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Dear Local Plan Team

**Luton Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment
Scoping Report May 2026.**

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the Luton Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report May 2026. As the Government's adviser on the historic environment Historic England is keen to ensure that the protection of the historic environment is fully taken into account at all stages and levels of the local planning process.

We have previously provided comments on your SEA Scoping Report in January 2025. We welcome the changes you have made in response to our previous comments.

Sustainability Appraisal Scoping

We recommend that these comments should be read alongside our Advice Note 8 on [Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment](#).

We have provided responses to the questions in paragraph 6.2 of the Scoping Report ([blue text](#)) as well as some more general comments.

1. Whether the scope of the SA is appropriate as set out considering the role of the Luton Local Plan to help meet and manage Luton's needs.

We welcome the consideration of the historic environment as part of the strategic environmental assessment process.

We welcome the commitment at paragraph 5.6 to close collaboration with council officers who are drafting the Local Plan to ensure a fully integrated and iterative SA process.

2. Whether there are any additional plans, policies or programmes that are relevant to the SA that should be included.

Chapter 2 Relevant Plans and Programmes

We welcome the Review of Relevant Policies, Plans and Programmes in Chapter 2, and Appendix A.

3. Whether the baseline information provided is robust and comprehensive and provides a suitable baseline for the SA of the new Local Plan.

Baseline

Paragraphs 3.122 – 3.127 We welcome the identification of designated heritage assets within the baseline information. We also welcome the mapping of these assets in Figure 3.10. This provides a greater indication of their distribution and highlights sensitive areas.

We would stress that assessing the potential impact of development on the significance of heritage assets requires more than a simple mapping of the location of those assets and identification of those assets on or in proximity to potential sites. Our Advice Note 3 [The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans - Historic England Advice Note 3 | Historic England](#) sets out a sequential approach to assessing the impact on significance.

We also would expect non-designated heritage assets to be identified. Whilst we note reference to the Local List of buildings at paragraph 3.128, non-designated heritage assets include, but are not confined to, locally listed buildings.

In addition to the above, we would expect reference to currently unknown heritage assets, particularly sites of historic and archaeological interest. The unidentified heritage assets of the area should be acknowledged and outlined in this section.

We also suggest that you use the word setting in relation to heritage assets.

Paragraphs 3.130 – 3.132 We welcome the references to Heritage at Risk in paragraphs 3.130 – 3.132. We also recommend mapping of designated and non-designated heritage assets at risk can provide an indication of clusters and themes. For Heritage at Risk, Historic England's National Heritage at Risk Register includes Grade II listed places of worship provided that they are used six or more times a year for worship.

Other sources of evidence Historic England's Good Practice Advice Note 1 [The Historic Environment in Local Plans - Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 1 | Historic England](#) contains advice on other relevant sources of evidence. These include Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans, Local Lists, Historic Characterisation assessments and any other in-house and local knowledge. We recommend that these other sources of evidence are considered as part of the SEA process.

Historic Landscapes and Townscapes We welcome the reference to Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Landscape Characterisation in your Scoping Report.

SEA Framework

4. Whether there are any additional key sustainability issues relevant to the new Local Plan that should be included.

Key Sustainability Issues

We welcome the recognition of heritage assets at risk on page 110 as a key issue.

We would suggest that other Key Sustainability Issues for the Historic Environment should include:

- Conserving and enhancing designated and non-designated heritage assets and the contribution made to their significance by their settings
- Areas where there is likely to be further significant loss or erosion of landscape/seascape/townscape character or quality, or where development has had or is likely to have significant impact (direct and or indirect) upon the historic environment and/or people's enjoyment of it
- Traffic congestion, air quality, noise pollution and other problems affecting the historic environment

5. Whether the SA framework (Chapter 5) is appropriate and includes a suitable set of SA objectives for assessing the effects of the options included within the new Local Plan as well as reasonable alternatives.

SEA Objectives

The objectives and questions identified on page 118 provide a useful starting point for the historic environment.

We welcome objective 10.

Whilst recognising that the number of objectives needs to be manageable, we also recommend including some of the objectives below:

Environmental Objectives

- Protect, enhance and manage the character and appearance of landscapes/ townscape, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place
- Protect, manage and improve local environmental quality
- Achieve high quality sustainable design for buildings, spaces and the public realm

Social Objectives

- Improve and broaden access to the local historic environment
- Provide better opportunities for people to understand local heritage and participate in cultural and leisure activities

Economic Objectives

- Foster heritage-led regeneration and address heritage at risk
- Optimise the use of previously developed land, buildings and existing infrastructure
- Promote heritage-led sustainable tourism
- Support the sustainable use of historic farmsteads

Appraisal Questions

We welcome the four appraisal questions on page 118.

Questions 3 and 4 appear very similar.

We recommend the inclusion of (some of) the following additional appraisal questions:

Environmental: will the policy or proposal

- Improve the quality and condition of the historic environment?
- Respect, maintain and strengthen local character and distinctiveness?
- Promote high quality design?
- Integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into the historic environment sensitively?
- Alter the hydrological conditions of water-dependent heritage assets, including organic remains?

Social: will the policy or proposal

- Increase the social benefit (e.g. education, participation, citizenship, health and well-being) derived from the historic environment?
- Improve the satisfaction of people with their neighbourhoods as places to live?
- Engage communities in identifying culturally important features and areas?
- Provide for increased access to and enjoyment of the historic environment?
- Provide for increased understanding and interpretation of the historic environment?
- Provide new leisure, recreational, or cultural activities?
- Support and widen community uses through shared facilities?

Economic: will the policy or proposal

- Increase the economic benefit derived from the historic environment?
- Promote heritage-led regeneration?
- Lead to the repair and adaptive re-use of a heritage asset and encourage high quality design?
- Make the best use of existing buildings and physical infrastructure?
- Promote heritage based sustainable tourism?
- Ensure that repair and maintenance is sympathetic to local character?
- Help to reduce the number of vacant buildings through adaptive re-use?

Assessment Criteria

In developing assessment criteria, we would advise against a purely distance-based approach (Paragraph 5.8). The impact of proposals on the significance of heritage assets should be taken into consideration at an early stage. In terms of projects, this should be based on more than just measuring the proximity of a potential allocation to heritage assets.

Impacts on significance are not just based on distance or visual impacts, and assessment requires a careful judgment based on site visits and the available evidence base. This is

preferred to the application of a standard proximity test (e.g. is the site within a set distance of a heritage asset) as it avoids misleading results (Our Advice Note [The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans - Historic England Advice Note 3 | Historic England](#) sets out a sequential approach to assessing the impact on significance).

We would suggest that you avoid summing the scores indicating how each proposal performs against the criteria to give an aggregate contribution to each relevant SEA objective since such an approach may inadvertently mask 'showstoppers' by effectively averaging out the scores. There needs to be some mechanism of identifying where an impact is so great that the proposal should not be progressed.

Consideration of Opportunities

We would expect to see consideration of opportunities. It is considered that the historic environment can make a significant contribution to the success of development and there may be opportunities for the enhancement of the historic environment which comes from sustainable development proposals. It is considered that the SEA should highlight these opportunities. Example opportunities for the historic environment to include within the SEA can be found in our guidance notes in the links above.

Method for Generation of Alternatives

The historic environment should be a factor when considering a method for the generation of alternative proposals. We welcome the reference to reasonable alternatives at paragraph 5.10.

Archaeology

Scoping and evaluation of archaeological and landscape impacts needs to be an iterative process where existing sources (HER's cartographic etc. and research frameworks e.g. <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/researchframeworks/eastmidlands/wiki/>) are consulted, work is done to explore those questions and new questions asked (including lidar, aerial survey, geophysical survey, field walking, deposit modelling see our new guidance <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/deposit-modelling-and-archaeology/heag272-deposit-modelling-and-archaeology/>, trial trenching). These techniques should be used to model risk and build a robust approach to understanding that through any project so the greater heritage and project delivery risks are targeted first so they can inform minimisation and timely mitigation).

Other Assessment methodologies

Finally, we would add that whilst this assessment process is a vital part of the assessment, more detailed assessment of particular aspects may be necessary going forward for particular sites/schemes.

For example, Historic England would expect to see the completion of a Heritage Impact Assessment as part of the evidence base for certain sites/proposals likely to have an impact on the significance of heritage assets (including development within the setting of the heritage assets). We would be happy to provide further advice in this regard if and where this may be necessary as part of the evidence base site allocations.

Conclusion

The National Planning Policy Framework (para 33) is very clear that, in terms of sustainable development, harm to the historic environment should be avoided in the first instance and wherever possible alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued.

NPPF Para 33: Local plans and spatial development strategies should be informed throughout their preparation by a sustainability appraisal that meets the relevant legal requirements. This should demonstrate how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives (including opportunities for net gains). Significant adverse impacts on these objectives should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where significant adverse impacts are unavoidable, suitable mitigation measures should be proposed (or, where this is not possible, compensatory measures should be considered).

Historic England strongly advises that the local authority conservation teams and archaeological advisors are closely involved throughout the preparation of the assessment of this evidence. They are best placed to advise on; local historic environment issues and priorities, including access to data held in the Historic Environment Record (HER- formerly Sites and Monuments Record); how the proposal can be tailored to minimise potential adverse impacts on the historic environment; the nature and design of any required mitigation measures; and opportunities for securing wider benefits for the future conservation and management of heritage assets.

This opinion is based on the information provided by you and, for the avoidance of doubt, does not affect our obligation to advise you on, and potentially object to any specific development proposal which may subsequently arise from this or later versions of the strategy which is the



subject to consultation, and which may, despite the assessment, have adverse effects on the historic environment.

If you have any queries about any of the matters raised above or would like to discuss anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Debbie Mack
Historic Environment Planning Advisor

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