

Equality Impact Assessment

Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) places a duty on all public authorities in the exercise of their functions to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between persons who have a “protected characteristic” and those who do not.

“Protected characteristics” are defined in the Act as age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is the systematic analysis of a policy or policies, in order to identify the potential for an adverse impact on a particular group or community, in particular those with a protected characteristic. It is a method of assessing and recording the likely differential and/or adverse impact of a policy on people from different groups so that if a policy results in unfairness or discrimination, changes to eliminate or lessen the impact are considered.

This document is designed to ensure that the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan does not have any adverse impact on equality, and that statutory duties in this regard are met.

Aims

The purpose of the analysis is to increase participation and inclusion, to change the culture of public decision-making, and to nurture a more proactive approach to the promotion of equality and fairness at the heart of public policy. It also seeks to promote fairness and equality of opportunity.

The sections below consider the goals and objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan in order to assess the impact of policies and proposals on groups with protected characteristics.

Methodology

The assessment is of whether the SCNDP has a positive, negative or neutral impact on each group with protected characteristics, insofar as data is available. If an impact is considered negative, it is given a high, medium or low rating.

High impact – considered significant, with risk or exposure, history of complaints, no mitigating measures in place etc

Medium impact – some potential, some mitigating measures necessary.

Low impact – considered almost irrelevant to the process.

Baseline data

Data for Sonning Common is available for the following protected characteristics: **age, disability, race, religion or belief, gender**. It is not readily available for: **gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation**.

The source of the data presented is the 2011 Census.

- In 2011 the population of Sonning Common was 3784, of whom just over 2000 were female, 52.9% of the total. The proportions for England as a whole were 49.3% male and 50.7% female.
- The proportion of residents aged 0-15 was 19.4%, those aged 15-65 62.5%, and over 65s 18.1%. The national figures for the same age groups are 18.9%, 64.8% and 16.3%. Thus it can be seen that the proportion of elderly is somewhat above the national average.
- The proportion of 0-4 year-olds was 5.4%, compared with a national average of 6.25%.
- 6.7% of the overall population had their day-to-day activities considerably restricted by long-term health problems or disability, compared with national average of 8.3%. 9.5% had their day-to-day activities restricted a little by the same factors, a little above the national average of 9.3%.
- More than 8.1% of the population said they were in very good or good health, which is on a par with the national average.
- 5.3% of residents of working age claimed benefits in 2014 (figures from Nomis Ward labour market profile for Sonning Common) compared with a national average of 13.3%.
- 90.9% of the population were classified as British white, 5.1% as other white, and 4.0% as non-white. The corresponding national figures are British white 79.9%, other white 5.7%, and non-white 14.5%.
- 64.8% of people in Sonning Common defined themselves as Christian. The proportion of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and Sikhs was 1.3%. Just over 25% said they had no religion, and 8.3% made no declaration of religion.
- There is no useful data available for Sonning Common with regard to gender reassignment or sexual orientation.

In summary, Sonning Common has more elderly people than the national average, and fewer infants; a significantly smaller than average proportion claiming benefits; a much lower-than-average proportion of non-whites, and of people practising religions other than Christianity; and a lower proportion of young families.

Key priorities

The aims of the Sonning Common NDP are derived from its headline vision: that it will grow and renew itself while maintaining its village character. The overarching aims of the Plan could be defined thus:

1. To protect its rural setting, maintain its rural feel, and establish a coherent shape to the settlement based on its existing built limits.
2. To allocate the housing required by SODC in a way that balances new developments between sites and supports the principles in (1).
3. To integrate that housing into the existing settlement, with good pedestrian and cycle connections, and access roads that will minimise extra pressure on the existing road network.
4. To specify a housing mix that provides existing and future residents with the opportunity to live in a decent home, with different types and a greater range of affordable housing.
5. To secure and designate more land for public amenity use and address shortfalls in recreational and sporting facilities.
6. To support and enhance the retail centre, thereby helping to maintain the vitality of the village.
7. To ease congestion and parking problems and support the local bus service.
8. To support the schools and other essential facilities.

All these aims, which are fleshed out in more detail in the Objectives and Policies set out in the NDP, are designed to benefit all members of the community. But some support policies and proposals which might affect people with certain protected characteristics differently than others. For example, (4) should make it easier for the elderly and for young families setting out on the housing ladder to find suitable homes. (3) and (7) should reduce the need for car use, while making the village centre more accessible for those without cars and those dependent on assistance to get around. This is particularly important for the elderly, those with disabilities, and those with limited mobility. (6) and (8) should both contribute towards making the village more self-sustaining, benefiting those with young children and the elderly, who may have limited access to private transport.

Impact on groups with Protected Characteristics

The purpose of the analysis in this section is to establish how various groups will be affected by the proposals in the NDP, and whether groups with protected characteristics could be adversely impacted.

Age

- The NDP seeks to provide more recreational facilities for all age groups, including children and the elderly. The release of land for housing at Chiltern Edge School will enable the school to improve its facilities for local children. Developers will be required to contribute towards community facilities
- The NDP's housing policies require 40% of new housing to be affordable, benefiting young families seeking to secure their own homes. The housing mix

will be tilted towards smaller homes, which will assist young families as well as giving elderly people the opportunity to downsize.

- The support given to the village centre – both the retail sector, and health and social facilities such as the Village Hall and the Health Centre – will be of particular value to older people, as will the provision of new pedestrian accesses and the enhancement of existing ones.

Disability

- The NDP seeks to improve broadband provision for the village, which will be of particular value to people with disabilities or limited mobility by improving opportunities for home-working and access to online services.
- The integration of new housing into the village settlement, together with the provision of paths suitable for wheelchairs, walking frames and mobility scooters, will help secure access to local facilities and bus stops.
- New housing will be required to conform and perform well against criteria within the Sustainable Design Supplementary Planning Document, which requires to be adaptable and flexible, thereby meeting the different needs of disabled people.

Maternity and pregnancy

- The affordable housing provision will help people starting a family to secure a home
- Improved broadband would benefit young mothers wishing to work from home and/or access online services
- New and improved connections around the village and between new developments and the village centre will enhance access for mothers with pushchairs.
- The support given to schools will enhance the provision of education for local children.
- The provision of additional open space and recreational facilities will be of evident benefit to pregnant mothers and those with young children.

Race

- The NDP seeks to ensure that new housing developments will follow good design principles, enabling them to be both safe and inclusive.

Gender

- The NDP contains no specific policies or proposals targeted towards either gender. It is designed to provide equal opportunity to both sexes in respect of the provision of development and access to facilities. Neither is disadvantaged with any of the policies or proposals, and both will benefit equally from its implementation.

Religion, gender reassignment, sexual orientation

- Key issues for religious groups are discrimination relating to employment, housing, the provision of services, and their portrayal in the media. Key issues for gender re-assigned people, gays and lesbians are personal relationships, transphobia and/or discrimination, and hate crime. The Neighbourhood Plan

does not and cannot directly address the social attitudes that are involved in these issues. But it does seek to provide a built environment which is open to all, with a safe public realm which all social groups can access and use equally.

Conclusion

It can be seen clearly from the above that the Sonning Common NDP would, if fully implemented, result in a range of benefits for the community, including those sections of it with protected characteristics: older people, young people, pregnant women and mothers with young children, those with disabilities and limited mobility.

While it does not explicitly address the needs of other groups with protected characteristics, by providing affordable housing and additional social, community and leisure facilities and supporting the existing range of facilities, it will benefit them as much as the rest of the community.

The NDP contains nothing that could be considered as having a negative impact on groups with protected characteristics. While some impacts could be considered neutral, the majority are positive.