

**Babergh & Mid Suffolk District
Councils**

Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan Review SEA Screening Opinion

Final report

Prepared by LUC
July 2026

Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

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10994

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Contents

Chapter 1	
Introduction	1

Chapter 2	
SEA Screening	3

Scope of the Neighbourhood Plan Review	3
Baseline Information	4
SEA Screening Conclusion	10
Next Steps	10

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The existing Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan was adopted ('made') by Babergh District Council in 2019. Elmsett Parish Council is now in the process of reviewing the 2019 Neighbourhood Plan to bring it in line with the new policies for the location of development across Babergh, as set out in the adopted Part 1 Joint Local Plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk. Elmsett is located within Babergh District, approximately four miles north east of Hadleigh and eight miles west of Ipswich. LUC has been appointed by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils to consider whether there is a need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan Review.

1.2 SEA may be required for a Neighbourhood Plan, if it is likely to have significant environmental effects. Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is similar to SEA. However, SA includes assessment of the likely significant effects of a plan or programme on economic and social factors, as well as environmental factors. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)¹ clarifies that there is no legal requirement for a Neighbourhood Plan to be subject to SA, but that SA can be used to demonstrate how the plan will contribute to sustainable development.

1.3 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils commissioned LUC in May 2024 to carry out SEA Screening of the Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan Review March 2024 (hereafter referred to as the Neighbourhood Plan Review) in order to determine whether an assessment is required under European Directive 2001/42/EC (the SEA Directive), transposed into UK law through the SEA Regulations².

1.4 SEA Screening for the current Neighbourhood Plan was carried out by Place Services on behalf of Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and determined that a full SEA would not be required. The scope of the Neighbourhood Plan Review is limited, and therefore the May 2024 SEA Screening focussed only on those elements of the Neighbourhood Plan that were proposed to be amended.

¹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2016, updated 2021). Planning Practice Guidance. (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>)

² The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SI 2004/1633), as amended by The Environmental

Assessments and Miscellaneous Planning (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/1232). It should be noted that the purpose of the amendments to the SEA Regulations is to ensure that the law functions correctly after the UK has left the European Union. No substantive changes are made to the way the SEA regime operates.

1.5 Since then, correspondence with the Examiner for the Neighbourhood Plan Review has clarified that in the event of a Neighbourhood Plan being subject to review which involves amending only some policies, the whole NDP as proposed to be reviewed should be subject to SEA Screening. Therefore, the May 2024 SEA Screening Report has now been updated to take into account the whole plan, including those elements that are not subject to change.

1.6 In October 2023 the Levelling up and Regeneration Act received royal assent, setting out detailed reforms to the planning system. Amongst other things, the Act allows for the replacement of the current SEA regime with a new requirement for an Environmental Outcomes Report. The specific requirements will be set out in forthcoming regulations, along with information about transition arrangements; however at present the requirement for SEA remains as set out in existing legislation.

Chapter 2

SEA Screening

Scope of the Neighbourhood Plan Review

2.1 Elmsett Parish Council has prepared a Neighbourhood Plan Review (March 2024), which was subject to pre-submission consultation until 13th May 2024.

2.2 The existing Neighbourhood Plan 2019 includes a vision for the long-term future of Elmsett along with 10 objectives relating to the following topics:

- Housing
- Historic and Natural Environment
- Infrastructure and Facilities

2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan 2019 then set out 16 planning policies (EMST1 - 16) which outline the spatial strategy as well as the approach to local green space, heritage assets, areas of local landscape sensitivity, communities' facilities and services and design considerations.

2.4 The majority of the 2019 Neighbourhood Plan policies are to be retained in the same form. Policy EMST1 - Spatial Strategy is the only policy that will be retained and updated as part of the Neighbourhood Plan Review. The revised Policy EMST1 states that the Neighbourhood Area will accommodate development commensurate with the policies of the adopted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan - Part 1. The focus for new development will be within the defined Settlement Boundaries where the principle of development is accepted. The policy specifies that proposals for development outside of that area will only be permitted where they are in accordance with national, district and neighbourhood level policies and where they would not have a detrimental impact.

2.5 The Neighbourhood Plan 2019 allocated one site for development in Policy EMST3 - Land at Hadleigh Road. The site was allocated for approximately 41 dwellings and has since been granted planning permission and built out. This policy has therefore been deleted from the Review Plan and the subsequent policies are renumbered accordingly. The Neighbourhood Plan Review does not therefore include any site allocations.

2.6 This updated SEA Screening Report considers the entirety of the Neighbourhood Plan as proposed to be reviewed, i.e. all policies that remain in the plan, regardless of whether they are subject to change since they were originally

made. The updated Screening Report also reflects the removal of policy EMST3.

Baseline Information

2.7 This section summarises baseline information for the parish of Elmsett, drawing from the information set out in the 2019 Neighbourhood Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan Review March 2024.

Context

2.8 Elmsett is a village within Babergh District, in the county of Suffolk. The village is approximately four miles north east of Hadleigh and eight miles west of Ipswich, with the main built-up area primarily focused along The Street and Hadleigh Road.

Biodiversity, flora and Fauna

2.9 There are no internationally designated conservation sites within Elmsett Parish although the parish is around 11km from the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar site and Special Protection Area (SPA) to the southeast. In addition, Elmsett Park Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) falls within the southern portion of the parish. The parish also contains pockets of Ancient Woodland, three County Wildlife Sites and a number of Tree Preservation Orders. There are also five priority habitats present: deciduous woodland, traditional orchards, lowland meadows, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and good quality semi-improved grassland.

2.10 The Neighbourhood Plan area is located within the 13km "Zone of Influence" of the Stour and Orwell Estuary SPA and Ramsar site to the southeast. Unless mitigated against, Natural England considers that additional residential development within the Zone of Influence could have a detrimental impact on the designations due to an increase in recreational trips.

Population

2.11 At the time of the 2021 Census, Elmsett had a population of 812. The 2021 Census indicates that 53.4% of those aged 16 years and over were in work compared to 46.5% being economically inactive. The largest age group within the parish was between 16 to 64.

Human Health

2.12 Based on the 2021 census, 86.1% of the Elmsett population was in either 'very good health' or 'good health' which is higher than the average for Babergh District as a whole which is 82.2%.

2.13 There are no GPs within Elmsett and the closest hospital is in Ipswich.

Soil

2.14 The entirety of the parish is Grade 3 Agricultural Land, although it is not clear if it is Grade 3a (classed as high quality) or the lower quality Grade 3b. The soilscape is made up of lime-rich loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage and freely draining slightly acid loamy soils.

Water

2.15 A small portion of the parish lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3, with those areas associated with the tributaries to the River Gipping, located in the south east. Flood Zone 3 comprises land assessed as having a 1 in 100 or greater annual probability of river flooding (>1%), or a 1 in 200 or greater annual probability of flooding from the sea (>0.5%) in any year.

Air Quality and Climatic Factors

2.16 There are no Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) within or near to Elmsett Parish. The closest AQMA is nine miles from the parish to the west within Ipswich.

2.17 Climate data are not available at parish level, but within Babergh District as a whole, reductions in overall carbon emissions of 28% were achieved between 2005 and 2019. This reduction was mostly due to progress in reducing emissions from domestic sources, closely followed by industrial and commercial sectors, with minimal progress on transport emissions. Transport makes the largest contribution to carbon emissions in Babergh District.

Material Assets

2.18 The 2019 Neighbourhood Plan designates seven spaces as Local Green Space and this remains unchanged in the Neighbourhood Plan Review.

2.19 Public transport is poor in the village and there is no daily bus service to Hadleigh or Ipswich. However, the Hadleigh Community Transport Group runs a weekly bus service to Ipswich. The nearest railway station is located in Ipswich eight miles to the east.

2.20 The parish contains multiple Public Rights of Way that provide access to the surrounding countryside.

2.21 Elmsett has a range of services and facilities including the Village Hall, The Rose and Crown pub, Post Office and shop, Methodist Church Hall and primary school.

Cultural Heritage

2.22 The parish has 18 Listed Buildings, the most notable of which is the Grade I listed Church of St. Peter. Although the parish does not fall within a Conservation Area, the moated site at the Old Rectory is a Scheduled Monument.

2.23 The 2019 Neighbourhood Plan designated the area around The Green on Whatfield Road a Special Character Area as it is an area of significant local importance. This remains unchanged in the Neighbourhood Plan Review.

Landscape

2.24 The nearest National Landscape is Dedham Vale National Landscape which is approximately 6km to the south.

2.25 Land to the east and southeast of the built-up area of the village was designated as a Special Landscape Area. It covered an area with tributaries to the River Gipping. The 2019 Neighbourhood Plan made a new designation for the area, the Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity. The Plan also identifies 19 Important Views within the parish. This remains unchanged in the Neighbourhood Plan Review.

2.26 The parish sits within the South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland National Character Area. It is an ancient landscape of wooded arable countryside with a distinct sense of enclosure. The overall character is of a gently undulating, chalky boulder clay plateau, the undulations being caused by the numerous small-scale river valleys that dissect the plateau. The Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment states that Elmsett falls within Ancient Plateau Claylands.

SEA Screening

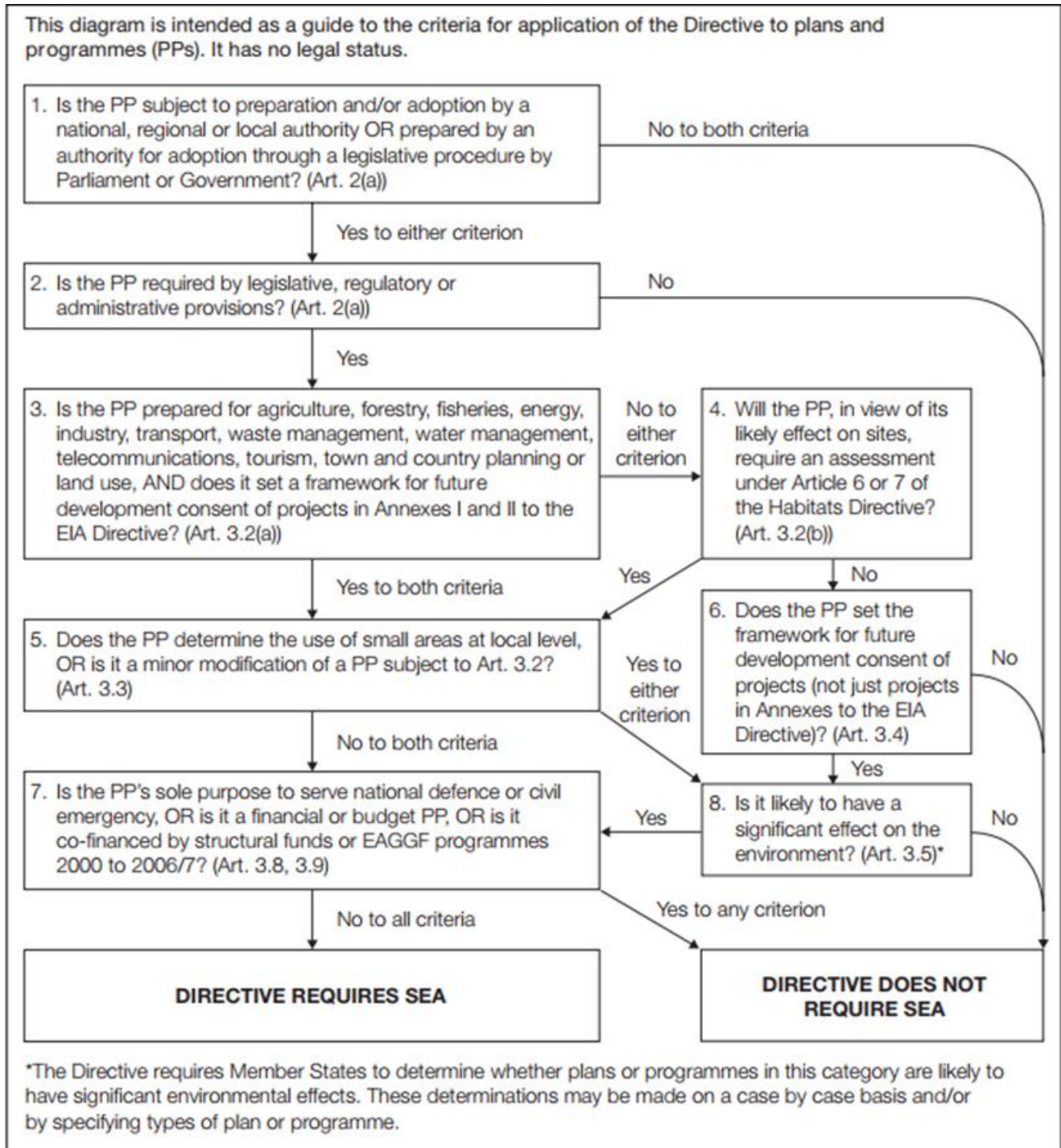
2.27 An assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan Review (March 2024) requires SEA in accordance with the SEA Regulations.

2.28 **Figure 2.1** overleaf presents the flow diagram entitled 'Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes' which is taken from the Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive³, published in September 2005. This is a useful guide when considering whether a plan should be subject to SEA (The Practical Guide has been superseded by the Planning Practice Guidance; however it still provides a useful and relevant guide to the process to use in making SEA screening decisions).

³ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005). A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. (see

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practicalguidesea.pdf)

Figure 2.1 Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes



2.29 Table 2.1 below presents the assessment of whether the Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan Review will require a full SEA. The questions in the first column are drawn from the diagram above which sets out how the SEA Directive should be applied.

Table 2.1 Application of SEA Directive to the Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan Review

Stage	Yes/No	Reason
1. Is the PP (plan or programme) subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Article 2(a))	Yes	The Neighbourhood Plan Review is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and will be adopted ('made') by the Local Authority (Babergh District Council) as part of the statutory development plan. Move to Q2
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Article 2(a))	No	The Neighbourhood Plan Review is being prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. However, there is no requirement to produce a Neighbourhood Plan; it is an optional plan. Once made it will become part of the statutory development plan. Therefore, it should continue to be screened. Move to Q3.
3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Article 3.2(a))	Yes and No	The Neighbourhood Plan Review is being prepared for town and country planning and land use, but it does not set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive. Move to Q4
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Article 3.2 (b))	No	Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening of the Neighbourhood Plan Review has been undertaken separately on behalf of Babergh District Council and has concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan Review is not likely to have a significant effect on any European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Move to Q6
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)	Yes	The Neighbourhood Plan Review does not allocate any sites for housing or other development. The Neighbourhood Plan Review does include a revised policy against which proposals for development within the Parish will be assessed. Move to Q8
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	No	See Table 2.2. SEA IS NOT REQUIRED

2.30 Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations sets out the criteria for determining the likely significance of effects. These are listed in **Table 2.2** below along with comments on the extent to which the Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan Review meets these criteria.

Table 2.2 Likely Significant Effects of the Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan Review

SEA Requirement	Comments
The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:	
1. the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	Once made, the Neighbourhood Plan Review will become part of the statutory development plan and will guide the delivery of development in Elmsett, including in terms of design. The Neighbourhood Plan Review does not allocate any sites for residential or other forms of development. The previously adopted Babergh Core Strategy (2014) identified Elmsett as a 'Hinterland Village' under Policy CS2: Settlement Pattern. This policy also sought to direct development to towns/urban areas (which includes the Ipswich Fringe) and then to the Core Villages and Hinterland Villages. Policy CS3 made provision for 1,050 homes to be delivered at Core and Hinterland Villages over the Plan period to 2031. The adopted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 (Nov 2023) does not set out a settlement hierarchy. Following the examination of the Joint Local Plan it was decided that an up-to-date settlement hierarchy would come forward in Part 2 of the Plan. However, in March 2025 a revised Local Development Scheme introduced the Councils' decision to not continue with a Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 2 Development Plan Document, but to produce a full Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Review. This is at an early stage in its development and is unlikely to be adopted for some time.
2. the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	The Neighbourhood Plan Review was prepared to be in general conformity with the local strategic framework (i.e. the adopted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 and saved policies from the previous local plans). This requirement was replaced in March 2025 by a new basic condition which requires that Neighbourhood Plans must not result in less housing development taking place in its area than if it was not made. The Neighbourhood Plan Review must also have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework. The Neighbourhood Plan Review does not have influence over other plans. Once made, the Neighbourhood Plan Review will form part of the statutory development plan for Elmsett Parish and will be used in conjunction with the adopted Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 and the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Review (once adopted) to determine planning applications.
3. the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,	One of the Basic Conditions which the Neighbourhood Plan Review must meet is to contribute to sustainable development.
4. environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,	Baseline information relating to Elmsett Parish was described earlier in this report. Key issues of relevance to the Neighbourhood Plan Review are the presence of land within flood zones 2 and 3, one SSSI (Elmsett Park Woods), three County Wildlife Sites, multiple Priority Habitats and Ancient Woodland and a number of listed buildings.

SEA Requirement	Comments
5. the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).	N/A
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:	
6. the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,	The Neighbourhood Plan Review does not allocate any sites for housing or other forms of development. The Neighbourhood Plan Review will cover the period up to 2036 and its effects are expected to be mostly indirect. Most impacts will be long-term and permanent.
7. the cumulative nature of the effects,	Cumulative effects could result from the Neighbourhood Plan Review in combination with development that takes place in the surrounding towns and villages - albeit the Neighbourhood Plan Review does not allocate any sites for development and the parish of Elmsett is rural and around four miles from the nearest settlement (Hadleigh) to the south west. The previously adopted Babergh Core Strategy (2014) identified Elmsett as a 'Hinterland Village' in the settlement hierarchy, with the expectation that it would accommodate some development to help meet local need. The adopted Part 1 Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan does not identify a minimum housing requirement for Elmsett.
8. the transboundary nature of the effects,	The Neighbourhood Plan Review focuses on Elmsett Parish only. Transboundary effects under the SEA Regulations refers to transboundary effects on other EU Member States; therefore they are not relevant to this Neighbourhood Plan Review.
9. the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),	There are no anticipated risks to human health or the environment from the Neighbourhood Plan Review.
10. the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),	The Neighbourhood Plan Review covers the entirety of Elmsett Parish. The population of the parish, according to the 2021 Census, was 812 people.
11. the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: ■ special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, ■ exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, ■ intensive land-use,	Elmsett Parish is home to Priority Habitats, and there are 18 listed buildings within the parish. There are several sensitive locations within the parish including the Elmsett Park Woods SSSI, as well as patches of ancient woodland. The parish contains Grade 3 agricultural land. There are no internationally designated nature conservation sites within the parish, but the parish is within 13km of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar and SPA.
12. the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	The Neighbourhood Plan 2019 designated part of the parish as an Area of Local Landscape Sensitivity. The nearest National Landscape is Dedham Vale National Landscape which is approximately 6km to the south.

SEA Screening Conclusion

2.31 A screening assessment has been undertaken by applying the criteria from the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations to determine whether or not the Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan as proposed to be reviewed is likely to have significant environmental effects when assessed against the topics listed in the SEA Regulations.

2.32 The Neighbourhood Plan Review amends one policy in the 2019 Neighbourhood Plan, to bring it in line with the new policies for the location of development across Babergh, as set out in the adopted Part 1 Joint Local Plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk. It does not allocate any sites for development, with the previous allocation policy EMST3 being deleted from the Plan due to the site that it allocated having now been built out.

2.33 On this basis, it is considered that the Elmsett Neighbourhood Plan Review is unlikely to have significant environmental effects and full SEA is therefore not required.

Next Steps

2.34 This updated SEA screening opinion will be sent to the three statutory consultees (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) and will be reviewed as appropriate in light of any comments received.

LUC

July 2026