

Winslow Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2033

Environmental Report



**Published by Winslow Town Council for consultation in
accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and
Programmes Regulations 2004**

Regulation 14 consultation pre-submission draft

18 December 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this Environmental Report is to provide an Environmental Assessment (EA) of any significant effects resulting from the policies and proposals of the Submission version of the Winslow Neighbourhood Plan 2021-2033 (WNP) in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. This WNP is an update of the original Winslow Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2031 (WNP2014), and the EA in this report follows the same methodology as was used in the Strategic EA for WNP2014.

1.2 Although no formal screening opinion has been issued by Buckinghamshire Council (BC) requiring an EA, one has been prepared by Winslow Town Council in any event. The WNP has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended). Both the WNP and EA have been undertaken in close collaboration with officers of BC.

2. Background to the Environmental Assessment

2.1 An Environmental Assessment (EA) involves the evaluation of the environmental impacts of a plan. The requirement for an EA is set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans or Programmes Regulations 2004 as follows:

- An outline of the contents, main objectives of the Plan, and relationship with other relevant plans or programmes
- 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, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance
- The environmental protection objectives, established at international or national level, which are relevant to the Plan and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation
- The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the inter-relationship between the above factors
- The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce, and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the Plan
- An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of competency encountered in compiling the required information
- A description of measures that may be used for monitoring.

2.2 The method for the assessment of the WNP is intended to be proportionate to the task of assessing the relatively modest development proposals compared to those covering a whole local planning authority area.

2.3 The report responds to each of the EA requirements in turn, beginning with a short description of the WNP, identifying the key environmental features of the area and then assessing the impact of the strategic objectives and policies of the WNP on those features, using a number of EA objectives and measures.

3. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the WNP and relationship with other relevant plans or programmes

3.1 The WNP contains a number of policies for the use and development of land in the town of Winslow in the plan period from 2022 to 2033. These policies, together with the policies of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) that was adopted in September 2021 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, updated in July 2021), will be used by BC in determining planning applications once the WNP is made.

3.2 The Vision of the WNP is:

“In 2033, Winslow will have grown to become a more sustainable town that is increasingly able to meet its own needs for housing, jobs, community facilities and public and commercial services.

The town will have continued a pattern of growth started over fifty years earlier by infilling land in stages to relevant natural physical boundaries. Its population will have reached 6,000 with 2,500 homes, which comprise a mix of open market and affordable housing of all types. It has provided an increasing number of homes for older people.

Its new railway station has improved the town’s connectivity to large towns to the east and west, and to London via Aylesbury and southern Buckinghamshire, helping local people commute into and out of the town or travel to commercial and leisure facilities without using their cars on roads that have become increasingly congested. Train services also connect Winslow with other national railway routes either by through trains or by connections to other services at Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford, St Neots and Cambridge.

Its secondary, primary and special schools are popular and provide excellent education to the town’s students and those in the surrounding rural area. Its new medical centre and improved community and sports facilities have provided the extra capacity to meet the growing needs of local residents. The number of jobs in the town has grown significantly as competitive business parks have supported local entrepreneurs and, together with the higher level skills of the town’s workforce, have attracted inward investment.

Above all, the town has retained its special historic and architectural character by carefully managing change within its built-up area and by protecting its setting and surrounding open countryside from development.”

3.3 In pursuit of this Vision, the WNP sets six strategic objectives and the following re-statement of these also suggests specific measures by which success could be monitored and evaluated :

i. To meet the future housing demand and need for the town

- No. of open market homes
 - No. of custom-build homes
 - No. of affordable homes
 - No. of affordable homes for local people
- ii. **To retain and grow the number of jobs in the town**
- No. of jobs retained
 - No. of new jobs created
- iii. **To protect the special historic and landscape character of the town and its surroundings**
- No. of designated heritage assets lost to development
 - No. of designated environmental assets lost to development
- iv. **To improve the breadth and quality of community and sports facilities in the town**
- Net additional floorspace in active community use
 - Net additional land in active sports use
 - Area of publicly accessible open spaces
 - Length of footpaths through open spaces and countryside
- v. **To bolster the resilience of the town’s shopping area**
- No. of retail establishments
 - Additional retail floorspace
- vi. **To encourage greater use of public transport, cycling and walking**
- No. of bus services serving the town
 - Km of cycle paths in the parish (including shared foot/cycle paths)

3.4 The WNP sets out a range of housing, employment, retail, and community asset policies and land allocations. These policies are each assessed in section 8 of the EA below.

4. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment

4.1 Within the WNP area there are no statutory environmental designations other than some areas of woodland identified on the National Inventory of Woodlands & Trees. There are also a number of different types of Environmental Stewardship Agreements and one Woodland Grant Scheme on the eastern edge of the Town at Abovemead Farm. A designated Biological Notification Site covering former clay workings lies to the south-east of Brickyard Farm. Elsewhere a number of compensatory environmental mitigation measures are being implemented by East West Rail to create habitats for sensitive species displaced from the railway corridor.

- 4.2 The settlement of Winslow contains a number of important heritage assets, namely:
- the Winslow Conservation Area
 - 81 listed buildings, including Winslow Hall (Grade I), Keach’s Meeting House & Graveyard Walls (II*) and Church of St Laurence (II*)
 - many other designated heritage assets (buildings and spaces)

5. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected

5.1 The WNP area comprises the town settlement of Winslow set within the parish’s rural landscape of a variety of characteristics. The 2008 Aylesbury Landscape Character Assessment shows that the urban edge to the east, south and west (beyond Furze Lane) of the town - defined as the Claydon Valley - is the most sensitive to the encroachment of development.

5.2 Conversely, the character areas forming the rural edge north of the railway line – defined as the Winslow Ridge and Claydon Tributary - are relatively less sensitive. It is important, therefore, that the WNP policies reflect this relative landscape quality and capacity to contain development on the edge of the town.

5.3 The area also includes the Winslow Conservation Area, which lies at the heart of the town and includes its main shopping area and most of its listed buildings and other heritage assets. An Appraisal by the former Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) for the Conservation Area was adopted in 2007 and provides a detailed analysis of its special character and the means by which this character will be preserved and enhanced.

6. Any existing environmental problems that are relevant to the WNP

6.1 The WNP area does not suffer from any significant environmental problems. The community consultations have shown that traffic congestion in the High Street and at key local junctions on the A413 can be problematic at peak times. Similarly, the Station Road Industrial Estate access onto Station Road, which is not well suited to HGV movements, and its close proximity on all sides to residential development, indicate that the site is no longer appropriate for this type of business use.

6.2 Work on East West Rail has temporarily disrupted many local footpaths and reduced some areas of open space, but these disruptions are only temporary.

6.3 The town has few employers of any significant size, which has resulted in increasing levels of out-commuting to larger urban centres as the town has grown over the decades. This is a cause of congestion on the town’s main road network at peak periods as well as a contributor to carbon emissions and reduced air quality

6.4 There are no other pressing environmental problems to which the WNP needs to respond.

7. The environmental protection objectives that are relevant to the WNP and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation

7.1 The EA objectives of the WNP are set out in Table A below. They were derived from the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan Strategy of 2012. They comprise those environmental objectives of greatest relevance to the WNP and that have measures that are meaningful to assess at this small scale. (VAP SA refers to the Vale of Aylesbury Plan Sustainability Appraisal)

WNP EA Objective	WNP EA Measures
1. Design - secure the highest possible design quality in existing places and new development (VAP SA objective 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no. of proposals achieving high design standards
2. Green infrastructure - enable residents to access green infrastructure and open space. (VAP SA objective 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> area of existing green infrastructure assets protected and/or enhanced area of new green infrastructure planned
3. Best use of land - minimise loss of biodiverse and bioproductive land to development and harness development to decontaminate and remediate damaged land where practicable. (VAP SA objective 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of development on previously used land
4. Transport and travel - reduce the need to travel, encourage people to do as much of their travelling as possible on foot and bicycle, support more sustainable modes and minimise car use. (VAP SA objective 14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no. of new public transport, cycling or walking routes, services or facilities
5. Air quality - minimise air pollution, minimise exposure to it. (VAP SA objective 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> amount of air pollution

WNP EA Objective	WNP EA Measures
<p>6. Landscape and heritage - protect and enhance the landscape, townscape, historic environment and cultural heritage and promote access to and enjoyment of them. (VAP SA objective 16)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of new homes allocated on sites in less sensitive landscape character areas • number of development sites in or adjoining the Winslow Conservation Area or affecting Listed Buildings and other designated heritage assets
<p>7. Biodiversity - protect and enhance biodiversity, natural habitats and fauna and flora, including (but not only): international, national and local designated sites; and protected species and habitat types identified as priorities for biological conservation. (VAP SA objective 17)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % development proposals affecting biodiversity assets
<p>8. Flooding - minimise the risk to people and property from flooding. (VAP SA objective 18)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of new homes allocated on sites located in Flood Zone 2 or 3
<p>9. Water stress - maintain, and where possible enhance, water quality & avoid water stress (VAP SA objective 19)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of new homes allocated on sites that avoid water stress
<p>10. Energy and climate change - minimise emissions of greenhouse gases in the District that are caused by activities and decisions in it, and maximise the resilience of residents, businesses and the natural environment to future climate change. (VAP SA objective 20)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of new homes allocated that will deliver renewable energy

Table A: WNP EA Objectives & Measures

8. The likely significant effects on the environment

8.1 The likely significant effects of the strategic objectives and policies of the WNP on the environment are assessed in turn below. In each case, the assessment uses the following notation:

- + positive
- 0 neutral
- negative

8.2 In most cases, it is acknowledged that the data is not collected or reported at a WNP scale to enable an accurate assessment. In addition, the scale of development proposed in the WNP, whilst significant in relation to the town's existing housing stock, is nevertheless too small to make reliable identification of cause-and-effect relationships between inputs and outputs. However, the assessment does seek to identify the relative attributes of the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan to inform the reader.

Assessing the impact of the WNP Strategic Objectives

8.3 In Table B below the six strategic objectives of the WNP are assessed against the ten WNP EA objectives.

WNP EA Objectives	WNP Strategic Objectives					
	1 Housing	2 Jobs	3 Character	4 Community	5 Shopping	6 Transport
Design	+	0	+	+	0	0
Green Infrastructure	0	0	+	+	0	+
Best Use of land	+	0	0	+	0	0
Transport & Travel	0	+	0	+	0	+
Air Quality	-	+	0	+	0	+
Landscape & Heritage	0	-	+	+	+	0
Biodiversity	0	0	+	+	0	0
Flooding	0	0	0	0	0	0
Water stress	-	-	0	0	0	0
Energy & ClimateChange	+	+	-	+	0	+

Table B: Assessment of WNP Strategic Objectives

8.4 This analysis suggests that there is an overall positive relationship between the two sets of objectives. On the one hand it acknowledges that the housing and economic development objectives will inevitably have an environmental impact. On the other, it highlights the opportunity for such development to have net benefits across the full range of objectives.

8.5 In some cases there is a strong correlation between the two sets of objectives, notably in transport and travel; air quality; green infrastructure and energy and climate change. Here, the WNP strategic objectives aim to deliver development growth in the most appropriate locations and to achieve a balance between housing, employment and retail policies, the net result of which will be a lower dependence on private vehicle journeys for employment and shopping purposes than at present.

Assessing the impact of the Neighbourhood Plan policies

8.6 The assessment considers each policy in turn, combining an overview and comparison of the impact of the policy and of having no policy with a short commentary. The assessment should therefore be read in conjunction with the Pre-Submission WNP document and Proposals Map.

Policy 1 - A Spatial Plan for the Town

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	+	0
Green Infrastructure	+	0
Best Use of land	+	-
Transport & Travel	+	-
Air Quality	+	-
Landscape & Heritage	+	-
Biodiversity	+	-
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	+	-

8.7 This policy establishes the key principle within which all other policies, especially those that allocate land for development, have been designed. Essentially, there are two possible spatial strategies, assuming that there will be a maximum quantum of housing development within the plan period:

- infill the existing settlement to its current physical boundaries and respond to the alignment of the 'East West Rail' line on the northern boundary – this was the chosen strategy on which Policy 2 of WNP2014 was based
- extend the town beyond those boundaries in any one of a number of directions south-west, south, south-east, east and north-east – this is the strategy that could have formed an alternative policy for WNP2014.

8.8 For this revised WNP most of the sites being allocated are those which had already been allocated in WNP2014. The main exceptions are

- Housing on site WIN001 which has been allocated in VALP
- An extension of the former site 13 for Sports Facilities in response to the recognition

that the original site was too small and included land now found to be undevelopable because of protected habitats

- A displaced location of the former site 7 for employment development to the west in order to accommodate the enlargement of former site 13 for sports facilities.

8.9 The two strategies are compared above. In the absence of a Neighbourhood Plan it would not be as easy to confine development to only one direction beyond the town’s current boundary, so “no NP” scores badly against the WNP policy on almost all environmental objectives.

8.10 This is especially the case in respect of making the best use of land within the current settlement form and the consequences arising therefrom regarding encroachment into the open countryside and the need for car trips to access services. On some other measures, the comparison is less stark but they still favour the chosen policy in WNP. On the others, there is no discernible difference.

8.11 The assessment shows that this important policy of the WNP, which steers the later allocations policies on housing, business and retail, has strong environmental benefits. In directing development to a specific edge of the town and defining a Winslow Settlement Boundary for this purpose, the policy is intended to minimise impacts on the open countryside and to avoid unnecessary and harmful development dispersal.

Policy 2 - Housing Site Allocations

WNP EA Objective	Station Road Site a	Rugby field Site b	Extra-care Site c	WIN001 Site d
Design	0	0	0	+
Green Infrastructure	+	+	0	+
Best Use of land	+	+	+	+
Transport & Travel	+	+	+	+
Air Quality	+	+	+	+
Landscape & Heritage	0	0	0	+
Biodiversity	+	+	0	+
Flooding	0	0	0	0
Water stress	0	0	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	0	0	0	0

8.12 The assessment shows that the proposed allocation sites, which are the only sites that accord with Policy 1, collectively deliver significant environmental benefits.

8.13 All the sites allocated make a good use of land within the existing settlement form. Their location will encourage and enable many more trips to be made by walking and cycling using an enhanced green infrastructure network connecting the largest new development sites to key locations. This will reduce the environmental impact of traffic congestion in the historic town centre and more generally help to improve local air quality as a result.

8.14 The Station Road site (a) proposal will make better use of the current industrial land and will enable any ground condition problems arising from its industrial uses to be addressed to deliver biodiversity gain. The Rugby field site (b) will also deliver such a gain from its protection of an existing wildlife area and its connection into the surrounding countryside. Sites (c) and (d) are strategic allocations made by VALP which must be included in WNP.

8.15 On all sites the housing design policy seeks to secure good quality architecture that is sensitive to and consistent with the established architectural styles within the town.

8.16 It is not possible to identify any specific impacts in relation to flooding or climate change.

Policy 3 – Affordable Housing

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	0	0
Green Infrastructure	0	0
Best Use of land	0	0
Transport & Travel	0	0
Air Quality	0	0
Landscape & Heritage	0	0
Biodiversity	0	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	0	0

8.17 The assessment shows that this policy has no environmental impact.

Policy 4 – Housing Design

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	+	0
Green Infrastructure	+	0
Best Use of land	+	0
Transport & Travel	+	0
Air Quality	0	0
Landscape & Heritage	+	0
Biodiversity	+	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	+	0

8.18 The assessment shows that the policy will strongly support high quality design outcomes and especially within or adjoining the Conservation Area boundary to conserve or enhance the value of the town’s heritage assets.

Policy 5 – Employment

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	+	0
Green Infrastructure	0	0
Best Use of land	+	0
Transport & Travel	+	0
Air Quality	+	0
Landscape & Heritage	0	0
Biodiversity	0	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	+	0

8.19 The assessment shows that the policy has a positive impact in making the best use of two sites close to the new railway station for a variety of complementary employment uses that together will encourage fewer car trips from the town than may otherwise have been the case. The sites are also located in close proximity to the major housing allocation sites and close to other complementary land uses proposed in policies 6 (sports and recreation facilities on the Sports Hub). These attributes should provide job opportunities for the local labour force that may over time reduce the level of current out-commuting.

8.20 The sites also have the potential to enhance the appearance of the northern entrance to the town with high quality buildings to establish a new identity of Winslow in the landscape.

Policy 6 – Sports and recreation (the Sports Hub)

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	+	0
Green Infrastructure	+	0
Best Use of land	+	0
Transport & Travel	+	-
Air Quality	+	-
Landscape & Heritage	+	0
Biodiversity	+	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	+	-

8.21 The assessment shows that the policy will have positive benefits by encouraging sport and recreation on a suitable site of little current agricultural or landscape value at a scale that is consistent with the growth of the town's population.

8.22 It is very well located in close proximity to the employment allocations in policy 5 adjoining the A413 Winslow to Buckingham Road, the Great Horwood Road to Milton Keynes and most especially the proposed railway station.

8.23 The earlier WNP allocated only part of the site covered by this policy, but more detailed assessments showed that a larger site was necessary to accommodate the sports facilities which are to be relocated from the Winslow Centre whilst, at the same time, ensuring the protection of a significant area of wildlife habitat in the centre of the site.

Policy 7 –Medical facilities

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	0	0
Green Infrastructure	0	0
Best Use of land	+	0
Transport & Travel	+	0
Air Quality	0	0
Landscape & Heritage	+	0
Biodiversity	0	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	0	0

8.24 The assessment shows that the policy will have a positive impact by locating the new facility on previously developed land close to the core of the town and to the main new housing allocation sites.

Policy 8 – Heart of Winslow

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	+	0
Green Infrastructure	+	0
Best Use of land	+	0
Transport & Travel	+	0
Air Quality	0	0
Landscape & Heritage	+	0
Biodiversity	0	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	0	-

8.25 The assessment shows that the policy has a number of positive environmental impacts. It seeks to maintain and enhance community, sport and recreation facilities in the centre of town. Tomkins Park & Arboretum (a designated heritage asset) will remain as an area of quality landscape and biodiversity, whilst also accommodating recreation uses.

8.26 If development proposals for the Sports & Recreation Ground come forward, then these should add community meeting spaces, improve accommodation for the sports clubs and provide much needed additional parking for the Heart of Winslow and for town centre visitors and residents.

Policy 9 – Site of the former Winslow Centre

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	+	0
Green Infrastructure	0	0
Best Use of land	+	0
Transport & Travel	+	0
Air Quality	+	0
Landscape & Heritage	0	0
Biodiversity	+	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	0	0

8.27 Assessment of this policy to re-use this “brownfield” site for a mixed use development comprising a medical centre, extra-care housing, the community library, with the potential for some other functions and/or some additional housing shows positive benefits against a number of objectives.

Policy 10 – Winslow Shopping Area

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	0	0
Green Infrastructure	0	0
Best Use of land	0	0
Transport & Travel	+	0
Air Quality	0	0
Landscape & Heritage	+	0
Biodiversity	0	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	+	0

8.28 The assessment shows that the policy will have a positive impact by seeking to protect the existing retail uses in the traditional Shopping Area. A viable and vital town centre will encourage property owners to invest in maintaining buildings in the Conservation Area thus preserving its special heritage value.

Policy 11 – Traffic, Transport, Cycle Routes and Parking

WNP EA Objective	Traffic impacts	Public transport	Cycle routes	EV charging
Design	0	+	+	+
Green Infrastructure	0	0	+	0
Best Use of land	0	0	+	0
Transport & Travel	+	+	+	+
Air Quality	+	+	+	+
Landscape & Heritage	0	0	+	0
Biodiversity	+	0	0	0
Flooding	0	0	0	0
Water stress	0	0	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	0	+	+	+

8.29 Assessment of this multi-faceted policy shows benefits from each aspect against several objectives. The scores in this table have been set relative to a “no policy” option in each of these policy areas, so + represents better whilst - would be worse.

Policy 12 - Preserving and Enhancing the Environment and the Town's Heritage

WNP EA Objective	WNP Policy	No Policy
Design	+	0
Green Infrastructure	+	0
Best Use of land	0	-
Transport & Travel	0	0
Air Quality	+	0
Landscape & Heritage	+	0
Biodiversity	+	0
Flooding	0	0
Water stress	0	0
Energy & Climate Change	0	-

8.30 The assessment shows that the policy has positive impacts by protecting important green infrastructure assets as well as the town's many historic buildings and other built form features that help to shape the character of the town. Some of the areas to be designated as local green spaces also have biodiversity value.

9. The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce, and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the WNP

9.1 The assessment shows that there are no significant adverse effects resulting from the policies of the WNP. The policies have been specifically chosen and formulated to adhere to the principles of sustainable development as defined by the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan and the NPPF.

10. An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with

10.1 The assessment has compared the WNP policies with the option of having no policy. In most cases, the 'no policy' option has made no material difference, as all the policy areas are covered by the development plan (VALP) and NPPF. The WNP is merely refining those policy areas to reflect their specific relevance to Winslow. And, given the approach taken in Policy 1 to directing site-specific development allocations, the sites chosen for allocation are those that comply with those policies. These comprise sites which are already allocated in WNP2014 or those which have been allocated by VALP prior to the review of WNP being completed. Those sites satisfy the strategic requirements imposed by VALP. It has therefore not been necessary to search for new sites nor to compare sites relative to each other.

11. A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring

11.1 Buckinghamshire Council and Winslow Town Council will jointly monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the WNP using the available data. The Buckinghamshire Council Monitoring Report will provide some data at this level.