WARRINGTON
Borough Council

Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

Final Screening Determination Statement

October 2025

1. Habitats Regulations Assessment Introduction

1.1 This statement sets out Warrington Borough Council's initial and final determination of the need for a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in accordance with Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and European Directive 92/43/EEC (the Habitats Directive) for the Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan.

2. Habitats Regulations Assessment Context

2.1 The requirement for a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) is set out within Regulation 63 the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive. Legislation requires an Appropriate Assessment of any plan or project to be undertaken to assess if it is likely to have significant adverse effects upon the integrity of internationally designated sites of nature conservation importance, now known as the national site network (formerly known as Natura 2000 sites).

2.2 The Habitats Directive is transposed into English legislation through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

2.3 The Warrington Local Plan 2021/22-2038/39 has been subject to an HRA assessment process undertaken by AECOM. The HRA has been developed over a number of years in parallel to the drafting of the Local Plan and hence has fully assessed the impacts of the Plan. An assessment was undertaken for the first Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation in 2019. An updated assessment was undertaken to accompany the UPSVLP 2021 (The Draft Local Plan).

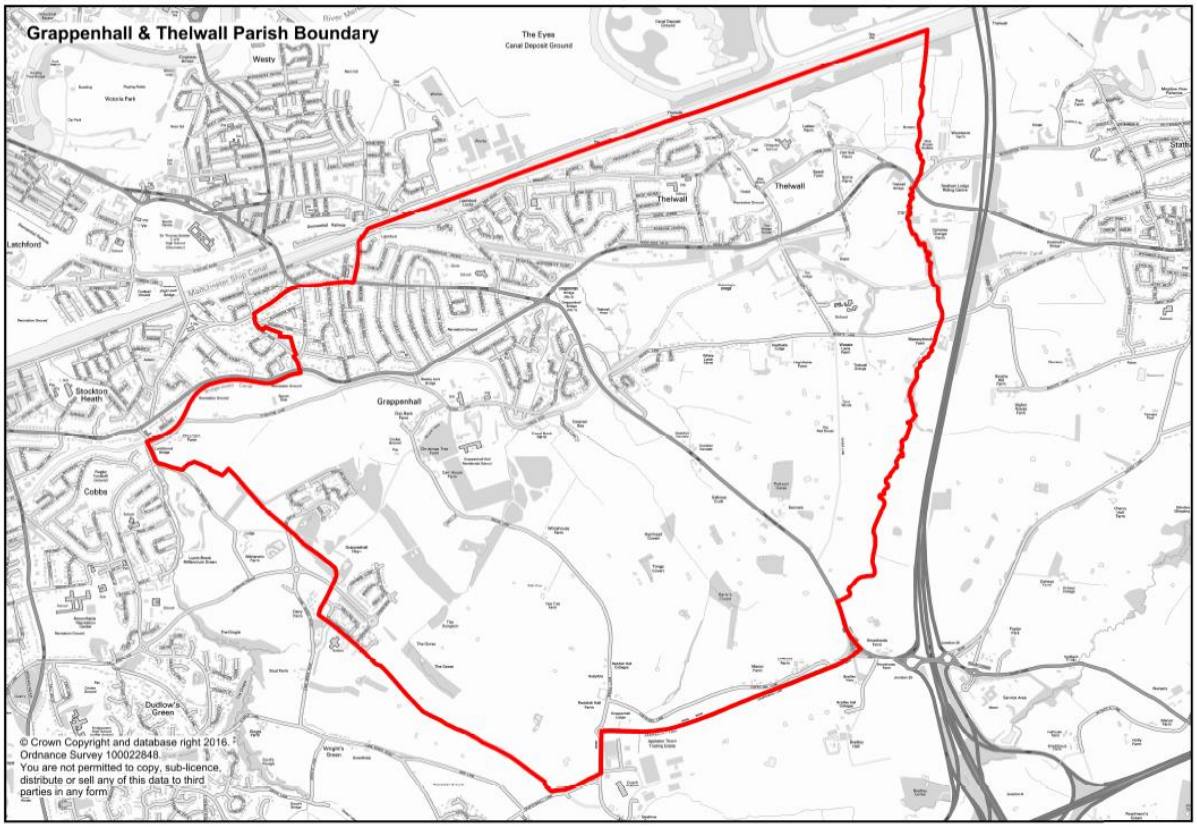
2.4 This assessment included an assessment of in combination effects taking into account other plans and projects as well as Local Plan site allocations, policies and the impact of the plan as a whole. A further updated version of the Warrington Local Plan HRA Report was produced in December 2021 in order to take account of comments made on the HRA during the Regulation 19 consultation on the Draft Local Plan (the UPSVLP 2021). The Warrington Local Plan 2021/22-38/39 was also subject to a final HRA assessment produced by AECOM (March 2023) at the Main Modifications Stage.

2.5 The purpose of a HRA is to assess the impacts of a land-use plan against the conservation objectives of the national network of sites (formerly known as Natura 2000 Sites). The assessment must determine whether the plan would adversely affect the integrity of the site in terms of its nature conservation objectives. Where negative effects are identified other options should be examined to avoid any potential damaging effects.

3. Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan

3.1 The Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan has been led and produced by Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council, along with a number of local volunteer residents; with the designated Neighbourhood Plan area covering the whole of the Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish area, as shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Designated Neighbourhood Plan area.



3.2 The Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate any sites for development over and above those identified in the Council's adopted Local Plan that have already been through the HRA process at the required Plan making stages. It focuses on a series of criteria-based policies against which development proposals through the planning application process should be assessed against, within the neighbourhood area.

3.3 The Neighbourhood Plan sets out the following vision for the designated area:

Our area will develop in such a way as to provide well-designed housing and infrastructure that meets the needs of the local community and reflects the green setting of the Parish.

Development will maintain and enhance our network of green spaces incorporating trees, hedges, water bodies and wildlife corridors. The development of an integrated system of walking, cycling and public transport will be a priority.

Development will respect and enhance the area's local identity, history and heritage including the sensitive restoration and reuse of vacant or underused buildings and sites.

New housing will comprise a mix of housing type and tenure, build on the area's current sense of community and civic pride and facilitate investment in local infrastructure in terms of transport improvements, community, play, health and educational facilities.

3.4 In order to deliver the Neighbourhood Plan vision, a series of themes are also set out in the Neighbourhood Plan:

- **Theme 1 Green and Blue Spaces**: Protecting, maintaining and enhancing our network of green and blue spaces; identifying our most important green spaces and adding an extra layer of protection by designating them as Local Green Spaces; and strengthening the green belt boundary.

- **Theme 2 Heritage**: Ensuring that new development preserves and enhances the area's heritage, being especially mindful of the Parish's listed buildings, locally listed assets and the three designated conservation areas.

- **Theme 3 Design**: Setting out a series of design principles for all new development, from infill proposals and conversions to large-scale housing developments, to ensure that it contributes positively to the existing character and architectural heritage of the area.

- **Theme 4 Housing Need**: Ensuring that new homes meet the needs of local people.

- **Theme 5 Infrastructure**: Protecting the Parish's existing community facilities and ensuring that, as our area grows, the need for additional infrastructure is addressed and ensuring that footpaths and cycling routes are protected, connected and enhanced.

4. HRA Screening

4.1 The HRA Screening Assessment must determine whether a plan would adversely affect, or is likely to affect, the integrity of a site(s) in terms of its nature conservation objectives.

4.2 As set out in the Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Determination Statement, there are no Natura 2000 sites within the boundary of the designated Neighbourhood Plan area.

5. Initial HRA Screening Determination Conclusion

5.1 The Local Plan 2021/22-2038/39 was adopted by Full Council on 04 December 2023 and has already been subject to a full and iterative HRA through the Local Plan process, as well as extensive public consultation and an Examination in Public by the Planning Inspectorate.

5.2 The Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan, if made, will become part of the statutory development plan for the designated Neighbourhood Plan area, alongside the adopted Warrington Local Plan 2021/22 – 2038/39.

5.3 The Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan has no site allocations but does introduces criteria-based policies (which have yet to be subject to consultation and examination) that address local issues. However, they do not alter the status of land to a degree which would have a significant effect on the environment.

5.4 Based on this initial Screening Determination Statement, the Council therefore concludes it is not necessary to carry out a full HRA on the Grappenhall and Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan.

5.5 However, the Council will review the screening conclusions reached in light of any recommendations made by the statutory consultee, and consult with the Parish Council, before confirming its final HRA conclusion.

6. Final HRA Screening Determination Conclusion

6.1 A 5-week consultation period on the Council's initial Screening Determination conclusion was undertaken between 05 September 2025 and 13 October 2025, where Natural England were given the opportunity to comment on the Council's initial conclusion.

6.2 As part of the iterative screening process and taking into account the initial screening determination consultation response received from Natural England, final screening has confirmed the initial conclusions reached in section 5 of this statement, are still relevant and that the Neighbourhood Plan can be screened out from further stages of assessment because significant effects are unlikely to occur, either alone or in combination.

6.3 The consultation responses received by the Council from Natural England is available contained in Appendix 1 of this statement.

Appendix 1: Natural England Initial Screening Response

Date: 13 October 2025
Our ref: 526037
Your ref: Grappenhall & Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan

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Warrington Borough Council

BY EMAIL ONLY
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Dear Sir/Madam

Grappenhall & Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan - SEA/HRA Screening Opinion Consultation

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 05 September 2025.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where they consider our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

Natural England does not have any specific comments on this draft neighbourhood plan.

However, we refer you to the attached annex which covers the issues and opportunities that should be considered when preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and to the following information.

Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Further information on protected species and development is included in Natural England's Standing Advice on protected species .

Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission standing advice.

We therefore recommend that advice is sought from your ecological, landscape and soils advisers, local record centre, recording society or wildlife body on the local soils, best and most versatile agricultural land, landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity receptors that may be affected by the plan before determining whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment is necessary.

Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If an Strategic Environmental Assessment is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.

For any further consultations on your plan, please contact: consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours faithfully
Sally Wintle
Consultations Team

Annex 1 - Neighbourhood planning and the natural environment: information, issues and opportunities

Natural environment information sources

The Magic[1] website will provide you with much of the nationally held natural environment data for your plan area. The most relevant layers for you to consider are: **Agricultural Land Classification, Ancient Woodland, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Local Nature Reserves, National Parks (England), National Trails, Priority Habitat Inventory, public rights of way (on the Ordnance Survey base map)** and **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (including their impact risk zones)**. Local environmental record centres may hold a range of additional information on the natural environment. A list of local record centres is available from the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres .

Priority habitats are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found here[2]. Most of these will be mapped either as **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**, on the Magic website or as **Local Wildlife Sites**. Your local planning authority should be able to supply you with the locations of Local Wildlife Sites.

National Character Areas (NCAs) divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each character area is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. NCA profiles contain descriptions of the area and statements of environmental opportunity, which may be useful to inform proposals in your plan. NCA information can be found here[3].

There may also be a local **landscape character assessment** covering your area. This is a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It can help to inform, plan and manage change in the area. Your local planning authority should be able to help you access these if you can't find them online.

If your neighbourhood planning area is within or adjacent to a **National Park** or **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONB), the relevant National Park/AONB Management Plan for the area will set out useful information about the protected landscape. You can access the plans on from the relevant National Park Authority or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website.

General mapped information on **soil types** and **Agricultural Land Classification** is available (under 'landscape') on the Magic[4] website and also from the LandIS website[5], which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

Natural environment issues to consider

The National Planning Policy Framework[6] sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. Planning Practice Guidance[7] sets out supporting guidance.

Your local planning authority should be able to provide you with further advice on the potential impacts of your plan or order on the natural environment and the need for any environmental assessments.

Landscape

Your plans or orders may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes. You may want to consider identifying distinctive local landscape features or characteristics such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls and think about how any new development proposals can respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness.

If you are proposing development within or close to a protected landscape (National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or other sensitive location, we recommend that you carry out a landscape assessment of the proposal. Landscape assessments can help you to choose the most appropriate sites for development and help to avoid or minimise impacts of development on the landscape through careful siting, design and landscaping.

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[1] http://magic.defra.gov.uk/
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england
[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making
[4] http://magic.defra.gov.uk/
[5] http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm
[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2
[7] http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/

Wildlife habitats

Some proposals can have adverse impacts on designated wildlife sites or other priority habitats (listed here[8]), such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Ancient woodland[9]. If there are likely to be any adverse impacts you'll need to think about how such impacts can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for.

Priority and protected species

You'll also want to consider whether any proposals might affect priority species (listed here [10]) or protected species. To help you do this, Natural England has produced advice here[11] to help understand the impact of particular developments on protected species.

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services for society. It is a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, a store for carbon and water, a reservoir of biodiversity and a buffer against pollution. If you are proposing development, you should seek to use areas of poorer quality agricultural land in preference to that of a higher quality in line with National Planning Policy Framework para 112. For more information, see Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land [12].

Improving your natural environment

Your plan or order can offer exciting opportunities to enhance your local environment and should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the National Planning Policy Framework. If you are setting out policies on new development or proposing sites for development, you should follow the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy and seek to ensure impacts on habitats are avoided or minimised before considering opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. You may wish to consider identifying what environmental features you want to be retained or enhanced or new features you would like to see created as part of any new development and how these could contribute to biodiversity net gain and wider environmental goals.

Opportunities for environmental enhancement might include:

- Restoring a neglected hedgerow.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.
- Think about how lighting can be best managed to reduce impacts on wildlife.
- Adding a green roof to new buildings.
- Providing a new footpath through the new development to link into existing rights of way.

Site allocations should be supported by a baseline assessment of biodiversity value. The statutory Biodiversity Metric may be used to understand the number of biodiversity units present on allocated sites. For small development allocations the Small Sites Metric may be used. This is a simplified version of the statutory Biodiversity Metric and is designed for use where certain criteria are met. Further information on biodiversity net gain including planning practice guidance can be found here

You may also want to consider enhancing your local area in other ways, for example by:

- Setting out in your plan how you would like to implement elements of a wider Green Infrastructure Strategy (if one exists) in your community.
- Assessing needs for accessible greenspace and setting out proposals to address any deficiencies or enhance provision. Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework sets out further information on green infrastructure standards and principles
- Identifying green areas of particular importance for special protection through Local Green Space designation (see Planning Practice Guidance[13]).
- Managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips in less used parts of parks or on verges, changing hedge cutting timings and frequency).

[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england
[9] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences
[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england
[11] https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals
[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-land-assess-proposals-for-development/guide-to-assessing-development-proposals-on-agricultural-land
[13] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space

- Planting additional street trees.
- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network, e.g. cutting back hedges, improving the surface, clearing litter or installing kissing gates) or extending the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition, or clearing away an eyesore).

Natural England's Environmental Benefits from Nature tool may be used to identify opportunities to enhance wider benefits from nature and to avoid and minimise any negative impacts. It is designed to work alongside the statutory Biodiversity Metric and is available as a beta test version.