

**Mepal
Neighbourhood Plan
2022-2031**

**STRATEGIC
ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT**

**SEA Screening Request
December 2022**



Mepal Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2031

SEA Screening Request December 2022

Pre-submission draft of the Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with Regulation 14 of Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012



The Parish Council received professional planning support from NEIGHBOURHOOD-PLAN.CO.UK during the production of this Neighbourhood Plan.



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Mepal Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2031



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Introduction

1. Mepal Council have undertaken this SEA screening statement request. It is the role of East Cambridgeshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to undertake a screening of the Neighbourhood Plan to determine whether or not the contents of the Mepal Neighbourhood Development Plan require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
2. This document has been produced to assist the LPA undertake the screening in collaboration with the three designated environmental bodies, namely the Environment Agency; Natural England; and Historic England.
3. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will need to be undertaken for certain development plans that would have a significant environmental effect. An SEA may be required for a Neighbourhood Plan, dependant on what the plan is proposing.
4. The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 require that the need for an SEA is to be determined by a screening process. This must meet the criteria of Schedule 1 of the Regulations (Appendix 2).
5. For Mepal, it is the responsibility of East Cambridgeshire District Council to determine whether an SEA is required. To make this decision the District Council are required to consult with three statutory consultation bodies: Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England.
6. This SEA screening statement request comprises of two parts: part one assesses the Neighbourhood Plan against the steps that should be taken to determine the need for SEA in accordance with the Directive and associated regulations, part two assesses the likely significant effects on the environment of the Neighbourhood Plan.
7. This Statement has been prepared to accompany the Mepal Neighbourhood Development Plan (“the Neighbourhood Plan”) under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (“the Regulations”). The relevant local planning authority is East Cambridgeshire District Council.

Designation of Mepal Parish as a Neighbourhood Planning Area

8. A formal [application](https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/neighbourhood-planning)¹ was made by Mepal Parish Council as a ‘relevant body’ under Section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) for the designation of a neighbourhood area in order to develop a neighbourhood plan. The area of the Neighbourhood Plan is based upon the parish boundary, which was seen as appropriate as this area is recognised as the distinct community of Mepal. The request was that the Parish be recognised as a Neighbourhood Area for the purpose of producing a neighbourhood plan, in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012.
9. The Parish was [designated](https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Mepal%20NA%20Map%20A4%20ptrt.pdf)² a Neighbourhood Area on the 28 February 2022.
10. The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared by Mepal Parish Council, a qualifying body, (Section 38A (12) of the Planning and Compensation Act 2004) for the Neighbourhood Area covering the Parish of Mepal, as designated by East Cambridgeshire District Council. The

¹ <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/neighbourhood-planning>

² <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Mepal%20NA%20Map%20A4%20ptrt.pdf>

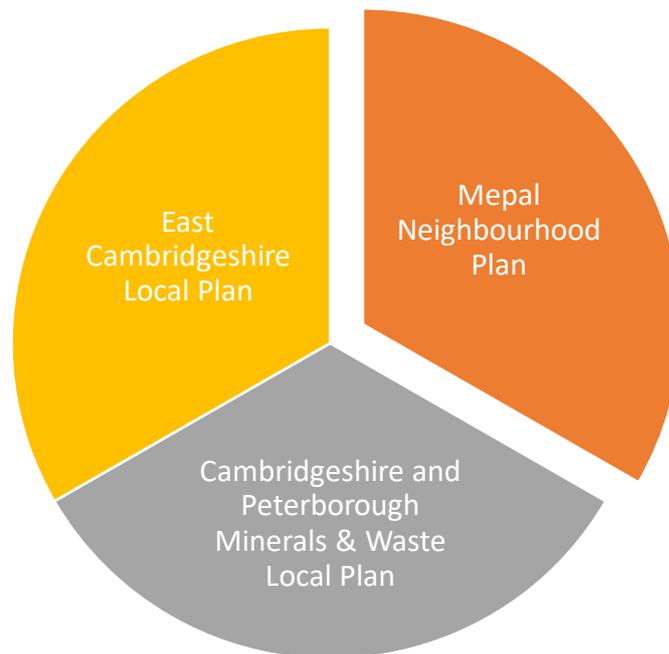
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name of the neighbourhood area is the 'Mepal Neighbourhood Area'. It does not relate to more than one neighbourhood area.

11. The policies described in the Neighbourhood Plan relate to the development and use of land in the designated Neighbourhood Area only. The document sets out the period of the Neighbourhood Plan which is from 2022 to 2036.

The Development Plan

12. The East Cambridgeshire Local Plan sets out the vision, objectives spatial strategy and policies for the future development of the district. It also identifies land and allocates sites for different types of development, such as housing and employment, to deliver the planned growth for the district to 2031.
13. The preparation of the Local Plan was informed through several stages of public consultation. The [Local Plan](#)³ was adopted by the Council on 21 April 2015, it covers the plan period up to 2031. In April 2020 the Council determined that it was necessary to review the Local Plan through what is known as a 'Single Issue Review' and addresses the housing requirement for the same plan period up to 2031.
14. The 'Development Plan' for Mepal is made up of 3 main components as follows:



15. Consultation on the Proposed Submission version of the 'Single Issue Review' of the Local Plan was carried out between 3 May and 13 June 2022. Two earlier consultations also took place on a draft document, during 2021. On 19 July 2022, the Council submitted its proposed [Single Issue Review Local Plan](#)⁴ to the Planning Inspectorate, so that an independent examination of the proposal can take place. The Examination of the Local Plan Review is underway and the hearing sessions were held in November 2022. Neither

³ <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/east-cambridgeshire-local-plan-2015>

⁴ <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/local-plan-review>

the existing East Cambridgeshire Local Plan nor the Single-Issue Review Local Plan allocate sites for development in Mepal.

Strategic policies for the purposes of neighbourhood planning

16. The system of neighbourhood planning allows Parish and Town Councils to produce neighbourhood plans to guide development at a local level. One of the requirements of such plans is that they should be in line with the 'strategic policies' of the adopted development plan for the local area.
17. East Cambridgeshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority defines which policies are to be considered 'strategic' with regard to the production of a neighbourhood plan. However, the Local Plan does not explicitly state which policies within the Local Plan are to be considered 'strategic' for the purposes of neighbourhood planning.

Stage One: Establishing the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment

18. The Government published Planning Practice Guidance states there is no legal requirement for a Neighbourhood Plan to have a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) as set out in section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. However, a qualifying body, in this case Mepal Parish Council, must demonstrate how its plan or order will contribute to achieving sustainable development. Planning Practice Guidance also states, in some limited circumstances, where a neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, it may require a strategic environmental assessment. Draft Neighbourhood Plan proposals should be assessed to determine whether the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. Consequently, a SEA screening statement has been undertaken using guidance from the Government published advice in 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' (2005).
19. The document 'A Practical Guidance to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' was published by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It sets out guidance on how to comply with the European Directive 2001/42/EC known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive that applied at that time. The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 embeds the same aspects into UK law. Figure 2 of this practical guidance shows the Directive's field of application in the form of a diagram (Appendix 2), which provides an outcome of whether a plan does or does not require an SEA.
20. Mepal Parish Council as the designated body have to "Determine whether a plan or Order is likely to have significant environmental effect". In order to do this, we are providing an assessment of the NDP against the diagram provided in Appendix 2 to establish whether an SEA is required. Each stage of the diagram provides a criterion which a 'yes' or 'no' response is required to progress to the next stage.
21. The table below shows the assessment of whether the NDP will require a full SEA. The questions below are drawn from the diagram in Appendix 2 which sets out how the SEA Directive should be applied and provides justification for the particular path considered suitable by us on behalf of Mepal Parish Council.

22. The views of East Cambridgeshire District Council as the relevant Local Planning Authority will be sought as will the views of the statutory environmental bodies through the consultation on the draft plan and the SEA Screening Statement. It is the responsibility of East Cambridgeshire District Council to determine whether an SEA is required, this screening has been produced to assist them in this process.

Table 1: Establishing the Need for SEA

Stage	Y/N	Reason
1. Is the PP (plan or programme) subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2(a))	Yes to criterion 1	The preparation of and adoption of the plan is allowed under The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The NDP is prepared by Mepal Parish Council (as the 'relevant body') and will be 'made' by East Cambridgeshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority. The preparation of the NDP is subject to The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) and The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	No	Communities, such as Mepal have a right to be able to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. The plan is not required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions. Instead, if 'made' the plan would form part of the statutory development plan. Therefore, it is considered necessary to answer the following questions to determine further if an SEA is required.
3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	Yes to criterion 1 No to criterion 2	The NDP is prepared to set out for town and country planning purposes; the NDP set out policies which will influence future development within the Parish of Mepal, including development of housing, employment and community land uses. However, the plan will be used as a tool which manages the design details of development rather than the principles of land use. The NDP does not allocate any sites for housing or employment development. It does however safeguard land for open space, local green space and for community use. Furthermore, the NDP will not be a tool to manage development of the scale and nature envisaged by Annex I and Annex II of the EIA Directive.

Stage	Y/N	Reason
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))	No	A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening assessment, has considered the potential impacts of the NDP on sites covered by the Habitats Regulations. This HRA screening assessment concludes that a HRA is not required for the NDP.
5. Does the PP Determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)	Yes	The NDP does not determine the land uses within Mepal as it contains no land allocations. Notwithstanding this, the NDP does provide details of the community's preferential locations for local green space and community use at local level.
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Yes	Once the NDP is 'made' by East Cambridgeshire District Council it will form part of the statutory development plan against which planning applications will be determined.
7. Is the PP's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)	No	The NDP does not deal with any of these issues.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	No (see stage 2 below)	Stage 2 of this SEA Screening Statement will consider the potential effects of the NDP on the environment. This considers the effects of the NDP against the criteria referred to in Article 3.5 of SEA Directive 2001/42/EC.

Stage Two: Likely Significant Effects on the Environment

23. The table below shows the assessment of the potential significant effects of the environment, as required by Article 3.5 of the SEA Directive.

Table 2: Assessment of the likely significant effects of the environment.

SEA Directive Criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary	Likely Significant effect? (Y/N)
The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard to:		
(a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for	The NDP would form part of the Statutory Development Plan and therefore would set a framework for future development projects in	No

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<p>projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources</p>	<p>Mepal. However, the plan sits within a wider framework set out by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan.</p> <p>The policies of the NDP are in general conformity with the NPPF and the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan. In addition, the projects for which the NDP contributes to setting a planning framework are very local in nature.</p>	
<p>(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy</p>	<p>The NDP has a low hierarchical position within a number of statutory development plans, therefore the NDP will respond to rather than influence other plans or programmes. Policies set out in the NDP are in conformity with the NPPF and the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of The TSP will work to protect and enhance the natural environment and landscape of the plan area</p>	<p>The NDP will work to protect and enhance the natural environment and landscape of Mepal, including statutory environmental designations. The policies of the NDP provide protection for areas of high environmental value, including Local Green Space. The NDP will work to protect and enhance the natural environment of Mepal, including statutory environmental designations. The policies of the NDP will not affect the protection for areas of high environmental value, including the SACs, SPAs or Ramsar sites both within and outside of but within the catchment of the plan area. The built environment of Mepal is also sought to be protected through the NDP.</p> <p>A number of NDP policies will contribute to the social sustainability of Mepal as a distinct community. Therefore, the NDP will provide socially sustainable development as defined in the NPPF.</p> <p>Through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), new residential development is seen as essential to fund important services required for socially sustainable development.</p> <p>Therefore, it is considered that the NDP will have a positive impact on local environmental assets and therefore will promote sustainable development.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme</p>	<p>There are no environmental problems directly relevant to this plan. There will be a possible increase in the number of houses in the village as a result of new development allowed for within the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan. However, the NDP will help to address wider environmental problems as highlighted in the NPPF at a local level, including provision of green space and community facilities.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of</p>	<p>The NDP is not directly relevant to the implementation of retained European legislation. This legislation is taken into account by the East</p>	<p>No</p>

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Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)	Cambridgeshire Local Plan with which the Neighbourhood Plan complies.	
SEA Directive Criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary	Likely Significant effect? (Y/N)
Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:		
(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	<p>The NDP will result in positive environmental effects through policies that seek to protect the built heritage character from coalescence and green spaces. The plan will result in positive social effects through policies which seek to support the development of community facilities.</p> <p>The duration of the positive effects outlined above are likely to be long term. However, due to the small scale and nature of the issues considered in the NDP, it is considered that any effects will be low in frequency and reversible.</p>	No
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	<p>A combination of this neighbourhood plan which seeks to protect and enhance the character, environment and setting of Mepal, and wider environmental policy of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, is likely to have cumulative positive environmental effects will have cumulative positive benefits for the area of Mepal.</p> <p>Notwithstanding this, as the NDP deals with issues which are of a small scale and nature, it is considered that the impact of the neighbourhood plan will be limited.</p>	Yes
(c) the trans boundary nature of the effects	All effects will be very local in impact, having negligible impacts on neighbouring areas.	No
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	There are no significant risks to human health or the environment. Instead, the plan aims to enhance the environment and to provide the infrastructure required to meet the social needs of local residents.	No
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);	The Neighbourhood Plan relates to an area of approximately 744ha. This is a relatively modest geographical area with a population estimate ⁵ of approximately 953. Therefore, the magnitude and spatial extent of the plan is small.	Yes
(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:	The Parish of Mepal contains no National Nature Reserves. The Plan area contains one Site of Special Scientific Interest, the Ouse Washes SSSI. The SSSI within the Parish includes more than one parcel and	Yes

⁵ This is a 2020 ONS population estimate

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; - exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or - intensive land-use 	<p>is recorded as being in both favourable condition and unfavourable - no change condition.</p> <p>In the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan area lie the Ouse Washes SAC, the Ouse Washes SPA and the Ouse Washes Ramsar sites these are part of the ‘National Sites Network’. The Ouse Washes SPA and Ramsar designations are contiguous and also cover the SAC area; the SAC covers a narrower corridor.</p> <p>In the wider vicinity of the Neighbourhood Plan area the ‘National Sites Network’ of interest are the Orton Pit SAC (Peterborough); Nene Washes SAC; Portholme SAC (Huntingdon/Godmanchester); Upper Nene Valley SAC/Upper Nene Valley Ramsar (Rushden); Fenland SAC/Woodwalton Fen Ramsar; Fenland SAC/Chippenham Fen Ramsar; Fenland SAC/Wicken Fen Ramsar; Devils Dyke SAC; and Breckland SAC/Breckland SPA/Rex Graham Reserve SAC.</p> <p>The closest site in the ‘National Sites Network’ but outside of the Neighbourhood Plan area is the Fenland SAC/Wicken Fen Ramsar lying approximately 15km to the south-east.</p> <p>The plan area contains a Scheduled Monuments and 9 Listed Buildings (no Grade I; 1 Grade II*; and 8 Grade II). There is no Conservation Area. These heritage assets will also be protected by higher tier documents, such as the NPPF, and the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan looks to identify Non-Designated Heritage Assets.</p>	
<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognized national, Community or international protection status</p>	<p>The Parish of Mepal contains no National Nature Reserves. The Plan area contains one Site of Special Scientific Interest, the Ouse Washes SSSI. The SSSI within the Parish includes more than one parcel and is recorded as being in both favourable condition and unfavourable - no change condition.</p> <p>In the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan area lie the Ouse Washes SAC, the Ouse Washes SPA and the Ouse Washes Ramsar sites these are part of the ‘National Sites Network’. The Ouse Washes SPA and Ramsar designations are contiguous and also cover the SAC area; the SAC covers a narrower corridor.</p> <p>In the wider vicinity of the Neighbourhood Plan area the ‘National Sites Network’ of interest are the Orton Pit SAC (Peterborough); Nene Washes SAC; Portholme SAC (Huntingdon/Godmanchester); Upper Nene Valley SAC/Upper Nene Valley Ramsar (Rushden); Fenland SAC/Woodwalton Fen Ramsar; Fenland SAC/Chippenham Fen Ramsar; Fenland SAC/Wicken Fen Ramsar; Devils Dyke SAC; and</p>	<p>No</p>

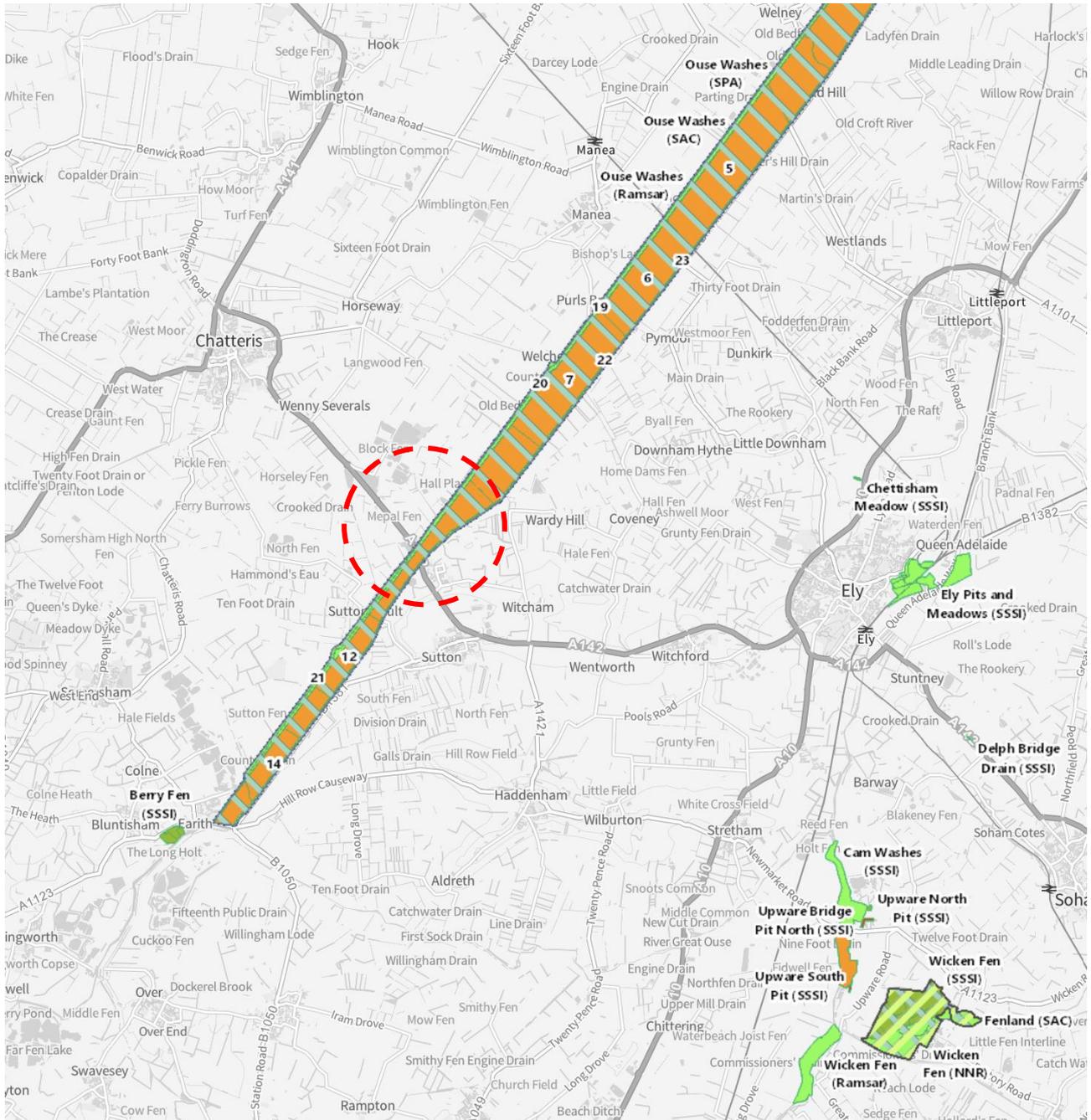
	<p>Breckland SAC/Breckland SPA/Rex Graham Reserve SAC.</p> <p>The closest site in the ‘National Sites Network’ but outside of the Neighbourhood Plan area is the Fenland SAC/Wicken Fen Ramsar lying approximately 15km to the south-east.</p> <p>The NDP contains policies aimed at protecting open space outside of designated sites such as the SAC and SSSIs to help reduce visitor pressure on the SAC.</p>	
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Consultation and Conclusion

24. As a result of the assessment in section 3, based on Article 3.5 of the SEA Directive, Mepal Parish Council considered that there would be no significant environmental effects arising from the NDP. As such, in the view of the Parish Council the NDP does not require a full SEA to be undertaken.
25. Consultation on this SEA Screening Request will be undertaken alongside the publication of the draft Neighbourhood Plan. Consultation will include East Cambridgeshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority; and the Environment Agency; Natural England; and Historic England as the three statutory environmental bodies.

Appendix One: Environmental and Heritage Assets

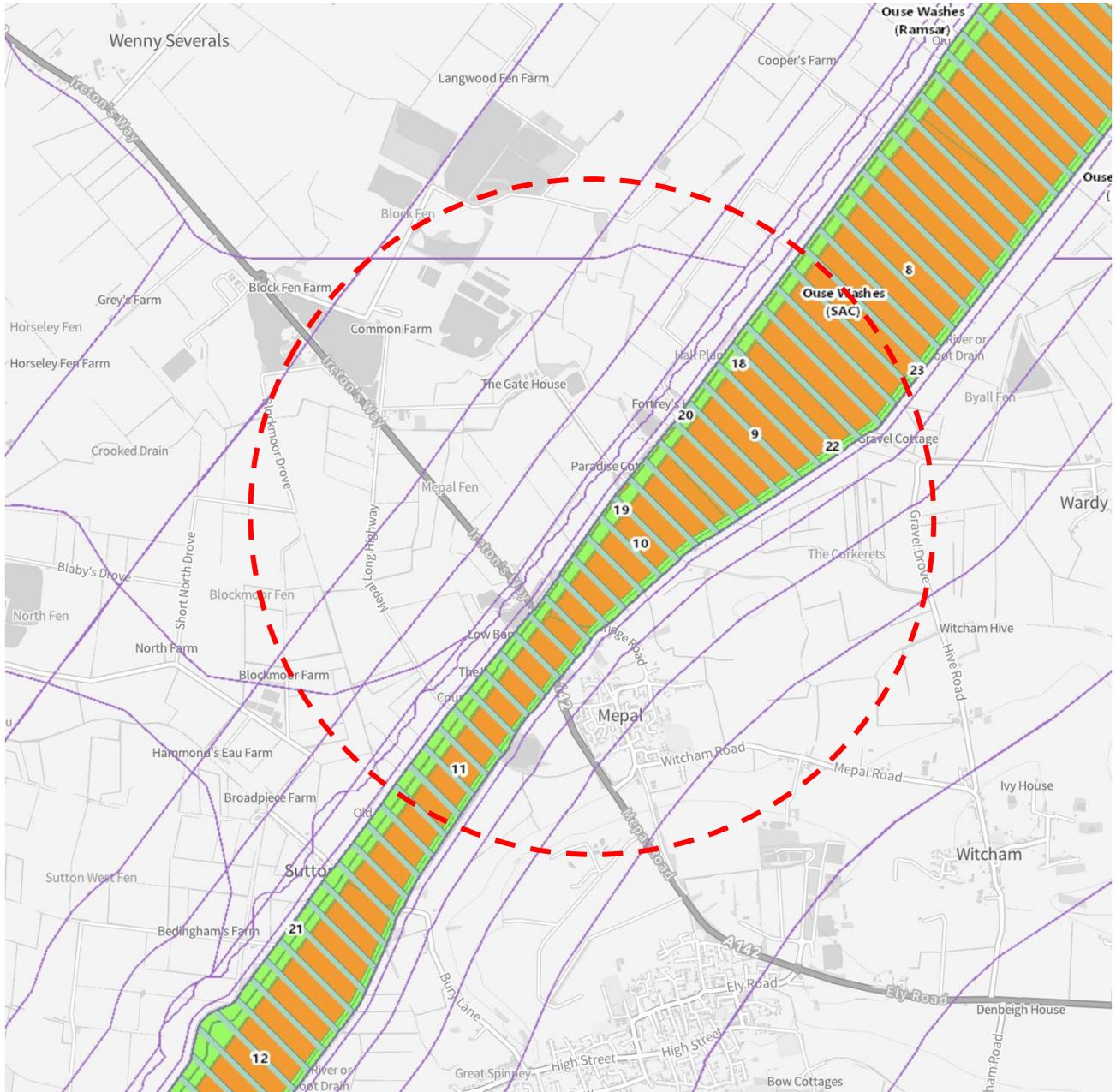
Nature Conservation Sites



Extract from magic.gov.uk website © Defra

 Broad Area of Mepal Parish

Nature Conservation Sites

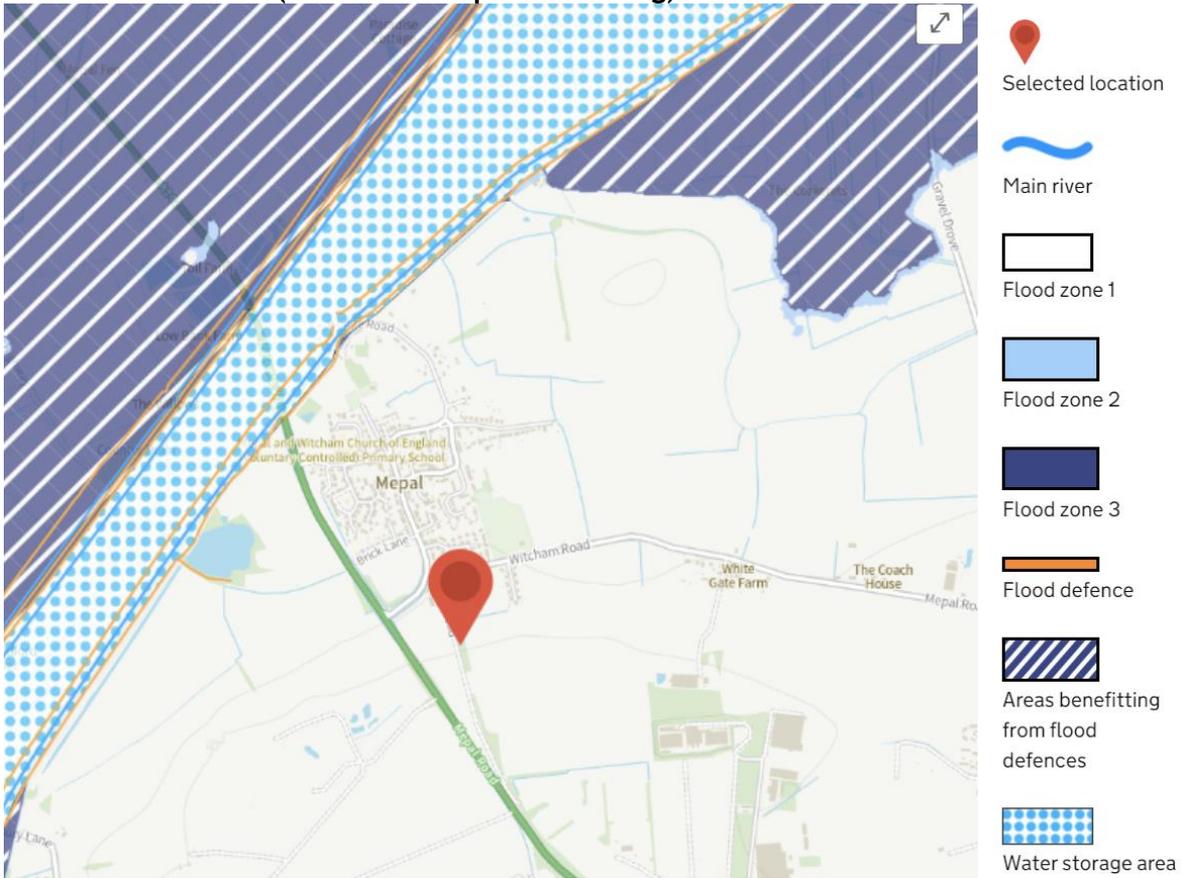


Extract from Magic.gov.uk website © Defra

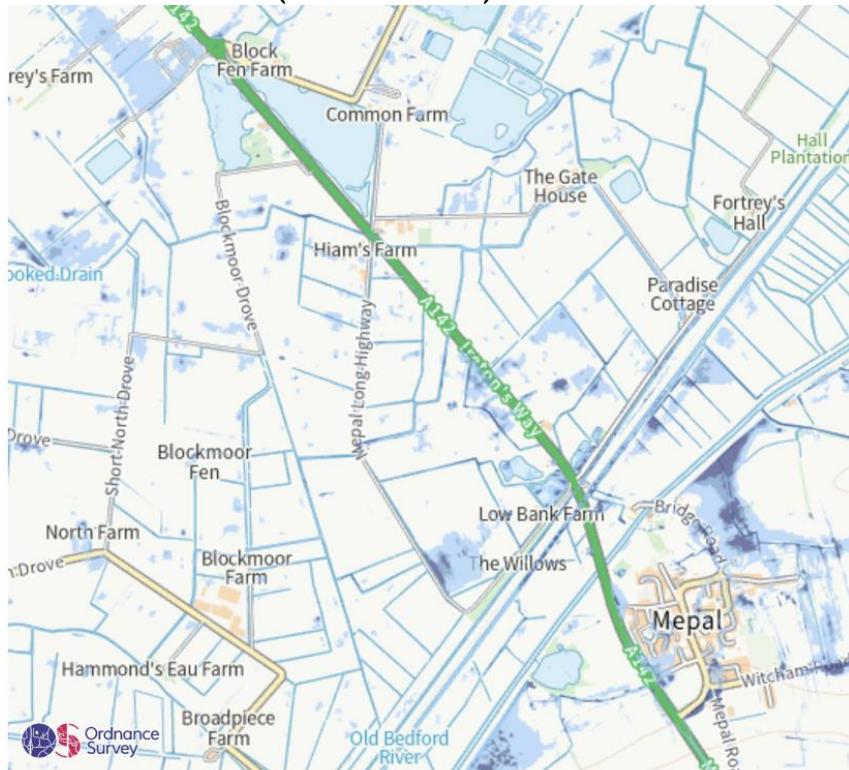
 Broad Area of Mepal Parish

Natural England defines Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) for SSSIs and has undertaken amendments across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to the IRZs to introduce a recreational pressure 'zone of potential risk' for SSSIs of either 2km or 5km.

Areas of Flood Risk (Flood Risk Map for Planning)



Areas of Flood Risk (Surface Water)



Extent of flooding from surface water

High Medium Low Very Low

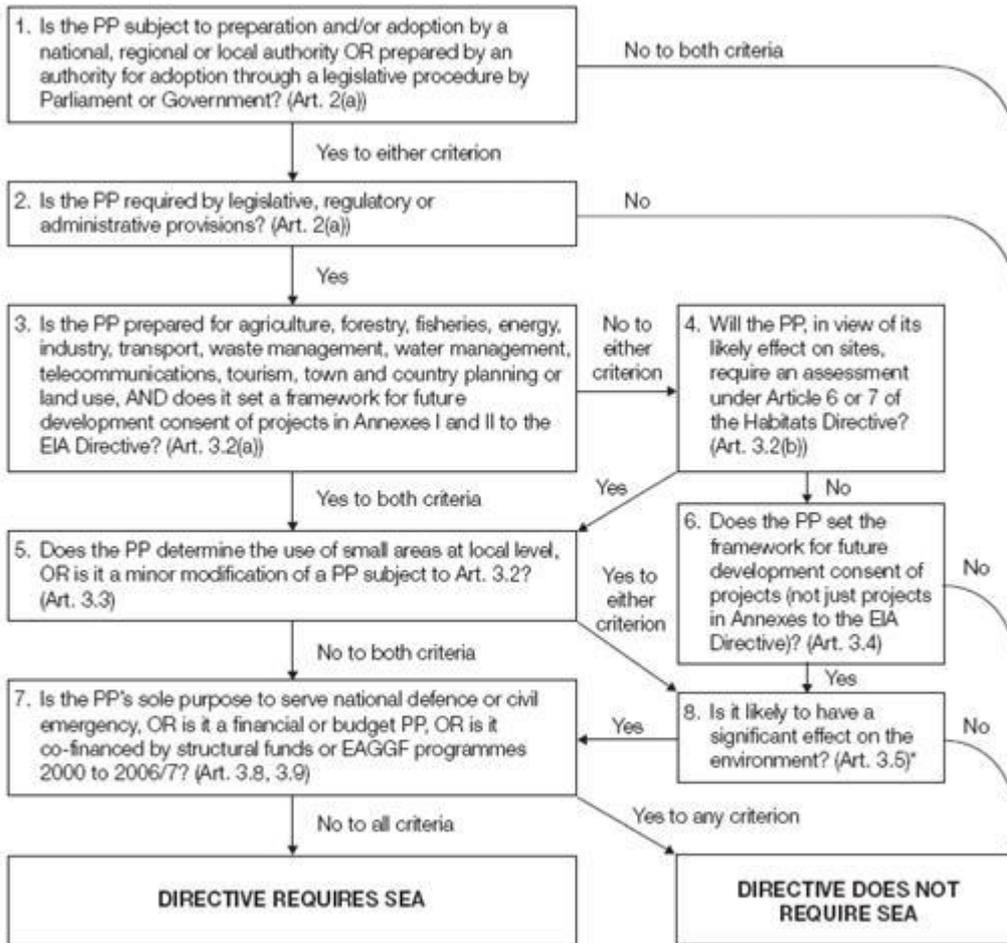
Extract from Flood Maps © Environment Agency

Listed Buildings



Listed Buildings © Historic England

Appendix Two: Diagram of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes



*The Directive requires Member States to determine whether plans or programmes in this category are likely to have significant environmental effects. These determinations may be made on a case by case basis and/or by specifying types of plan or programme.

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The Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Mepal produced in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012



<https://www.mepalparish.org/mepal-neighbourhood-plan/>

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