

West Berkshire Council

**Stratfield Mortimer
Neighbourhood Development Plan**

**Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report
& Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report**

July 2015

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the Council's determination under Regulation 9 (1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 as to whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required for the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). The NDP must be in general conformity with the adopted West Berkshire Core Strategy (July 2012) (2006-2026) which was subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) throughout its preparation.
- 1.2 It also considers whether a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) to consider potential impacts on sites of European importance for Nature Conservation is necessary.

2. SEA legislative requirements

- 2.1 European Directive 2001/42/EC¹ is the legislative basis for SEA, and it was transposed into UK law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004)².
- 2.2 Under these requirements, plans that set the framework for future development consent of projects must be subject to an environmental assessment. This is to determine if the plan, in this case the NDP, will have any significant effects on the environment.
- 2.3 There are exceptions to this requirement for plans that determine the use of a small area at local level, and for minor modifications if it has been determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.
- 2.4 In accordance with the provisions of the SEA Directive and Regulation 9 (1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, the Council must determine if a plan requires an environmental assessment. If the Council determines that a SEA is not required, then under Regulation 9 (3) it must produce a statement that sets out the reason for this determination. This screening report is the Council's Regulation 9 (3) statement.

3. Background to the Stratfield Mortimer NDP

- 3.1 Stratfield Mortimer is a rural parish in the south-east part of the District. In the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Mortimer is

¹ European Directive 2001/42/EC: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001L0042&from=EN>

² Environmental Assessment of Plans and Regulations 2004: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2004/1633/pdfs/ukxi_20041633_en.pdf

designated as a rural service centre in the East Kennet Valley³. Mortimer along with Burghfield Common will be the focus for development in this area, together with more modest development of the identified service village of Woolhampton. The Core Strategy goes on to say that development may take the form of small extensions to these villages, based on information set out in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), which has shown a 'basket' of potentially developable sites from which to select through the Housing Site Allocations DPD.

- 3.2 The NDP will supplement policies within the adopted Core Strategy, notably ADPP1 Spatial Strategy and ADPP6 The East Kennet Valley, which have already been subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA).and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- 3.3 The SA/SEA for the West Berkshire Core Strategy⁴ was produced in order to ensure that sustainability issues were considered throughout the preparation of the Core Strategy. The SA/SEA was an iterative process which identified the likely significant effects of the Core Strategy and the extent to which its implementation would achieve social, environmental and economic objectives.
- 3.4 The SA/SEA was published at key stages of the Core Strategy process and updated as necessary. Each of the stages was assessed against the 11 SA framework objectives and the 29 sub objectives to determine the predicted economic, environmental and social effects of the Core Strategy on the District. At each stage, the findings of the SA/SEA were used to inform the formulation of policies, thereby improving the sustainability of the Core Strategy in the process. The process of the SA/SEA means that the overall spatial strategy and the housing distribution strategy of the Core Strategy have been tested.
- 3.5 In July 2014 the Council published the Preferred Options version of the West Berkshire Housing Site Allocations DPD for consultation. Site selection work has been carried out on the sites in Mortimer in the same way as the other parts of the District. The NDP will form part of the overall planning framework for the area and can allocate sites for development. Two options were consulted on;
Option 1) Stratfield Mortimer is given a housing number of at least 100 dwellings and allocates sites for development through the NDP, in conformity with the policies of the Core Strategy. The settlement boundary of Mortimer would then be re-drawn around the site/s.
Option 2) West Berkshire Council allocates sites to fulfil the housing requirement.

³ West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Area Delivery Plan Policy 1 Spatial Strategy and Area Delivery Plan Policy 6 The East Kennet Valley

⁴ <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=29472&p=0>

- 3.6 The Preferred Options consulted on the preferred sites for Mortimer should Option 2 be taken forward. All sites assessed as potentially developable in Mortimer have therefore been assessed and the information set out in the full SA/SEA Environmental Report of the DPD.
- 3.7 Four sites adjacent to the current settlement boundary of Mortimer were considered through the SHLAA process as potentially developable, with choices to be made through the plan-led process.
- 3.8 A Neighbourhood Development Plan will enable the Parish to guide future development and to allocate land for development. It is proposed that it will set out a strategy and vision for the area, with a series of policies on design, commercial development, infrastructure, residential site allocations, affordable housing, biodiversity, and green spaces. The NDP will therefore provide a framework for future planning applications in the area.

4. The SEA Screening Process

- 4.1 Producing the Stratfield Mortimer NDP requires the Council to look at whether a SEA is required; this is known as the screening process. The screening is based on the criteria set out in Annex II of European Directive 2001/42/EC and Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, and considers the likely significant environmental effects as a result of the NDP.

5. SEA determination and reasons for determination

- 5.1 The Council has assessed the NDP against the criteria set out within Annex II of European Directive 2001/42/EC and Schedule 1 of the Regulations (as summarised in Table 5.1 below).

Table 5.1: Assessment of the likely significant effects (screening)

| Criterion (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of Regulations) | West Berkshire Council's Response |
|--|--|
| 1. Characteristics of plans or programmes, having regard, in particular, to: | |
| The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources | <p>The NDP, if adopted, will become part of the development plan for the area. It will not set a framework for other plans or policies outside of the Stratfield Mortimer NDP area. It will help inform decisions within the parish relating to development up to 2026.</p> <p>The NDP will allocate housing in line with the Adopted West Berkshire Core Strategy DPD (July</p> |

| Criterion (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of Regulations) | West Berkshire Council's Response |
|---|--|
| | <p>2012). Mortimer is identified as a Rural Service Centre and together with Burghfield Common will be the focus for development in the East Kennet Valley area.</p> <p>Through the early stages of the Housing Site Allocations DPD, Mortimer has been identified as needing to allocate for at least 100 dwellings, either through the DPD or the NDP. The NDP would therefore be looking to allocate land for approximately 100 dwellings in one or more sites in line with the plan period of the Core Strategy and HSA DPD, up to 2026. The NDP preferred site is land to the south of St John's Church of England School, Victoria Road. This level of development equates to an average of 10 dwellings per annum over a ten year period (2016-2026). The site/s would require a specific planning application.</p> <p>The NDP proposes to contain policies on site design, building design, street lighting, parking, telecommunications and connectivity, flood management, environmental gain, and residential site allocation/s. As such, it will set a framework for various types of projects and activities, and in so doing will influence the size, location and operating conditions of the particular development. The policies will therefore set criteria which will be applied to planning applications.</p> <p>Overall there would be no significant effect</p> |
| The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy | <p>The NDP does not influence other plans or programmes in the Local Development Framework (LDF) / Local Plan; instead it supplements them. The NDP will form part of the Development Plan for the District and will only apply to the designated Neighbourhood Area, the parish of Stratfield Mortimer. NDPs by their nature are locally driven and focused, providing detailed guidance to local development.</p> <p>Overall there would be no significant effect</p> |
| The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development | <p>The NDP, in accordance with the NPPF, must have regard to sustainable development for it to be deemed sound.</p> <p>Overall there would be no significant effect</p> |
| Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme | <p>There are no existing identified environmental problems in the area.</p> |

| Criterion (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of Regulations) | West Berkshire Council's Response |
|--|---|
| | <p>Part of the NDP Vision is for "The rural character and setting of the village will remain with the minimum of intrusion on the existing surrounding green and agricultural space". As such it will aim, amongst other things, to retain the rural approaches to the village, retain open space between Mortimer and other villages, and retain the best landscape features of the parish.</p> <p>The policies of the NDP will therefore supplement policies within the Core Strategy and relevant policies within the emerging Housing Site Allocations DPD. The NDP proposes policies on Flood Management, Environmental Gain, Biodiversity and Green Spaces which would supplement relevant Local Plan policies.</p> <p>Overall there would be no significant effect</p> |
| <p>The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of [European] Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)</p> | <p>Strategies relating to waste disposal or water protection, and other community legislation on the environment, are dealt with in higher tier plans which have already been tested in full. The NDP will not impact on EU legislation on the environment.</p> <p>Part of the NDP area to the east is located within 7km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, and a very small area falls within the 5km area. These areas are to the east of the railway station. The 5km boundary has been determined by Natural England as a buffer area to regulate development near the SPA. Certain types of development up to 7km from the boundary of the SPA could have an impact and this is investigated in the HRA screening below (which concluded that there would be no significant effect). New residential developments of one or more net additional dwellings up to 5km from the boundary of the SPA, and residential development of over 50 dwellings between 5 and 7km of the SPA would require screening to assess any likely significant effect on the SPA. The NDP does not propose to allocate development of this scale within either of the zones. If a planning application came forward in these areas it would require screening at that time.</p> <p>Overall there would be no significant effect</p> |
| <p>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected [by the plan or programme], having regard, in particular, to:</p> | |
| <p>The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects</p> | <p>The NDP will provide a context and framework to guide future development within the Neighbourhood Area and will supplement adopted planning policy. It will guide development up to 2026.</p> |

| Criterion (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of Regulations) | West Berkshire Council's Response |
|--|--|
| | <p>The NDP will promote small scale development and the allocation of a site for approximately 100 dwellings. There is the potential for some short term detrimental effects on the village, such as during the construction phase, however this would be considered at the planning application stage.</p> <p>No significant effects are envisaged due to the scope and duration of the NDP.</p> |
| The cumulative nature of the effects | <p>See above. The NDP will propose to allocate a site/s for residential development, including a new Doctors surgery, primary school and affordable housing. An extension to the railway station car park will be encouraged. Independent local retail and local businesses will be supported.</p> <p>No significant effects are envisaged</p> |
| The transboundary nature of the effects | <p>Proposed development would contribute to the overall District requirements for housing provision.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Development Area borders with Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, which is within the county of Hampshire. The impact of development would have been tested through the SA/SEA for the Core Strategy. The effects on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA of proposed residential development in the NDP, the Housing Site Allocations DPD and the Core Strategy have been considered in their respective HRA screenings which conclude that there would be no significant effect.</p> <p>The NDP will supplement adopted policy and is not envisaged, in itself, to have a significant effect.</p> |
| The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents) | <p>No risks to human health have been identified as a result of the proposed policies in the NDP. Policies relating to environmental nuisance, pollution control and noise pollution are included in higher tier planning documents.</p> <p>Overall there would be no significant effect</p> |
| The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected) | <p>The Neighbourhood Development Area is approximately 1250 hectares in size. At the last census in 2011, the population was 3,807.</p> <p>NDPs cover small geographical areas and their policies must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan. As such they contain non-strategic development plan policies to address specific local issues. (NPPF paras 184-185).</p> |

| Criterion (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of Regulations) | West Berkshire Council's Response |
|---|---|
| | <p>The NDP will provide a context and framework to guide future sustainable development in the area. The majority of effects would be focused within or immediately adjacent (site allocation/s) to Mortimer village.</p> <p>Overall there would be no significant effect</p> |
| <p>The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • special natural characteristics or cultural heritage • exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values • intensive land-use <p>And</p> <p>The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status</p> | <p>The built and natural environmental designations within or adjacent to the NDP area, along with the proposed NDP policies to protect these are considered below.</p> <p>Stratfield Mortimer Parish has the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 Listed Buildings, including St Marys The Virgin Church (Grade II), Mortimer Station Bridge (Grade II), Mortimer Station (Grade II*) and a Brick Passenger Shelter opposite Mortimer Railway Station (Grade II*) • Wokefield Park is a Grade II* building located in grounds adjacent to the NDP area • 7 Local Wildlife Sites, including Mortimer Fairground and part of Wokefield Common • Biodiversity Opportunity Area • Four areas of Common Land • Areas of Ancient Woodland • Tree Preservation Orders • Four Scheduled Monuments (burial mounds) • The area has a number of archaeological areas, lines and points, notably the Devil's Highway, a Roman Road radiating from Roman Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum), which marks much of the southern boundary of the Parish. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Silchester (the Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum) is located approximately 1.5km from the NDP area • Part of the NDP is located within 7km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, and a very small area is within 5km • Conifer plantations dominate the landscape to the northwest of the Parish <p>Within the NDP area there are no known:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International or national conservation designations (or adjacent to it), including SSSIs or other ecological or wildlife designations outside of those listed above; • National landscape designations such as AONB; • World or National Heritage Sites; • Registered Historic Parks and Gardens; |

| Criterion (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of Regulations) | West Berkshire Council's Response |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation Areas; • Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) or Local Geological Sites <p>The NDP will promote small scale development and proposes to allocate a site to accommodate approximately 100 dwellings. The site (south of St John's Church of England School) is currently cropped arable land and its value in terms of cultural heritage and natural characteristics are low. Part of the site is susceptible to surface water flooding however it is proposed to limit the area of development to the northern part of the site, away from the area at risk. Any remaining risk could be mitigated against by the design and position of development, possibly including a buffer zone as an area of amenity space, and the provision of SUDS.</p> <p>The NDP will protect the above with a vision of "the rural character and setting of the village will remain with the minimum of intrusion on the existing surrounding green and agricultural space". A site design policy and building design policy will require a high standard of design that delivers the rural character valued by the village. The NDP will require new residential developments to retain the existing compact nature of the village and ideally be close to the centre of the village, minimising any extension of the village envelope.</p> <p>It is not considered that the NDP is likely to have any significant effects on local heritage assets or nature conservation interests. Development will not increase flood risk and will be surrounded by development on three sides helping to minimise any potential impact on the countryside. As such, an SEA of the plan is not considered necessary.</p> |

5.2 Based on these findings, the Council's initial conclusion is that a SEA of the Stratfield Mortimer NDP is not necessary under the SEA Directive and Regulations because it has been demonstrated that there will be no significant environmental effects as a result of the NDP.

5.3 Nonetheless, a final determination cannot be made until the three statutory bodies (Historic England, Environment Agency, and Natural England) have commented on this SEA Screening Report. This SEA Screening Report is now subject to such consultation for a five week period commencing on **Friday 31st July 2015** and running through

until Friday 4th September 2015. The responses received will then be analysed and this SEA Screening Report updated as appropriate.

5.4 Comments should be returned to:

Planning Policy
Planning and Countryside
West Berkshire Council
Market Street
Newbury
Berkshire
RG14 5LD

or

Email: planningpolicy@westberks.gov.uk
Tel: 01635 519111

- 5.5 In accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, within 28 days of making its determination, the Council will publish a statement outlining whether a SEA is required or not, with reasoning provided if a SEA is not required.

6. Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 6.1 A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is required to determine if a neighbourhood development plan would have a significant impact upon the integrity of nature conservation sites of international importance, i.e. Ramsar sites, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), and Special Protection Areas (SPA). The principal aim of this part of the document is to 'screen' the potential of the Stratfield Mortimer NDP for its likely effect, either alone or in combination, on these sites.
- 6.2 This is a requirement under EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC⁵, and has been transposed into British law by Regulation 102 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010⁶. The Directive states that any plan or project not connected or necessary to a sites management, but likely to have significant effects, shall be subject to Appropriate Assessment. An Appropriate Assessment determines the impact that plans and projects would have on internationally important nature conservation sites.
- 6.3 Within West Berkshire there are three SACs (River Lambourn, Kennet and Lambourn floodplain and Kennet Valley Alderwoods), and no

⁵ EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CONSLEG:1992L0043:20070101:EN:PDF>

⁶ Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/490/pdfs/uksi_20100490_en.pdf

Ramsar sites or SPAs. However, a very small area of the district around Beech Hill (see attached maps) falls within the 5km buffer area of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA which Natural England has determined as being needed to regulate development near the SPA.

- 6.4 An Appropriate Assessment of all Core Strategy policies and the emerging Housing Site Allocations DPD have been undertaken to ensure that either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, the policies do not adversely affect any of the SACs or the buffer area for the Thames Basin Heath SPA.
- 6.5 A very small area of the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Area falls within the 5km buffer area of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, and part of the area is within the 7km buffer area (see attached maps). The neighbourhood area is not in close proximity to any of the three SACs.
- 6.6 The 5km boundary for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA has been determined by Natural England as a buffer area to regulate development near the SPA. It is possible, as stated under paragraph 5.113 of the Core Strategy⁷, that certain types of development up to 7km from the boundary of the SPA could have an impact on the SPA. Proposals for new residential development of one or more net additional dwellings up to 5km from the boundary of the SPA, and residential development of over 50 dwellings located between 5 and 7km of the boundary of the SPA, will therefore require screening to assess whether they will have a likely significant effect on the SPA. Where a significant effect exists or cannot be excluded, an Appropriate Assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 would need to be undertaken.
- 6.7 The scope of the NDP has been explained above. The NDP does not propose to allocate development of this scale within either the 5km or 7km buffer areas. It is therefore considered unnecessary to carry out an Appropriate Assessment of the NDP. The Council has concluded that the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan in itself will have no significant adverse impact on the integrity of nature conservation sites of international importance. Furthermore, individual planning applications if necessary can undergo HRA.
- 6.8 Further comments are invited upon this assessment, which should be sent to the Council in accordance with the details and timetable set out above in section 5.

⁷ West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) Adopted July 2012:
<http://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=36371&p=0>

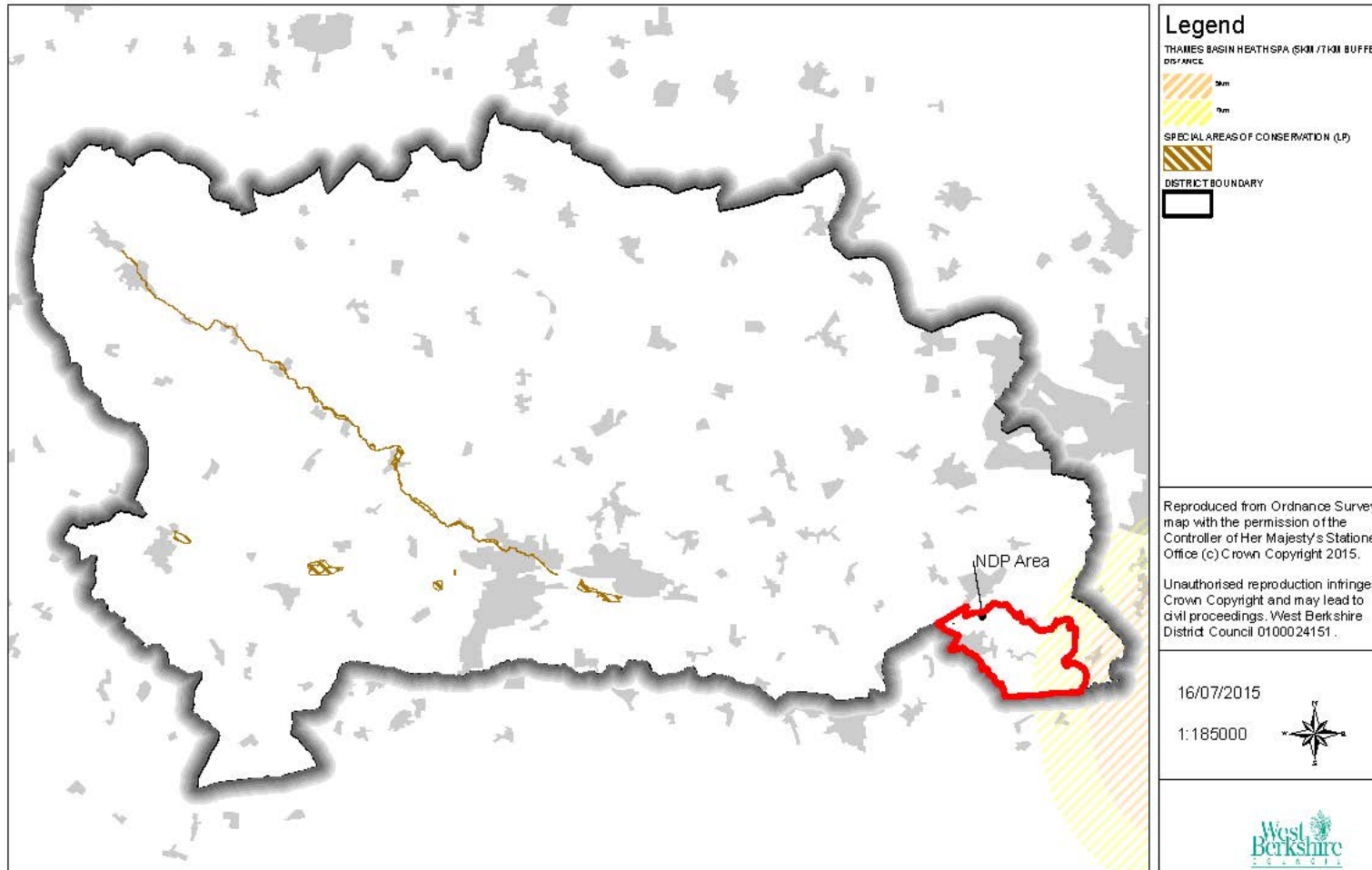
MAPS

District: Location of SACs and SPA buffer

NDP area: Location of SPA buffer

Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan Area

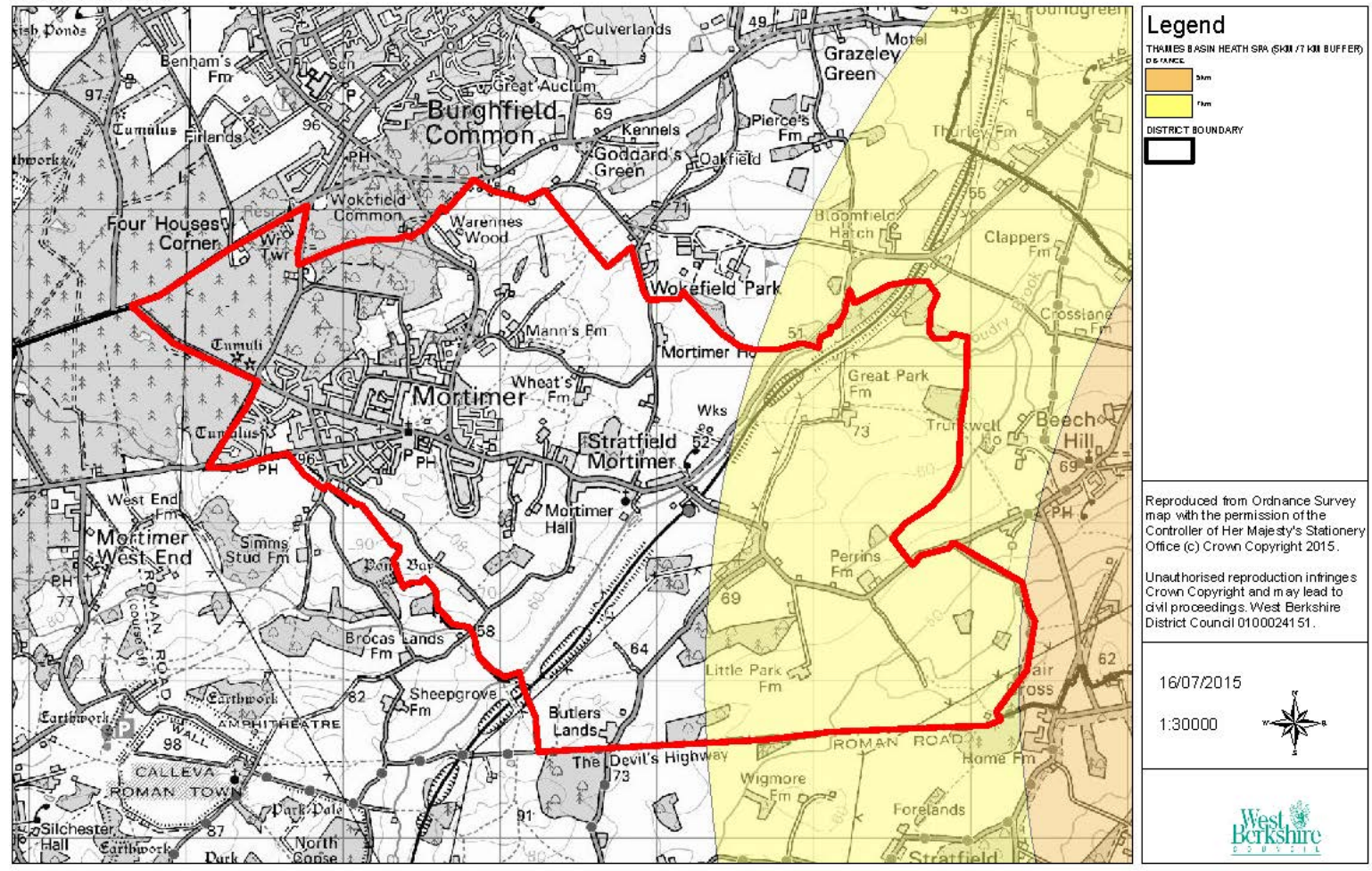
Location of SACs and SPA buffer



Reproduced from Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (c) Crown Copyright 2015. West Berkshire District Council 0100024151.

Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan Area

Location of SPA buffer



Reproduced from Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (c) Crown Copyright 2015. West Berkshire District Council 0100024151.