



Habitats Regulations Assessment

Audley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document 2022 V2.4a

January 2023

HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT (SCREENING) FOR THE AUDLEY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SCREENING DOCUMENT 2022 V2.4a

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report will determine whether the Audley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document 2022 V2.4a requires a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in accordance with Article 6(3) and (4) of the EU Habitats Directive and with Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The objective of the Habitats Directive is to protect biodiversity through the conservation of natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora. The Directive lays down rules for the protection, management and exploitation of such habitats and species. A HRA is required when it is deemed that likely adverse significant effects may occur on protected European Sites (Natura 2000 sites) as a result of the implementation of a plan / project. Good practice suggests that sites with pathways of 10-15km of the plan / project boundary should be included with a HRA. See Table 2 and Appendix 1 for the list of sites screened as part of this assessment.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Audley Neighbourhood Plan is to guide development across the parish. It will contain land-use policies with the purpose of guiding the sustainable development of the Neighbourhood Plan area and achieve the overall vision of the Plan, which is to protect and enhance the character, features and rural setting of the parish of Audley, to ensure a sustainable and pleasant place to live that meets the needs of local people. A map of the Neighbourhood Plan area is shown in Figure 1 of the Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document. This HRA screening report has been undertaken on the Audley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document V2.4a which was provided by the Qualifying Body for the purposes of this report.
- 1.3 The legislative background set out in section 4 outlines the regulations that require the need for this screening exercise. Section 4, provides a screening assessment of both the likely significant effects of the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan and the need for a Habitats Regulation Assessment.
- 1.4 A summary of findings and conclusions for the screening process can be found in section 7.

2. Information about Audley Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.1 The Audley Neighbourhood Plan has been produced to guide development within the parish of Audley. It will contain land-use type policies with the purpose of guiding the sustainable development of the neighbourhood area and achieve the overall vision of the plan.
- 2.2 The policies apply to all new development, comprising development on greenfield or brownfield sites, redevelopment of existing developed sites, and conversions of existing buildings. They are organised accordingly to the policy themes identified in the vision and aims of the plan (see Neighbourhood Plan, section 2.3 and 2.4).

- 2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan sets out the following vision for the neighbourhood plan area:

To protect and enhance the character, features and rural setting of the parish of Audley, to ensure a sustainable and pleasant place to live that meets the needs of local people.

- 2.4 If the Audley Neighbourhood Plan is successful at examination, and approved by the local community through a referendum it attains the same legal status as a Local Plan, and at this point comes into force as part of the statutory development plan. It will then be used in determining planning applications within the neighbourhood plan area. Prior to referendum it may carry some weight in planning decisions as a material consideration as an emerging plan. Paragraph 48 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets out the weight that may be given to relevant policies in emerging plans in decision taking. The referendum ensures that the community have the final say in the Neighbourhood Plan coming into force as part of the development plan.

3. Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening

- 3.1 This Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening report has been undertaken by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council in respect of the Audley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document 2022 V2.4a.
- 3.2 The aim of this HRA screening report is to assess whether the Audley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document V2.4a will result in any likely significant effects on any European sites within relative proximity of the neighbourhood plan area.

4. Legislative background

- 4.1 The Natura 2000 network (European sites) consists of sites across Europe designated for their nature conservation importance. These consist of:
- *Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and potential SACs (pSACs)* - these are designated under the Habitats Directive to protect those habitat types and species that are considered to be most in need of conservation at a European level (excluding birds).
 - *Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and potential SPAs (pSPAs)* - these are designated under the Birds Directive to protect rare and vulnerable birds, and also regularly occurring migratory species.

- *Ramsar sites* - these are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention.

4.2 To help protect the Natura 2000 network, there are particular requirements for plans and projects. Article 6(3) of the European Union Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the 'Habitats Directive') states:

'Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public'.

4.3 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the "Habitats Regulations 2017") consolidate and update all the various amendments made to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (the "Habitats Regulations 2010"). They also introduce a small number of minor amendments designed to take account of changes to other related legislation, such as amendments to Town and Country Planning legislation. It should be noted that there have been two reviews of the implementation of the Habitats Regulations 2010 which have concluded that they remain fit for purpose. This included a fitness check of the Nature Directives conducted by the EU and in June 2017 the EU launched an Action Plan to address the shortcomings in implementation. A further review of the Regulations would be a complex and time consuming exercise which could only be undertaken when resources are available and would be best considered following our exit from the European Union. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations 2017'), the UK's transposition of the Habitats Directive and Regulation 105, provides:

'(1) Where a land use plan –

(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and;

(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site,

the plan-making authority for that plan must, before the plan is given effect, make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of that site's conservation objectives'.

- 4.4 This means that any proposed plan that may affect a European site (Special Area of Conservation or Special Protection Area), (also includes RAMSAR sites) must first undergo an assessment to look at its potential impacts applying the precautionary principle. This is to determine if the plan will adversely affect the integrity of the European site(s) concerned.
- 4.5 This process is known as a Habitats Regulations Assessment and the first stage considers any likely significant effects (the screening stage). An 'appropriate assessment' is the second stage of the HRA process and a plan should undertake this where likely significant effects are identified at the screening stage and cannot be ruled out after applying straightforward mitigation measures. An appropriate assessment looks at the implications of a plan for a European site in view of the site's conservation objectives. Further more detailed mitigation measures may be introduced at the appropriate assessment stage to avoid or reduce the effects of a plan on the European site(s). Before a plan may be given effect, the plan-making authority as the competent authority must ascertain that it would not adversely affect the integrity of the European site(s).
- 4.6 In terms of Neighbourhood Plans, the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 require a submitted Neighbourhood Plan to include a statement explaining how the proposed Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions set out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. One of these basic conditions is that the Neighbourhood Plan must be compatible with EU obligations and it is therefore necessary to demonstrate that it is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site.

Table 1: Stages of Habitats Regulation Assessment

Stages of Habitats Regulations Assessment
<p>Stage 1- Screening</p> <p>This stage identifies the likely impacts upon a European site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and determines whether these impacts are likely to be not significant (inconsequential), significant or whether this is uncertain.</p> <p>Stage 2 - Appropriate Assessment</p> <p>Where there are likely significant effects, or the effects are uncertain, the Plan should be subject to appropriate assessment. This stage considers the impacts of the plan or project on the integrity of the relevant European sites, either alone or in conjunction with other projects or plans, with respect to the sites structures and function and their conservation objectives. Where there are adverse impacts, it also includes an assessment of the potential mitigation for those impacts.</p> <p>Stage 3 - Assessment of Alternative Solutions</p> <p>Where adverse impacts are predicted, this stage examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the order that avoids adverse impacts on the integrity of European sites.</p>

Stage 4 - Assessment Where No Alternative Solutions Exist and where Adverse Impacts Remain

This stage assesses compensatory measures where it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed for imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

5. European sites in and around the Audley Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 5.1 The first step of the screening process is to consider the European sites that could be affected by a plan. In addition to those sites located within the plan area, best practice suggests that sites occurring within 10 -15km of the area directly affected by a plan should be identified and assessed, although in some instances effects could be likely over a greater distance where pathways exist.
- 5.2 There are no European sites within the neighbourhood plan area and no likely pathways with sites over a greater distance, acknowledging that the Neighbourhood Plan covers a predominantly rural area and does not allocate specific sites for development.
- 5.3 The following sites are within 15 km of the neighbourhood plan area boundary:

Table 2: European sites within 15 km of the plan area

Site Name	Distance from plan area	Type
Betley Mere (Midlands Meres and Mosses Phase 1)	c.1.9 km N	Ramsar
Black Firs & Cranberry Bog (Midlands Meres and Mosses Phase 2)	c. 1.8 km W	Ramsar
Wybunbury Moss (West Midlands Mosses)	c. 6.7 km W	Ramsar / Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
Oakhanger Moss (Midlands Meres and Mosses Phase 2)	c. 2.0 km NW	Ramsar

- 5.4 Further details of each of these sites can be found in Appendix 1.

6. Screening assessment of the Audley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document V2.4a

- 6.1 The screening assessment has had regard to the conservation objectives of the various European sites located within 15km of the plan area. Natural England's Impact Risk Zones for SSSIs which underpin the European site designations have been used to consider whether development proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to affect a European Site. It is acknowledged that Impact Risks Zones do not alter or remove the requirements to consult Natural England on other natural environment impacts or other types of development proposal under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 and other statutory requirements. This assessment also makes reference to other plans and projects, including the Borough Council's adopted development plan. Key questions relating to the Neighbourhood Plan are included below and along with the screening assessment, help to establish if an appropriate assessment is required.

Is the Audley Neighbourhood Plan directly connected with, or necessary to the management of a European site for nature conservation?

- 6.2 The Audley Neighbourhood Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of a European site, so screening for the need of a Habitats Regulations Assessment is required.

Are there any European sites within the plan area?

- 6.3 There are no European sites within the neighbourhood plan area.

Are there any European sites within 15km of the plan area?

- 6.4 Yes, there are 4 European sites within 15km of the neighbourhood plan area including 4 designated as Ramsar sites. One of Ramsar sites is also a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These sites are listed in Table 2 and Appendix 1.

Does the Audley Neighbourhood Plan propose new development or allocate sites for development?

- 6.5 No, the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate specific sites for development, but it does support and focus development towards defined settlement boundaries across the parish. This includes Audley, Bignall End, Miles Green, Wood Lane, Alsagers Bank and Halmer End.

Are there any other projects or plans that together with the Audley Neighbourhood Plan could impact on the integrity of a European site, the 'in combination' impact?

- 6.6 Yes, these are listed at paragraphs 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11.

Policy screening assessment

- 6.7 The following table reflects the findings of the screening assessment for each of the policies within the Audley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document V2.4a.

Table 3: Policy Assessment

Policy Number	Description	Likely significant effect identified
ANP1	Residential Development	There are no site specific allocations for development in the Neighbourhood Plan. The policy focuses development towards defined settlement boundaries including Audley, Bignall End, Miles Green, Alsagers Bank, Wood Lane, Halmer End. Furthermore, the policy encourages development through infill (i.e. in Scot Hay) and conversions. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP2	Business and Community Facilities	The policy supports E (office), F1 and F2 use class development and focuses it towards defined settlement boundaries including Audley, Bignall End, Miles Green, Alsagers Bank, Wood Lane, Halmer End. Furthermore, the policy encourages development through infill (i.e. in Scot Hay) and conversions. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP3	Audley Village Centre (Church Street)	The policy is designed to support development with Audley Village Centre that is complimentary, enhances the viability and vitality of the centre, and prevents harm to key services and facilities including retail, food and drink, recreation, entertainment and culture. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP4	Sustainable Design	The policy encourages development to be well designed (and delivered to high standards), distinctive and complementary to the surrounding environment whilst taking into account its size, scale and physical properties. Other considerations and encouragements are proposed from new development including the delivery of infrastructure, connectivity

		(pedestrian), biodiversity and reducing carbon footprint. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP5	Audley Conservation Area	The policy seeks to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Audley Conservation area, taking into account architectural / historical assets (i.e. St James Church, The Castle Motte, dry stone walls etc) and the landscape / streetscape. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP6	Character of Settlements	The policy encourages development to be complimentary and distinctive to the local environment, taking into account the position / orientation, scale and materials for development. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP7	Heritage	The policy aims to avoid any harm to designated, non-designated heritage assets (i.e. John Wedgwood Monument), and other architectural features. Furthermore, the policy seeks to preserve and enhance these features alongside the surround area or setting. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP8	Shopfronts	The policy aims to retain and reinstate historical shopfronts and shopfront features, and ensure they are in keeping with the character of properties and the wider streets. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP9	Natural Environment and Landscape	The policy seeks to avoid harm and protect / enhance Audley's green landscapes (focusing on Alsagers Bank, Audley, Bignall End, Halmer End, Miles Green, Scot Hay and Wood Lane), wildlife corridors, habitats, and physical environmental features (i.e. trees). Furthermore, the policy seeks to protect and enhance designated sites of ecological value including Ancient Woodland, Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Biological Importance, Biodiversity Alert Sites and other sensitive / designated landscapes. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP10	Green Infrastructure	The policy encourages development to provide green infrastructure (i.e. planting, landscaping, community facilities) that is proportionate to the scale and nature of development and

		will deliver high levels of amenity and biodiversity net gain. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP11	Local Green Space	The policy lists a collection of open / green spaces across the neighbourhood plan area to be formally designated as Local Green Spaces. Furthermore, the policy aims to avoid harm and adverse impacts to these spaces as a result of development. Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP12	Transport and Active Travel	The policy encourages development to be supported by sustainable transport provision and infrastructure (i.e. electric charging points, parking etc), and to avoid impacts and adverse impacts on existing connectivity (i.e. public rights of way, cycle routes etc). Significant effects are unlikely.
ANP13	Local Energy Generation	The policy encourages development to provide local energy schemes as long as there is no impact on amenity (visual and residential), agricultural land, local character, Audley Conservation Area and defined settlements. Significant effects are unlikely.

In Combination Effects

6.8 Different plans and programmes can interact to produce impacts that are greater than any individual plan alone, so it is necessary to identify other plans which could lead to potentially significant 'in-combination' impacts. It is one of the 'basic conditions' that a Neighbourhood Plan has to be in 'general conformity' with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area.

6.9 The adopted development plan consists of:

- The Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026
- The 'saved policies' of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011
- The Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire Staffordshire 2015-2030

6.10 The neighbourhood plan area shares a boundary with the following local planning authorities and parishes:

Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Authority Area

- Betley, Balterley and Wrinchill Parish (Neighbourhood Plan made 2022)

- Keele Parish (Neighbourhood Plan in production)
- Madeley Parish (Neighbourhood Plan made 2022)
- Kidsgrove Town (Neighbourhood Plan in production)
- Silverdale Parish Council (Neighbourhood Plan in production)

Stoke-on-Trent City Local Authority Area

- Stoke-on-Trent City Council (Local Plan in production)

Cheshire East Local Authority Area

- Cheshire East Council (Local Plan adopted 2017 and 2022 in 2 parts)
- Barthomley Parish (Neighbourhood Plan not started)
- Alsager Town (Neighbourhood Plan made 2020)

6.11 The following adopted / made plans have been reviewed in terms of 'in-combination' effects:

- [The Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026](#)
- [The 'saved policies' of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011](#)
- [The Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire 2015-2030.](#)
- Emerging plan: The Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Local Plan 2020-2040
- [Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2037](#)
- [Madeley Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018-2037](#)
- [Cheshire East Local Plan 2010-2030](#)
- [Alsager Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2030](#)

The Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026

6.12 The Core Spatial Strategy was adopted in 2009 and provides a broad framework for the development of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent. The plan (which was subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment) seeks to focus development and investment to the city and town centres, prioritising the use of previously developed land. A number of strategic sub areas are identified, for example Rural Areas, within which the parish of Audley is located; and include areas within and beyond the Green Belt.

6.13 Policy ASP6 – Rural Area Spatial Strategy: Rural Area Spatial Policy makes provision for positive approach to rural enterprise; appropriate design policies; and preserving and enhancing conservation areas. Furthermore, the policy seeks to deliver a maximum of 900 net additional dwellings on brownfield land within defined settlement boundaries of the key Rural Service Centres. This collectively includes Loggerheads, Madeley and the villages of Audley Parish – Audley, Bignall End, Alsagers Bank, Wood Lane, Halmer End and Miles Green.

6.14 The CSS was subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment and it was concluded that there would be no likely significant effects. It is unlikely that there will be any in-combination effects arising from the CSS and Audley Neighbourhood Plan.

The 'saved policies' of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011

- 6.15 The Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan was adopted in 2003 and a number of its policies were 'saved' beyond 2007 by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. They continue to form part of the development plan for the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme.
- 6.16 The Local Plan sought to focus development to sustainable locations such as the defined village envelopes and to enable the appropriate re-use of rural buildings (as stated in Policy H1: Residential Development: Sustainable Location and Protection of the Countryside). It is unlikely that there will be any in-combination effects arising from the Audley Neighbourhood Plan and Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan.

The Minerals Local Plan for Staffordshire 2015-2030.

- 6.17 The Minerals Local Plan does not allocate sites for the development of new waste facilities within the Audley neighbourhood plan area. It is unlikely that there will be any in-combination effects arising from the Audley Neighbourhood Plan and Minerals Local Plan.

Emerging plan: The Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Local Plan 2020-2040

- 6.18 Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is currently in the process of producing a standalone Local Plan for Newcastle-under-Lyme. The Borough Council successfully delivered an Issues and Strategic Options Consultation in 2021/2022, and is now working towards a draft Local Plan. The Local Plan once adopted, will replace the existing Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026 and Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011. Given the Local Plan is still in production, it is not possible to ascertain whether there will be any future in-combination effects. However, the emerging Local Plan will be subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment in due course, and this will have to take into account any in-combination effects.

Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2037

- 6.19 The Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Neighbourhood Development Plan was produced by Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Parish Council, and was formally made in January 2022. The Neighbourhood Plan's vision is to maintain and improve the quality of life for the residents whilst protecting and enhancing the special rural character and heritage of the parish. Various policies are presented to promote sustainable development, accommodate new and existing development (housing and E use class development), and to protect and enhance the natural and historic / heritage environment. The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate specific sites for development, but does focus and support development within the defined settlement boundary of Betley. It is important to note that the neighbourhood area hosts 2 Ramsar sites which are as follows:

- Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 / Betley Mere
- Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 2 / Black Firs and Cranberry Bog

- 6.20 The protection of these environmental designations falls under Policy BBW6: Recognising the Intrinsic Character of the Countryside and Protecting and Enhancing Valued Landscapes. Their designations are referenced as justification for the creation of this policy. Given the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocated specific sites for development, directs development within the existing settlement boundary, and seeks to protect / enhance the natural environment, it is unlikely that there will be any in-combination effects arising from the Audley Neighbourhood Plan and Betley, Balterley and Wrinehill Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Madeley Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018-2023

- 6.21 The Madeley Neighbourhood Development Plan was produced by Madeley Parish Council, and was formally made in May 2022. The Neighbourhood Plan's vision is to provide opportunities for residents to live rewarding and productive lives, enabling sustainable growth and development, whilst protecting the rural character and heritage of the parish. Various policies are presented to protect open / green spaces, accommodate a mix of development, promote sustainable design, protect community facilities (i.e. recreation, sports etc), protect / enhance the natural and historic environment and deliver balanced transport provision and connectivity. The Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate specific sites for development, but does focus and support development within the defined settlement boundaries of Madeley and Madeley Heath. There are no European designated sites within the Madeley Parish. Given the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocated specific sites for development, directs development within existing settlement boundaries, and seeks to protect / enhance the natural environment, it is unlikely that there will be any in-combination effects arising from the Audley Neighbourhood Plan and Madeley Neighbourhood Plan.

Cheshire East Local Plan 2010-2030

- 6.22 The Cheshire East Local Plan is made up of two key components forming the development plan which includes the following:
- Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – adopted July 2017
 - Site Allocations and Development Policies Document – adopted December 2022
- 6.23 Within the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (LPS), Policy PG 1 aims to deliver a minimum of 380 hectares of employment development and 36,000 homes across the plan area over the plan period 2010-2030. This requirement will be delivered across a variety of settlements presented within a hierarchy under Policy GP 2. A key settlement for consideration is Alsager (neighbouring settlement to Audley Parish) which is defined as a Key Service Centre offering a good range of facilities and serving a wider locality. The Local Plan aims to see growth in Key Service Centres such to maintain their vitality and viability, with the scale of development being complementary to the surrounding environment whilst maintaining their distinctive historic character. Policy GP 7 goes into finer detail about Key Service Centres, and specifically expects Alsager to deliver 40 hectares of employment land and 2,000 new homes. The document

identifies a series of Local Plan strategy sites for growth in the future surrounding the settlement of Alsager including White Moss Quarry (housing), Radway Green North (employment), Radway Green Brownfield (employment), and Radway Green Extension (employment). The development of these sites are presented within Policies LSP 20, LSP23, LSP24 and LSP 25. It is important to note that the settlement of Alsager and Audley parish boundary is separated by Green Belt.

- 6.24 The Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) presents a policy to protect and enhance the ecological network. Policy ENV 1 requires development to increase the size, quantity and quality of habitats, ecological corridors or stepping stones, and improve connectivity between habitats for mobile species, and minimise impacts on meres and mosses as a result of pollution and disturbance. The enhancement of the natural environment is reinforced with Policy ENV 2 which encourages development to deliver net gains in biodiversity. An appropriate assessment was undertaken to assess whether Cheshire East Council's LPS and SADPD has the potential to result in significant adverse effects on the integrity of identified European sites, either alone or in combination with a number of other plans and projects. The Assessment identified that the existing policies and provisions in the Cheshire East Council's LPS and SADPD in relation to water supply and the provision and protection of open space, sport, leisure and recreation facilities, will ensure that the Local Plan will have no adverse effects on European sites. Given this, it is unlikely that there will be any in-combination effects arising from the Audley Neighbourhood Plan and Cheshire East Local Plan.

Alsager Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2030

- 6.25 The Alsager Neighbourhood Plan was produced by Alsager Town Council, and was formally made in April 2020. The Neighbourhood Plan's vision is to offer an excellent quality of life for its residents, provide a range of housing and employment development to meet local need, enable good access to services and facilities, and protect the Green Belt, open spaces, countryside and townscape. A number of policies are presented to promote sustainable development, accommodate a mix of housing and employment / business development, improve the viability and vitality of Alsager Town Centre, protect open space and recreational facilities, improve environmental quality, protect and enhance the natural / historical environment, Green Belt and open countryside (latter two in accordance with the Cheshire Local Plan), improve accessibility / connectivity (i.e. pedestrian infrastructure) and promote sustainable transport solutions. The Neighbourhood Plan supports the developments at Radway Green as allocated within the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy. Furthermore, the neighbourhood plan is supportive of development (i.e. within and around the town centre of Alsager) but requires it to be complimentary to the surrounding environment in terms of scale, size, height, layout, density and design. The Neighbourhood Plan supports the existing allocations of the Cheshire Local Plan, but does not allocated new and additional sites for development. It encourages development within the Alsager Town Centre boundary. Given the above factors, it is unlikely that there will be any in-combination effects arising from the Audley Neighbourhood Plan and Alsager Neighbourhood Plan.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 As a result of the assessment above, it is considered unlikely that any likely significant effects on European sites would occur from the implementation of the Audley Neighbourhood Plan. This is because the Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate specific sites for development and there are no logical or obvious pathways between the neighbourhood area; and the European or Ramsar Sites identified. If the plan changes, following the Regulation 14 pre submission consultation, it may be necessary to re-screen the plan. However at this stage, the Audley Neighbourhood Plan Screening Document V2.4a does not require a further HRA appropriate assessment to be undertaken.

Appendix 1 European Sites within a 15km radius

European site	Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 Ramsar site (Betley Mere)
Distance from NP boundary	1.9 km W
Site information and Qualifying Ramsar feature	<p>Midland Meres & Mosses (Phase 1). Comprises a series of lowland open water and peatland sites set in depressions in glacial drift left by receding ice sheets. The 16 component sites include nutrient-rich water bodies (meres), associated fringing habitats of reed swamps, fen, carr and damp pasture, and floating quaking bog (schwingmoor). The wide range of resulting habitats supports numerous rare species of plants and invertebrates. Human activities include recreation, fishing, livestock grazing, and haymaking.</p> <p>Betley Mere comprises a diverse range of habitats from open water to raised bog.</p> <p>Supports a number of rare species of plants associated with wetlands including five nationally scarce species together with an assemblage of rare wetland invertebrates (three endangered insects and five other British Red Data Book species of invertebrates)</p>
Impact Risks	The neighbourhood area partially falls within the SSSI Impact Risk zones, but the plan does not propose development of types that fall within the Impact Risk Zone categories.

European site	Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 2 Ramsar site (Black Firs & Cranberry Bog).
Distance from NP boundary	1.8 km W
Site information and Qualifying Ramsar feature	<p>Midland Meres & Mosses (Phase 2) comprises a series of 18 sites made up of nutrient-rich open water bodies (meres) with fringing habitats of reed swamp, fen, carr and damp pasture, and peatlands. The landscape features developed in depressions in the glacial drift left by receding ice sheets. The wide range of habitats supports nationally important flora and fauna. Human activities include hunting, fishing, and research activities.</p> <p>Black Firs and Cranberry Bog comprises a diverse range of habitats from open water to raised bog and supports a number of rare species of plants associated with wetlands, including the nationally scarce cowbane <i>Cicuta virosa</i> and, elongated sedge <i>Carex elongata</i>. Also present are the nationally scarce bryophytes <i>Dicranum affine</i> and <i>Sphagnum pulchrum</i>.</p>

	Also supports an assemblage of invertebrates including several rare species. There are 16 species of British Red Data Book insect listed for this site including the following endangered species: the moth <i>Glyphipteryx lathamella</i> , the caddisfly <i>Hagenella clathrata</i> and the sawfly <i>Trichiosoma vitellinae</i> .
Impact Risks	The neighbourhood area partially falls within the SSSI Impact Risk Zones, but the plan does not propose development of types that fall within the Impact Risk Zone categories.

European site	West Midlands Mosses Ramsar / SAC (Wybunbury Moss)
Distance from NP boundary	6.7 km W
Qualifying feature	Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds (Annex I habitat). Transition mires and quaking bogs (Annex I habitat)
Conservation objectives	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats • The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, and • The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely
Requirements to maintain favourable condition status of site	<p>Dystrophic Pools (Schwingmoor)</p> <p>Maintain present distribution of species representative of community;</p> <p>Maintain present pH range and water levels;</p> <p>Maintain sediment quality and quantity;</p> <p>Filamentous algae should be absent or at very low levels.</p> <p>Basin mire with a quaking surface (Schwingmoor): NVC types M2 and M18</p> <p>Water level and degree of fluctuation capable of sustaining the floating raft composed of NVC type appropriate to longstanding water chemistry and fertility; Maintain raft characteristics, exclude surface and drainage water likely to increase fertility; Stable groundwater, not fluctuating more than 30cm annually; Maintain type and extent of site specific NVC communities; Scrub or woodland limited to margins, or no more than scattered over open NVC communities; Maintain NVC communities: M2</p>

	Sphagnum recurvum bog pool community and M18 Erica tetralix-Sphagnum papillosum mire. Scrub not to be more than occasional; Maintain or enhance populations of special or rare plant (and animal) species.
Impact Risks	The neighbourhood area does not fall within the SSSI Impact Risk Zones.

European site	West Midlands Meres and Mosses Phase 2 Ramsar site (Oakhanger Moss)
Distance from NP boundary	2.0 km NW
Site Information and Qualifying Ramsar feature	<p>Midland Meres & Mosses (Phase 2) comprises a series of 18 sites made up of nutrient-rich open water bodies (meres) with fringing habitats of reed swamp, fen, carr and damp pasture, and peatlands. The landscape features developed in depressions in the glacial drift left by receding ice sheets. The wide range of habitats supports nationally important flora and fauna. Human activities include hunting, fishing, and research activities.</p> <p>Oakhanger Moss is one of the shallowest of a cluster of depressions in glacial sands lying to the west of Alsager. It is of greatest importance for the range of mire vegetation communities it supports and the way they, together with the sediment and peat deposit record, so clearly demonstrate the vegetation succession stages from open water to raised bog. The site was known to be a mere at least until the 1600s, sustained by a flow of water from Alsager Mere to the east. Since that time the basin has become completely infilled, firstly with sedge and reedswamp peat, and latterly with peat derived from Sphagnum mosses.</p> <p>The site supports four different mire communities, each of which has a well-developed shrub cover giving the site a wooded appearance. Over much of the site, in the wettest, low-lying areas associated with the few drains which cross the site, there is swamp vegetation dominated by lesser pond-sedge <i>Carex acutiformis</i>, over which willow carr, with goat willow <i>Salix caprea</i>, sallow <i>S. cinerea</i> and downy birch <i>Betula pubescens</i>, has developed. In the south-west, where inundation from the drains has less effect on water level and nutrient supply, sedges give way to purple moor-grass <i>Molinia caerulea</i> with broad buckler-fern <i>Dryopteris dilatata</i> locally, and birch displacing willow from the shrub layer. More diverse are the areas of fen which have developed along the site's eastern edge, where surface water enters the basin, and nutrient levels are at their highest. Here alder <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and willows dominate above mature greater tussock-sedge <i>Carer paniculata</i>, with cyperus sedge <i>C. pseudocyperus</i>, marsh pennywort <i>Hydrocotyle vulgaris</i>, marsh violet <i>Viola palustris</i>, purple-loosestrife <i>Lythrum salicaria</i> and marsh cinquefoil <i>Potentilla palustris</i>, all uncommon plants in Cheshire. Similarly diverse botanically are the two distinct areas of vegetation dominated by bog moss <i>Sphagnum recurvum</i> in the centre of the site. The moss 'lawns' are noticeably higher than the surrounding communities and at times of high groundwater continue to remain free of its nutrient influence because of the buoyant properties of <i>Sphagnum</i>. This incipient raised bog community includes common cotton-grass <i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i>, cross-leaved heath <i>Erica tetralix</i>, and cranberry <i>Vaccinium oxycoccos</i>. Birch dominates the canopy which is comparatively open in character, and around the edges of the <i>Sphagnum</i> areas, in the transition to more nutrient-rich fen, alder</p>

	<p>buckthorn <i>Frangula alnus</i> becomes a common shrub with white sedge <i>Carex curta</i> and narrow buckler-fern <i>Dryopteris carthusiana</i> growing amongst the mosses. Drier perimeters of the site support a few pedunculate oaks <i>Quercus robur</i> over a bracken <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> ground layer. The vegetation communities represented at this site, their development as recorded in the sediments and peats, and the site's comparison with nearby peatlands renders it a particularly important link in the Midlands Meres and Mosses series of glacial wetlands.</p> <p>Adders <i>Vipera berus</i>, a protected species, are found here and at only one other known site in Cheshire.</p>
Impact Risks	<p>The neighbourhood area partially falls within the SSSI Impact Risk Zones, but the plan does not propose development of types that fall within the Impact Risk Zone categories.</p>

