

# South Kesteven Design Code Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Opinion  
(incorporating Habitats Regulations considerations)

South Kesteven District Council

March 2026

## Quality information

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# 1. Purpose of this SEA Screening Opinion (incorporating HRA considerations)

## 1.1 Background

1.1.1 South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) is producing a Design Code<sup>1</sup> Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the district. The SPD will set standards for how buildings, streets and public spaces should look, feel and function and will go through multiple stages of public engagement before being finalised.

1.1.2 Following their recent testing and engagement phase for the SPD which closed in January 2026, SKDC has asked AECOM to provide an SEA Screening Opinion (incorporating Habitats Regulations considerations) for their draft Design Code SPD. This report presents our Screening Opinion.

1.1.3 The aim of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (i.e., the “SEA Regulations”), which transpose the SEA Directive (2004/42/EC) in to UK law, is as follows (with added emphasis):

*“to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.”*

1.1.4 Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the “Habitats Regulations”), an appropriate assessment is required, where a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect upon an international site, either individually or in combination with other projects.

## 1.2 Who is responsible for screening?

1.2.1 In order to decide whether an SPD is likely to have significant environmental effects, and hence requires SEA / HRA, it should be ‘screened’ at an early stage, i.e. once the scope of the SPD has been established.

1.2.2 The Regulations state that a screening determination should be reached by ‘the responsible authority’, which, in this case, is SKDC.

1.2.3 The Council should reach a determination in-light of this screening opinion, and in consultation with the statutory consultation bodies designated under the Regulations:

- Natural England (SEA and HRA).
- The Environment Agency (SEA); and.
- Historic England (SEA).

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<sup>1</sup> South Kesteven District Council (2026): [A Design Code for South Kesteven](#)

## 1.3 Screening methodology

- 1.3.1 Screening essentially involves giving consideration to the anticipated scope of the plan in question and the nature of environmental issues locally, before coming to a conclusion on the potential for a cause and effect relationship, i.e. the likelihood of the plan leading to 'significant effects on the environment'.
- 1.3.2 **Schedule 1** of the SEA Regulations<sup>2</sup> lists a series of criteria that should be taken into account when establishing the potential for the plan to result in significant effects. Furthermore, **Schedule 2** of the SEA Regulations<sup>3</sup> lists a series of broad environmental issues that should be considered. The criteria/issues listed in the Regulations are helpful in that they provide a methodological basis for screening.
- 1.3.3 Finally, there is a need to note the following Planning Practice Guidance (with emphasis added)<sup>4</sup>:

*“Supplementary planning documents do not require a sustainability appraisal but may in **exceptional circumstances** require a strategic environmental assessment if they are likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already have been assessed during the preparation of the relevant strategic policies.”*

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<sup>2</sup> The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004: [Schedule 1](#)

<sup>3</sup> The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004: [Schedule 2](#)

<sup>4</sup> See Paragraph 8 at: [Strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal](#)

## 2. Context for the draft Design Code SPD

### 2.1 Key information relating to the draft SPD

2.1.1 Key information relating to the SPD is presented in **Table 2.1** below.

**Table 2.1: Key information relating to the draft Design Code SPD**

Name of qualifying body	South Kesteven District Council (SKDC)
Title of the SPD	South Kesteven Design Code Draft
Area covered by the SPD	South Kesteven District
Timescale	The SPD will be phased over a period of time (a transition period), which will commence at a time when the emerging Local Plan is adopted.
Purpose, aims, and objectives	<p>The purpose of the Design Code SPD is to improve the quality of new development in South Kesteven. SKDC has produced the Design Code SPD primarily to assist and inform both applicants and officers involved in the design and development process, with a particular focus on ensuring that applicants for planning permission (for more than 10 homes or non-residential proposals for over 1,000 sqm of floorspace) apply the necessary considerations to their proposals.</p> <p>The vision of the Design Code SPD reflects the responses received from extensive engagement with local residents and stakeholders to date, and is focused on ten key priorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sustainable development.</li> <li>2. Greener communities.</li> <li>3. Community-centred design.</li> <li>4. Controlled and sustainable growth.</li> <li>5. Supporting infrastructure.</li> <li>6. Transport and accessibility.</li> <li>7. Preserve local character.</li> <li>8. Diverse and affordable housing.</li> <li>9. Future-proof development; and</li> <li>10. Distinctive public realm.</li> </ol>
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## 2.2 Planning context for the draft SPD

2.2.1 The draft Design Code SPD has been prepared in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>5</sup> (NPPF, December 2024) and associated Planning Practice Guidance, and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. **Section 1.5** within the draft SPD states that the Design Code must also be read alongside relevant national and local documents, including (but not limited to) the National Design Guide (2021), National Model Design Code (2021), Manual for Streets (2019), Building for Healthy Life (2020) and the adopted South Kesteven Local Plan<sup>6</sup> (2020).

2.2.2 **Section 1.5** of the draft SPD also states that the Design Code should take into consideration any subsequent planning and environmental legislation and guidance as it becomes available. This will likely include the Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance<sup>7</sup> (2026 consultation) and the emerging South Kesteven Local Plan (to 2043). The Local Plan context is provided below.

2.2.3 The South Kesteven Local Plan (2011-2036) was adopted in January 2020. The HRA Screening for the adopted Local Plan concluded that there was no requirement to proceed with an appropriate assessment (AA)<sup>8</sup>. The Planning Inspector's final report on the adopted Local Plan confirmed that the Council should commit to undertaking an early review of the Local Plan from April 2020. SKDC have since progressed with a review of the adopted Local Plan, which has been accompanied by a full Sustainability Appraisal (SA) (incorporating SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) AA. Plan making has included:

- An initial 'issues and options' consultation in October 2020, presenting high-level approaches and alternatives for the emerging Local Plan.
- Regulation 18 consultation on an initial Draft Local Plan was undertaken between February and April 2024. The Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan consultation document contained a series of planning policies to guide development in the district to 2043, and potential locations for housing and employment land.
- A focused Regulation 18 consultation in July and August 2025 on 'Proposed Housing and Mixed-Use Site Allocations', in response to the revised standard method<sup>9</sup> for the district proposed in the December 2024 NPPF. The HRA AA concluded that the identified impact pathways to international sites from the Draft Local Plan could be 'screened out' of causing any likely significant effects to habitats or species for which the international sites are designated.

2.2.4 Further information is available on SKDC's website<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> MHCLG (last updated February 2025): [revised NPPF](#)

<sup>6</sup> South Kesteven District Council (2020): [The adopted South Kesteven Local Plan \(to 2036\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> MHCLG (2026): [Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance](#)

<sup>8</sup> South Kesteven District Council (2018): [South Kesteven Local Plan \(2011-2036\) HRA](#)

<sup>9</sup> The updated NPPF included revisions to the standard method for calculating housing need. The revisions have increased the need for South Kesteven District from 701 homes per annum to 886 homes per annum.

<sup>10</sup> South Kesteven District Council (2026): [Local Plan Review](#)

## 3. Screening assessment

### 3.1 Relevant environmental issues

- 3.1.1 A key determinant of whether effects are likely to be significant is the sensitivity of the asset affected. In this context, the more environmentally sensitive a location, the more likely it is that potential environmental effects from a plan will be significant.
- 3.1.2 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)<sup>11</sup> provides guidance on this topic through providing a list of sites and areas which should be deemed as ‘sensitive areas’ for the purposes of environmental assessment<sup>12</sup>. These comprise:
- International sites.
  - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
  - National Parks.
  - National Landscapes.
  - World Heritage Sites (WHS); and
  - Scheduled Monuments.
- 3.1.3 In the context of the PPG, there are 124 sensitive areas within South Kesteven, including:
- Two international sites: Baston Fen Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Grimsthorpe SAC.
  - 29 SSSI; and
  - 93 Scheduled Monuments.
- 3.1.4 Other key environmental assets (i.e., those which are not defined as ‘sensitive areas’ by the PPG), within South Kesteven include:
- Listed Buildings: 108 Grade I; 197 Grade II\*; and 1,848 Grade II.
  - 48 conservation areas.
  - Areas of priority habitats contributing to local ecological networks, including ancient woodland and deciduous woodland.
  - Local ecological and heritage designations: local wildlife sites; local geological sites; regionally important geological sites; and registered parks and gardens.
  - Main rivers and ordinary watercourses, including the River Witham, River Welland, River Glen (and their tributaries).
  - Mineral safeguarding areas; and
  - Air quality management areas.

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<sup>11</sup> MHCLG (2024): [Planning practice guidance](#)

<sup>12</sup> i.e., [those sites and areas that should be considered 'sensitive'](#) for the purposes of screening projects for environmental assessments.

## 3.2 Regulatory checklist

3.2.1 As discussed above in **Section 1.3**, Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations lists a series of criteria that should be taken into account when establishing the potential for the plan to result in likely significant effects. The aim of **Table 3.1** below is to discuss matters under each criterion in turn.

**Table 3.1: Checklist for establishing the potential for significant effects**

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
<i>1. The characteristics of the SPD, having particular regard to:</i>		
(a) the degree to which the SPD sets out a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	No	The SPD does aim to set a design framework for new development areas within the district, including a range of place-making principles under three prescriptions: 'must', 'should', and 'can'. Unlike development plan documents, the SPD will not set the direct framework for delivering new projects and activities in the district.
(b) the degree to which the SPD influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	No	The SPD is not likely to have a significant bearing on the preparation of other plans or programmes. The SPD is being prepared in the context of, and in alignment with, the provisions of several national and local planning documents. This includes the adopted (and emerging) South Kesteven Local Plan, which have been subject to SA (including SEA) and HRA. Further detail is provided in <b>Section 2.2</b> of this Screening Opinion.
(c) the relevance of the SPD for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	No	The SPD seeks to respond to a range of environmental constraints and problems, perhaps most notably in respect of biodiversity and green infrastructure, heritage, climate resilience, public realm and open spaces, movement and accessibility, density, and built form.
(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	No	Whilst these provisions have the potential to deliver positive effects within South Kesteven, impacts are not considered to be significant in the absence of any specific allocations within the draft SPD.

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
(e) the relevance of the plan for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example plans and programmes related to waste management or water protection).	No	It is not anticipated that the SPD will have a notable bearing in this respect.
<i>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular,</i>		
(a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	No	The effects of the SPD will be felt over the medium to long term, as planning applications come forward and the emerging Local Plan is adopted. As the SPD includes a design framework for delivering sustainable development throughout the district, the effects are likely to be permanent. However, this does not in itself lead to a conclusion that effects will be significant.
(b) the cumulative nature of the effects.	No	The SPD will be implemented alongside the adopted (and emerging) Local Plan, and so there will be a cumulative effect. However, the SPD is unlikely to lead to significant effects that would be seen otherwise.
(c) the trans boundary nature of the effects.	No	Not relevant; no international effects anticipated as the SPD only concerns South Kesteven District.
(d) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accident).	No	Environmental quality and environmental health are matters relevant to the SPD; however, the SPD is not likely to lead to any risks.
(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).	No	The key point to note is in respect of the magnitude of growth likely to come forward across the district through the adopted (and emerging) Local Plan, with the design of new development areas linked to the provisions of the SPD. However, the SPD is unlikely to lead to significant effects that would be seen otherwise through the Local Plan.

Criteria	Significant effect?	Discussion
<p>(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage</li> <li>▪ Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values</li> <li>▪ Intensive land use</li> </ul>	No	<p>There are a number of constraints in the district (discussed in <b>Section 3.1</b> within this Screening Opinion) which are sensitive to the design of new development areas, including ecological and heritage designations.</p> <p>As the SPD does not allocate land for housing or employment land, the proposals in the SPD are not likely to have significant effects to the integrity of sensitive areas within South Kesteven.</p>
<p>(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.</p>	No	<p>South Kesteven District is not constrained by any landscapes which have a recognised national, Community, or international protection status (e.g., National Parks, National Landscapes, or Green Belt land).</p>

### 3.3 Conclusion (Screening Opinion)

- 3.3.1 This screening opinion has considered whether the draft Design Code SPD is likely to lead to significant environmental effects in conjunction with the SEA and HRA Regulations. Whilst some limited environmental effects have the potential to take place as a result of the draft SPD, it is considered that these are unlikely to be significant in the context of the SEA and HRA Regulations and their requirements. This is considered below.
- 3.3.2 The European and national designations within South Kesteven (discussed in **Section 3.1** of this Screening Opinion) have a range of sensitivities that will need to be carefully considered through new development areas. In terms of key land use policies which should be considered for their potential for significant environmental effects, the draft SPD does not seek to allocate land for housing or employment uses. Therefore, the proposals in the draft SPD are not likely to have significant effects to the integrity of ‘sensitive areas’ within South Kesteven. As the draft SPD does not allocate land for housing or employment land, the impacts of new development areas (i.e., emerging Local Plan allocations or speculative applications during the plan period) would only arise through the development control process as applications come forward.
- 3.3.3 The draft SPD instead seeks to shape development which may come forward within South Kesteven District by supporting proposals which meets a series of criteria (see **Table 2.1** in Chapter 2 of this Screening Opinion). In this respect the SPD is strongly design led and will inform and influence planning applications which come forward through the adopted (and emerging) South Kesteven Local Plan, which have been subject to SA (incorporating SEA) and HRA. The likely significant effects are primarily

from the allocations taken forward through the Local Plan, and the SPD will help to limit these potential significant effects.

- 3.3.4 In the context of the above, the draft Design Code SPD has a key focus on bringing forward high-quality design that does not detract from South Kesteven's sensitive environment, which includes the various environmental designations and their settings. In this way, the draft SPD proposals work to shape potential development coming forward within South Kesteven without allocating sites. This includes establishing priorities and placemaking-principles for biodiversity and green infrastructure, heritage, climate resilience, public realm and open spaces, movement and accessibility, density, and built form. Whilst these provisions have the potential to deliver positive effects within South Kesteven, impacts are not considered to be significant in the absence of any specific allocations within the draft SPD.
- 3.3.5 In conclusion, it is not considered likely that the SPD will lead to significant effects on the environmental baseline situation. As such, **a full SEA process meeting the requirements of the SEA Regulations is not deemed to be required to accompany the development of the Design Code SPD.**
- 3.3.6 In light of the conclusions within the HRA Screening for the adopted Local Plan and the AA for the emerging Local Plan (as discussed in **Section 2.2** of this Screening Opinion) **the SPD, which accords with Local Plan policies, would not significantly affect an international site under the Habitats Regulations and trigger the requirement for AA.**

## 4. Next steps

### 4.1 Consultation on the draft SPD (and Screening Opinion)

4.1.1 This SEA Screening Opinion (incorporating Habitats Regulations considerations) accompanies the draft Design Code SPD for community consultation for a period of six weeks, commencing on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

4.1.2 Consultation documents are accessible via:

[A Design Code for South Kesteven | South Kesteven District Council](#)

4.1.3 SKDC, as the responsible authority, should give consideration to this screening opinion, consult with the Statutory Consultees (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) and then reach a screening determination.

4.1.4 If the SPD is ultimately screened out, then plan making may continue without having to give further consideration to SEA requirements; however, if it is ultimately determined that SEA is required, there will be a need to undertake SEA in accordance with the regulatory requirements.

4.1.5 Finally, it is important to note that our screening opinion is based on a series of assumptions, most notably in relation to the scope of the plan. If the scope of the plan changes, such that these assumptions no longer hold true, then 're-screening' could be necessary.

Prepared for: South Kesteven District Council