheme (LDS)¹¹ was published in February 2025, with evidence gathering underway. Consultation on the draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) is scheduled for September 2026.
- 2.1.4. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has now been published following the consultation period that ended in September 2024. The new framework includes significant reforms aimed at boosting housing supply and supporting sustainable growth. One of the key changes is the reintroduction of mandatory housing targets, which now require an increased number of dwellings in Guildford. The housing position for the authority area is likely to be influenced by 1) the increased housing numbers for the borough as outlined by the revised standard method in the latest NPPF, and 2) the absence of a five-year housing land supply in the borough as outlined in the Council's latest position statement (dated 1st April 2025). This may lead to an increased number of housing allocations in Ash in the emerging Local Plan.

¹⁰ Guildford Borough Council (no date). 'Guildford Local Plan' can be accessed through [this link](#).

¹¹ Guildford Borough Council (2025): [Local Development Scheme](#)

- 2.1.5. Neighbourhood plans will form part of the development plan for Guildford, alongside, but not as a replacement for, the Local Plan. Neighbourhood plans are required to be in general conformity with the Local Plan and can develop policies and proposals to address local place-based issues. In this way it is intended for the Local Plan to provide a clear overall strategic direction for development in Guildford, whilst enabling finer detail to be determined through the neighbourhood planning process where appropriate.

2.2. Vision and Objectives for the ANP

- 2.2.1. The vision for the ANP captures the community's views and aspirations for the neighbourhood area as expressed through the neighbourhood planning process. It forms the basis on which the neighbourhood objectives and proposed policies have been formulated.

- 2.2.2. The vision is as follows:

“The vision of Ash in 2045 is for the Parish to maintain its strong identity on Surrey’s western border. The Parish of Ash is made up of three areas, Ash Vale to the north, Ash in the centre and Ash Green in the southeast. Over the next twenty years of this document’s life span, the intention is for the Parish of Ash to remain a vibrant, sustainable community featuring housing, employment, retail and leisure facilities, and improved infrastructure for its residents and the residents of the neighbouring towns and villages. The vision also seeks to retain Ash Green’s identity as an independent village, separate from the Ash and Tongham built-up area that contains Ash and Ash Vale.

“These steps will be done by protecting the existing green spaces and recreational facilities, identifying land for new community facilities to be created and focus on a development policy that targets balanced redevelopment over new constructions on greenfield land. The intention of the Neighbourhood Plan is to both protect and guide Ash in that manner as it continues to develop towards 2045.”

- 2.2.3. The vision is accompanied by the following five plan objectives:

- To retain and enhance the individual identity of each settlement in the parish and prevent coalescence between Ash Green and Ash;
- To protect and enhance the natural environment;
- To increase the number of commuting trips by rail, bus, cycling and walking;

- To increase the capacity of social infrastructure, protect local facilities, promote local employment opportunities, shops and services; and
- To increase the health and wellbeing of residents through provision of more recreational activities and making it easier to get around the parish on foot and by cycle.

2.2.4. The ANP contains thirteen policies, each of which is intended to contribute to one or more of these objectives.

3. What is the Scope of the SEA?

3.1. Summary of SEA Scoping

- 3.1.1. A Scoping Report was prepared for the SEA in April 2025. The purpose of this report was to outline the 'scope' of the SEA through setting out:
- A context review of the key environmental and sustainability objectives of national, regional, and local plans and strategies relevant to the ANP;
 - Baseline data against which the ANP can be assessed;
 - The key sustainability issues for the ANP; and
 - An 'SEA Framework' of objectives and assessment questions.
- 3.1.2. Baseline information (including the context review and key issues) are available to view in the SEA Scoping Report, available to access alongside the ANP at Regulation 14 consultation.
- 3.1.3. 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 Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Historic England.¹² These authorities were consulted on the scope of the SEA for a period of five weeks between April and May 2025.
- 3.1.4. Only one response to the Scoping Report consultation was received. It came from Natural England on 04.06.2025, and they did not provide any specific comments on the scope of the SEA.

SEA Framework

- 3.1.5. The SEA Framework provides a way in which environmental effects can be defined and subsequently analysed based on standard 'tests'. Each proposal within the current version (i.e., the Regulation 14 version) of the ANP will be assessed consistently using the framework.
- 3.1.6. The updated SEA Framework is presented in **Table 3-1**.

¹² In-line with Article 6(3) of the SEA Directive, these consultation bodies were selected because '*by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effects of implementing plans and programme*'.

Table 3-1: SEA Framework for the ANP

SEA Theme	SEA Objective	Supporting Questions (Will the Option/ Proposal Help to...)
Biodiversity	Maintain and enhance the extent and quality of biodiversity habitats and networks within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.	<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 priority habitats and the links between them? • Achieve a net gain in biodiversity, perhaps over and above national BNG standards (where possible)? • Support habitat restoration or new habitat creation within the identified Network Enhancement or Expansion Zones? • Support enhancements to multifunctional green infrastructure networks and the network of open spaces?
Climate Change (including Flood Risk)	Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities in the neighbourhood area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport? • Improve or extend local footpaths, cycle paths or strategic green infrastructure routes? • Increase the number of new development meeting or exceeding sustainable design criteria? • Generate energy from low or zero carbon sources? • Support the transition to electric vehicles?
	Support the resilience of the neighbourhood area to the potential effects of climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding, considering the likely future effects of climate change? • Improve and extend green infrastructure networks in the neighbourhood area? • Sustainably manage water runoff? • Increase the resilience of the local built and natural environment?

SEA Theme	SEA Objective	Supporting Questions (Will the Option/ Proposal Help to...)
	change, including flood risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the potential risks associated with climate change are duly considered in the design of new development in the neighbourhood area?
Community Wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents and in suitably connected places, supported by the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure to enable cohesive and inclusive communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality and affordable housing? • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes targeted at aligning the housing stock with local needs? • Provide flexible and adaptable homes that meet people’s changing needs? • Improve the availability and/ or accessibility of local services and facilities? • Improve the availability and/ or accessibility of education? • Contribute to improving aspects of deprivation in the neighbourhood area? • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of existing and future residents? • Promote access to green spaces and recreational areas in Ash?
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? • Conserve and enhance the special interest, character and appearance of locally important features and their settings? • Protect the integrity of the Conservation Area and its setting? • Protect the integrity of the historic setting of key monuments of cultural heritage interest as listed in the Surrey HER?

SEA Theme	SEA Objective	Supporting Questions (Will the Option/ Proposal Help to...)
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape, including green infrastructure corridors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the undertaking of early archaeological investigations and, where appropriate, recommend mitigation strategies? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the special qualities and significance of the neighbourhood area? <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and/ or enhance the integrity and setting of the Surrey Heaths National Landscape and AGLV? • Protect and/or enhance the integrity of the Ash’s two NCAs, and four LCTs? • Protect and/ or enhance local landscape and villagescape 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? • Protect and extend/ enhance green infrastructure corridors? • Protect visual amenity? • Retain and enhance landscape and villagescape features that contribute to the rural setting, including trees and hedgerows?
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"> • Avoid the loss of higher quality agricultural land resources? • Support sustainable resource consumption and waste management? • Promote any opportunities for the use of previously developed land, or vacant / underutilised land? • Avoid impacts on water quality? • Support improvements to water quality? • Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside development? • Protect the neighbourhood area’s waterbodies? • Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water harvesting and/ or water recycling?

SEA Theme	SEA Objective	Supporting Questions (Will the Option/ Proposal Help to...)
Transportation	Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the objectives within the Surrey Local Transport Plan 4 to encourage the use of more sustainable transport modes? • Encourage opportunities to enhance connectivity and accessibility within the neighbourhood area, including through the uptake of active travel opportunities? • Extend or improve active travel networks? • 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?

4. Consideration of Reasonable Alternatives Through the SEA

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. In accordance with the SEA Regulations the Environmental Report must include...

- An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with; and
- The likely significant effects on the environment associated with alternatives / an outline of the reasons for selecting the preferred approach in light of alternatives appraised.

4.1.2. The 'narrative' of plan-making / SEA up to this point is told within this part of the Environmental Report. Specifically, how the SEA process to date has informed the consideration of different approaches for key elements of the ANP.

4.2. Defining Reasonable Alternatives

4.2.1. Whilst work on the ANP has been underway for some time, the aim of this section is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work to date, but rather to explain work undertaken to develop and appraise reasonable alternatives.

4.2.2. In the context of the above, this chapter of the Environmental Report presents information on reasonable alternative approaches to addressing key issues that are of central importance to the ANP.

Strategic factors informing the preferred approach

4.2.3. The ANP adopts a 'brownfield first' strategy, prioritising the redevelopment of previously developed land within the neighbourhood area. This approach reflects both a sustainable planning ethos and the practical constraints of site availability. While brownfield opportunities are limited, the ANP seeks to maximise their potential through policies that support demolition and redevelopment, ensuring that any new development is well-integrated into the existing built environment. To guide this process, a Design and Development Code (DDC) is being prepared, which will help shape the form, scale, and character of future proposals.

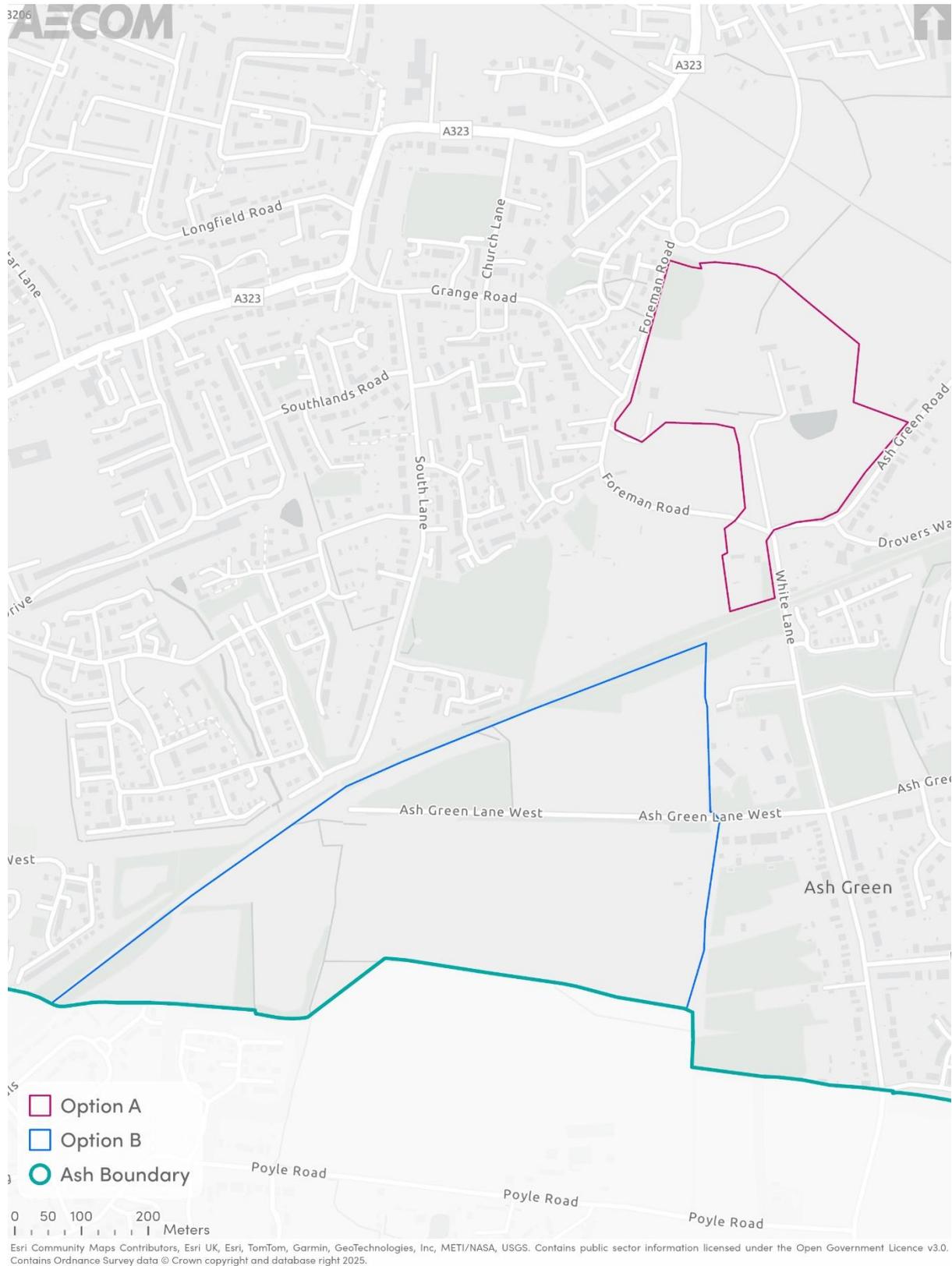
- 4.2.4. Much of the undeveloped land surrounding Ash is constrained by international and national biodiversity designations, as well as the Metropolitan Green Belt. Furthermore, a significant greenfield strategic allocation to the south of the neighbourhood area is already under construction and is expected to be retained in the Guildford Local Plan review. These constraints limit the scope for greenfield development and reinforce the need to protect the remaining open countryside.
- 4.2.5. Therefore, a key element of the ANP is the introduction of a 'local gap' policy. This policy aims to preserve the physical and visual separation between the three key settlements of Ash, Ash Green, and Tongham. The surrounding countryside has experienced considerable development pressure in recent years, particularly around Tongham, which lies just beyond the neighbourhood area boundary. This area, while not within the Green Belt or the Surrey Hills National Landscape, remains highly sensitive. Guildford Borough Council's Rural Urban Fringe Character Assessment¹³ highlights the vulnerability of this landscape, supporting the case for a policy that maintains openness and prevents coalescence between settlements.

Consideration of Potential Options

- 4.2.6. While the ANP does not propose to allocate specific sites, it must still consider the implications of key local issues which are of central importance to plan making.
- 4.2.7. In light of the strategic factors outlined above, the reasonable alternatives will focus on policy direction rather than site-specific growth scenarios. A particular area of interest is where to formally establish a 'local gap' policy. As such, the SEA has considered the relative sustainability merits of proposing a local gap at two potential locations within the neighbourhood area. They are as follows:
- Option A: Propose a local gap on land to the north of the disused railway.
 - Option B: Propose a local gap on land to the south of the disused railway.
- 4.2.8. Figure 4-1 **Figure 4-1** visually presents these two options.

¹³ Guildford Borough Council (2007). 'Guildford Landscape Character Assessment & Guidance' can be accessed through [this link](#).

Figure 4-1: Reasonable alternatives considered through the SEA



Appraisal Findings

4.2.9. Utilising the SEA Framework of objectives and assessment questions developed during the earlier scoping stage of the SEA, the appraisal has been presented through seven SEA Themes, as follows:

- Biodiversity;
- Climatic Change (Including Flood Risk);
- Community Wellbeing;
- Historic Environment;
- Landscape;
- Land, Soil and Water Resources; and
- Transportation.

4.2.10. The appraisal considers the relative sustainability merits of each of the two local gap options. Findings are presented as a commentary on effects. To support the appraisal findings, the options have been ranked in terms of their sustainability performance against the relevant SEA Theme. It is anticipated that this will provide the reader with a likely indication of the relative performance of the two options in relation to each theme considered.

4.2.11. **Table 4-1** to **Table 4-8** below present the findings of the appraisal of the two local gap options for each of the SEA themes.

Table 4-1: Appraisal Findings (Biodiversity)

Discussion of Potential Effects and Relative Merits of Options	Rank of Preference	
	A	B
<p>Option A includes a relatively small extent of priority habitat, consisting of some deciduous woodland and a traditional orchard. While it lies within a Nature Recovery Network Enhancement Zone (Zone 1), suggesting potential for habitat creation or enhancement, the overall biodiversity value of this option is moderate. Option A does not contain any statutory or non-statutory designated wildlife sites. As such, the potential ecological benefits from its protection would be minor.</p> <p>Option B contains a significantly larger area of priority habitat (all deciduous woodland) than Option A and encompasses a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI). These features indicate a higher baseline ecological value and make the area more sensitive to development pressures. Like Option A, it also falls within Network Enhancement Zone 1, further increasing its importance for nature recovery and connectivity. Limiting development in the Option B site would safeguard a larger, and more ecologically sensitive, area from development.</p>	2	1

Table 4-2: Appraisal Findings (Climate Change [Including Flood Risk])

Discussion of Potential Effects and Relative Merits of Options	Rank of Preference	
	A	B
<p>Both Option A and Option B offer opportunities to support climate change objectives, particularly by preventing development and maintaining open, undeveloped land. The key differentiator between the two options lies in their exposure to flood risk. While Option A is largely unaffected by surface water flood risk, Option B contains a significant area of high surface water flood risk along its northern boundary. This makes Option B more appropriate for designation as a Local Gap, as it aligns with climate adaptation policy by discouraging development in an area already vulnerable to climate-related impacts such as intense rainfall events.</p> <p>Although woodland is present in both options, Option B includes a larger area. Protecting more woodland could provide greater benefits for climate change mitigation, such as increased carbon sequestration and improved climate regulation. The existing tree cover and undeveloped condition of the land may also help reduce surface runoff and support natural flood management, particularly in areas already identified as being at risk, as is the case in Option B.</p>	2	1

Table 4-3: Appraisal Findings (Community Wellbeing)

Discussion of Potential Effects and Relative Merits of Options	Rank of Preference	
	A	B
<p>The designation of a Local Gap at either option would contribute to settlement separation, which supports community wellbeing by helping to preserve local identity, limit coalescence, and maintain the character of the surrounding environment. These attributes can positively affect residents' sense of place and attachment to their neighbourhood.</p> <p>Regarding community uses, Option A includes The Briars playground, providing a local, formal space for family activity and play. This delivers a direct recreational benefit to this area, especially for young children. Option B includes Ash Green Meadows, a locally valued green space that forms part of a SNCI and incorporates Bin Wood and surrounding fields. This area supports informal, countryside-based recreation, with family-friendly and dog-walking circular routes. These routes provide outdoor experiences, which can benefit mental health and general wellbeing. Importantly, the use of this area for everyday recreation also plays a strategic role in helping to reduce pressure on sensitive heathland habitats elsewhere.</p>	2	1

Table 4-4: Appraisal Findings (Historic Environment)

Discussion of Potential Effects and Relative Merits of Options	Rank of Preference	
	A	B
<p>Option A includes one Grade II* and three Grade II listed buildings, indicating that the area has significant historic environment value, with its landscape contributing to the setting and significance of these buildings. As the primary purpose of the settlement gap is to restrict development and maintain open land between settlements, designating Option A as a Local Gap would provide a strong protective function. This would help safeguard the setting of the listed buildings by preventing development that could detract from their historic character and visual context.</p> <p>Option B contains no designated heritage assets within or immediately adjacent to it, indicating a lower sensitivity from a historic environment perspective. Therefore, designating Option B as a Local Gap would not offer significant added protection to Ash's heritage assets.</p>	1	2

Table 4-5: Appraisal Findings (Landscape)

Discussion of Potential Effects and Relative Merits of Options	Rank of Preference	
	A	B
<p>Option B is a slightly larger site and lies more directly between the two settlements, which strengthens its potential role in maintaining a clear physical and visual separation. Option B is also within 250 m to an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV), which increases its landscape importance, as any changes from development at this site could influence the character and setting of this designation. Option A, by comparison, is located around 800 m from the AGLV, reducing the likelihood of indirect landscape effects on the designation.</p> <p>It is important to note that the designation of either option as a local gap will help to maintain the openness of the land between key settlements, safeguarding their special qualities and character.</p>	2	1

Table 4-6: Appraisal Findings (Land, Soil, and Water Resources)

Discussion of Potential Effects and Relative Merits of Options	Rank of Preference	
	A	B
<p>Both Option A and Option B are characterised primarily as land predominantly in urban use, with no significant areas of agricultural land present. Neither option contains any designated waste management sites, brownfield land, or historic landfill areas. Both sites include drainage ditches, which play a role in managing surface water runoff and are typical features within the local landscape.</p> <p>Although neither option includes high-quality agricultural land, soils in both areas continue to provide important ecosystem services such as water filtration, carbon storage, and support for vegetation, including the woodland present within Option B. Protecting these greenfield areas as settlement gaps helps to maintain these natural soil functions and prevents degradation from potential land use changes. The drainage ditches highlight the importance of conserving natural water management features to support local flood risk reduction and maintain water quality.</p>	=1	=1

Table 4-7: Appraisal Findings (Transportation)

Discussion of Potential Effects and Relative Merits of Options	Rank of Preference	
	A	B
<p>Option A is closer to the main settlement of Ash and its amenities, making it more suitable for development from a transport perspective. Its proximity to Ash supports sustainable travel modes</p>	2	1

such as walking and cycling to services and public transport, which would reduce reliance on private vehicles if development occurred there.

Option B includes two public rights of way routes and several local circular footpaths that provide important recreational and sustainable travel routes between the Ash and Ash Green. Designating Option B as a settlement gap would help protect these routes from development pressure, maintaining the openness and connectivity of the area. This aligns well with the purpose of the settlement gap (to restrict development in less suitable locations and safeguard key landscape and recreational features).

Summary of Appraisal Findings

4.2.12. The table below summarises the rankings of the options with regards to their relative performance in relation to each SEA Theme.

Table 4-8: Appraisal Findings

SEA Theme		Option A	Option B
Biodiversity	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No
Climate Change	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No
Community Wellbeing	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No
Historic Environment	Rank	1	2
	Significant?	Yes - beneficial	No
Landscape	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No
Land, Soil and Water Resources	Rank	=1	=1
	Significant?	No	No

SEA Theme		Option A	Option B
Transportation	Rank	2	1
	Significant?	No	No

- 4.2.13. Option A is assessed as performing more favourably in relation to the **Historic Environment** SEA theme. Its designation as a settlement gap offers potential for significant beneficial effects with regard to the protection of the setting of listed buildings, offering a more direct opportunity to support local heritage. Option B, by comparison, is considered to have lower sensitivity in this regard and does not provide the same level of heritage-related benefit.
- 4.2.14. Option B is considered to perform more favourably across the majority of SEA themes. In terms of the **Biodiversity** SEA theme, it presents greater potential for ecological protection and enhancement, particularly if safeguarded from incompatible uses. For the **Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)** SEA theme, the presence of areas at higher risk of surface water flooding supports its role in natural flood management and climate mitigation. Regarding the **Community Wellbeing** SEA theme, Option B offers wider informal countryside access, which may support physical and mental health and help reduce pressure on more sensitive areas. In the context of the **Landscape** SEA theme, its size and location between settlements are seen as more effective in maintaining separation and reducing the risk of coalescence, with additional value due to its proximity to the AGLV. Finally, for the **Transport** SEA theme, Option B benefits from an existing network of public rights of way and footpaths, which supports sustainable travel and recreational use.
- 4.2.15. In relation to the **Land, Soil, and Water Resources** SEA theme, both options are assessed as performing similarly. Neither presents notable constraints or opportunities in terms of soil quality, contamination, or water resource management, but both contribute positively to maintaining soil functions and water-related features.

4.3. Developing the Preferred Approach

Choice of Local Gap Taken Forward for the Purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan

- 4.3.1. The preferred Local Gap for the purposes of ANP policy is **Option A**, primarily due to the significant beneficial effects the local gap will have on conserving the historic setting of Ash Manor and other designated historic assets.
- 4.3.2. Although Option B performs more strongly across a broader range of SEA themes, the specific heritage value associated with Option A is a key consideration in this decision. The contribution of this area to the setting of Ash Manor is recognised as a locally important factor. Additionally, Option B has recently been designated as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to account for the significant growth coming forward at the strategic allocation in Tongham (to the south of the neighbourhood area). As the site already benefits from protection, it is less-suited for a local gap proposal through the ANP.
- 4.3.3. The preferred approach has been informed by the various surveys and evidence base documents prepared to support the Neighbourhood Plan, responses from community consultation events, and the SEA findings.
- 4.3.4. Specifically, the Neighbourhood Plan states:

‘This designation is supported by decision notices and evidence from appeals to demonstrate that this buffer zone is in conformity with the intention of policy A31 and that the manorial complex at Ash Manor forms an important ensemble of historically and architecturally significant listed buildings. There is long-running consensus that the rural setting of these buildings is key to understanding and appreciating their significance. The area comprising part of the proposed Local Gap has been the subject of four unsuccessful planning applications since 2017, the latest being refused on heritage grounds at appeal in May 2022 [PINS Ref: APP/Y3615/W/21/3273305].

Further development within this area would harm the significance of the grade II listed manorial complex by eroding its rural setting and the historic and evidential significance derived from it.*

There is a clear change in the landscape character on the fringe between Ash Green to Ash from pastoral to urban. The former is defined by the GBC Landscape Character Assessment with field patterns and woodland, with

the latter being an urban townscape. The entrances to Ash Green are all bounded by fields on both sides of the approach to the village, emphasising the rural nature of its setting.

Ash Green is formed predominately by detached houses, mostly chalet style bungalows along White Lane and Ash Green Lane, with the occasional two storey dwelling. The Old Cross Tree Way estate has its own identity of chalet style house and bungalows, with pitched roofs, white cladding and open frontages. Ash Green Road forms the older part of the village with villa style houses dating from the 1890s/1900s, all of which have long narrow gardens at the rear with smaller frontages to the road.'

5. Appraisal of the Regulation 14 Version of the Neighbourhood Plan

5.1. Introduction

5.1.1. The aim of this chapter is to present appraisal findings and recommendations in relation to the Regulation 14 version of the ANP. This chapter presents:

- An appraisal of the current version (i.e., the Regulation 14 version) of the ANP under the seven SEA theme headings;
- Consideration of potential cumulative effects; and
- The overall conclusions at this current stage.

5.2. Ash Neighbourhood Plan Policies

5.2.1. To support the implementation of the vision statement for the ANP, the Regulation 14 version of the plan puts forward 13 policies to guide new development within the neighbourhood area. These are outlined in **Table 5-1**.

Table 5-1: Policies in the Ash Neighbourhood Plan

Policy Reference	Policy Name
ASH1	ASH1 Spatial Strategy
ASH2	ASH2 Design Principles in Ash
ASH3	ASH3 Design Principles in Ash Vale
ASH4	ASH4 Design Principles in Ash Green
ASH5	ASH5 Local Centres and Dispersed local shops.
ASH6	ASH6 Employment Locations
ASH7	ASH7 Replacement Dwellings
ASH8	ASH8 Housing Mix, Type and Tenure

Policy Reference	Policy Name
ASH9	ASH9 Existing and New Local Community Assets
ASH10	ASH10 Green and Blue Infrastructure
ASH11	ASH11 Local Green Spaces
ASH12	ASH12 Thames Basin Heath SPA
ASH13	ASH13 Active Travel

5.3. Approach to the Appraisal

- 5.3.1. For each theme, ‘significant’ effects of the Regulation 14 version of the ANP on the baseline are predicated and evaluated. Account is taken of the criteria presented within Schedule 2 of the Regulations. For example, account is taken of the probability, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the effects as far as possible. These effect ‘characteristics’ will be described within the assessment, as appropriate.
- 5.3.2. Every effort is made to identify / evaluate effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the high-level nature of the ANP. The ability to predict effects accurately is also limited by understanding of the baseline and the nature of future planning applications. Because of the uncertainties involved, there is a need to exercise caution when identifying and evaluating significant effects to ensure all assumptions are explained. 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.
- 5.3.3. Finally, it is important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. 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 ANP 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.

5.4. Appraisal

Biodiversity

- 5.4.1. Given the proximity of the neighbourhood area to internationally designated sites for biodiversity and geodiversity, a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) process has been completed for the Neighbourhood Plan. Providing any recommendations within the HRA are incorporated into the submission version of the ANP, it is anticipated that there would be no adverse effects to the integrity of these sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects.
- 5.4.2. Of the ANP policies, ASH10 and ASH11 are the most directly relevant to biodiversity. ASH10 identifies a Green and Blue Infrastructure Network, comprising areas of ecological and recreational value, including woodland, heathland, meadows, watercourses, hedgerows and green corridors. The policy supports habitat retention and creation, improved connectivity, and long-term management through development contributions. It also encourages biodiversity adaptation to climate change, particularly through tree retention, increased canopy cover and the use of native species. These provisions are likely to have beneficial effects in terms of both biodiversity protection and enhancement.
- 5.4.3. ASH11 complements ASH10 by designating Local Green Spaces that are protected from development other than in very limited circumstances. While the policy focus is broader than ecology, these spaces may function as stepping stones for species movement, refuges for urban wildlife, or sites of local habitat interest.
- 5.4.4. Policy ASH12 addresses the potential impacts of residential development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). It ensures compliance with wider strategic mitigation requirements, including the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) or financial contributions. This approach is appropriate and avoids potential significant effects on designated sites.
- 5.4.5. Several other policies in the ANP provide indirect support for biodiversity through design and layout principles. For example, ASH4 encourages the retention of green buffers and the integration of new planting to support transitions between developed and rural areas. It also highlights the value of ecological connectivity in new development around Ash Green. Similarly, ASH7 includes expectations for biodiversity mitigation and enhancement in replacement dwellings, with explicit reference to net gain and the retention or creation of habitat features.

- 5.4.6. Policy ASH1 directs most development to the built-up areas of Ash and Ash Vale and restricts residential development within the 400 m buffer of the SPA. It also limits development in the countryside to uses that enhance the natural environment. This spatial strategy is likely to have a positive effect on biodiversity by reducing fragmentation and limiting encroachment into sensitive or undeveloped areas.

Climate Change (Including Flood Risk)

- 5.4.7. Policy ASH7 is anticipated to limit the carbon impact of replacement dwellings by requiring them to be 'zero-carbon ready' and to meet Passivhaus or equivalent standards. This approach includes a focus on lifecycle carbon analysis and post-occupancy evaluations, ensuring that buildings perform as designed in real conditions. Such policies are likely to deliver long-term carbon savings.
- 5.4.8. ASH10 also addresses climate adaptation by safeguarding and enhancing the green and blue infrastructure network. This policy promotes retention of existing trees and woodland and supports the planting of new trees to meet canopy cover targets, which are important for mitigating urban heat island effects and managing flood risk. The emphasis on biodiversity and habitat connectivity further contributes to ecosystem resilience, which is important in adapting to changing climatic conditions.
- 5.4.9. The spatial strategy in ASH1, which prioritises development within built-up areas and promotes brownfield reuse, aligns well with climate change objectives by reducing pressure on greenfield land and limiting urban sprawl. Concentrating growth in 'walkable neighbourhoods' reduces car dependency and associated emissions, indirectly contributing to mitigation.
- 5.4.10. Policy ASH13 supports active travel by promoting a walking and cycling network that connects residential areas with the Town Centre. It encourages developments to enhance this network and requires travel plans to contribute financially to footpath and cycleway improvements. The policy resists proposals that cause unmitigated loss or obstruction of these routes. By prioritising active travel, ASH13 helps reduce transport emissions and supports the ANP's climate objectives.

Community Wellbeing

- 5.4.11. Much of the undeveloped land surrounding Ash is constrained by international and national biodiversity designations, as well as the Metropolitan Green Belt. Furthermore, a significant greenfield strategic allocation to the south of the neighbourhood area is already under construction and is expected to be retained in the Guildford Local Plan

review. These constraints limit the scope for further greenfield development and reinforce the need to protect the remaining open countryside.

- 5.4.12. In the context of the above, the ANP adopts a 'brownfield first' strategy, prioritising the redevelopment of previously developed land within the neighbourhood area. This approach reflects both a sustainable planning ethos and the practical constraints of site availability. While brownfield opportunities are limited, the ANP seeks to maximise their potential through policies that support demolition and redevelopment, ensuring that any new development is well-integrated into the existing built environment. To guide this process, a Design and Development Code (DDC) is being prepared, which will help shape the form, scale, and character of future proposals.
- 5.4.13. Policy ASH5 identifies local centres and dispersed shops, recognising their importance in creating accessible, walkable communities that meet day-to-day needs. By supporting Class E uses and encouraging mixed-use schemes with residential above ground-floor units, the policy promotes local hubs, which enhance social interaction and reduce the need for travel. The focus on accessibility by walking, cycling, or public transport aligns well with creating connected, inclusive neighbourhoods. The policy also resists the loss of local shops unless clear evidence is provided, ensuring community facilities remain resilient.
- 5.4.14. Similarly, community facilities are protected and supported under ASH9, which resists the loss of existing assets unless viability is proven and encourages new or expanded facilities, including education and early years settings.
- 5.4.15. The housing mix, type, and tenure requirements in ASH8 encourage housing to be suitable for first-time buyers, renters, and downsizers, aiming to meet local needs. The 40% affordable housing requirement and emphasis on accessible and adaptable dwellings ensure the delivery of in-need housing, thereby reducing housing inequalities.
- 5.4.16. The spatial approach of ASH1 supports community wellbeing by directing development within existing built-up areas and promoting 'walkable neighbourhoods', fostering social cohesion and supporting local shops, services, and facilities. The policy's cautious approach to greenfield development and the protection of the settlement gap between Ash and Ash Green will also help maintain a sense of place and community identity.
- 5.4.17. Policy ASH13 contributes to wellbeing by improving active travel infrastructure, enhancing opportunities for healthy lifestyles and safer, more

sustainable journeys. This reduces social isolation and encourages community connectivity.

Historic Environment

- 5.4.18. Policy ASH2 sets out high-quality design principles for the Ash area, requiring all development proposals to positively contribute to local distinctiveness and character. By requiring full regard to the Ash Design Guidance and Codes, ASH2 ensures that new development respects the historic context and architectural character, thereby supporting the conservation of heritage assets within Ash. Complementing this, ASH3 addresses Ash Vale specifically, requiring that development within or near the Conservation Area preserves or enhances its special historic interest. Like ASH2, it requires compliance with the design guidance, ensuring that the unique historic character of Ash Vale is maintained and enhanced through sensitive, context-driven development.
- 5.4.19. Policy ASH4 extends these principles to Ash Green, emphasising the protection of the setting of key heritage assets such as Ash Manor. This includes safeguarding important views and approaches, for example from White Lane, and preventing development that would harm the rural character or lead to coalescence between Ash and Ash Green. Alongside the proposed 'local gap' on land to the north of the disused railway (as discussed within Chapter 4 of this Environmental Report), the policy's provisions for green buffers and transition zones help protect the historic landscape setting.

Landscape

- 5.4.20. Policy ASH1 establishes the spatial strategy directing significant development primarily to the built-up areas of Ash and Ash Vale, with Ash Green limited to small-scale infill. This approach helps prevent urban sprawl into the surrounding countryside and Green Belt, preserving the rural landscape and preventing coalescence between settlements.
- 5.4.21. Design principles set out in ASH2, ASH3, and ASH4 further protect landscape quality by ensuring all development respects local distinctiveness and character. In particular, ASH4 focuses on Ash Green's rural edge, requiring green buffers to soften development edges and maintain separation between Ash and Ash Green. This buffer zone helps protect the landscape's visual integrity and prevents the erosion of the settlement gap.
- 5.4.22. The Green and Blue Infrastructure policy (ASH10) plays an important role in landscape protection and enhancement, through the safeguarding and

enhancement of habitats, woodlands, hedgerows, water bodies, and recreational green spaces. The requirement for a minimum future canopy cover on larger development sites will benefit biodiversity, visual amenity, and climate resilience. Similar effects are anticipated from Policy ASH11, which protects important local green spaces from development except in very special circumstances.

Land, Soil, and Water Resources

- 5.4.23. The spatial focus of ASH1 on directing development primarily to built-up areas and prioritising brownfield land reuse helps limit the consumption of greenfield sites and agricultural land. This will lead to beneficial effects for protecting land and soil resources.
- 5.4.24. Design principles within ASH2, ASH3 and ASH4 contribute indirectly to land and water resource protection by promoting sensitive and contextually appropriate development. For example, ASH4's emphasis on green buffers and protection of the rural landscape in Ash Green helps preserve permeable land surfaces and natural drainage patterns, reducing the risk of soil erosion and runoff.
- 5.4.25. The Green and Blue Infrastructure policy (ASH10) is important for water resource protection. By safeguarding water bodies, hedgerows, and woodland habitats, the policy helps maintain natural regulatory ecosystem services such as water filtration and soil stability.

Transportation

- 5.4.26. Policy ASH13 identifies a walking and cycling network, which is designed to connect residential areas with the Town Centre and local services. The policy's support for proposals that enhance this network is beneficial for promoting active travel, contributing positively to health outcomes, reduced carbon emissions, and decreased traffic volumes. The requirement that travel plans prioritise financial contributions towards footpath and cycleway improvements demonstrates a proactive approach to embedding sustainable transport infrastructure within development schemes.
- 5.4.27. Policy ASH1 supports the spatial strategy of concentrating development within built-up areas, reinforcing 'walkable neighbourhood' principles. By locating homes, shops, and services close together, this reduces the need to travel by car and encourages walking and cycling for daily needs.
- 5.4.28. Design policies ASH2, ASH3 and ASH4 contribute indirectly by promoting high-quality, locally distinctive development that enhances pedestrian environments and provides safe, accessible routes for active travel. In

particular, ASH4's emphasis on ensuring safe and accessible links to the active travel network from Ash Green supports inclusive and convenient movement for residents.

- 5.4.29. The protection of local centres and dispersed shops under ASH5 further supports sustainable transport by maintaining accessible amenities within walking distance of residents, reducing the volume of car journeys in the neighbourhood area.

Cumulative Effects

- 5.4.30. The ANP shows strong consistency between its policies, which work together to support compact, walkable neighbourhoods supported by high-quality green and blue infrastructure. The ANP's policies are anticipated to reduce car use, encourage active travel, and contribute to climate change mitigation. The ANP also promotes inclusive growth by protecting local services, addressing housing need, and supporting community facilities, contributing to long-term social wellbeing.
- 5.4.31. Regarding in-combination effects with other plans, the ANP has been prepared in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Guildford Borough Local Plan Strategy and Sites (2015–2034, adopted 2019) and the Local Plan: Development Management Policies (2023). It aligns with Local Plan priorities for housing, employment land, sustainable transport, and green infrastructure. Together, the plans are expected to deliver beneficial effects in areas such as climate resilience, biodiversity, and access to services. However, growth in Ash and neighbouring parishes may lead to cumulative impacts on transport networks, landscape character, and public services. Ongoing coordination between parish councils and Guildford Borough Council will be important to manage these impacts and support long-term environmental and community outcomes.

5.5. Conclusions

- 5.5.1. The ANP is anticipated to result in **beneficial effects across all SEA themes**, with significant beneficial effects anticipated for **Biodiversity, Community Wellbeing, Historic Environment, Landscape, and Transportation**. These benefits are supported by a combination of spatial planning, design-led policies, protection of local assets, and promotion of sustainable travel and infrastructure. No significant adverse effects are anticipated from policies in the ANP.
- 5.5.2. While the ANP policies are expected to lead to beneficial effects, the SEA identifies opportunities to further strengthen their effectiveness. The

following recommendations are offered for consideration by plan makers to inform policy development:

- Supporting the provision of healthcare and social care facilities, to address the needs of an ageing population;
- Encouraging natural drainage solutions in all new developments would ensure effective management of surface water runoff, mitigating flood risk in the neighbourhood area;
- Encouraging the adoption of water efficiency measures, including rainwater harvesting and greywater reuse, are recommended to promote sustainable water resource management; and
- Encouraging the use of low-emission and electric vehicles, alongside the provision of appropriate charging infrastructure in new developments, would support the transition to cleaner transportation and contribute to local and national emissions reduction targets.

6. Next Steps

6.1. Plan Finalisation

- 6.1.1. Following Regulation 14 consultation, responses will be considered in finalising the ANP and SEA for submission. Following submission, the ANP and supporting evidence will be published for further consultation, and then subjected to Independent Examination. At Independent Examination, the ANP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Local Plan.
- 6.1.2. If the examination leads to a favourable outcome, the ANP will then be subject to a referendum, organised by Guildford Borough Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the ANP, then it will be 'made'. Once 'made', the ANP will become part of the Development Plan for Guildford, covering the defined neighbourhood area.

6.2. Monitoring

- 6.2.1. 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 Neighbourhood Plan to identify any unforeseen effects early and take remedial action as appropriate.
- 6.2.2. It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the ANP will be undertaken by Guildford 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 ANP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Guildford Borough Council.

