

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Rennington Neighbourhood Plan

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



Quality information

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Revision History

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V4	August 2025	Final Report	Ishaq Khan	Senior Planner

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Non-Technical Summary

Introduction

The Rennington Neighbourhood Plan (hereafter referred to as “the RNP”) is being prepared under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the local development framework of Northumberland County Council. Once ‘made’ the RNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, as part of the Northumberland local development framework.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been undertaken to inform the RNP. This process is required by the SEA Regulations.¹

Neighbourhood Plan groups use SEA to assess Neighbourhood Plans against a set of sustainability objectives developed in consultation with interested parties. The purpose of the assessment is to help avoid adverse environmental and socio-economic effects through the Neighbourhood Plan and identify opportunities to improve the environmental quality of the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan and the quality of life of residents.

Purpose of this Environmental Report

This Environmental Report, which accompanies the Regulation 14 version of the RNP is the latest document to be produced as part of the SEA process. The first document was the SEA Scoping Report (February 2025), which included information about the neighbourhood area’s environment and community.

The purpose of this Environmental Report is to:

- Identify, describe, and evaluate the likely significant effects of the RNP and alternatives; and
- Provide an opportunity for consultees to offer views on any aspect of the SEA process which has been carried out to date.

This Environmental Report contains:

- An outline of the contents and main objectives of the RNP and its relationship with other relevant policies, plans and programmes.
- Relevant aspects of the current and future state of the environment and key sustainability issues for the area.
- The SEA Framework of objectives against which the RNP has been assessed.
- The appraisal of alternative approaches for the RNP.
- The likely significant effects of the RNP.
- The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects as a result of the RNP.
- The next steps for the RNP and accompanying SEA process.

¹ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

The scope of the SEA

The scope of the SEA is reflected in a list of themes, objectives, and assessment questions, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SEA and provide a methodological ‘framework’ for assessment. A summary SEA Framework is presented here, and a full SEA Framework which includes assessment questions is provided within the SEA Scoping Report and **Table 3-2** of the Environmental Report.

SEA theme	SEA objective
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.
Historic environment	Protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.
Land, soil and water resources	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance water quality, using water resources in a sustainable manner.
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.

Consideration of reasonable alternatives for the Rennington Neighbourhood Plan

Establishing reasonable alternatives

The Environmental Report identifies and includes an assessment of the reasonable alternative approaches to addressing key issues that are intrinsic to the RNP.

Alternative approaches have been considered in relation to the housing growth strategy and the housing site allocations.

Taking the housing growth strategy (set out in Chapter 4 of the Environmental Report) into consideration, the following two reasonable alternative growth scenarios for the RNP have been identified:

- **Growth Scenario A:** Site capacity identified to be suitable in the site assessment.
- **Growth Scenario B:** Site capacity uplifted to 10 homes to support increased affordable housing delivery.

Based on the site options review in Chapter 4 of the Environmental Report, the following four site options represent the alternative options for the RNP:

- **Option 1:** Land behind Village Hall in Rennington
- **Option 2:** Land southeast of North Farm Steading

- **Option 3:** Land west of Rock Cricket Pitch
- **Option 4:** Land west of Long Row

Land west of Long Row has a gross site area of 0.6 acres. The site is not considered to be adequately large to accommodate 10 homes, and thus does not constitute a reasonable alternative under Growth Scenario B. Therefore, the site has not been assessed under Growth Scenario B.

The table below sets out site options and their capacity under each growth scenario.

Site options and their capacity under each growth scenario

Site option	Site capacity under Growth Scenario A	Site capacity under Growth Scenario B
Option 1: Land behind Village Hall in Rennington	5 homes	10 homes
Option 2: Land southeast of North Farm Steading	5-8 homes	10 homes
Option 3: Land west of Rock Cricket Pitch	6-8 homes	10 homes
Option 4: Land west of Long Row	6-8 homes	N/A

Assessing reasonable alternatives

The full assessment of the options for housing are presented in Chapter 4 of the Environmental Report. The summary findings are presented below.

Summary of assessment findings by SEA theme

		Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Biodiversity and Geodiversity					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	No	No	No	No
	Rank	1	2	2	1
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	No	No	No	-
	Rank	2	1	1	-
Community wellbeing					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	Yes - positive
	Rank	2	1	3	4
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	Yes - positive and uncertain negative	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	-
	Rank	2	1	1	-

		Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Historic environment					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	Yes - minor negative	No	No	No
	Rank	3	1	2	2
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	Yes - moderate negative	No	No	-
	Rank	3	1	2	-
Land, soil, and water resources					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	No	No	No	No
	Rank	3	1	2	1
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	Uncertain Negative	No	No	-
	Rank	2	1	1	-
Landscape					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	Yes - minor negative	No	Yes - minor negative	No
	Rank	2	1	3	1
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	Yes - moderate negative	No	Yes - moderate negative	-
	Rank	2	1	2	-

Overall, all options are likely to have positive effects in relation to community wellbeing and positive effects are predicted to be greater under Growth Scenario B, with the higher scale of growth supporting additional housing and affordable housing.

Option 1 (Land behind Village Hall) notably scores less favourable compared to other options, as there is potential for development to cause harm to the character of the setting of the adjacent listed building and for the higher scale of development under Growth Scenario B to require a high density of development which undermines the delivery of sustainable urban drainage and comprehensive flood risk mitigation and adversely impacts on landscape and townscape character.

Option 2 (Land southeast of North Farm Steading) scores most favourable of all site options followed by Option 4 (Land west of Long Row). Option 2 performs more favourable than Option 4 as the site benefits from a more sustainable location, with better access to community facilities and services including a bus service. Option 3 (Land west of Rock Cricket Pitch) also broadly performs well against the SEA objectives, but negative effects are predicted for Landscape, as development under both growth scenarios would appear as a linear extension of the built area into open countryside and thus cause harm to landscape character.

Developing the preferred approach

The RNP Steering Group's reasons for developing the preferred approach considering the assessment are identified below:

'Northumberland County Council's Local Plan doesn't specify a housing requirement for Rennington Parish, but since 2016, 50 new homes have either been completed or approved.

Rennington's proximity to the Northumberland Coast National Landscape Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) makes it an appealing location for retirees and second homes/holiday lets. The 2021 census revealed that over 39% of Rennington's 362 residents are retired, and 66% are over 50. The Housing Needs Assessment also shows that more than 23% of the housing stock is second homes or holiday lets.

The high demand for housing in the parish has driven up property prices. 1-bedroom cottages sell for over £200,000, 3-bedroom properties for over £450,000, and 4-bedroom properties exceed £600,000. Since the early 2000s, most new housing developments have been 'executive' style homes.

The Neighbourhood Plan aims to achieve a more balanced age demographic within the parish. The Housing Needs Assessment suggests that building smaller properties that are more affordable would attract younger families to the area.

The steering group conducted a Call for Sites, which resulted in four new sites for appraisal. These sites, along with those previously considered but rejected by Northumberland County Council in the Local Plan, were evaluated by our planning consultant against predefined criteria. Three sites were deemed suitable: land southeast of North Farm Rennington, land west of Rock Cricket Pitch, and land west of Long Row Stamford.

These sites were discussed at two public meetings and presented to residents through a survey distributed to each household in the Parish. The survey results showed 76% support for the proposed development in Stamford, 52% support for the development in Rock, and only 30% support for the development in Rennington.

To ensure the Neighbourhood Plan receives community backing, the steering group, supported by the Parish Council, decided to include only the two sites that carried community support'.

Appraisal of the Regulation 14 version of the Neighbourhood Plan

The Regulation 14 version of the RNP includes 12 planning policies for guiding development in the neighbourhood area. These were developed following extensive community consultation and evidence gathering.

The RNP has been appraised against each of the environmental objectives in the SEA Framework. In undertaking the appraisal, each of the policies of the RNP has been considered individually and collectively and the effects of the Plan are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations.²

² Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Overall, neutral or positive effects are predicted across each SEA topic, with the exception being the 'Landscape' objective, where a minor negative effect is predicted relating to the harm to landscape character from the proposed allocation at Land west of Cricket Field in Rock. However, the effects are not considered to be significant due to the limited scale of harm and the proposed mitigation in the RNP and protection afforded through local and national planning policy.

A summary of the appraisal findings is set out below and the detailed findings of the appraisal is presented in Chapter 5 of the Environmental Report.

Summary of overall effects for each SEA Topic

SEA Topic	Overall Effects
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Neutral effects
Community wellbeing	Minor positive effect
Historic environment	Moderate positive effect
Land, soil, and water resources	Neutral effects
Landscape	Minor negative effect

Recommendations

The following recommendations were identified through the SEA process to enhance the positive effects of the draft RNP and mitigate any negatives:

- Policy RR3 sets out a housing mix that deviates from the identified need in the HNA for primarily two-bedroom units in the neighbourhood area. The policy could be improved by requiring a housing mix that aligns with the type and size needs identified in the HNA and by encouraging a higher proportion of affordable housing. However, this should be subject to viability.
- Policy RR3 requires development to deliver a 10% biodiversity net gain, which accords with statutory requirements. The policy could be improved by requiring a higher amount of net gain for development (if viable) or by requiring onsite net gain where feasible.
- Policy RR8 identifies non-designated heritage assets. The policy could be improved by requiring development to protect these assets or require substantial public benefit to offset any harm or loss of the heritage asset.
- Policy R11 identifies wildlife corridors but does not set out any measures to protect and enhance them which undermines their effectiveness. The policy can be improved by setting out a requirement for development to protect and enhance the wildlife corridors.

Next steps

The SEA Environmental Report accompanies the RNP for Regulation 14 consultation.

Following the close of Regulation 14 consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Steering Group, and the RNP and Environmental Report will be updated as necessary. The updated and final version of the SEA Environmental Report will then accompany the RNP for submission to the Local Planning Authority, Northumberland County Council, for subsequent Independent Examination.

At Independent Examination, the RNP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with local planning policy.

If the Independent Examination is favourable, the RNP will be subject to a referendum, organised by Northumberland County Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the RNP, then it will be 'made'. Once made, the RNP will become part of the Development Plan for the neighbourhood area.

Monitoring

The SEA regulations require 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' to be outlined in the Environmental 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 RNP will be undertaken by Northumberland County 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 RNP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Northumberland County Council.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 AECOM has been commissioned to undertake an independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in support of the emerging Rennington Neighbourhood Plan (hereafter referred to as “the RNP”). The neighbourhood area is shown in the figure overleaf.
- 1.2 The RNP is being prepared under the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 and in the context of the local development framework of Northumberland County Council. Once ‘made’ the RNP will have material weight when deciding on planning applications, as part of the Northumberland local development framework.
- 1.3 Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012, as amended) requires that a Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to the Local Authority alongside either: A) an environmental report; or, B) a statement of reasons why SEA is not required, prepared following a ‘screening’ process. The RNP was subject to screening for Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) by Northumberland County Council. The screening exercise determined that a HRA is required for the RNP. The SEA Regulations³ require that if an eligible plan or programme requires an ‘appropriate assessment’ under the Habitats Regulations,⁴ then that plan or programme will also require an SEA. On this basis, it was determined that an SEA is required for the RNP (i.e. the plan was ‘screened-in’).
- 1.4 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 RNP seeks to maximise the emerging plan’s contribution to sustainable development.

³ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

⁴ Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

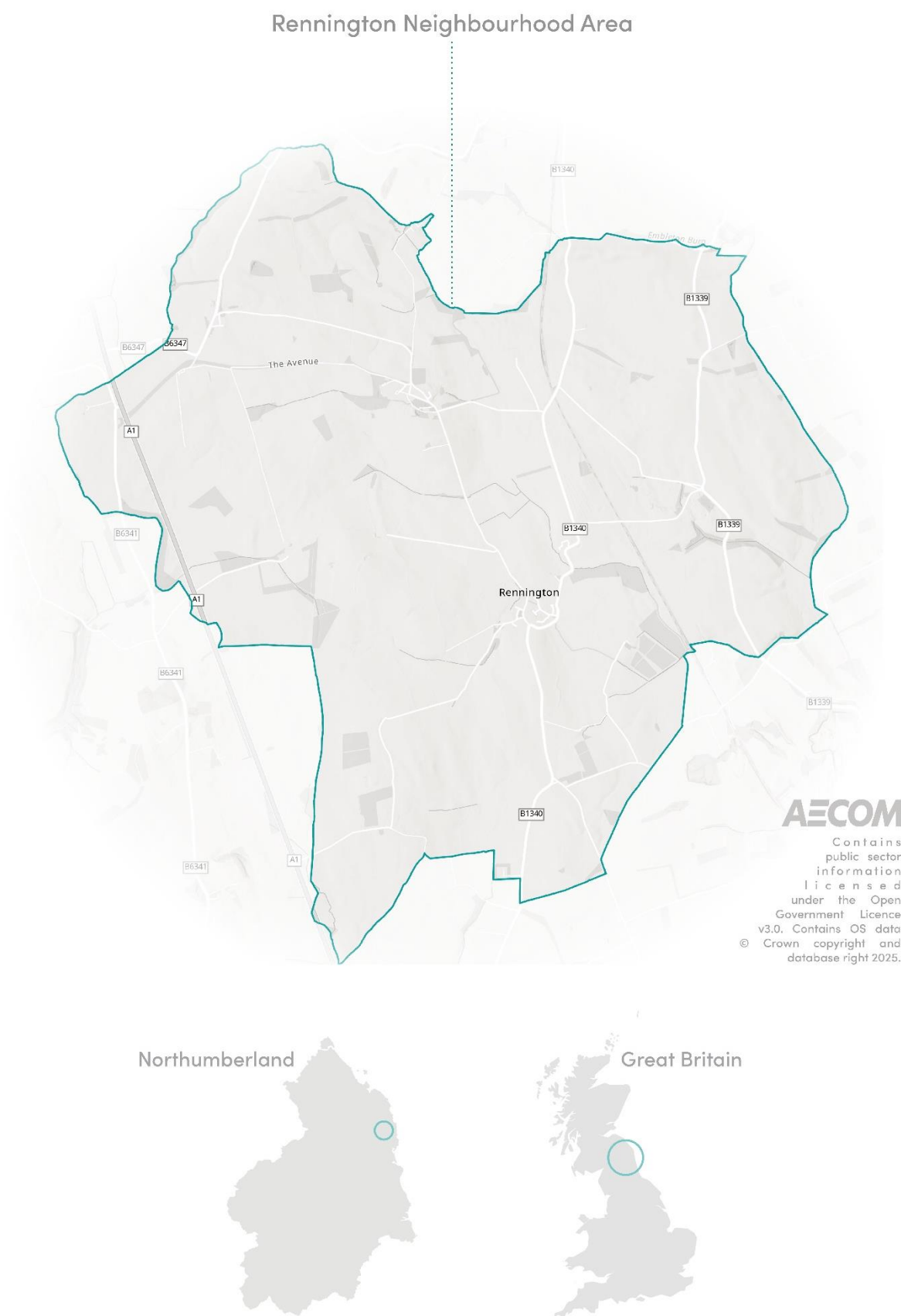


Figure 1-1: Rennington neighbourhood area

SEA explained

- 1.5 The SEA process is required to be undertaken in-line with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. 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 RNP) that presents outcomes from the environmental assessment (i.e., discusses ‘likely significant effects’ that would result from plan implementation) and reasonable alternatives.⁵ The report must then be taken into account, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.
- 1.6 This ‘Environmental Report’ is concerned with item ‘ii’ above.

Structure of this Environmental Report

- 1.7 This document is the SEA Environmental Report for the RNP and hence needs to answer all four of the questions listed in **Table 1-1** below with a view to providing the information required by the SEA Regulations. Each of the four questions is answered in turn within this report, as follows:

Table 1-1: Questions that Must be Answered by the SEA Environmental Report to Meet the Regulatory⁶ Requirements

Environmental Report question	In line with the SEA Regulations, the report must include... ⁷	
What's the scope of the SEA?	What is the plan seeking to achieve?	An outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan.
	What is the sustainability ‘context’?	Relationship with other relevant plans and programmes. The relevant environmental protection objectives , established at international or national level. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.

⁵ Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

⁶ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

⁷ 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... ⁷
What is the sustainability 'baseline'?	The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected. Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan including those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance.
What are the key issues and objectives?	Key problems/issues and objectives that should be a focus of (i.e., provide a 'framework' for) assessment.
What has plan-making/SEA involved up to this point?	Outline reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with. The likely significant effects associated with alternatives. Outline reasons for selecting the preferred approach in-light of alternatives appraisal/a description of how environmental objectives and considerations are reflected in the current version of the plan.
What are the assessment findings at this stage?	The likely significant effects associated with the submission version of the plan. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects of implementing the submission version of the plan.
What happens next?	The next steps for the plan making / SEA process.

2. Local Plan context and vision for the Neighbourhood Plan

Local Plan context for the Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.1 The neighbourhood area falls within Northumberland. The planning framework for Northumberland consists of the Northumberland Local Plan 2016-2036, adopted in March 2022.
- 2.2 The Local Plan recognises Rennington and Rock as ‘small villages’, which are suitable to support a proportionate level of development subject to Green Belt policy considerations where relevant. The Local Plan does not allocate a housing need for the neighbourhood area.
- 2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the development plan for Northumberland, 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 Northumberland, whilst enabling finer detail to be determined through the neighbourhood planning process where appropriate.

Vision and objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.4 The vision for the RNP 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.
- 2.5 The vision is as follows:

“To ensure that the Parish retains and conserves the special qualities that have attracted generations of people to choose this as a place to live and raise their families by sustaining Rennington Parish as a thriving community in its own right.”
- 2.6 The RNP sets out that the vision will be achieved by incorporating policies into the Neighbourhood Plan that:
 - Enhance and protect the natural living environment and promote biodiversity.
 - Ensure that any new development does not impact adversely on the important green spaces of the parish. Retain or enhance existing landscape features and preserve important views and vistas.
 - Promote easier accessibility and improve quality of life by supporting walkers, cyclists and horse riders with the development, upkeep and maintenance of footpaths and bridleways.
 - Ensure the design, materials, layout and appearance of any new housing supports and reinforces the character and distinctiveness of Rock, Rennington and the surrounding farmsteads.

- Ensure that new developments reflect the local architectural vernacular and protect the historic and heritage assets both in the Rock Conservation Area and the wider parish.
- Promote energy efficiency and sustainability.
- Sustain Rennington Parish as a thriving community in its own right.

3. What is the scope of the SEA

Summary of SEA scoping

- 3.1 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”*.
- 3.2 In England, the consultation bodies are Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Historic England.⁸ These authorities were consulted on the scope of the SEA between February and April 2025.
- 3.3 The purpose of scoping was to outline the ‘scope’ of the SEA through setting out the following information:
- A context review of the key environmental and sustainability objectives of national, regional, and local plans and strategies relevant to the RNP.
 - Baseline data against which the RNP can be assessed.
 - The key sustainability issues for the RNP; and
 - An ‘SEA Framework’ of objectives against which the RNP can be assessed.
- 3.4 Responses received on the Scoping Report, and how they have been considered and addressed (where appropriate), have been summarised in **Table 3-1** below. No response was received from Environment Agency.

Table 3-1: Consultation responses received on the SEA Scoping Report

Consultation response	How the response was addressed
Historic England	
<i>Historic Places Adviser (email response received 11th March 2025)</i>	
We agree that historic environment issues should form part of the SEA when it is completed alongside the emerging neighbourhood plan.	Comment noted with thanks.
We publish two relevant advice notes. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (Historic England Advice Note 8, December 2016) sets out the importance of a robust evidence baseline, how to predict significant historic environmental effects, and how this should lead to policy development in the plan or mitigation. The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans (Historic England Advice Note 3, October 2015), also applies to neighbourhood plans.	Comment noted. These documents have been reviewed and used to inform the SEA process and this Environmental Report.

⁸ These consultation bodies were selected *“by reason of their specific environmental responsibilities, [they] are likely to be concerned by the environmental effect of implementing plans and programmes”* (SEA Directive, Article 6(3)).

Baseline information should identify heritage assets' significance (rather than just how many there are), their condition, sensitivity, capacity to accommodate change, and the likely effects of alternative solutions. This baseline is likely to be the same as is needed for the plan itself, and need only be proportionate. For Rock Conservation Area, where the plan is expected to make housing allocations, the adopted character appraisal is now old and there has been significant change in the area since adoption (eg. new housing development). The SEA and plan-making process should therefore consider updating this appraisal to ensure proportionate, robust baseline evidence. This should include appraisal of the relationship the area has with its setting, which will be important if the plan is to make allocations outside the designated boundary.	Comments noted and discussed with the RNP Steering Group.
You correctly identify that Ellsnook scheduled monument is on the national Heritage at Risk register but do not then address this. A further question should therefore be added to 7.10, to ask whether the plan will improve the condition and management of heritage at risk. For this asset in particular, which is likely to be at risk due to woodland encroachment, chapter 5 of the UK Forestry Standard could help with plan preparation.	Comment noted and the SEA Framework has been updated accordingly. The UK Forestry Standard has also been reviewed and used to inform the SEA process.
In the decision-making criteria set out in 7.10, it would be better to say "heritage significance" rather than "integrity".	SEA Framework has been updated accordingly.
More could be done to address the other heritage assets identified, eg. considering whether the condition of listed buildings and non-designated heritage needs to be addressed in the plan.	Comment noted and the issue has been discussed with the RNP Steering Group.
The scoping report does not address indicators and monitoring of the plan's effects (see paras 2.13-2.16 of HEAN 8).	Monitoring of significant effects have been considered through the SEA and in this Environmental Report.

Natural England

Sustainable Development Officer (email response received 2nd April 2025)

We refer you to the advice in the attached annex which covers the issues and opportunities that should be considered when preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.	Comment noted. The advice has been reviewed and used to inform the SEA process and this Environmental Report.
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The SEA Scoping Report states that the “Rennington Neighbourhood Plan is seeking to allocate land for new development” that is not allocated in the current Northumberland Local Plan (pg. 25). No map has been provided on any potential allocation sites, therefore at this time Natural England cannot provide substantive advice on any impacts development may have.	Comment noted.
Natural England suggest that “identify and avoid the development of BMV agricultural land” is replaced with “avoid the loss of BMV agricultural land.” We recommend a sub-objective that assesses whether a proposed development promotes the sustainable management of soils via a soils resource management plan.	SEA Framework has been updated and comments relating to the soil resource management plan has been discussed with the RNP Steering Group.

Key sustainability issues

- 3.5 Drawing on the review of the policy context and baseline information, the SEA Scoping Report was able to identify a range of sustainability issues that should be a particular focus of SEA.
- 3.6 The scoping process allowed for some sustainability topics to be ‘scoped out’; as it was considered the Neighbourhood Plan is unlikely to have significant effects on certain factors. Historic England, Natural England and Environment Agency have not raised any concerns regarding the scoping-out of any sustainability topics.
- 3.7 The key sustainability issues and the scoping outcome are set out below.

Air quality

- 3.8 There are no AQMAs within proximity to the Rennington neighbourhood area, and air quality is mostly good across Northumberland. As such, development through the RNP is not anticipated to impact significantly upon air quality within and in proximity to the neighbourhood area.

SCOPED OUT

Biodiversity and geodiversity

- 3.9 Whilst the Rennington neighbourhood area does not have any international or national biodiversity or geodiversity designations, it is located within a very biodiverse landscape. There are a number of SACs, the Ramsar, the SPA and a number of SSSIs within proximity to the neighbourhood boundaries. As such, development through the RNP has the potential to impact upon the biodiversity and geodiversity offering of the neighbourhood area, which could impact upon the wider biodiversity connectivity of the surrounding landscape.

- 3.10 The RNP could take advantage of the Network Expansion Zone overlap in the south and north-west to encourage biodiversity net gain improvements. This will likely contribute to achieving an appropriate level of biodiversity net gain in the neighbourhood area in line with UK Government policy.

SCOPED IN

Climate change and flood risk

- 3.11 The RNP is seeking to allocate land for new development. As such, it is likely CO₂ emissions originating from the neighbourhood area will increase. It will be important for new development to adopt best building practises to limit the increase in emissions, such as using sustainable materials, and incorporating renewable energy infrastructure.
- 3.12 CO₂ emissions associated with the transport sector remain higher than other sectors in Northumberland. This highlights the importance of accessible development and the delivery of sustainable transportation infrastructure. However, as settlements in the neighbourhood area cover small spatial areas and are poorly served by sustainable modes of transport to other settlements, opportunities to locate development to be better integrated into the sustainable transport network and for viable alternatives to private vehicle usage are limited. Therefore, there is limited scope for the RNP to reduce emissions linked to transport within the neighbourhood area and to locations outside of it.
- 3.13 It is unlikely that the NP will have significant effects on levels of GHG emissions given to the scale of growth likely to be involved. Furthermore, standards for energy and water efficiency are established nationally and at strategic level. The scope for the Neighbourhood Plan to deliver substantial improvements is therefore unlikely to be significant. Climate change has been **SCOPED OUT**.
- 3.14 There are some areas at low to high risk of surface water flooding scattered across the neighbourhood area. The surface water flood risk is largely linked to the drainage pattern of the neighbourhood area. The likely scale and distribution of growth and the protection afforded through national and local planning policy should help minimise potential flood risk and help secure mitigation. Flood risk has been **SCOPED OUT**.

Community wellbeing

- 3.15 The neighbourhood area experiences deprivation linked to barriers to housing and services and living environment domains. This reflects the limited community infrastructure in the neighbourhood area including educational and health facilities. Bringing forward new housing will likely contribute to reducing deprivation linked to housing; however, this is also likely to add pressures to local services and facilities.

SCOPED IN

Historic environment

- 3.16 There are a number of designated heritage features in the neighbourhood area that contribute to the historic character of Rennington. This includes within and in proximity to the Rock Conservation Area. As such, the neighbourhood area is considered to have a sensitive historic environment which will likely be impacted upon through development. Development that is proposed in close proximity to the 30 listed buildings, the scheduled monument (which features on the 2024 Heritage at Risk Register) or the conservation area, will need to consider how it could impact upon the intrinsic qualities of the asset and its setting, and the contribution of the feature to the wider historic environment.
- 3.17 The RNP should consider the Rock Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Matters document. However, it is noted that this document was published over a decade ago, and the details provided may be outdated.
- 3.18 The RNP presents an opportunity to increase the understanding of and access to historical assets, especially in regard to the 72 local heritage assets identified through the Northumberland Historic Environment Record.

SCOPED IN

Land, soil, and water resources

- 3.19 Allocating land for development could influence changes to land, soil and water resources. Given that the entire neighbourhood area is considered to be underlain by Grade 3 provisional ALC land, it will be important for development to be focused within and in proximity to the existing settlement boundaries. This is likely to protect higher quality soils by in the open landscape. The conservation of higher quality soil could be achieved through maintaining and enhancing green infrastructure in the neighbourhood area.
- 3.20 Given the overlap of the Rennington neighbourhood area with three different water body catchment areas, it is possible development could impact upon water quality. This is a concern, given that two of the water body catchment areas have a poor ecological status. The Rennington Neighbourhood Plan could help to mitigate this by encouraging development to include measures that ensure water pollution does not occur at the different development phases.

SCOPED IN

Landscape

- 3.21 The Rennington neighbourhood area sits within a diverse landscape, including 2 NCAs and 2 LCAs, and adjacent to a National Landscape. Development will need to be considerate of the varying landscape features and sensitivities. The RNP has the potential to positively contribute to landscape amenity through encouraging development to integrate with the national and local landscape characters. This will maintain the unique landscape value of the area.
- 3.22 The local landscape character assessments for Northumberland County Council are dated, and as such may include outdated information. Whilst it is noted that updating the assessment is the responsibility of the local planning authority, landscape evidence compiled in the evidence gathering phase of the Neighbourhood Plan could be used to inform an update in the future.

SCOPED IN

Transportation

- 3.23 As the RNP is seeking to allocate sites for development, there will be an inevitable change in the current transportation baseline. Given the lack of sustainable transport options and services within the neighbourhood area, it is likely the change will increase the use of private vehicles on the local road network. This could contribute to congestion and emission levels in the neighbourhood area. However, this is not predicted to be significant considering the likely scale of growth and the existing travel patterns in the neighbourhood area including a high proportion of people working from home. The neighbourhood area is also unlikely to experience the scale of growth that would make major improvements to public transport viable.
- 3.24 Whilst the neighbourhood area benefits from a good PRow network, with limited employment opportunities and services within a walking or reasonable cycling distance of the neighbourhood area, there are limitations to the extent to which the RNP can locate and influence new development to support a modal shift to active and sustainable travel options.

SCOPED OUT

SEA Framework

- 3.25 The SEA framework has been established through the identification of key issues and environmental objectives as part of the scoping exercise. The framework consists of a set of headline objectives and supporting assessment questions, which has been used consistently to appraise the environmental effects of the draft Rennington Neighbourhood Plan (and reasonable alternatives).

Table 3-2: The Rennington Neighbourhood Plan SEA Framework

SEA theme	SEA objective	Supporting assessment questions
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.	• Protect and enhance internationally and nationally designated sites, including supporting the maintenance and / or improvement of their condition, and support habitats and species that are important to the integrity of these sites? • Protect and enhance semi-natural habitats as well as priority habitats and species? • Achieve biodiversity and environmental net gains and support the delivery of ecosystem services and multifunctional green infrastructure networks?

SEA theme	SEA objective	Supporting assessment questions
		• Increase the resilience of biodiversity in the area to the effects of climate change, including through enhancements to ecological networks? • Support access to, interpretation of, and understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity?
Community wellbeing	Ensure growth in the neighbourhood area is aligned with the needs of all residents, improving accessibility, anticipating future needs and specialist requirements, and supporting cohesive and inclusive communities.	• Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing? • Support the provision of a range of house types and sizes? • Meet the needs of all sectors of the community? • Provide flexible and adaptable homes that meet people's needs, particularly the needs of an ageing population? • Improve the availability and accessibility of key local facilities, including specialist services for disabled and older people? • Encourage and promote social cohesion and active involvement of local people in community activities? • Facilitate green infrastructure enhancements, including improved access to open space? • Maintain or enhance the quality of life of existing residents?
Historic environment	Protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the neighbourhood area.	• Protect the historic significance of Rock Conservation Area and its setting, and implement the management plan where appropriate? • Conserve and enhance buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest, both designated and non-designated, and their settings? • Protect the historic significance of the historic setting of key features of cultural heritage interest as listed in the Northumberland HER?

SEA theme	SEA objective	Supporting assessment questions
		• Support the undertaking of early archaeological investigations and, where appropriate, recommend mitigation strategies? • Support access to, interpretation and understanding of the historic evolution and character of the neighbourhood area? • Support improvements to the condition and the management of heritage at risk?
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.	• Promote the use of previously developed land wherever possible? • Avoid the loss of BMV agricultural land? • Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste? • Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development? • Protect waterbodies from pollution?
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character and quality of the immediate and surrounding landscape.	• Protect and / or enhance local landscape character and quality of place, including the local landscape character types and areas identified within the Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment? • Protect and enhance the special qualities of the Northumberland Coast National Landscape, and take into consideration the emerging Management Plan for the designated landscape? • Conserve and enhance local identity, diversity, and settlement character? • Identify and protect locally important viewpoints which contribute to character and sense of place? • Retain and enhance landscape features that contribute to rural setting, including trees and hedgerows?

4. Consideration of reasonable alternatives through the SEA

Introduction

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 The SEA Regulations⁹ are not prescriptive as to what constitutes a reasonable alternative, stating only that the Environmental Report should present an appraisal of the '*plan and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan*'.
- 4.3 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 RNP.

Establishing reasonable alternatives

- 4.4 Whilst work on the RNP has been underway for some time, the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive explanation of work to date, but rather to explain the work undertaken to develop and appraise reasonable alternatives.
- 4.5 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 RNP.

Housing growth strategy

- 4.6 Overall housing numbers (targets) are primarily the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority, Northumberland County Council. As set out in Section 2 of this report, the Local Plan does not set out a housing requirement for the neighbourhood area. However, a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA)¹⁰ has been undertaken for the Rennington neighbourhood area. The HNA estimates that 43 households are expected to be in potential need of affordable housing ownership dwellings and 11 additional social or affordable rent dwellings are required over the plan period. The HNA also recommends new housing to consist of small to medium sized housing units (especially two-bedroom units) to increase the variety of sizes available in the local housing stock.

⁹ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

¹⁰ AECOM (2023) [Rennington Housing Needs Assessment](#)

- 4.7 The Northumberland Local Plan Policy HOU6 sets out a requirement of 25% affordable housing for development proposals of 10 or more homes or for sites of 0.5 hectares or more. The Local Plan also recognises Rennington and Rock as 'small villages', which are suitable to support a proportionate level of development subject to Green Belt policy considerations where relevant.
- 4.8 A key objective of the RNP is to deliver and influence the location and type of new housing in the neighbourhood area to diversify the current mix and choice of housing and improve affordability, whilst according with the Local Plan objective for proportionate growth in Rennington and Rock.
- 4.9 An alternative to housing growth would be to not allocate any sites and to rely upon windfall development. However, this would be contrary to the objectives of the RNP to allocate sites and a windfall approach is less likely to support the diversification of the current mix and choice of housing and increased affordability. Therefore, this approach is considered to be unreasonable, and essentially reflects the 'baseline position'.
- 4.10 An alternative to the plan approach would also be to take a more proactive role in addressing affordable housing and the need identified through the HNA by increasing site capacity to 10 homes for site allocations, where feasible. A minimum site capacity of 10 homes would trigger the 25% affordable housing requirement set out in Policy HOU6 of the Local Plan, whilst not encouraging a high scale of development that is not proportionate to the scale of the settlements in the neighbourhood area. This approach has been tested through the SEA assessment.

Housing site allocations

- 4.11 A site assessment process has been undertaken by the RNP Steering Group. A total of 12 sites have been identified in the neighbourhood area. The sites were identified through a neighbourhood plan call for sites, known to be available locally or put forward by Steering Group members and the Northumberland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.¹¹
- 4.12 As part of the initial sifting process, sites with existing planning permission and not compliant with national planning policy and the Local Plan were omitted. This included the omitting of sites in isolated locations or sites within open countryside which are not within or adjacent to existing settlements (Rennington, Rock and Stamford).
- 4.13 The remaining six sites were taken forward for assessment to determine whether they would be appropriate to allocate for housing in the RNP. Key considerations focused on whether the sites were suitable, available and achievable.
- 4.14 The site assessment found three sites to be suitable and appropriate for limited housing allocation in the neighbourhood plan. The sites include:
- Site 3: Land southeast of North Farm Steading
 - Site 5: Land west of Rock Cricket Pitch

¹¹ Northumberland County Council (2024) [Northumberland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment](#)

- Site 6: Land west of Long Row

4.15 The remaining three sites were considered not suitable for allocation in the RNP, mostly due to constraints including landscape sensitivity and unsuitable access.

4.16 For the purposes of SEA, the site assessment conclusions have been revisited to consider if site options present a reasonable alternative option to the preferred approach in the RNP. **Table 4-1** sets out a summary of the site assessment conclusions and an assessment on if the site is a reasonable alternative for the purposes of SEA. The site options that constitute reasonable alternatives for the purposes of the SEA are illustrated in **Figure 4-1** and detailed maps are provided in **Appendix A**.

Table 4-1: Site assessment conclusions and assessment of reasonable alternative for the purposes of SEA

Site name	Site assessment conclusion	Reasonable alternative?
Land south of Rennington 2-5 (Site 1)	Allocating this site for housing would have some impact on NDHAs and potentially the setting of a listed building. There would likely be an amenity impact on occupiers of the small cottages along Rennington 2-5 (to be identified as NDHAs in the neighbourhood plan), as the site is directly south of these single storey dwellings. Overall, the site is not considered to be suitable to meet the limited demand for housing in the neighbourhood area.	No. The site is considered unsuitable in the site assessment as it is predicted to have adverse effects on the amenity of the occupiers of the adjacent properties.

Site name	Site assessment conclusion	Reasonable alternative?
Land behind Village Hall in Rennington (Site 2)	Vehicle access to this land is limited any new access would have significant visual impacts. Furthermore, an overall loss of visual amenity particularly when viewed from the north and south. Not suitable for housing.	Yes. The eastern boundary of the site along the C73 Road to Ridgeway Croft is adjacent and relates well to the built area of Rennington. The site area adjacent to the C73 Road and Church Road junction partly falls within FZ2 and FZ3 and is proposed for designation as a Local Green Space. Therefore, this part of the site does not constitute a reasonable alternative. The wider site area has high landscape sensitivity and is less suitable to accommodate a proportionate amount of development without adverse effects on landscape and townscape character. This part of the site also does not constitute a reasonable alternative.
Land southeast of North Farm Steading (Site 3)	The site is considered suitable for inclusion in any future consultation with the community. Any development on the site would be required to comply with a site-specific design code.	Yes. The site is considered suitable for development in the site assessment and is adjacent to existing development in Rennington. The site also has a suitable access to the west and does not include any known major environmental or infrastructure constraints.
Land west of B1340 (Site 4)	Although the site has limited physical and landscape constraints, it is a large site which is adjacent to a site currently under development and on the edge of the settlement. Any development here is likely to lead to the eventual merging of Rennington and Stamford Cottages in the longer term. This piece of land provides an important green wedge/setting to the village. The scale of development deliverable here is too large for the village to accommodate without significantly increasing its size, contrary to policy set out in the NLP.	No. The site has high landscape sensitivities and the size and character of the site is less suitable to accommodate a proportionate amount of development for Rennington.

Site name	Site assessment conclusion	Reasonable alternative?
Land west of Rock Cricket Field (Site 5)	This site is suitable in part. The site put forward is not suitable in terms of scale, but a smaller area (half the length of the site) to provide a small terrace of up to 6-8 dwellings would give the opportunity to provide a small amount of additional housing in Rock. Any housing on this site would need to be carefully designed to reflect traditional styles in the village, using locally sourced/traditional materials. There is an opportunity to provide biodiversity enhancements and significant net gain for biodiversity. Any new residences should be for permanent occupancy only to ensure that new housing does contribute to the long term sustainability of the village.	Yes. The site is considered suitable for small-scale development in the site assessment and is adjacent to existing development in Rock. The site also does not include any known major environmental or infrastructure constraints.
Land west of Long Row (Site 6)	Site is suitable for a small-scale scheme which fits in with the character, layout and density of the settlement of Stamford - between 4 and 8 units of a terraced style similar to existing residences. Opportunities exist to improve habitats as part of the scheme. Any scheme should be for permanent occupancy only.	Yes. The site is considered suitable for small-scale development in the site assessment and is adjacent to existing development in Stamford. The site also does not include any known major environmental or infrastructure constraints.



Figure 4-1: Reasonable alternative site options for the purposes of SEA

Assessing reasonable alternatives

4.17 Taking the housing growth strategy into consideration, the following two reasonable alternative growth scenarios for the RNP have been identified:

- **Growth Scenario A:** Site capacity identified to be suitable in the site assessment.
- **Growth Scenario B:** Site capacity uplifted to 10 homes to support increased affordable housing delivery.

4.18 Based on the site options review above, the following four site options represent the alternative options for the RNP:

- **Option 1:** Land behind Village Hall in Rennington (Site 2)
- **Option 2:** Land southeast of North Farm Steading (Site 3)
- **Option 3:** Land west of Rock Cricket Pitch (Site 5)
- **Option 4:** Land west of Long Row (Site 6)

4.19 The site capacity for Land behind Village Hall in Rennington (Site 2) under Growth Scenario A has been calculated as 5 homes based on the housing density immediately adjacent to the east of the site area taken forward for assessment.

4.20 Land west of Long Row (Site 6) has a gross site area of 0.6 acres. The site is not considered to be adequately large to accommodate 10 homes, and thus does not constitute a reasonable alternative under Growth Scenario B. Therefore, the site has not been assessed under Growth Scenario B.

4.21 The site options and their capacity under each growth scenario is set out in **Table 4-2** below.

Table 4-2: Site options and their capacity under each growth scenario

Site option	Site capacity under Growth Scenario A	Site capacity under Growth Scenario B
Option 1: Land behind Village Hall in Rennington	5 homes	10 homes
Option 2: Land southeast of North Farm Steading	5-8 homes	10 homes
Option 3: Land west of Rock Cricket Pitch	6-8 homes	10 homes
Option 4: Land west of Long Row	6-8 homes	N/A

Methodology

- 4.22 For each of the growth scenarios and options, the assessment examines likely significant effects on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability themes and objectives identified through scoping (see **Table 3-2**) as a methodological framework. Where appropriate neutral effects or uncertainty has been noted.
- 4.23 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately. It has been made explicit in the appraisal text where there is a need to rely on assumptions to reach a conclusion on a 'significant effect'.
- 4.24 A site visit was undertaken on 17 April 2025 to assess physical factors such as access and current use and more qualitative characteristics such as views and character, and to clarify issues which emerged from the initial desk study.
- 4.25 Where it is not possible to predict likely significant effects based on reasonable assumptions, efforts are made to comment on the relative merits of the alternatives in more general terms and to indicate a rank of preference. This is helpful, as it enables a distinction to be made between the alternatives even where it is not possible to distinguish between them in terms of 'significant effects'. Numbers are used to highlight the option or options that are preferred from an SEA perspective with 1 performing the best. A high performing site can be made more sustainable with suitable mitigation and enhancement, as the ranking and assessment does not assume the likely mitigation and enhancement measures which may come forward through policy.
- 4.26 It is also important to note that effects are predicted considering the criteria presented within the SEA Regulations.¹² So, for example, account is taken of the duration, frequency, and reversibility of effects.

Biodiversity and geodiversity

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Growth Scenario A				
Significant effect?	No	No	No	No
Rank	1	2	2	1
Growth Scenario B				
Significant effect?	No	No	No	-
Rank	2	1	1	-

- 4.27 It is important to recognise that potential impacts to ecological and geological resources are influenced by a number of factors. For example, incorporating green infrastructure enhancements (including amenity and open spaces) through new development areas can deliver net-gains for nature, tackle local air quality concerns by widening tree and vegetation cover, and support ecological resilience and connectivity in the area. As such, if all development seeks to integrate these elements, then all options could theoretically perform equally in terms of impact on biodiversity.

¹² Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

- 4.28 None of the options intersect with a designated site or are known to contain any priority habitat. All options present opportunities to introduce new green infrastructure and habitats. The scale of growth proposed for all options under Growth Scenario A should allow for development proposals to integrate green infrastructure and support biodiversity net gain. Options 1 and 3 further include waterbodies and this scale of growth should also allow for the incorporation of new habitats to support aquatic ecosystems. However, the scale of growth and small site areas under Option 1 under Growth Scenario B may limit opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure and achieve any substantial onsite net-gains for nature.

Community wellbeing

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Growth Scenario A				
Significant effect?	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	Yes - positive
Rank	2	1	3	4
Growth Scenario B				
Significant effect?	Yes - positive and uncertain negative	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	-
Rank	2	1	1	-

- 4.29 All options are likely to perform well in relation to this theme through the additional delivery of housing that will be targeted towards meeting local needs for more affordable and smaller homes. The effects are predicted to be of a minor greater significance under growth scenario B, as this growth scenario involves a slight higher number of homes for all options and include affordable housing.
- 4.30 Community infrastructure is limited in the neighbourhood area but includes a bus service in Rennington and Rock. Stamford is not served by a bus service or other key services and facilities other than a post box. Therefore, Options 1 and 2 perform slightly better than Option 3, as these options are located at the settlement edge of Rennington. Option 4 performs least favourably due to its location within an area without a bus service or other important community services. The scale of growth under both growth scenarios is unlikely to support any significant improvements in community infrastructure, although the scale under Growth Scenario B may be slightly more likely to support limited new provision, such as a children's play area.
- 4.31 The site options do not include or fall within an area with constraints which are likely to have adverse effects on the wellbeing of existing and new residents. However, Options 1 and 4 falls within areas at risk of surface water flooding and this may be challenging to comprehensively address through a high density development. Option 1 is further in proximity to an area at risk of fluvial flooding, and there is a risk that a higher density development under Growth Scenario B could risk exacerbating flood risk.

Historic environment

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Growth Scenario A				
Significant effect?	Yes - minor negative	No	No	No
Rank	3	1	2	2
Growth Scenario B				
Significant effect?	Yes - moderate negative	No	No	-
Rank	3	1	2	-

4.32 The neighbourhood area includes a number of designated or non-designated heritage assets or features including the Rock Conservation Area and listed buildings. All options do not overlap with any listed buildings or other heritage designations.

4.33 Option 1 falls adjacent and immediately south of the Grade II listed North Farmhouse. Whilst the setting of the listed building is considered to be mainly contained to its curtilage, the listed building is characterised by its surrounding open countryside and enjoys uninterrupted views from Rennington village and from vantage points within the surrounding landscape. Development is therefore likely to cause some harm to the character of the setting of the listed building, although under Growth Scenario A some mitigation is likely and development can be designed to protect key views from Rennington.

4.34 Option 3 falls opposite to the Rock Hall and related listed buildings and in proximity to the Rock Conservation Area. However, development is unlikely to have an adverse effect on the listed building and its setting as Rock Hall has a fairly contained setting relating to its curtilage. Development on the site can further be sensitively designed to avoid any adverse effects on nearby heritage assets.

4.35 Options 2 and 4 do not fall within proximity to heritage assets. Option 4 is adjacent to cottages that are pre-1860, but these cottages have been substantially altered since 1950 including the adding of a second floor and external render. Development can likely be sensitively designed to avoid adverse impacts on the character of the cottages and the townscape.

Land, soil, and water resources

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Growth Scenario A				
Significant effect?	No	No	No	No
Rank	3	1	2	1
Growth Scenario B				
Significant effect?	Uncertain Negative	No	No	-
Rank	2	1	1	-

- 4.36 Development at all site options would result in the loss of Grade 3 agricultural land. Other than Option 4, all sites are currently in agricultural use and thus development on these sites would also result in the loss of productive agricultural land, although its unknown if the land is among the best and most versatile. Given the scale of development proposed under both growth scenarios, no significant effects are considered likely. Options 1 and 3 form part of a larger agricultural field, but development is not likely to impede the use of the remaining field for agricultural use.
- 4.37 In relation to water resources, the scale of housing across all options is unlikely to lead to any significant impacts at the catchment level. In terms of water quality, Options 1 and 3 include waterbodies which are vulnerable to deterioration in quality from pollution in run-off, although there is potential for some positive effects under Option 3 through the removal of potential existing agriculture related pollution in run-off.
- 4.38 The scale of growth under Growth Scenario A should allow for the incorporation of natural buffers and sustainable drainage systems to protect water quality across all options. However, the higher scale of growth under Growth Scenario B and the small site areas could undermine the adequate incorporation of sustainable drainage systems for Option 1. There is potential for this to derive uncertain negative effects for Option 1, as the site is in close proximity to an area at risk of fluvial flooding and the increase in hardstanding areas and potential increases in surface water run-off could exacerbate flood risk.

Landscape

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Growth Scenario A				
Significant effect?	Yes - minor negative	No	Yes - minor negative	No
Rank	2	1	3	1
Growth Scenario B				
Significant effect?	Yes - moderate negative	No	Yes - moderate negative	-
Rank	2	1	2	-

- 4.39 The options do not fall within or in proximity to the Northumberland Coast National Landscape. However, all options involve sites with landscape features which are intrinsic to local landscape character. Impacts on these features including boundary hedgerows and trees can likely be minimised through sensitive design, although some harm for all options is likely. All options further present opportunities to incorporate and enhance existing landscape features and introduce new green infrastructure to reduce landscape and visual impact from development. However, the scale of growth under Growth Scenario B is likely to undermine opportunities for development to incorporate green infrastructure and landscape features to mitigate the impact of development on landscape character under Options 1 and 3.

- 4.40 Development at Option 1 would benefit from some containment from North Farmhouse to the north and a raising topography to the west. The site also resonates with the existing built up area to the east and the wider village to the south east. However, development is likely to disturb some long-distance views between the village and to the west and north west. The scale of development under Growth Scenario A would allow for a lower density of development that resonates with the local townscape character and for the introduction of green infrastructure and new landscape features to help mitigate adverse impacts. The higher scale of growth under Growth Scenario B would require the comprehensive development of the site and this is likely to result in a high density development which is not in-keeping with local townscape character and limited landscape features to soften impacts on landscape character and the transition between the built up area and open landscape.
- 4.41 Land southeast of North Farm Steading (Option 2) resonates well with the built up area of Rennington as it adjoins the village to the south and west and forms a small separate parcel of land to the surrounding large arable farming fields. The site is open in character to the north and east, but adverse impacts on landscape character and visual impact can likely be mitigated through introducing new boundary landscape features and establishing a strong natural settlement boundary.
- 4.42 Development at Option 3 would involve extending the built area of the village beyond a defined extent to the south of The Avenue and thus would appear as a linear extension of the built area into open countryside. Under Growth Scenario A, the scale of development should allow for comprehensive new landscaping to the north which could help establish some level of containment to development, but permanent harm to landscape character is still likely. The harm to landscape character is likely to be more significant under Growth Scenario B, as development would extend further north and opportunities to introduce comprehensive green infrastructure would be reduced.
- 4.43 Development at Option 4 would involve a well-contained site bounded to the west by woodland and contained by development and its curtilage to the east and south. Option 4 is therefore not predicted to derive adverse effects on landscape character.

Summary of assessment findings

- 4.44 **Table 4-2** below sets out where significant effects are predicted and summarises the rankings of the options in terms of their relative performance for each SEA theme.

Table 4-2: Summary of assessment findings by SEA theme

		Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Biodiversity and Geodiversity					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	No	No	No	No
	Rank	1	2	2	1

		Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	No	No	No	-
	Rank	2	1	1	-
Community wellbeing					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	Yes - positive
	Rank	2	1	3	4
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	Yes - positive and uncertain negative	Yes - positive	Yes - positive	-
	Rank	2	1	1	-
Historic environment					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	Yes - minor negative	No	No	No
	Rank	3	1	2	2
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	Yes - moderate negative	No	No	-
	Rank	3	1	2	-
Land, soil, and water resources					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	No	No	No	No
	Rank	3	1	2	1
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	Uncertain Negative	No	No	-
	Rank	2	1	1	-
Landscape					
Growth Scenario A	Significant effect?	Yes - minor negative	No	Yes - minor negative	No
	Rank	2	1	3	1
Growth Scenario B	Significant effect?	Yes - moderate negative	No	Yes - moderate negative	-
	Rank	2	1	2	-

4.45 Overall, all options are likely to have positive effects in relation to community wellbeing and positive effects are predicted to be slightly greater under Growth Scenario B, with the higher scale of growth supporting additional housing and affordable housing.

- 4.46 Option 1 (Land behind Village Hall) notably scores less favourable compared to other options, as there is potential for development to cause harm to the character of the setting of the adjacent listed building and for the higher scale of development under Growth Scenario B to require a high density of development which undermines the delivery of sustainable urban drainage and comprehensive flood risk mitigation and adversely impacts on landscape and townscape character.
- 4.47 Option 2 (Land southeast of North Farm Steading) scores most favourable of all site options followed by Option 4 (Land west of Long Row). Option 2 performs more favourable than Option 4 as the site benefits from a more sustainable location, with better access to community facilities and services including a bus service. Option 3 (Land west of Rock Cricket Pitch) also broadly performs well against the SEA objectives, but negative effects are predicted for Landscape, as development under both growth scenarios would appear as a linear extension of the built area into open countryside and thus cause harm to landscape character.

Establishing the preferred approach

- 4.48 The RNP Steering Group seek to allocate Land southeast of North Farm Steading (Option 2) and Land west of Rock Cricket Pitch (Option 3). The preferred approach has been informed by the various surveys and evidence base documents prepared to support the RNP (to date), responses from community consultation events, and the findings of the site assessment and SEA.
- 4.49 The RNP Steering Group's reasons for developing the preferred approach considering the assessment are identified below:

'Northumberland County Council's Local Plan doesn't specify a housing requirement for Rennington Parish, but since 2016, 50 new homes have either been completed or approved.'

Rennington's proximity to the Northumberland Coast National Landscape Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) makes it an appealing location for retirees and second homes/holiday lets. The 2021 census revealed that over 39% of Rennington's 362 residents are retired, and 66% are over 50. The Housing Needs Assessment also shows that more than 23% of the housing stock is second homes or holiday lets.

The high demand for housing in the parish has driven up property prices. 1-bedroom cottages sell for over £200,000, 3-bedroom properties for over £450,000, and 4-bedroom properties exceed £600,000. Since the early 2000s, most new housing developments have been 'executive' style homes.

The Neighbourhood Plan aims to achieve a more balanced age demographic within the parish. The Housing Needs Assessment suggests that building smaller properties that are more affordable would attract younger families to the area.

The steering group conducted a Call for Sites, which resulted in four new sites for appraisal. These sites, along with those previously considered but rejected by Northumberland County Council in the Local Plan, were evaluated by our planning consultant against predefined criteria. Three sites were deemed suitable: land southeast of North Farm Rennington, land west of Rock Cricket Pitch, and land west of Long Row Stamford.

These sites were discussed at two public meetings and presented to residents through a survey distributed to each household in the Parish. The survey results showed 76% support for the proposed development in Stamford, 52% support for the development in Rock, and only 30% support for the development in Rennington.

To ensure the Neighbourhood Plan receives community backing, the steering group, supported by the Parish Council, decided to include only the two sites that carried community support'.

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

Introduction

- 5.1 This chapter presents an appraisal of the Regulation 14 version of the RNP under the SEA topic headings, reflecting the established assessment framework (see **Chapter 3**).

Rennington Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 5.2 The RNP contains 12 policies, listed in **Table 5-1** below.

Table 5-1: The RNP policies

Policy Reference	Policy Name
RR1	Rennington and Rock Settlement Boundaries
RR2	Affordable Housing to meet Local Needs
RR3	New housing development
RR4	Land west of Cricket Field, Rock
RR5	Housing allocation in Stamford
RR6	Principal Occupancy
RR7	Design in new development
RR8	Heritage Assets
RR9	Community and Recreational Facilities
RR10	Local Green Spaces
RR11	The Natural Environment and Biodiversity
RR12	Employment and rural enterprise

Approach to this appraisal

- 5.3 The assessment identifies and evaluates 'likely significant effects' on the baseline, drawing on the sustainability objectives identified through scoping (see **Table 3-2**) as a methodological framework.
- 5.4 Every effort is made to predict effects accurately; however, this is inherently challenging given the strategic nature of the policies under consideration and understanding of the baseline (now and in the future under a 'no plan' scenario) that is inevitably limited. Given uncertainties there is a need to make assumptions, e.g., in relation to plan implementation and aspects of the baseline that might be impacted. Assumptions are made cautiously and explained within the text (with the aim of striking a balance between comprehensiveness and conciseness). In many instances, 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.

- 5.5 It is also important to note that effects are predicted taking account of the criteria presented within Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations.¹³ 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 RNP 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.

Biodiversity and geodiversity

- 5.6 There are no internationally designated sites within the neighbourhood area. However, the neighbourhood area is nearby the Northumbria Coast Ramsar and several SACs, SPAs and SSSI designations (mostly within approximately 2-5km). The neighbourhood area also includes areas of priority habitat including deciduous woodland, good quality semi improved grassland and purple moor grass and rush pastures. There is potential for development in the neighbourhood area to cause harm to these designated sites for biodiversity through increased recreational pressures and poorer air quality.
- 5.7 In October 2024, Northumberland County Council completed Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening¹⁴ on the pre-Regulation 14 version of the RNP. The HRA Screening considered whether the policies and proposals within the draft RNP would potentially result in any likely significant effects on European sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.
- 5.8 The HRA screening exercise concluded that the pre-Regulation 14 version of the RNP includes several policies that have the potential to lead to likely significant effects on the Northumbria Coast SPA and the North Northumberland Dunes SAC. Therefore, Policy R11 has been updated to incorporate the following wording (as recommended within the HRA screening report):

“To ensure that the impacts arising from increasing levels of recreational disturbance on coastal Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European Sites can be addressed, all development within 7km of the coast that will result in a net increase in the number of residential units or tourist accommodation will be required to contribute to the Coastal Mitigation Service, or provide alternative mitigation of demonstrable effectiveness.

Within a zone, as shown on the policies map, extending between 7km and 10km from the coast, only major development will be required to make a contribution to the Coastal Mitigation Service, or provide alternative mitigation of demonstrable effectiveness.

All financial contributions required in accordance with this policy will be secured by way of a planning obligation under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, or any subsequent amending legislation”.

¹³ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

¹⁴ Northumberland County Council (2024) *Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Advice, Rennington Neighbourhood Development Plan 2024-2036*

- 5.9 HRA Appropriate Assessment will be undertaken by Northumberland County Council at the Regulation 14 stage, and it is anticipated that any additional suggested recommendations or mitigation measures proposed will be considered by plan makers when finalising the submission version of the RNP.
- 5.10 More broadly, the RNP seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity within the neighbourhood area. Policy R11 identifies and seeks to protect, and where possible enhance, wildlife corridors and woodlands in the neighbourhood area including the Plantations around Rock and the Mill Chase woodland in Rennington. This should enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity in the local area.
- 5.11 The proposed housing site allocations do not intersect with any biodiversity or geodiversity designations and are not known to include any priority habitats. Land west of Cricket Field in Rock has trees and planting along the eastern and southern boundaries, including some mature trees and established hedgerow with some potential to support species such as nesting birds, although in the absence of a detailed ecological assessment it is unknown if any species are present on site. There is also a watercourse along the east which is likely to be of some ecological importance. Policy RR4 seeks to protect these habitats by requiring development to retain all existing trees and the access to be designed to avoid mature trees. The policy further proposes a belt of native woodland trees along the northern boundary of the site, which should provide new habitats in proximity to existing habitats to the north of the cricket pitch. In this context, the housing allocation at Stamford is adjacent to woodland to the west. Policy RR5 seeks to protect existing trees within and adjacent to the housing allocation in Stamford which should also help safeguard important habitats from potential impacts from development.
- 5.12 Policy RR3 requires housing development to 'demonstrate with justification on-site delivery of a Biodiversity Net Gain greater than 10%'. The policy seeks to secure greater contributions to the 10% biodiversity net gain mandatory requirement for all qualifying schemes in the Environment Act 2021.¹⁵ Whilst positive, the effects are not predicted to significantly deviate from the baseline position, as higher levels of BNG is unlikely to be feasible for most schemes in the neighbourhood area, as most new qualifying development is likely to utilise greenfield land.
- 5.13 Policy RR10 designates local green spaces in Rennington and Rock and affords them protection 'in a manner consistent with national policy'. This will benefit biodiversity as many green spaces provide a habitat for wildlife or form part of an ecological corridor. Similarly, Policy R11 seeks to resist development which involves the loss of hedgerow and mature trees.
- 5.14 As considered above, the RNP sets out measures to protect and enhance biodiversity features and designations. However, cumulatively, the policies do not significantly deviate from the baseline protection already afforded in the neighbourhood area through statutory measures and national and local planning policy. The scale and location of proposed growth and the mitigation measures set out in policy should likely avoid any significant effects. Overall, **neutral effects** are predicted.

¹⁵ Environment Act (2021) can be accessed [here](#)

Community wellbeing

- 5.15 At the strategic level, the Local Plan does not set out an unmet housing need for the neighbourhood area. However, a HNA has been undertaken which identifies a need for 43 affordable dwellings and 11 additional social or affordable rent dwellings over the plan period. The HNA also recommends that new housing consists of small to medium sized housing units (especially two-bedroom units). The RNP seeks to address the need for smaller housing types by allocating two sites for up to 14 homes. The scale of development at site allocations does not meet the threshold set out in Policy HOU6 of the Local Plan for affordable housing contributions. However, given that this would exceed the objectively assessed housing needs for the area in the Local Plan, positive effects are predicted. New housing in the parish should also provide housing choice and should help increase affordability in the local area.
- 5.16 In regard to the composition of housing, Policy RR3 requires the mix of housing types and sizes to 'meet local needs as set out in the Housing Needs Assessment' and supports a housing mix of 20% 1-2 bedrooms, 60% 3 bedrooms and 20% 4 or more bedrooms. This housing mix deviates from the identified need in the HNA for primarily two-bedroom units in the neighbourhood area. Therefore, whilst the policy should contribute towards widening housing choice, the effectiveness of the policy is undermined as it does not encourage a higher proportion of smaller housing to align with the needs of the local area. Furthermore, the HNA identifies a high need for affordable housing, and this is not reflected through the plan strategy which seeks to distribute growth across smaller sites and at scales that do not achieve the minimum threshold to require affordable housing provision. In this context, Policy RR2 encourages on-site provision of affordable housing, but the 25% requirement also aligns with Local Plan requirements and does not seek to maximise delivery to address the significant shortfall by setting a higher requirement.
- 5.17 The RNP seeks to safeguard the long-term availability of housing and affordable housing for local people. Policy RR6 requires all new dwellings including through the conversion of existing buildings to be secured as 'principal occupancy' by planning condition or Section 106 agreement. Policies RR4 and RR5 also require all dwellings of the site allocations to be of principal occupancy. This should help sustain a long-term supply of housing for local people and avoid the loss of resource to other uses such as holiday lets. Policy RR2 requires affordable housing to be retained in perpetuity as affordable housing, similar to the requirement set out in Policy HOU6 of the Local Plan.
- 5.18 The RNP aspires for the parish to be an active and thriving place to live and to ensure existing and new communities have good access to local services and facilities and green space. Policy RR9 identifies six community facilities of 'significant value to the local community' and seeks to protect them from loss unless where it can be demonstrated that the use is no longer required, viable, or if there is provision for alternative equivalent facilities nearby. Identifying community facilities should afford them additional protection. However, the protection afforded does not deviate significantly from the protection already provided through Policy INF2 and INF4 of the Local Plan, which protects community facilities unless if alternative provision is made or evidence demonstrate that its continued current use is no longer economically viable. Policy RR10 designates local green spaces in Rennington and Rock and thus affords protection to locally important spaces for leisure, recreation and sport.

- 5.19 The RNP also sets out measures to support local employment. Policy RR12 supports proposals for the 'expansion of small to medium enterprises at business parks' and the expansion of existing businesses and services within settlement boundaries. This is likely to derive long-term positive effects by supporting sustainable new communities through new employment opportunities and improved access to services. However, the policy is unlikely to support any substantive new employment due to the rural nature of the parish and thus the effects are not predicted to be significant.
- 5.20 Overall, the RNP performs well under the community wellbeing objective. In particular, allocating sites to deliver housing above the objectively assessed housing needs and safeguarding community facilities and green space will derive positive effects. However, the scale of positive effects is not considered to be significant and opportunities to encourage a higher proportion of smaller housing to align with the local needs identified through the HNA are missed. Overall, a **minor positive effect** is predicted.

Historic environment

- 5.21 The neighbourhood area has a rich historic environment, recognised through the diversity of features and areas which are nationally and locally designated for their heritage interest. This is reflected by policies which have a focus on conserving and protecting the significance of buildings, structures and features of architectural or historic interest and their settings. Policy RR8 requires development affecting the significance of heritage assets or their settings to 'take into account its significance and the scale of any harm or loss'. The policy further requires developers to record the asset where a loss is proposed for all or part of a heritage asset. In practice, the recording of an asset is widely required and applied to designated heritage assets. However, some positive effects are predicted as this policy is likely to extend to non-designated locally listed buildings and features, and the features and significance of such heritage assets would likely not be otherwise recorded. Therefore, the policy should help improve the preservation of the understanding of local heritage in the neighbourhood area.
- 5.22 Policy RR8 identifies four non-designated heritage assets and requires any development to 'protect these assets or require substantial public benefit to offset any harm or loss of the heritage asset'. Identifying and protecting buildings of local heritage interest should make positive contributions towards conserving the historic environment and local features of historic importance.
- 5.23 Policy RR7 requires development proposals in Rock to 'demonstrate how they preserve or enhance the character of the Rock Conservation Area'. Development should also have particular regard to the 'setting of listed buildings and the importance of the natural and designed landscapes'. This should help deliver high quality and sensitive design within the conservation area and Rock. In addition, Policy RR7 requires development proposals to complement the local vernacular and align with the Design Code accompanying the neighbourhood plan. This should positively respond to protecting the distinct character of heritage assets and the built environment of the parish.

- 5.24 The neighbourhood area includes the Ellsnook round barrow scheduled monument which is listed on the Heritage at Risk Register. The RNP does not set out any measures to directly secure improvements for this designation, although it is noted that the heritage asset is in private ownership and there is limited opportunities for the RNP to deliver improvements without the support and cooperation of the owner.
- 5.25 Policy RR4 allocates Land west of Cricket Field in Rock for housing, opposite to the Rock Hall and related listed buildings and nearby the Rock Conservation Area. Policy RR5 also allocates a site for housing in Stamford which is adjacent to cottages of a traditional character. The site allocation policies set out design standards including the use of natural stone, natural slate roof tiles and suitable boundary treatments. This should support sensitive design that positively responds to the distinct character of nearby heritage assets and the built environment in Rock and Stamford.
- 5.26 The RNP designates six areas as Local Green Space which should help preserve the character of settlements in the parish. In particular, the designation of Field south and west of North Farm should safeguard key views to and from Rennington and of the Grade II listed North Farmhouse. The designation of the Field to the north of Rennington House will preserve a site with ridge and furrow features and views towards the Grade II listed Rennington House.
- 5.27 Overall, the RNP policies take a proactive approach in conserving the distinctive character and heritage interests of Rennington parish. This is recognised through its focus on safeguarding heritage features (both designated and non-designated) and their settings and ensuring that development respects townscape character. The protection afforded to historic features including the buildings identified to be of local heritage interest should help conserve their historic importance in the long-term. However, this does not deviate significantly from the statutory protection already afforded to these designated and non-designated assets and that provided in the Local Plan. The RNP is considered to have a **moderate positive effect** on this objective.

Land, soil, and water resources

- 5.28 In terms of the location of the best and most versatile agricultural land, a detailed classification has not been undertaken for the neighbourhood area including the proposed site allocations in Rock and Stamford. Therefore, there is a need to rely on the 'Provisional Agricultural Land Quality' national dataset. The Provisional Agricultural Land Quality dataset shows that the land immediately surrounding settlements in the parish including the site allocations consist of Grade 3 agricultural land, however, the data does not differentiate as to whether this is Grade 3a (e.g. the best and most versatile) or lower quality 3b land. The land immediately surrounding settlements are susceptible to loss in future development.

- 5.29 The Local Plan Policy STP1 affords protection to agricultural land resources by defining settlement boundaries for small villages and limiting residential development in rural areas to infill development within existing built up areas. The Local Plan further defines a tight settlement boundary around the built area of Rennington. The RNP does not propose to alter the Local Plan settlement boundary for Rennington. However, Policy RR1 does set out a tight settlement boundary for Rock which includes the current built area and the proposed site allocation at Land west of Cricket Field. The continuation of the Local Plan approach of a tight settlement boundary for Rennington and a settlement boundary for Rock will help to ensure the long term preservation and retention of agricultural land resources around these settlements, although positive effects are not realised because in the absence of the RNP, protection is afforded by the Local Plan.
- 5.30 The proposed site allocations consists of Grade 3 agricultural land. However, given the scale of the sites and loss of resource (less than 1 hectare), no significant effects are predicted.
- 5.31 The scale of housing proposed is unlikely to have any significant impacts at the catchment level to cause pressure on water resources. There is potential for development to result in pollution in surface water run-off which could adversely affect water quality. However, such potential effects can likely be mitigated through sustainable urban drainage and somewhat balanced from potential improvements to water quality from the change of use of the site allocations and thus removal of agriculture related pollutants in run-off.
- 5.32 Overall, the small scale of growth proposed in the RNP will result in a minor loss of agricultural land resources. Otherwise, the mitigation measures proposed within policy should support the preservation of land, soil and water resources. As the RNP does not propose any significant deviation from the baseline, broadly **neutral effects** are predicted on this SEA objective.

Landscape

- 5.33 The Rennington neighbourhood area sits within a diverse landscape, including across two National Character Areas and two local character areas, and adjacent to a National Landscape. At a localised scale, the neighbourhood area is mostly characterised by gently rolling farmland with an often weak field boundary pattern, large farmsteads and some small hills and occasional wooded estates. Towards Rock, the landscape is largely wooded, with coniferous shelterbelts and deciduous woodland strips. Hedgerows are common, although their condition is variable. Belts of Scots pine are a distinctive feature, and estate influences occur at Rock House resulting in a more intimate landscape experience. The RNP seeks to protect these landscape features through Policy RR11 which requires development to conserve and where possible enhance 'Trees and woodlands in the Neighbourhood Area including the Plantations around Rock, and the Mill Chase woodland in Rennington'. The policy further resists development which involve the loss of hedgerows and mature trees.

- 5.34 The protection of local landscape character and appearance is further supported through policies that set out measures that directly or indirectly protect and seek to enhance landscape character and sensitivity. Policy RR7 requires development to have particular regard to 'the importance of the natural and designed landscapes'. Policy RR3 also requires housing development planning submissions to be accompanied by a 'detailed landscaping scheme'. This should help reduce some impacts on landscape and townscape character through supporting sensitive design. Policy RR3 should also encourage developers to consider landscape design and character early in the design.
- 5.35 The intrinsic qualities of the local landscape are afforded a level of protection through the RNP policies which recognise the importance of green and open spaces both within and adjacent to the built area. Policy RR10 designates six sites as local green space and seeks to afford them protection in 'a manner consistent with national policy'. These designations include features which contribute positively towards maintaining the rural built character of Rennington and Rock and are intrinsic to the landscape character.
- 5.36 Effects of development on the landscape character and setting are likely to be further managed through the implementation of Policy RR1, which seeks to limit development to within settlement boundaries, with the remaining of the parish other than site allocations defined as open countryside. This should afford additional protection to the countryside which should help preserve existing village character and the openness of the surrounding landscape.
- 5.37 Regarding site allocations, Policy RR4 allocates Land west of Cricket Field in Rock for up to 8 homes. The site benefits from existing trees and planting along the southern and eastern boundaries, which provide some definition to the site along these boundaries. Otherwise, the site is open in character to the north and the west. Development would involve extending the built area of Rock beyond a defined extent to the south of The Avenue and thus would appear as a linear extension of the built area into open countryside. Policy RR4 seeks to mitigate some impacts on landscape character by requiring development to retain all existing trees and introduce a 'belt of native woodland trees' on the northern boundary. This will help to establish some level of containment to the development, but permanent harm to landscape character is still likely due to the linear extension of development into open countryside.
- 5.38 In the contrary, the housing allocation in Stamford is well-contained and bounded to the west by woodland and contained by development and its curtilage to the east and south. Policy RR5 further requires all trees within and adjacent to the site to be retained and development proposals to be accompanied by a detailed landscaping scheme. Development at this location is therefore not likely to result in any adverse effects on landscape character, although the potential to introduce new landscape features and derive positive effects are also likely to be limited.
- 5.39 It is considered that the RNP provides a good framework for the protection and enhancement of the local landscape. However, the proposed allocation at Land west of Cricket Field in Rock is likely to have some adverse effects on landscape character through the linear extension of the built area of Rock beyond a defined extent into open countryside. Whilst mitigation measures are proposed in the RNP to address the effects, harm to local landscape character is still likely. Overall, a **minor negative effect** is predicted.

Conclusions

5.40 **Table 5-2** summarises the overall effects of the policies within the draft RNP for each SEA topic. It is important to differentiate between significant effects, which are predicted to lead to changes in the baseline position, and those effects that are broadly positive or negative, but are less likely to lead to substantial changes.

5.41 Overall, neutral or positive effects are predicted across each SEA topic, with the exception being the 'Landscape' objective, where a minor negative effect is predicted relating to the harm to landscape character from the proposed allocation at Land west of Cricket Field in Rock. However, the effects are not considered significant due to the limited scale of harm and the proposed mitigation in the RNP and protection afforded through local and national planning policy.

Table 5-2: Summary of overall effects for each SEA Topic.

SEA Topic	Overall Effects
Biodiversity and geodiversity	Neutral effects
Community wellbeing	Minor positive effect
Historic environment	Moderate positive effect
Land, soil, and water resources	Neutral effects
Landscape	Minor negative effect

Recommendations

5.42 A number of recommendations were identified through the SEA process to enhance the positive effects of the draft RNP and mitigate any negatives. These are summarised below:

- Policy RR3 sets out a housing mix that deviates from the identified need in the HNA for primarily two-bedroom units in the neighbourhood area. The policy could be improved by requiring a housing mix that aligns with the type and size needs identified in the HNA and by encouraging a higher proportion of affordable housing. However, this should be subject to viability.
- Policy RR3 requires development to deliver a 10% biodiversity net gain, which accords with statutory requirements. The policy could be improved by requiring a higher amount of net gain for development (if viability) or by requiring onsite net gain where feasible.
- Policy RR8 identifies non-designated heritage assets. The policy could be improved by requiring development to protect these assets or require substantial public benefit to offset any harm or loss of the heritage asset.
- Policy R11 identifies wildlife corridors but does not set out any measures to protect and enhance them which undermines their effectiveness. The policy can be improved by setting out a requirement for development to protect and enhance the wildlife corridors.

6. What are the next steps?

Plan finalisation

- 6.1 This SEA Environmental Report accompanies the RNP for Regulation 14 consultation.
- 6.2 Following the close of Regulation 14 consultation, any representations made will be considered by the Steering Group, and the RNP and Environmental Report will be updated as necessary. The updated and final version of the SEA Environmental Report will then accompany the RNP for submission to the Local Planning Authority, Northumberland County Council, for subsequent Independent Examination.
- 6.3 At Independent Examination, the RNP will be considered in terms of whether it meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with local planning policy.
- 6.4 If the Independent Examination is favourable, the RNP will be subject to a referendum, organised by Northumberland County Council. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the RNP, then it will be 'made'. Once made, the RNP will become part of the Development Plan for the neighbourhood area and replace the current Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan.

Monitoring

- 6.5 The SEA regulations¹⁶ 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.
- 6.6 It is anticipated that monitoring of effects of the RNP will be undertaken by Northumberland County 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 RNP that would warrant more stringent monitoring over and above that already undertaken by Northumberland County Council.

¹⁶ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Appendix A - Reasonable alternative site options detailed maps

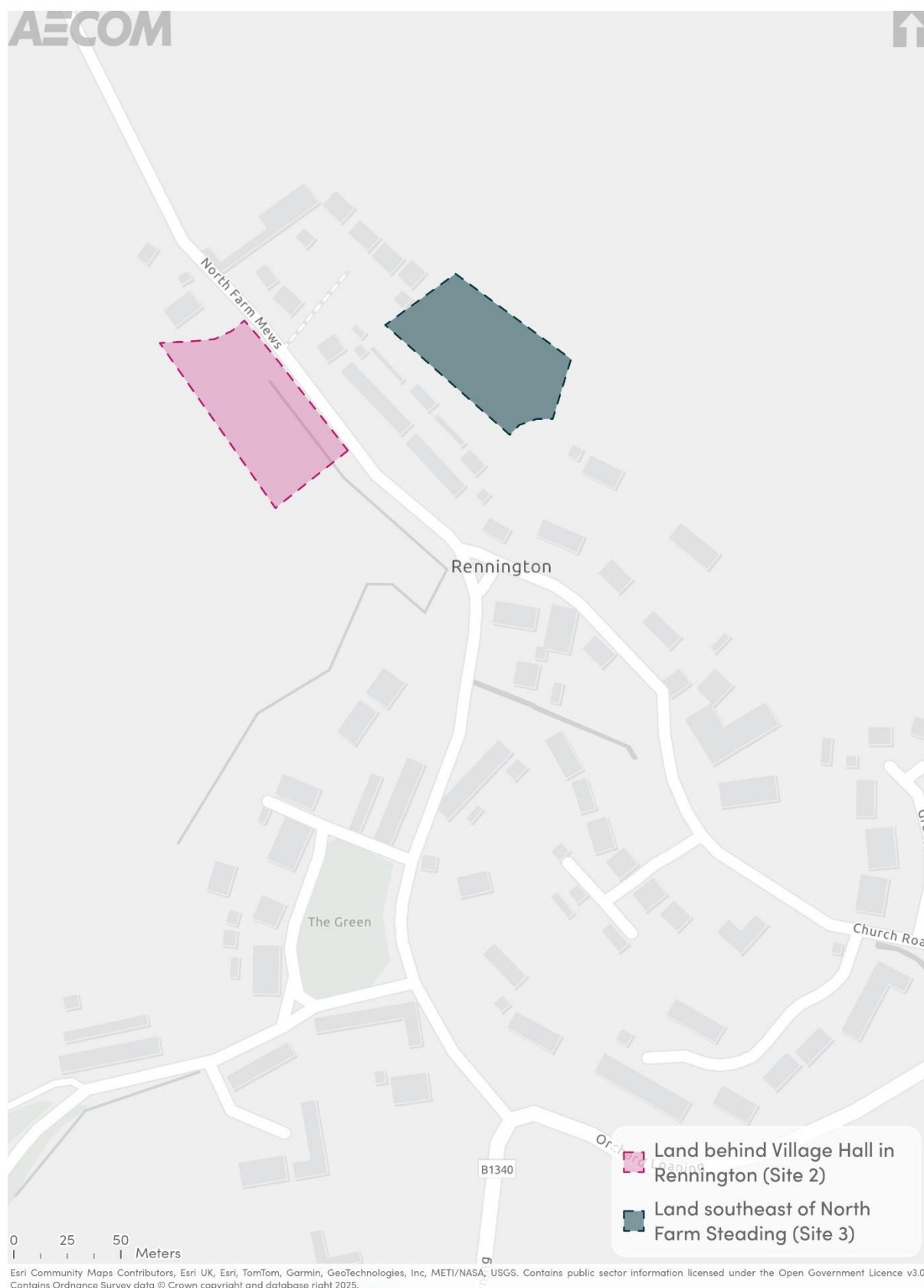


Figure A.1: Reasonable alternative site options in Rennington

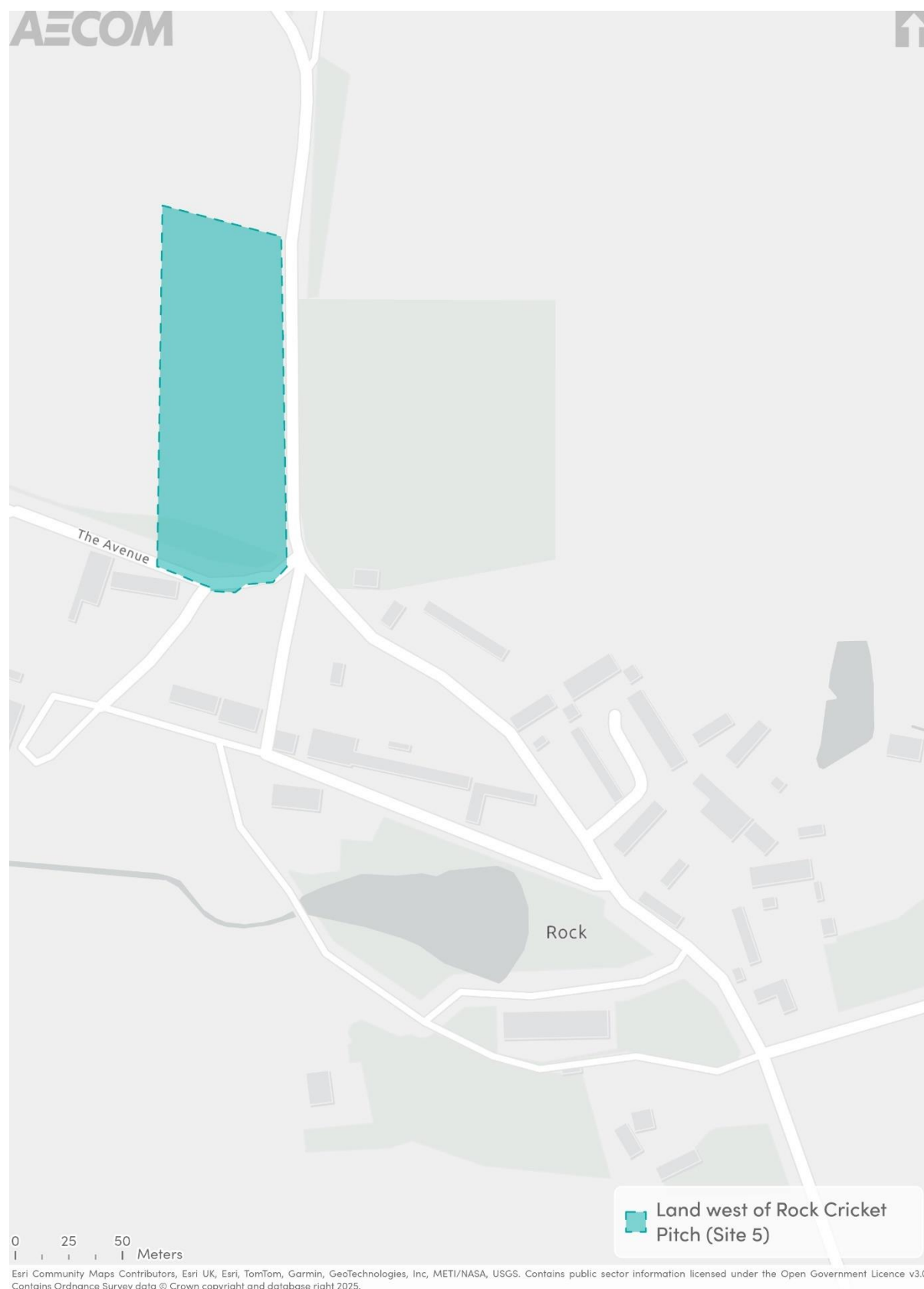


Figure A.2: Reasonable alternative site options in Rock

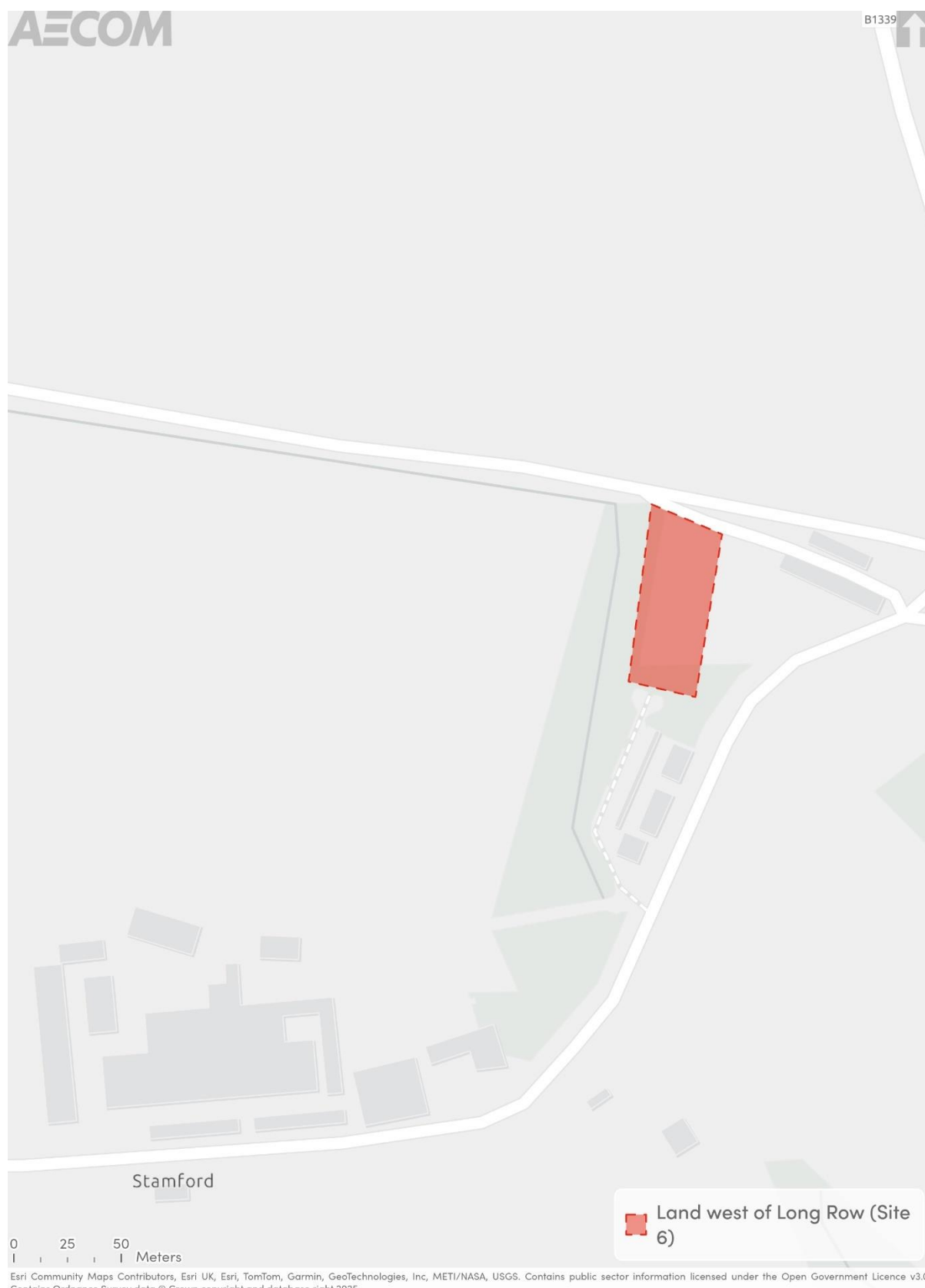


Figure A.3: Reasonable alternative site options in Stamford

Appendix B - SEA Scoping Report

See separate Scoping Report document.

