

# Bracknell Forest Borough Local Development Framework Amen Corner Area Action Plan

PLANNING



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## Sustainability Appraisal Report (Issues and Options) Summary





# Amen Corner Area Action Plan Sustainability Appraisal Report (Issues and Options) Summary

## Initial Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment)

Bracknell Forest Borough Council is preparing a framework of documents which will guide development in your Borough. This will advise how and where housing, shops, offices, industry, transport and leisure facilities are located.

An essential consideration when drawing up these documents is their effect on the environment and people's quality of life, both now and in the future.

The Amen Corner Area Action Plan Issues and Options Report is an early consultation stage in the production of this Development Plan Document. This stage has been tested with a 'Sustainability Appraisal' to ensure that environmental, social and economic issues are taken into account in their preparation.

Some of the suggestions from the first stage of the Sustainability Appraisal are:

- The development of the Amen Corner site should not affect the integrity of the Thames Basin Heath SPA and should promote and enhance biodiversity features located on site, including Riggs Copse.
- The potential for land contamination and its impact on controlled waters and human health should be considered as key constraints for the development at this site.
- An integrated drainage strategy (SUDs) should be considered as key to the development of the site.
- Consideration should be given to the potential location of development in relation to Wokingham and the potential impacts on the characteristic countryside of Wokingham borough.

**The appraisal has tried to balance all of these issues, and others, and then suggest how the development plans can be changed so they protect the environment and give people a good quality of life.**

Please read on for a more detailed summary of the appraisal process.

## Introduction

This leaflet summarises the findings of an Initial Sustainability Appraisal on documents within the Borough's Local Development Framework. More detail can be found in the full Sustainability Appraisal Report (Issues and Options) and the Amen Corner Area Action Plan Issues and Options Report. These documents are available by request or can be downloaded from the Bracknell Forest Borough Council website: [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/SA](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/SA) (and then following the link to the Amen Corner Sustainability Appraisal page) and [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/amencorner](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/amencorner).

## The Local Development Framework

The current Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan is being replaced by the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Development Framework (LDF). This is a collection of documents containing policies and proposals to guide future development in the Borough.

The Amen Corner Area Action plan is a Development Plan Document being prepared by the Borough Council as part of its Local Development Scheme (LDS).

## Integrating Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is often referred to as '*development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*'. All local planning authorities must test their plans using a 'Sustainability Appraisal' and a 'Strategic Environmental Assessment' to make sure they are consistent with the aims of sustainable development and protect the environment.

There are a number of key issues that relate to the development of the Amen Corner site; these have been identified through early discussion with the public, local residents, statutory bodies, landowners and developers. Each of these issues can be addressed through a number of options which together form a number of potential plans for the site. These various options for development are presented in the 'Issues and Options' paper on the Amen Corner Area Action Plan Development Plan Document.

This Initial Sustainability Appraisal has considered these proposed options and appraised the impact of each upon the sustainability of the Borough.

The results of the appraisal will help develop and refine the options by highlighting the sustainability implications of each, predicting the effects, and suggesting recommendations for improvement. These results will inform the final decisions, but do not give the definitive answer on which should go forward as the preferred policy option.

## Appraisal Methodology

The appraisal was guided by a set of sustainability objectives specific to Bracknell Forest.

The purpose of these objectives is to:

- State the direction and priorities of the SA / SEA;
- Give a structure to the appraisal; and

- Help identify relevant indicators.

The objectives are shown in the following table:

<b>Draft Bracknell Forest Sustainability Objectives</b>	<b>soc</b>	<b>econ</b>	<b>env</b>
1. To meet local housing needs by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, sustainably constructed and affordable home	✓	✓	
2. To reduce the risk of flooding and <b>harm to people, property and the environment</b>	✓	✓	✓
3. To protect <b>and enhance human health and wellbeing</b>	✓		
4. To reduce poverty and social exclusion	✓		
5. To raise educational achievement levels	✓		
6. To reduce and prevent crime and the fear of crime	✓		
7. To create and sustain vibrant and locally distinctive communities	✓		✓
8. To provide accessible essential services and facilities	✓		
9. To make opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation readily accessible	✓		
10. To encourage urban renaissance by improving efficiency in land use, design and layout	✓	✓	✓
11. To maintain air quality and improve where possible	✓		✓
12. To address the causes of climate change through reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, and ensure Bracknell Forest is prepared for associated impacts	✓	✓	✓
13. To conserve and enhance the Borough's biodiversity	✓	✓	✓
14. To protect <b>and enhance where possible</b> the Borough's countryside and its historic environment <b>in urban and rural areas</b>	✓	✓	✓
15. To improve travel choice and accessibility, reduce the need for travel by car and shorten the length and duration of journeys	✓	✓	✓
16. To sustainably use and re-use <b>renewable and non-renewable</b> resources		✓	✓
17. To address the waste hierarchy by: minimising waste as a priority, re-use, then by recycling, composting or energy recovery			✓
18. To maintain and improve water quality <b>in the Borough's water courses</b> and to achieve sustainable water resource management			✓

19. To maintain and improve soil quality			✓
20. To increase energy efficiency, and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources in the Borough			✓
21. To ensure high and stable levels of employment	✓	✓	
22. To sustain economic growth and competitiveness of the Borough		✓	
23. To encourage 'smart' economic growth	✓	✓	✓
24. To develop and maintain a skilled workforce by developing the opportunities for everyone to acquire the skills needed to find work	✓	✓	

Each of the plan options has been scored against these objectives by looking at the effect on the current situation or its contribution towards meeting any targets or legal requirements. However, at this high level, with strategic options and policy choices, the analysis will only highlight broad impacts and trends.

### Amen Corner Area Action Plan Development Plan Document

The appraisal of the Amen Corner DPD has identified which of the suggested options have positive sustainability impacts, and identified where improvements could be made. Along with comments from the Issues and Options consultation, this will inform which options are chosen and draw attention to areas which could be changed to ensure sustainability is fully integrated.

The most sustainable options emerging from the appraisal are those which address the key sustainability issues which have come up as recurring themes throughout the process. Within each issue, a range of possible plan options were highlighted, the following therefore summarises the appraisal's outcomes of these options.

#### **Key Issue 1: Fixing the Boundary of the site.**

The most sustainable option considered within this issue would be to maintain the physical gap between Binfield and Wokingham or a gap function through for example, quality planting schemes. However this option should be implemented with high quality design to ensure densities do not result in loss of character and increase in traffic congestion.

Areas of open space, including buffer strips along the A329 (M) should be maintained to provide an effective physical and visual separation between Wokingham and (south) Binfield.

The A329 (M) corridor provides a significant physical barrier between the settlement areas of Binfield and Wokingham. Through maintaining and improving vegetative buffers along this corridor, the two settlements will continue to remain physically and visually separated.

Additional landscaping along the common edge between abutting development zones will help to offset any negative visual impacts which may occur as a result of planned

development at Amen Corner and supplement the existing perimeter planting surrounding the site.

### **Key Issue 2: Sustainable Growth**

The most sustainable option would be to plan for a balanced mixed use scheme with significant element of employment floorspace, taking into account the current situation in the Borough, and housing of at least 725 dwellings. This option will benefit both economic and social objectives (i.e. provision of housing). However this should be implemented in conjunction with transport initiatives which aim to restrict car usage and promotes other transport choices.

### **Key Issue 3: Quality of Life**

The Limiting the Impact of Development SPD, should always be used as a starting point for seeking infrastructure and services in line with the development for the site. However there exists opportunities where a bespoke package of measures may be more suited. Nevertheless, it is pertinent that were opportunities for such bespoke measures exist, they are clearly set out within the Area Action plan, particularly with regard to mitigation for the SPA.

Ensuring that high quality design and architecture are key principles used in the redevelopment of the site and the redevelopment of previously developed parts of the site in the first instance are also good sustainability options and accord with national priorities. Ensuring innovative and high quality design as part of any development proposal for the site will form an important component in delivering a positive image to the western “gateway” of the Borough.

### **Key Issue 4: Environment**

Any policy guiding development within areas which contribute positively towards the biodiversity and landscape character of the site will have predominantly positive environmental effects. The extent of these benefits will depend on the level of protection offered. For example keeping development in line with the surrounding character could decrease the ability to deliver sufficient housing for all, and the intensification of other areas could potentially lead to a loss of character. The Council’s landscape character assessment report, which is a background document to the draft Core Strategy, suggests that the site has ‘moderate-high’ capacity to accept large-scale residential or employment development, without damage to landscape character.

It is important that development proposals do not impact negatively on Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats or on the Wildlife Heritage Site at Riggs Copse or its surroundings. In order to achieve this, landscape and ecological enhancements adjacent to Riggs Copse should be expected as part of any redevelopment proposal. This could include the introduction of buffer zones between development areas and the Copse to protect and enhance the Wildlife Heritage Site.

There are existing rights of way across the site and these have potential to provide a gain in biodiversity and informal recreational connectivity across the site and to other areas.

### **SPA Mitigation**

All plan options considered under this topic, would result in positive environment impacts as they lead to suitable mitigation for development on the SPA, allow for the enhancement and preservation of biodiversity, promote readily accessible open space

and allow for the provision of an integrated SUDs scheme as part of the mitigation site. These also influence positive health impacts and provide an attractive environment for employees. It is however important to consider the restrictions these options place on the availability of land within the site and the Borough as a whole. On balance mitigation of the SPA is key if we are to deliver housing so restrictions on other parts of the borough are necessary.

It would also be important to consider the potential for maintaining and enhancing a rights of way network for easy access to off-site mitigation sites, as part of an access management plan

#### **Key Issue 5: Somewhere to live**

Seeking to promote a mix of housing types, size and style in conjunction with requirements for affordable housing all result in positive social and economic benefits.

Draft Core Strategy Policy CS16, highlights some of the housing needs of the community and requires development proposals which are in keeping with these needs i.e. mobility and special needs, affordable housing and a range of housing types, sizes and tenures.

These policy options should be implemented with measures which seek to make leisure, recreational and community facilities accessible and which promote other forms of transport apart from the use of cars. This will help to reduce any impact on the environment as a result of residential development. All of these options have negligible impact on environmental objectives

#### **Key Issue 6: Somewhere to Work**

Promoting predominantly office or smaller scale commercial and industrial employment uses within the site may not be suited to the varying skill set of the surrounding residents and will not contribute to the development of a vibrant mixed-use community. To achieve the maximum amount of employment floorspace, the development will need to provide a range of employment uses with different employee densities to match the available housing supply in the residential area. This will help strengthen the economic base of the area and bring real benefits to the community by way of new and different jobs to those which are there now. In this way, a balance of skills, employment densities and links with other services in the area may result.

In general, any economic growth will lead to increased traffic and Green House Gas (GHG) emissions which further impacts on air quality and climate change. In order to mitigate against these negative impacts, it is important for biodiversity interests to be adequately enhanced and preserved and for measures which promote alternatives to car use be introduced as part of any employment scheme for the site.

#### **Key Issue 7: Transport**

A combined approach to public transport provision will provide choice and promote reliable, affordable alternatives to the use of car, particularly during peak hour periods and encourage less dependence on car usage. This will lead to a healthier local environment, underground recycling centres for business, leisure, education and residential development.

Such an approach will result in positive impacts on the environment by reducing the likelihood of road congestions, the amount of carbon dioxide emissions and other GHG which in turn has a positive impact on the environment and health in the borough. It also

promotes accessibility, travel choice and inclusively in the community as not everyone may be able to afford a car.

### **Railway Provision**

Both options considered in relation to this topic are likely to result in positive impacts for the environment, in terms of the general reduction in GHG emissions. These options are also likely to result in positive outcomes when considered alongside economic objectives. For example both options would promote better access to jobs, services, especially the Town Centre and would also make the area more attractive to businesses and investors, leading to additional employment opportunities. However, there is a slight negative impact in terms of the likelihood of increases in land values as a result of the railway station, and increased areas of tarmac, for car parking, may also lead to increased levels of flood risk in the longer term.

### **Road Improvements**

The adoption of either of the options considered or a combined approach could potentially lead to some positive economic and social impacts including promoting access to jobs, essential services and facilities, including leisure and recreational facilities. It could also contribute to making the area attractive to investment. Thereby encouraging the creation of a vibrant and locally distinctive community. There are however some negative effects in terms of increase in traffic flows and congestion as a result of increased car usage in and around the site. The resultant effect of increased traffic flows will lead to negative impacts on the environment. These negative impacts stem from the increased emission of GHGs which in turn impact negatively on air quality, climate change and biodiversity within the site. Further negative impacts may also arise through increased pollution from noise and run-off of pollutants from roads.

There is however an obvious need to plan for suitable access to and from the site, as the surrounding road network is considered at, and sometimes over, capacity during peak hours. This is not appropriate for the level of development planned on the site.

The street network between London Road and the Amen Corner roundabout will provide access to the proposed residential area and some relief to the enhanced John Nike Way. This will further promote Improved access to Jennets Park and further linkages to existing and planned neighbourhoods in the borough.

Therefore the most sustainable solution would be to plan for suitable access and egress from the site while including measures to mitigate for environmental impacts. These include creating and improving foot paths, pedestrian access ways and bus and cycle routes. Promoting measures which restrict car usage and other travel plan measures would also go a long way in promoting travel choice and reduce the likely impact of congestion and increase in GHG emissions.

## **Recommendations from appraisal findings**

Appraisal findings also suggest that there is a need to establish options relating to the following issues

### **Contamination:**

According to the Environment Agency, approximately, a quarter of the site is underlain by historic landfills and is therefore potentially contaminated

Investigations to the satisfaction of the Environment Agency and the Borough Council will need to be carried out in order to determine the extent of any remedial works necessary prior to the consideration of any planning application. It will also be necessary to determine the extent of remediation required prior to development in order to protect against harm to human health. This should be in line with Planning Policy Statement 23

### **Sustainable Urban Drainage:**

Although the site is not within a flood plain, the extent of development planned for the site may place considerable pressure on the existing drainage network. As the Amen Corner AAP represents a strategic planning framework for the site, it would be useful to consider an integrated drainage scheme as part of the development planned for the site.

### **Mineral Extraction:**

The constraints map in Appendix 1 of the Initial Sustainability Appraisal identifies the presence of sand and gravel on the site. It is therefore necessary to determine if extraction may be necessary and how this may effect planned development at the site.

### **Rights of Way and Biodiversity**

The Initial Sustainability Appraisal of the plan options has indicated that there exists the potential to provide for a gain in biodiversity and informal recreational connectivity across the site and to other areas through the enhancement of rights of way across the site.

It would also be important to consider the potential for maintaining and enhancing a rights of way network for easy access to off-site mitigation sites, as part of an access management plan.

## **Appropriate Assessment**

Under Regulation 48 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994, commonly known as the Habitats Regulations, plans or projects which may affect the special interest of the SPA must pass a series of stringent stepwise tests. Essentially, these require all plans or projects with the potential to affect a SPA and not directly connected with or necessary to its management for nature conservation, to be assessed to see if the effects are likely to be significant.

Those that are likely to have a significant effect on the site, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, must be subject to a more detailed Appropriate Assessment in order to ascertain if the proposal would adversely affect the integrity of the site.

Although the SA/SEA and AA are two separate process with their own legal requirements, it is considered good practice to carry out both processes in conjunction, were possible, in order to maximise the relevant evidence gathered in the SA and use it to inform the AA and vice versa. Comments are therefore being sought on the contents of both processes.

A screening exercise has been carried out to establish the impacts of the Amen Corner AAP DPD on Natura 2000 sites within the Borough and to establish whether there is a likelihood of significant effect arising from the DPD upon other Natura 2000 sites outside the Borough. This was based upon best information available to Bracknell Forest Borough Council at the current time.

Conclusions from the Screening exercise indicate that the proposed Amen Corner Area Action Plan Development Plan Document:

- (a) is likely to have a significant effect on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (both alone and in-combination with other plans and programmes)
- (b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site.

Accordingly an “Appropriate Assessment” shall be made of those effects under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive before the Council decides to undertake or adopt this plan. This process will be carried out at the preferred options stage (Draft Sustainability Appraisal) of the Development Plan Document process.

A full report on this process is set out in Appendix 3 of the full Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report.

## Impact of the process

The Initial Sustainability Appraisal process has investigated the likely significant environmental and sustainability impacts of the options presented in the Amen Corner Area Action Plan Issues and Options Paper. A range of impacts has been identified for each of the options, and mitigation measures have been proposed.

The Issues and Options paper was developed in close association with the sustainability appraisal process. The appraisal results will form an important role in the selection of Preferred Options for the Development Plan. It is therefore important that you take this opportunity to comment on the methodology and results at this stage.

## Consultation

A key component of the SA / SEA process is consultation of stakeholders and there are various stages when the public can comment on the appraisal.

### Scoping Report Consultation

The first stage has already been carried out and required consultation on a Scoping Report with the three statutory SA / SEA Consultation Bodies with environmental responsibilities:

- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Countryside Agency

Other appropriate social and economic bodies were also consulted.

A copy of the Scoping Report can be found at <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/SA> and then following the link to the Amen Corner SA page. Please note that feedback from the consultation has been incorporated throughout the Initial Sustainability Appraisal.

### Initial Sustainability Appraisal Consultation

This Initial Sustainability Appraisal is subject to consultation with the bodies with environmental responsibilities, and the public will also be consulted as key stakeholders. Full details of how this consultation will be carried out can be found in the Bracknell Forest Statement of Community Involvement.

- 1) Do you have any comments on the appraisal methodology and sustainability objectives used?

- 2) Do you have anything to add to the baseline data collected and the review of plans, programmes and strategies, as detailed in the Scoping Report?
- 3) In your view, should any other options be appraised?
- 4) Are there any sustainability effects which you feel have not been appropriately identified?
- 5) Do you have any further comments on this Initial Sustainability Appraisal?

**Please return any comments on the above questions or any other relevant issues by 14 December 2007 to:**

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### **Future Stages**

Comments received from the consultation on the Initial Sustainability Appraisal and the DPD consultation will be incorporated into the Sustainability Appraisal Report and the Development Plan Document. A Preferred Option will be put forward and its effects on the sustainability of the Borough will be predicted. The significance of these effects will be assessed and mitigation measures put forward. All this will be detailed in the Sustainability Appraisal Report (Preferred Options) to be produced for public consultation by May 2008.