



NORWICH
City Council

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report:

Purpose-built student accommodation in Norwich Supplementary Planning Document

May 2025

1.0 Purpose of this Document

- 1.1 This purpose of this report is to determine if the Draft Purpose-built Student Accommodation (PBSA) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) requires Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) through a process known as SEA screening.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) involves evaluation of the environmental impacts of a plan or programme. The SEA Directive sets out a legal assessment process that must be followed. Often within the planning context, the SEA requirements are met by incorporating it within a Sustainability Appraisal (SA), which is a requirement for Development Plan Documents. There is no legal requirement for Supplementary Planning Documents to be accompanied by Sustainability Appraisal.
- 2.2 However, “in exceptional circumstances” there may be a requirement for SPDs to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment where it is felt they may have a likely significant effect on the environment that has not been assessed within the SEA/SA of the Local Plan. To assess whether a SEA is required the local planning authority must undertake a screening process based on a standard set of criteria, to establish whether the draft SPD is likely to have a significant environmental effect. This must be subject to consultation with the three consultation bodies: Historic England, the Environment Agency and Natural England.
- 2.3 A screening process has been followed and forms the main content of this report.

3.0 Draft Purpose-built Student Accommodation SPD

- 3.1 The PBSA SPD, once adopted, will supplement policy 5 of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP). It will assist developers, educational institutions and the Local Planning Authority in implementing policy 5 of the GNLP.
- 3.2 The PBSA SPD sets out that current evidence suggests that there is no need for further PBSA in Norwich over the GNLP plan period (taking into account existing and pipeline supply), however it does acknowledge that the situation can and may change over time. There is therefore flexibility in policy 5 which provides the opportunity for applicants to submit an assessment of need as part of a future planning application.
- 3.3 The objective of the SPD is to encourage good quality accommodation in appropriate and sustainable locations where the need for future PBSA is established. This will ensure that the needs of Norwich’s student population can be met and that any future PBSA will contribute to mixed and inclusive neighbourhoods. The SPD lists the factors that the council will take into consideration in the assessment of relevant planning applications. It pulls together existing policy, evidence, best practice and information about student

development into a series of guidelines to inform the planning application and assessment process.

4.0 The Screening Process

- 4.1 The purpose of the screening opinion is to determine whether the SPD is likely to have significant environmental effects, using the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive. The Greater Norwich Local, to which this SPD supplements, has been subject to the preparation of a Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating SEA. Despite no longer requiring sustainability appraisal, SPDs may still require SEA. The ODPM practical guidance provides a checklist approach based on the SEA regulations to help determine whether SEA is required. This guide has been used as the basis on which to assess the need for SEA.
- 4.2 The three consultation bodies (Historic England, Environment Agency, and Natural England) will be consulted to determine whether they agree with the conclusion of this report, in determining whether the draft SPD has a “significant environmental effect” and therefore requires SEA. Should it be determined by the local authority and consultation bodies that SEA does need to be undertaken, the council will need to undertake the Scoping stage of SEA.

Table 1: Establishing the need for SEA

Assessment criteria	Assessment	Reason
1) Is the Plan 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 of Government? (Article 2(a))	Yes	The SPD is to be prepared and adopted by the local authority Norwich City Council.
2) Is the SPD required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Article 2(a))	Yes	Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are optional; there is no legislative or regulatory requirement to prepare them. SPDs can be prepared and adopted by Local Planning Authorities provided the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 are met. This SPD

Assessment criteria	Assessment	Reason
		has been produced to supplement the Greater Norwich Local Plan.
3) Is the SPD 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? (Article 3.2(a))	Yes	The SPD is for town and country planning purposes and sets a framework of guidance for future development consent of PBSA projects.
4) Will the SPD, in view of its likely effect on sites, require and assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive (Art. 3.2(b))	No	The policy that the SPD is supplementing has been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment.
5) Does the SPD determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Article 3.2? (Article 3.3)	No	Not applicable
6) Does the SPD set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)	Yes	The SPD provides further guidance to supplement GNLP policy 5 related to PBSA. Whilst not allocating land, the SPDs provide a framework for future development.
7) Is the SPD's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, OR is a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7?	No	The SPD does not serve national defence or civil emergency, nor is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes.

Assessment criteria	Assessment	Reason
8) Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	No	The purpose of the SPD is to provide guidance to assist in the interpretation of policy 5 of the GNLP. The GNLP was subject to SEA (incorporated within the Sustainability Appraisal), and no significant effects were expected. Therefore, the SPD will not have any significant effects on the environment.

Table 2: Likely Significant Effects on the Environment

Criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive	Assessment	Is there a Significant Environmental effect?
1) The characteristics of plans and 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,	While the SPD will include additional considerations, it does not determine the detail of the framework i.e., it does not establish policy.	No
The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy,	The PBSA SPD supplements policy 5 of the GNLP rather than influencing the overall direction of the GNLP.	No
The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,	The SPD assists in the promotion of sustainable development together with other policies within the GNLP.	No
Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,	There are no environmental problems that are specific to this SPD.	No
The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to	Not relevant to this SPD.	No

Criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive	Assessment	Is there a Significant Environmental effect?
waste-management or water protection).		
2) Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,	The SPD supplements policy 5 of the GNLP and therefore the overall impacts will be in accordance with the GNLP.	No
The cumulative nature of the effects,	The SPD will not lead to significant cumulative negative effects.	No
The transboundary nature of the effects,	The SPD is unlikely to have an impact on neighbouring authorities.	No
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),	The SPD is unlikely to introduce significant risks to human health or the environment.	No
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),	The SPD supplements policy 5 of the GNLP and therefore the overall impacts will be in accordance with the GNLP.	No
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: - special natural characteristics or cultural heritage, - exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, - intensive land-use, the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status.	The SPD supplements policy 5 of the GNLP and along with other policies within the GNLP will ensure that there is no significant negative impact upon natural or heritage assets.	No

5.0 Statement of Reasons for Determination

- 5.1 On the basis of the screening process, it is the council's opinion that the impact of the Draft Purpose-built Student Accommodation SPD, through responses to the SEA Directive Criteria, will not have significant environmental effects on Norwich that have not already been assessed as part of the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP). This SPD is not setting a new policy; it supplements existing GNLP policy 5. Therefore, the council considers that an SEA will not be required for this SPD. However, it is necessary to consult with the three statutory environmental bodies over the SEA Screening Report for the Purpose-built Student Accommodation SPD.