

# Sustainability Appraisal (Incorporating SEA) Non-Tech Summary, Draft Submission Site Allocation Development Plan Document



# 1 Non-Technical Summary

## Introduction

**1.1** Bracknell Forest Council is preparing a framework of documents which will guide development in the Borough – the Local Development Framework (LDF). This will guide how and where housing, shops, offices, industry, transport and leisure facilities are located in the Borough in the period to 2026.

**1.2** The LDF consists of two types of documents: Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). The first DPD to be adopted as part of the LDF was the Core Strategy, in February 2008. When drawing up DPDs and SPDs an essential consideration is the likely effects that the policies contained within them will have on the environment and people's quality of life, both now and in the future. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) – which incorporates the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has therefore been carried out alongside the preparation of these documents to make sure social, environmental and economic considerations are taken into account at every stage.

**1.3** This document summarises the findings of this appraisal process which has accompanied preparation of the Bracknell Forest Borough Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADPD). It sets out how changes have been made to the document as a result of the SA process. More detail can be found in the full report entitled 'Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating SEA): Site Allocations DPD Draft Submission Document' and its Appendices.

## Approach to the SA/SEA

**1.4** Government guidance on SA identifies the various stages involved in carrying out the SA, as follows:

- Stage A: Setting the context and objectives; establishing an understanding of the social, environmental and economic conditions of Bracknell Forest ('the baseline'); identifying key sustainability issues in the Borough; outlining sustainability objectives for use in the appraisal of the DPD policies; and gathering consultation feedback on the purpose and breadth of detail necessary for SA.
- Stage B: Developing and refining options and assessing effects. This comprises the 'Initial Issues and Options' and the 'Preferred Option' stages referred to in the SA Main Report (Sections 3 and 4). This stage includes:
  - the assessment of strategic and preferred sites;
  - identifying likely cumulative, synergistic and indirect effects arising from the implementation of the strategy and policies;
  - appropriate mitigation to avoid predicted negative effects and enhance beneficial effects; and,
  - identifying a suitable monitoring strategy.
- Stage C: Preparing the SA Report. This is undertaken using the information gained from Sections 2-4 of the Sustainability Appraisal (Incorporating SEA), Draft Submission Site Allocation Development Plan Document

- Stage D: Consulting on the preferred options of the DPD and SA Report. This is the current stage of the SA and is addressed in Section 5 of the SA Main Report.

## **Habitats Regulations Assessment**

**1.5** An assessment of the SADPD under the Habitats Regulations has been prepared separately. Its findings have been considered and have informed the preparation of the SADPD. Further information is available in the document entitled 'Habitats Regulations Appropriate Assessment: Site Allocations DPD Submission' which accompanies the January/February 2012 consultation on the SADPD.

## **Nature and content of the SADPD**

**1.6** The purpose of the SADPD is to help deliver the vision and objectives from the Core Strategy for how the Borough will change over the next 15 years. It translates the Core Strategy's vision and principles into specific proposals to sustain the community and local economy by identifying sites for future development. It also ensures that appropriate infrastructure is identified alongside new development, and revises the boundaries of certain designations shown on the Proposals Map (e.g. employment areas, retail areas, etc). Its principal focus is the delivery of housing and the associated infrastructure and mitigation, as this is currently the most important issue facing the Council.

## **The SA process and findings**

### **Scoping Stage**

**1.7 (Stage A: setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope)**

**1.8** This analysis is set out in Section 2 of the Main Report. It involves the following stages.

**1.9** A review was undertaken of all relevant plans and programmes at national, regional and local level, to identify relationships between these and the SA process – this was done through a Scoping Report. This drew from a previous Scoping Report which covers the whole of the LDF and much of which remained relevant to the SADPD. The purpose of the SADPD Scoping Report was to identify where the LDF Scoping Report was relevant to the issues covered by the SADPD and in particular which of the SA objectives for the LDF as a whole were relevant to the SADPD.

**1.10** Baseline information was collected to provide the basis for predicting and monitoring the effects of the policies and proposals in the SADPD. This is presented in Appendix A of the LDF Scoping Report, which was considered to contain sufficient information for the SADPD.

**1.11** Key sustainability issues were identified through the Scoping Report – these include social, environmental and economic issues relevant to the SADPD as follows:-

### **Social**

- Housing provision for all

- Pockets of deprivation in an otherwise prosperous Borough
- Access to essential facilities

#### Environmental

- Protecting the landscape character of the Borough
- Biodiversity and conservation issues, especially key species and habitats
- Reduction in waste and increase in reuse/recycling/recovery
- Reduction in fossil fuels for energy use
- Air Quality
- Water usage
- Water quality

#### Economic

- Redevelopment of Bracknell Town Centre
- Skills shortage
- Reducing congestion and journey times

**1.12** The SA Framework was developed. This had 24 key sustainability objectives for assessing the SADPD against. These made up an appraisal framework relevant to the local area. The SA Objectives were weighted as high, medium or low according to their local importance and deliverability. They are set out in Table 1 below:

**Table 1 SA Objectives**

Bracknell Forest Council SA Objectives
<b>SA1:</b> To meet local housing needs by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, sustainably constructed and affordable home
<b>SA2:</b> To reduce the risk of flooding and harm to people, property and the environment
<b>SA3:</b> To protect and enhance human health and wellbeing
<b>SA4:</b> To reduce poverty and social exclusion
<b>SA5:</b> To raise educational achievement levels
<b>SA6:</b> To reduce and prevent crime and the fear of crime

## Bracknell Forest Council SA Objectives

**SA7:** To create and sustain vibrant<sup>(1)</sup> and locally distinctive communities

**SA8:** To provide accessible essential services and facilities

**SA9:** To make opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation readily accessible

**SA10:** To encourage urban renaissance by improving efficiency in land use, design and layout. This includes making best use of previously developed land in meeting future development needs

**SA11:** To maintain air quality and improve where possible

**SA12:** To address the causes of climate change through reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, and ensure Bracknell Forest is prepared for associated impacts

**SA13:** To conserve and enhance the Borough's biodiversity

**SA14:** To protect and enhance where possible the Borough's characteristic countryside and its historic environment in urban and rural areas

**SA15:** To improve travel choice and accessibility, reduce the need for travel by car and shorten the length and duration of journeys

**SA16:** To sustainably use and re-use renewable and non-renewable resources

**SA17:** To address the waste hierarchy by: minimising waste as a priority, reuse, then by recycling, composting or energy recovery

**SA18:** To maintain, protect and improve water quality in the Borough's water courses including groundwater and to achieve sustainable water resource management

**SA19:** To maintain and improve soil quality

**SA20:** To increase energy efficiency, and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources in the Borough

**SA21:** To ensure high and stable levels of employment

**SA22:** To sustain economic growth and competitiveness of the Borough

**SA23:** To encourage 'smart'<sup>(2)</sup> economic growth

**SA24:** To develop and maintain a skilled workforce by developing the opportunities for everyone to acquire the skills to find work

1 Vibrant communities are those where people are engaged in civic activities (defined by the Integrated Regional Framework for the South East)

2 Smart growth describes economic growth that does not require the importing of extra labour or the use of extra land. This is achieved by such means as: encouraging more of the existing population to become economically active; increasing the skill base of the workforce; the use of technology to improve productivity; and out-sourcing jobs that do not have to be based in the area.

## **Issues and Options**

### **(Stage B: Developing and refining options and assessing effects)**

**1.13** This stage of the SA is set out in Section 3 of the Main Report.

**1.14** The identified the SA objectives were compared with the objectives of the SADPD itself. The SADPD Objectives reflect those in the Core Strategy and will help implement its policies. For example, the Core Strategy objective 'A' is 'To plan for a balance of housing and employment growth'; and the SADPD objective expanded on this to include as a sub-objective 'To ensure a continuous supply of land for housing to facilitate the delivery of new homes'.

**1.15** Comparison of the SA and SADPD objectives showed some inconsistencies between them. For example the SADPD objective to encourage economic growth has the potential to conflict with the SA objective to protect the environment. This exercise helped to identify where objectives need to be balanced to ensure outcomes are consistent, and where it might be possible to achieve a win-win situation.

**1.16** The initial policy options were tested to assess the different ways in which development needs could be met through the SADPD. These options included continuing the current policy approach, amending the current policy approach in a variety of ways, introducing a new policy approach or not having a policy at all. The SA predicted the significant positive and negative effects of each of the policy options on the sustainability objectives using the following scoring method:

- ++ significant positive effect on the SA objective
- + minor positive effect on the SA objective
- 0 neutral
- minor negative effect on the SA objective
- very negative effect on the SA objective
- +/- positive and negative effects
- I outcome dependent upon implementation
- ? impact cannot be predicted

**1.17** The results of the assessment informed decisions on which policy approaches to take forward. For example, 'Options for a robust and flexible land supply for housing' identified three different policy approaches. The SA assessment identified that option 3 was the most sustainable. This was supported by other evidence and this policy approach was taken forward to the SADPD Preferred Option. Two options for designating retail areas were assessed. These were to make amendments to accord with PPS4 or to do nothing (i.e. keep the current designations). The former was found to result in more positive effects and was taken forward.

**1.18** As well as assessing the SADPD policies, a number of individual sites and 8 'clusters' of sites (termed the Broad Areas) were assessed in the same way. Weightings were applied to the SA objectives for the site assessments by categorising them as low, medium or high priority in terms of their local importance and deliverability. The positive or negative site-specific

effects were identified. The significance of the impacts was evaluated for the degree the specific site or Broad Area could deliver each SA objective. This enabled the sites and Broad Areas to be ranked according to their overall score. The results of this appraisal and the overall scores informed the allocation of development sites and the related policies.

**1.19** All the small sites which scored positively in the SA were taken forward to the Preferred Option. Two sites which scored negatively overall were also taken forward as their principal negative impacts could potentially be mitigated which would improve the scores. The highest scoring Strategic Site (Broad Area 8: East Bracknell) was subsequently found to be unavailable for residential development and could not be allocated. The three next highest scoring sites were carried forward to the Preferred Option.

**1.20** The SA recommended the most sustainable policy options and sites. The SA results, along with technical information and public consultation responses, informed the plan-making process for the next stage of the SADPD.

## **Preferred Option**

### **(Stage B: Developing and refining options and assessing effects)**

**1.21** The SADPD Preferred Option document therefore set out the policy approach based on the findings of the Participation Document SA, technical work and consultation responses. The refined Broad Areas (Preferred Option Policies SA4, SA5, SA6 and SA7), all other smaller sites and Preferred Option Policies were reappraised, along with the assessment of any new sites which had been submitted to the Council.

**1.22** The former Options Sites were assessed according to the weighted criteria and were subsequently ranked. The starting point for consideration of the specific sites was their sustainability scores at the Options Stage. Unfortunately, the highest ranked (most sustainable) Broad Area (East Bracknell) was no longer available. Further technical work was undertaken to better define the former Broad Areas to more sustainable and developable sites. This tended to reduce their capacities.

**1.23** This iterative process included consideration of the SA findings. For example, some sites had scored negatively due to uncertainties over SANG provision, or the need for buffer areas to important features (e.g. watercourses, trees, historic features) etc.. Where it was established that these could be mitigated through a site's layout or by reducing its capacity, their SA scores were amended and, where appropriate, sites were taken forward. Following these assessments, it was determined that the capacity of the next highest ranked sites (Broad Areas 4, 3 and 2) would make a significant contribution to the residual housing requirement that the SADPD seeks to allocate and were therefore carried forward to the Preferred Options stage. These sites were not however sufficient to meet the full requirement. Broad Area 5 was revised to show a smaller capacity which could form an extension to the built up area of Bracknell and have far less impact on heritage assets than the original Broad Area. This reduced site was also carried forward to the Preferred Option stage.

## Preparation of the SA

### (Stage C: Preparing the SA Report)

**1.24** Prior to submission of the SADPD, the SA reappraised significant changes to the policies arising from consultation on the Preferred Option document and further technical information. This was needed to pick up changes in policy approaches from the Preferred Options document and because some policies were not taken forward to the draft submission document. Some policies needed re-appraisal because sites had been added and where significant changes were proposed for existing sites (e.g. significantly higher densities or amendments to the mix of uses proposed).

### Draft Submission Policies

### (Stage D; Consulting on the preferred options of the DPD and SA Report)

**1.25** The SA process has therefore helped inform the choice between various strategic policy approaches and between a number of potential urban extensions to deliver development in the Borough in the most sustainable way. All but two of the sites allocated in the SADPD score positively in the SA and therefore can be considered sustainable locations. For those which do not score positively, the Full SA Report sets out how the concerns raised (and which resulted in negative scoring) could be improved with greater detail being provided and with suitable mitigation. A summary of the significant effects of the strategic policies and sites is found in the table below:

**Table 2**

Policy	Principal Sustainability Effects
SA1: Previously developed land within defined settlements	All of the sites generally scored positively overall, and can be considered to be sustainable sites. Some concerns (for example, related to biodiversity at Farley Hall and loss of open space at Garth Hill) can be overcome by mitigation. Only one of the SA1 sites did not have an overall positive score (Land at School Hill, Crowthorne).
SA2: Other land within defined settlements	Generally these sites are considered sustainable although some sites scored negatively against specific criteria (e.g. impact on historic environment, biodiversity). It is likely that these can be overcome through mitigation but without this being confirmed the precautionary approach was taken. The majority of SA2 sites had a sustainability score which was positive overall. The exceptions were Land at Cricket Field Grove, Crowthorne; and Land at 152 New Road, Ascot.

Policy	Principal Sustainability Effects
SA3: Edge of settlement sites	All of the sites generally scored positively overall and can be considered sustainable. Some sites were negatively scored against specific criteria (e.g. impact on historic environment, biodiversity).
SA4: Land at Broadmoor	All the Strategic Sites (SA4-7) scored positively in the SA – they comprised 4 of the 8 highest-scoring sites overall. Land at the Transport Research Laboratory was the highest scoring site overall.
SA5: Land at Transport Research Laboratory, Crowthorne	
SA6: Land at Amen Corner North, Binfield	
SA7: Land at BlueMountain, Binfield	
SA8: Land at Amen Corner South, Binfield	This policy was assessed through the Core Strategy SA, as it is included in Policy CS4. It was considered unnecessary to reappraise the policy. However, the results of the assessment were considered in this SA where necessary, including the cumulative, synergistic and indirect effects assessment.
SA9: Land at Warfield	This policy was assessed through the Core Strategy SA, as it is included in Policy CS5. It was considered unnecessary to reappraise the policy. However, the results of the assessment were considered in this SA where necessary, including the cumulative, synergistic and indirect effects assessment.
SA10: Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst	This policy resulted in positive scores under several of the key SA Objectives, including sustaining distinctiveness of the local community, countryside and historic environment, employment, economy, and skilled workforce.
SA11: BracknellTown Centre	Of those effects that could be predicted, this policy scored positively on all but two of the SA Objectives. These were: biodiversity, and historic environment. The policy therefore scored positively overall.
SA12: The Peel Centre	This site was predicted to impact positively on 7 of the SA Objectives, Housing Need, Poverty & Exclusion, Community, Accessible Services and Countryside Urban and Historic, Travel Choice, Soil Quality and Economic Growth. With respect to the other SA Objectives the impact was not known, depended on implementation, or required further work to be carried out.

Policy	Principal Sustainability Effects
SA13: Proposals Map	Both positive and negative effects are predicted against the SA Objectives.

### Cumulative, Synergistic and Indirect Effects

**1.26** The SADPD performs well in terms of cumulative, synergistic and indirect effects relating to:

- Efficient use of land;
- Economic prosperity;
- Accessibility to community facilities and improvement in community health and well being;
- Shift to more sustainable modes of transport; and
- Meeting housing needs.

**1.27** There are also a number of negative effects highlighted by the assessment. These include:

- Local air quality;
- Biodiversity;
- Countryside and open space; and
- Flood risk.

**1.28** The assessment serves to highlight the need for those elements that are expected to result in negative effects to be addressed more overtly as part of the LDF process, supported by mitigation as appropriate, as well as enhancement of positive effects where possible.

### Mitigation

**1.29** Mitigation measures have been suggested throughout the SA process to help mitigate any predicted harmful impacts of the policies and allocated sites. Examples include:

- Amendments to policy wording
- Amendments to the capacity, mix of uses, etc of development sites and the provision and timing of delivering associated infrastructure;
- Future production of lower tier DPDs and SPDs; and
- Identification of areas requiring further study, e.g. Environmental Impact Assessments of detailed development proposals on specific sites through the planning application process.

**1.30** Recommended mitigation measures have been incorporated in the SADPD where appropriate as a result of the SA. Additional measures as a result of the HRA have also been integrated into the DPD. It is considered that these measures, along with the implementation of national planning policy, the Core Strategy, SFRA and the Thames Basin Heaths Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, should lead to the avoidance of significant negative effects.

## Monitoring

**1.31** The predicted significant effects of the policies identified by the SA will be monitored to highlight specific performance issues and inform future decision making. Monitoring of policies in the LDF, including those in the Core Strategy, is already in place and will continue and include the SADPD. This will be partly through the Annual Monitoring Report and the reporting of Planning Commitments for Housing and Employment (all of which are undertaken annually). This includes monitoring against the schedule of Core Strategy Objectives and SADPD Sub-Objectives as set out in Section 6 of the SA Main Report

## Conclusions

**1.32** The evolving, iterative nature of the SA has enabled the integration of the core principles of sustainable development into the SADPD. Taken together with the policies in the Core Strategy and national planning policy, it is considered that the policies in the SADPD will help achieve sustainable development over the plan period. On balance, the predicted effects of the SADPD policies should help create of sustainable communities, with the predicted positive effects outweighing the negative ones.

**1.33** The DPD is likely to deliver significant benefits for sustainable development, particularly in relation to:

- Efficient use of land;
- Economic prosperity;
- Accessibility to community facilities and improvement in community health and well being;
- Shift to more sustainable modes of transport; and
- Meeting housing needs.

**1.34** Mitigation of predicted negative effects, such as local air quality, biodiversity, countryside and open space and flood risk, can be achieved through the effective implementation of measures included within supporting documents to the LDF, such as the the Core Strategy, Thames Basin Heaths Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and the Air Quality Action Plan.

**1.35** The Habitats Regulations Appropriate Assessment has concluded that the Site Allocations DPD is not likely to have a significant effect on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. This is because the potential adverse effects on site integrity have been assessed and avoidance and mitigation measures have been proposed in accordance with the Council's Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy. These avoidance and mitigation measures should ensure there is no significant adverse effect upon the integrity of the SPA as a result of the developments within the SADPD.

## Future Tasks

SA Output	Provisional timetable (at January 2012)
Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report	January 2010
Site Allocations DPD Participation document	February 2010

SA Output	Provisional timetable (at January 2012)
(Section 6 and Appendix 6)	
Draft Sustainability Appraisal Report (Preferred Options)	November 2010
Sustainability Appraisal Report (Draft Submission)	Summer 2012

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### **Nepali**

यस प्रचारको सक्षेपं वा सार निचोड चाहिं दिइने छ ठूलो अक्षरमा, ब्रेल वा क्यासेट सून्नको लागी । अरु भाषाको नक्कल पनि हासिल गर्न सकिने छ । कृपया सम्पर्क गनुहोला ०१३४४ ३५२००० ।

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