

Bracknell Forest Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment Adoption Statement

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Sustainability Appraisals are a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and Strategic Environmental Assessments are required by European Directive EC/2001/42 (SEA Directive), which was transposed into UK law by the Environmental Assessment Regulations for Plans and Programmes (July 2004). Central government guidance (ODPM, 2005) has merged these processes to allow for a single joint appraisal to be carried out.

The SEA Directive requires local planning authorities to carry out formal strategic environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. The SEA process ensures that opportunities for public involvement are provided and the significant environmental effects arising from policies, plans and programmes are predicted, evaluated, mitigated and monitored.

The objective of an SEA is *“to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development”*.

Planning Policy Statement 12 requires a Sustainability Appraisal of Local Development Documents, which incorporates the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive but broadens this to include both social and economic considerations.

The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is to systematically appraise the social, environmental and economic effects of the strategies and policies in a local development document from the outset of the preparation process. This will ensure that decisions are made that accord with sustainable development.

Throughout the remainder of this statement, reference to SA encompasses the requirements of a merged SA / SEA.

How does this relate to the Core Strategy DPD?

The formal preparation of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document began after 20 July 2004, so according to the requirements of the EU Directive this plan falls within the timescale of those requiring an SEA. Government planning policy also requires that local planning authorities undertake Sustainability Appraisals throughout the preparation process of a local development document (PPS12, 2004).

The Core Strategy DPD was prepared by officers within the Planning and Transport Policy section at Bracknell Forest Borough Council, while the SA was carried out by the Senior Environmental Policy Officer. This meant that although both reports were produced simultaneously, the assessment maintained a degree of independence from the policy formation. This integrated process also allowed for the recommendations from the SA process to feed into and inform the Core Strategy from the initial to final stages of its production and provides a formal statement and audit trail of the appraisal process.

The purpose of the Core Strategy DPD is to establish the broad principles and locations for delivering housing and other strategic development, for example employment, retail and transport. The Core Strategy DPD is due to be adopted in January 2008.

Purpose of the SA Statement

Upon adoption of a local development document, planning authorities are required to prepare a statement summarising:

- How sustainability issues have been integrated into the plan (in this case the Core Strategy DPD);
- How the sustainability appraisal and consultation has been taken into account; and
- The reasons for choosing the document as adopted in light of other reasonable alternatives.

Full details of the SA process are set out in Final Sustainability Appraisal Report submitted with the DPD.

What difference has the process made?

The integrated SA of the Core Strategy DPD was a multi-stage process, as set out in the following sections.

SCOPING

Prior to the production of the DPDs, a scoping stage was necessary to propose and agree the appraisal methodology and collate the information needed to carry this out. The appraisal needed to be set within the context of existing plans and policies and an understanding of the current baseline situation was essential to predict effects and identify key sustainability issues and problems.

Sustainability is a complex issue so 24 sustainability objectives were produced to consider relevant local issues. These objectives cover a range of social, environmental and economic impacts, for example: protecting and enhancing human health, conserving and enhancing biodiversity, ensuring high and stable levels of employment and addressing the causes of climate change.

Changes made

The scoping stage of the SA process identified changes to the plan objectives to make the overarching aims and direction of the Core Strategy DPD as sustainable as possible. This

involved amendments and additions to the objectives' wording, for example an original plan objective was written as "To maintain the built and natural environment....". This was amended to read "To maintain **and improve** the built and natural environment.....".

REFINING OPTIONS AND PREDICTING EFFECTS

There is more than one way of meeting the needs of people who live and work in Bracknell Forest so various options for development were proposed at the Issues and Options stage in July 2005. The methodology for carrying out a Sustainability Appraisal, proposed at the scoping stage, was used to test each of these options and predict their significant positive and negative impacts on the baseline data identified at the Scoping stage. This also drew on legal requirements and targets identified by the review of relevant plans, policies and programs. However, in some cases professional judgement, predominantly based upon consultation responses, was also used to predict the effects. This aimed to develop the plan options and compare these against the sustainability objectives in order to inform the decision-maker on how to develop the Core Strategy in the 'most sustainable' way. This process also identified areas which could be improved by mitigation. This, alongside public consultation responses, informed the choice of policy approach.

Changes made

The options with the most positive and least negative sustainability impacts were recommended to the plan-makers, and without exception these were taken forward as policy approaches in the Preferred Options document – Core Strategy Development Plan Document: A Draft Spatial Framework to 2026.

PREFERRED OPTIONS

Once the policy approaches were selected, their likely significant effects were evaluated by testing potential outcomes against the baseline data and targets set in other plans and programmes. At this stage the input from consultation comments relating to the prediction of effects was included and helped refine the methodology. During this evaluation, measures were suggested to mitigate against adverse effects and maximise beneficial effects to further improve the sustainability of each policy.

Changes made

As the policy approaches were developing, each was appraised to evaluate any specific impacts; the identification of these impacts and proposals for improvement helped fine-tune the plan and enhance its sustainability. These included amendments to the following policy approaches (the Preferred Option policy approach references are used below):

- SG1 (sustainable principles) – to include reference to accessible services.
- SG2 (location principles) – to include reference to open space provision in addition to character and infrastructure.
- QL3 (design) – this additional policy was proposed to ensure other policies, e.g. housing provision, did not negatively impact on the character of the area.
- QL5 (quality communities) – design aspects to include the historic and natural characteristics of the area.
- E2 (sustainable resources) – to include the preferred use of locally produced products where possible.
- E5 (renewable energy) – ensure any development associated with energy production does not adversely impact on the natural or historic environment. Amend the policy to focus on carbon emissions instead of energy demand.

- E6 (waste management) – the policy to include the waste hierarchy, with waste minimisation as a priority.
- SL4 (gypsies and travellers) – consider environmental constraints when identifying sites.

SUBMISSION DRAFT

After extensive public consultation on the policy approaches, the submission policies were drawn up. Where these differed significantly from the policy approach, a new sustainability appraisal was carried out on the differences; this included appraising any effects arising from the removal of several policies and amendments to others. At this stage the appraisal considered the implementation of all policies simultaneously, for example recognising where one policy can provide mitigation for another. To illustrate, several policies, including CS10 on Sustainable Resources will help remove some of the adverse environmental effects arising from the provision of new development.

At this final stage, suggestions proposing amendments to the policy wording were minimal, as a result of the recommendations and changes made during previous stages of appraisal. However, the synergies between each policy, and therefore the sustainability of the overall plan were appraised.

Public involvement

A key component of the SA / SEA process is consultation of stakeholders. The consultation throughout the sustainability appraisal process has been in accordance with:

- Article 6 of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC.
- Regulations set out in the Environmental Assessments of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- The Bracknell Forest Statement of Community Involvement.

In total there have been four main stages of consultation, although comments and input have been accepted throughout the appraisal due to the iterative nature of the process.

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (Regulation 12[6]) define certain timescales for the formalised consultation periods. This requires the responsible authority to give the consultees **5 weeks** from the date the appraisal is received.

Throughout the process of carrying out the Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy, three key bodies are required to be consulted – the Environment Agency, English Heritage and Natural England (formerly English Nature and the Countryside Agency). During the Sustainability Appraisal, comments from these bodies in particular have shaped the Appraisal and have been fed into the assessment of Options, Preferred Options and the formulation of the Core Strategy up to and including submission. At each stage of the process, details regarding the comments received and the changes made as a result of those comments have been provided.

The following provides a summary of the consultation process at each stage of the SA process

SCOPING REPORT CONSULTATION

This first stage of consultation was carried out in December 2004 – February 2005, and this included the statutory SEA Consultation Bodies with environmental responsibilities.

In accordance with the Sustainability Appraisal Guidance (ODPM 2005), and as outlined in Planning Policy Statement 12, other appropriate social and economic consultees were also contacted.

The consultation sought to:

- Ensure the SA methodology is comprehensive and robust enough to support the DPD during the later stages of full public consultation and examination.
- Advise on the appropriateness of the sustainability objectives.
- Advise on the appropriateness of the key sustainability issues.
- Advise on the comprehensiveness of the baseline data.

The Core Strategy Scoping Report (December 2004) first presented a collection of sustainability objectives. There have been several changes to these arising from comments from the statutory bodies and key stakeholders at each consultation stage, and the refined objectives were used as a framework for each future stage of appraisal.

INITIAL SA CONSULTATION

The Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report was subject to consultation with the bodies listed above and the public. This was issued for consultation in July 2005 and the comments incorporated into future iterations of the appraisal.

DRAFT SA REPORT

The Draft SA Report and associated technical documents were issued for consultation with the statutory bodies with environmental responsibility, other appropriate social and economic consultees and the public during January and February 2006.

There was also a non-technical summary of the report which was sent to all recipients of the Core Strategy public participation documents. This was in accordance with Regulation 26 of the Local Development Regulations and the Bracknell Forest Statement of Community Involvement

SUBMISSION DRAFT

The Final SA Report was produced in October 2006. This is a key output in the appraisal process as it presents information and changes made during all stages of the appraisal. The report also included the requirements of the Environmental Report necessary to meet the requirements of the SEA Directive.

The Final Sustainability Appraisal Report therefore provides a key part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy DPD and was used to assess its 'soundness' during Examination.

Future stages

The Core Strategy DPD will be adopted from December 2007. This SA Statement will be made available to statutory authorities and the public once the SPD has been adopted, to ensure they are informed of the outcomes and process.

However, the SA / SEA process is iterative, so its success and effectiveness will be monitored by the continued collection of baseline data according to the identified indicators. The final SA report sets out relevant indicators to monitor the significant effects of the plan and identifies any remedial action required if the trends or targets detailed in the SA Framework table are not met.

Examples of indicators include:

- Renewable energy capacity installed by type;
- Number of local Biodiversity Plan objectives achieved;
- Number of planning permissions granted contrary to the advice of the Environment Agency on either flood defence or water quality grounds;
- Percentage of new build and retrofit homes which meet the best practice standards, currently BREEAM Very Good or Excellent.

This information will be predominantly included within the Annual Monitoring Report, which may be downloaded from the council's website.

Further information

A full copy of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Submission) Sustainability Appraisal Report (October 2006) can be downloaded from the website:
www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/ldf.

Alternatively, to receive a hard copy, please contact:

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