



**Sustainability Appraisal
(incorporating a Strategic
Environmental Assessment)**

Scoping Report

**AMEN CORNER AREA ACTION PLAN
DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT**

July 2007

1. SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

An essential consideration when drawing up planning documents is their effect on the environment and people's quality of life, both now and in the future. To help address this, a **Sustainability Appraisal** and a **Strategic Environmental Assessment** have been carried out alongside the preparation of these plans to make sure social, environmental and economic issues are taken into account at every stage.

Sustainability Appraisals (SA) are a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) are required by European Directive EC/2001/42, which was transposed into UK law by the Environmental Assessment Regulations for Plans and Programmes (July 2004). Government guidance, 'Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks' (ODPM, 2005), has merged this process to allow for a single joint appraisal to be carried out, which meets the requirements of both.

The SA / SEA is also being conducted in line with additional guidance targeted more specifically, for example towards climate change and biodiversity.

Before the production of the planning document starts, a scoping stage is necessary to propose and agree the sustainability appraisal methodology and collate the information needed to carry this out. The appraisal needs to be set within the context of existing plans and policies and an understanding of the current baseline situation is essential to help predict effects and identify key sustainability issues and problems. This relates to Stage A of the ODPM (2005) guidance.

2. AIM OF THE REPORT

This report sets out the extent of and methodology for the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA / SEA) of the Amen Corner Area Action Plan Development Planning Document (DPD). This DPD forms part of the Bracknell Forest Local Development Framework (see section 3).

This Scoping Report aims to set out a framework for assessing the DPD against social, environmental and economic objectives. It should be read in conjunction with Bracknell Forest's Local Development Framework Scoping Report which sets out the parameters for SA / SEA of Local Development Documents within Bracknell Forest Borough. The full LDF Scoping Report can be viewed online at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk or supplied on request from the Borough Council.

The purpose of this more specific scoping exercise is to identify where the broader LDF SA / SEA is relevant to the specific issues addressed in the DPD. This is a consultation document for the statutory agencies with environmental responsibilities in England, along with other relevant bodies with a sustainability remit or a local interest.

3. 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 (Local Development Documents) containing policies and proposals to guide future development in the Borough.

The Local Development Scheme (LDS) is a three year project plan, prepared by the Borough Council, which outlines every Local Development Document that the Council intends to produce over the next three years, along with timetables for their preparation. It will also outline which current Local Plan Policies are to be saved until 2007.

The LDS will include:

- Development Plan Documents (DPDs), which are subject to external examination and therefore carry full statutory weight for determining planning applications; and
- Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), which provide additional information to explain policies and proposals in more detail to assist in the preparation of planning applications.

3.1 Amen Corner Area Action Plan DPD

3.1.1 The content of the document

This Area Action Plan DPD aims to expand upon policies within the Core Strategy DPD. Policy CS4 in the Core Strategy identifies the area covering the south of London Road, north of the A329m and west of Beehive Road as a strategic development site. The Area Action Plan will provide a framework against which future planning applications can be judged. Therefore, the document will identify the type and level of development for the site, the distribution and layout of uses across the site and the measures which will be required to support the development.

3.1.2 Links to higher-tier SA

ODPM guidance (2005) states that the many different forms of Local Development Document, for example reflecting different scales and levels of detail, necessitate a relatively flexible approach to SA to ensure it is relevant and appropriate. In most cases the SA of DPDs will draw extensively on appraisals undertaken at the higher level (e.g. Core Strategy DPD) and the need for new work may be limited.

For the higher-tier Core Strategy DPD, the sustainability appraisal (Bracknell Forest Borough Council, October 2006) predicts and evaluates the effects arising from submission policy CS4: Land at Amen Corner.

The submission policy wording is:

CS4: LAND AT AMEN CORNER

Land at Amen Corner, to the south of London Road and west of Beehive Road, Binfield is identified for a comprehensive, well designed mixed use development including:

- **Residential; and**
- **Employment; and**
- **Social and physical infrastructure; and**
- **The protection of the local gap between Binfield and Wokingham; and**
- **Measures to avoid and mitigate the impact of the residential development upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.**

Development will be detailed through further policies and delivered during the period 2006 – 2021, unless monitoring indicates otherwise.

In summary, the SA concluded that the Core Strategy policy will have the positive economic effects of providing employment in an accessible location along with appropriate levels of infrastructure. There would also be benefits arising from the provision of housing (some affordable) with good access to services and, as a larger site, there is the potential to provide a new primary school in an area of need. However, there are some potential negative effects on biodiversity and the site is partially on undeveloped land. The site is partially on a strategic gap between settlements.

The SA also stated that future policy documents should set out in more detail how the site will be delivered in a sustainable way and should address the negative effects identified in this strategic Core Strategy level appraisal. This should include improvements to educational facility, health facilities and housing with good access to services.

Technical Document C (Bracknell Forest Borough Council, October 2006) identified potential negative impacts arising from the loss of a small amount of low quality open space, the requirement to use some greenfield land, potential for some contaminated land on site, the site covers an area of landscape importance with low or moderate capacity to accept change and a proportion of the site covers a Wildlife Heritage Site (Rigg's Copse) and Biodiversity Action Plan habitat.

Therefore, a more detailed SA is required for this Area Action Plan to ensure that sustainability impacts identified at the strategic level are carried through when a more detailed site layout is considered.

3.1.3 Draft DPD objectives

The draft objectives of the plan are based upon the draft objectives of the Core Strategy DPD, to ensure consistency and appropriate tiering of documents within the LDF. Core Strategy Spatial Objectives B,D, F, G, H, J, K, L are directly relevant. However, Core Strategy objectives A, C, E and I have been amended for this DPD to provide a local interpretation; these are highlighted in italics in the table below.

A	<i>To ensure the timely delivery and continued monitoring of suitable development sites</i>
B	To aid the delivery of housing in the Borough which meets the needs of all sectors of the community, including the provision of affordable housing.
C	<i>To support the regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre</i>
D	To promote a sequential approach to the location of new development
E	<i>To mitigate against the impacts of the development on the Strategic Road Network</i>
F	To ensure high quality well designed development is delivered in the Borough
G	To support and facilitate essential community facilities and infrastructure in accessible locations
H	To deliver accessible development meeting the needs of the borough
I (i)	<i>To protect the function of the gap between Binfield and Wokingham</i>
I (ii)	<i>To mitigate against the impact upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area</i>
I (iii)	<i>To create landscape character and enhance biodiversity</i>
J	To maintain high and stable levels of economic growth
K	To promote the sustainable use and disposal of resources.
L	To mitigate against and adapt to climate change

4. TASK A1 - IDENTIFYING OTHER RELEVANT PLANS, PROGRAMMES AND SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES

Aim: Identify and review other relevant policies, plans, programmes, and sustainable development objectives that will affect or influence the DPD.

The LDF Scoping Report includes a wide-ranging review of the plans, policies and programmes which are likely to impact on the plans within the Local Development Framework. This DPD scoping has examined this list to establish whether additional documents should be included which are specifically relevant to the production of the Amen Corner Area Action Plan.

No additional plans, policies and programmes, over and above those already listed within the LDF Scoping Report, were identified as relating specifically to issues raised within the Amen Corner Area Action Plan.

5. TASK A2 - DEVELOP BASELINE INFORMATION

Aim: Collect relevant social, environmental and economic baseline information and produce a characterisation of the DPD area.

A comprehensive amount of baseline data is presented in the LDF Scoping Report. This DPD scoping exercise has identified that this level of detail is sufficient for the Amen Corner Area Action Plan and therefore no additional baseline data is necessary to inform the production of this DPD. For ease of application to this locally specific area, a map is shown in Appendix 1 identifying constraints particular to this site. In addition, sections from the Landscape Character Assessment (Entec, August 2006), specific to the area covered by this DPD, have been reproduced in Appendix 1.

6. TASK A3 - IDENTIFYING SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

Aim: Identify key sustainability issues for the SA to address.

The LDF Scoping Report provides information on the significant sustainability issues within Bracknell Forest. This scoping exercise has identified there are no additional issues which must be considered to inform the production of this DPD.

From the higher tier SA detailed above the following are presumed to be the most relevant to the Amen Corner Area Action Plan DPD:

- Protecting the landscape character of the Borough, for example using the landscape and topography in design to make the most of the setting;
- Biodiversity and conservation issues, especially key species and habitats and the on-site Wildlife Heritage Site;
- Road congestion and journey times;
- Contamination of land.

There may also be some cross-boundary issues to consider as part of the site is close to the administrative boundary between Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

7. TASK A4 - DEVELOPING THE SA FRAMEWORK

Aim: Develop the SA framework, consisting of the sustainability objectives, indicators and targets.

Sustainability is a complex issue so 24 sustainability objectives were produced to consider relevant local issues, covering a range of social, environmental and economic impacts. The justification for their selection and a testing for internal compatibility are detailed in the LDF Scoping Report.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council Sustainability Objectives	Can this objective be delivered by the Amen Corner DPD?
1. To meet local housing needs by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, sustainably constructed and affordable home	Yes
2. To reduce the risk of flooding and harm to people, property and the environment	Yes
3. To protect and enhance human health and wellbeing	Yes
4. To reduce poverty and social exclusion	Yes
5. To raise educational achievement levels	Yes
6. To reduce and prevent crime and the fear of crime	Yes
7. To create and sustain vibrant and locally distinctive communities	Yes
8. To provide accessible essential services and facilities	Yes
9. To make opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation readily accessible	Yes
10. 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	Yes
11. To maintain air quality and improve where possible	Yes
12. To address the causes of climate change through reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, and ensure Bracknell Forest is prepared for associated impacts	Yes
13. To conserve and enhance the Borough's biodiversity	Yes
14. To protect and enhance where possible the Borough's characteristic countryside and its historic environment in urban and rural areas	Yes
15. To improve travel choice and accessibility, reduce the need for travel by car and shorten the length and duration of journeys	Yes
16. To sustainably use and re-use renewable and non-renewable resources	Yes
17. To address the waste hierarchy by: minimising waste as a priority, reuse, then by recycling, composting or energy recovery	Yes
18. To maintain and improve water quality in the Borough's water courses and to achieve sustainable water resource management	Yes
19. To maintain and improve soil quality	Yes
20. To increase energy efficiency, and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources in the Borough	Yes
21. To ensure high and stable levels of employment	Yes
22. To sustain economic growth and competitiveness of the Borough	Yes
23. To encourage 'smart' economic growth	Yes
24. To develop and maintain a skilled workforce by developing the opportunities for everyone to acquire the skills needed to find work	Yes

This table shows that, due to the broad nature of the Amen Corner Area Action Plan DPD, and its ability to deliver sustainable development, the plan relates to all of the 24 sustainability objectives.

As all the sustainability objectives are relevant to this DPD the Sustainability Appraisal Framework detailed in the LDF Scoping Report is directly applicable. Therefore, the SA Framework table has not been reproduced in this document.

8. TASK A5 - CONSULTING ON THE SCOPE OF SA

Aim: Produce a Scoping Report and consult relevant authorities, the public and other key stakeholders on the scope of the appraisal and the key issues and possible options for solutions

This report is based specifically on the SA / SEA of the Amen Corner Area Action Plan DPD, however because much of this document relies heavily upon and refers back to the information presented in the generic LDF Scoping Report; responses are welcomed on both documents.

The LDF Scoping Report has already been through three separate consultation processes and the comments received have been incorporated into the working document (April 2006). This document will continue to be updated as additional comments are submitted throughout the development of the Local Development Framework and associated Sustainability Appraisal consultations.

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (Regulation 12(6)) defines certain timescales for consulting the statutory bodies on a Scoping Report. This requires the responsible authority's give the consultation body a period of **5 weeks** from the date it receives the Scoping Report.

Statutory Consultation Body
Natural England
The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (English Heritage)
Environment Agency

In accordance with the Sustainability Appraisal Guidance 2005, and as outlined in PPS12, other appropriate social and economic consultees will be contacted at various stages throughout the SA process. This consultation procedure is integrated into the Statement of Community Involvement.

The Scoping Report is also available to the public via the Council's website.

Consultation seeks to:

- Ensure the SA is comprehensive and robust enough to support the DPD during the later stages of full public consultation.
- 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.

8.1 Consultation Questions

The following questions should be used to guide the formation of a consultation response:

- 1) Are there other relevant policies, plans, programmes or sustainable development objectives that will affect or influence the DPD?
- 2) Do you agree that the baseline data collected is appropriate to the LDF and more specifically the DPD?
- 3) Do you have, or know of, any additional relevant baseline data which should be added to that already listed?
- 4) As far as you are aware, are there any inaccuracies or anomalies in the data presented?
- 5) Do you agree that these are the key sustainability issues for Bracknell Forest?
- 6) Are you aware of any issues which, in your opinion, should be added, or any that should be removed?
- 7) Are the objectives suitable in the context of Bracknell Forest?
- 8) Are there any additional objectives that should be included or should any be removed?
- 9) Do the indicators provide a relevant measure for the associated objective? If not then please suggest additional indicators.
- 10) Do you have any comments on the suggested targets?
- 11) Do you have any further comments on the information in the Sustainability Appraisal Framework?

Please return any comments on the questions or any other relevant issues by Friday 10 August 2007 to:

melissa.read@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

**Melissa Read
Environmental Policy Officer
Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell
RG12 1JD
01344 351185**

9. RELEVANT REFERENCES

Bracknell Forest Borough Council (April 2006) Local Development Framework Revised SA Scoping Report.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council (October 2006) Final Sustainability Appraisal Report. Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Submission).

European Commission (2001) Directive 2001/42/EC "on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment".

ODPM (2005) A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive.

ODPM (2005) Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks.

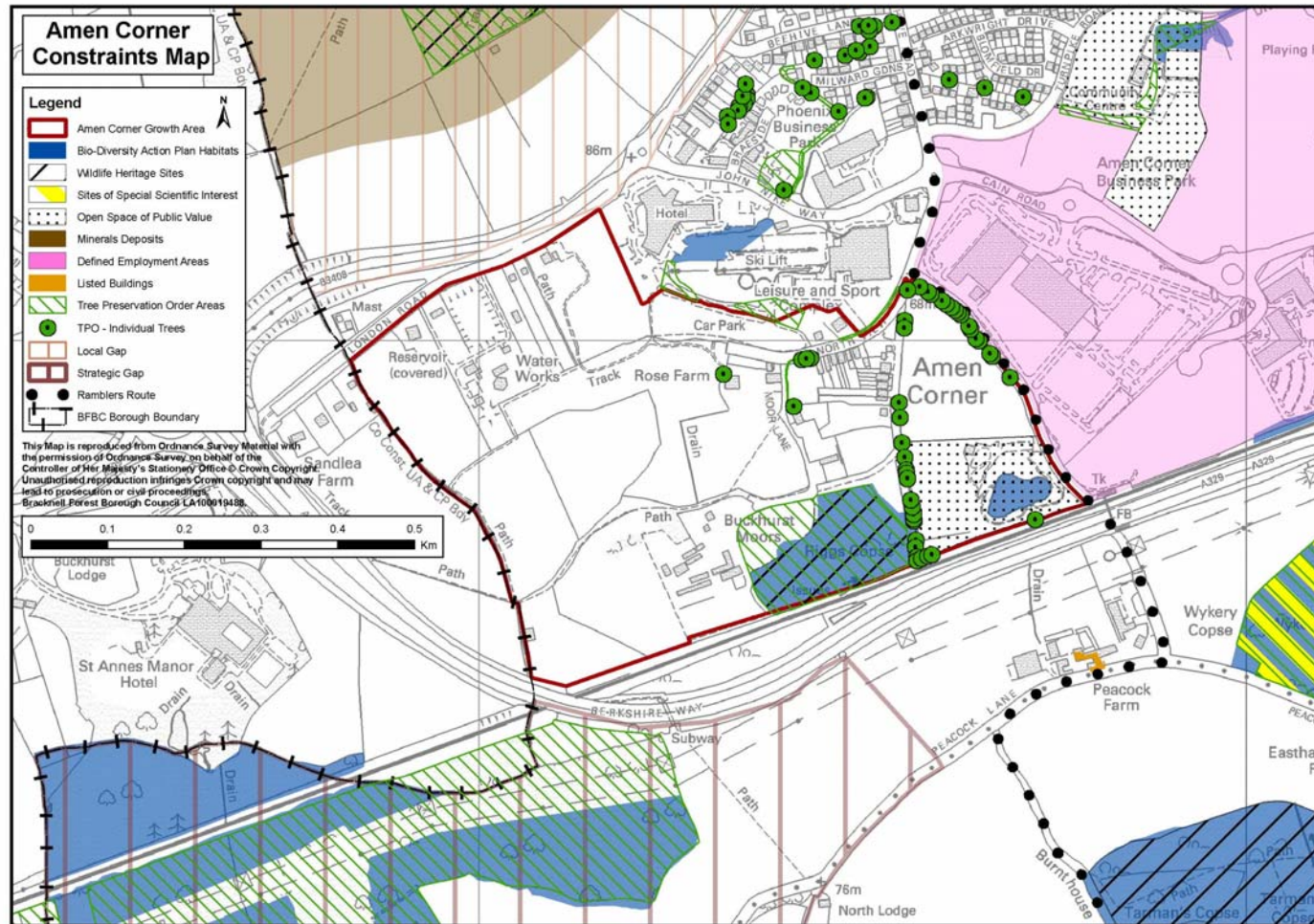
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Countryside Council for Wales; English Nature; RSPB; Environment Agency; Levett-Therival; South West Ecological Surveys; Oxford Brookes University. (June 2004). Strategic Environmental Assessment and Biodiversity: Guidance for Practitioners.

Countryside Council for Wales; English Nature; Environment Agency; UK Climate Change Programme, CAG, Levett-Therival; Environmental Change Institute. (May 2004). Strategic Environmental Assessment and Climate Change: Guidance for Practitioners.

Appendix 1 - Baseline data

The following map shows the constraints and issues specific to the area of land in the region of Amen Corner.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The document *Landscape Analysis of Sites Allocations and an Assessment of Gaps / Green Wedges* (Entec UK Ltd., August 2006) identified a particular landscape type covering the area at Amen Corner. Extracts from this document are reproduced below.

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3.2.6 Amen Corner Small-Scale Enclosed Forest and Heaths (FH8)

This landscape character area lies to the west of Bracknell. Its northern boundary is defined by the B3408 and western and southern boundary by the A329. Industrial development defines the area's eastern boundary.

Topographically this area is between 65m AOD in the south rising to a low hill of 95m AOD to the north. The majority of this area lies on the sands of the Bagshot Beds whilst to the southeast it falls upon the sands, silt and clays of the Claygate Formation.

The soilscape of much of this area is described as freely draining, slightly acidic, loamy soils producing a Grade 3 Agricultural Land Classification. The area appears to be largely pastoral with a range of other urban fringe uses including industrial units, water works and telephone mast. The suburban land-use together with the adjacent industrial development and infrastructure dominates much of the area and separates it from adjacent landscapes. Tree cover is provided by hedgerow trees, planting alongside the roads, scrub and small woodlands. Riggs Copse is a small ancient woodland to the south of the character area that is designated as a Wildlife Heritage Site.

Settlement is characterised by a group of red brick cottages alongside the road. The enclosure is of sub-regular fields, the pattern of which is becoming broken in places due to the absence of hedgerows. There are a number of public rights of way that run through the area.

This area provides little physical separation between the urban area of Bracknell and the A329 (M) due to the limited extent of rural character and the dominance of the industrial and suburban land use and infrastructure within and visible from this area. Visibility of adjacent industrial development is afforded due to the scale of development (large modern industrial buildings) and lack of tree cover or other screening.

This disrupted suburban landscape contrasts to the rural landscape to the north. The character area is seen as a transitional zone from the east to west as the landscape moves away from the urban area of Bracknell.

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Table 4.6 Amen Corner Small-Scale Enclosed Forest and Heaths (FH8)

Factors considered in judging landscape capacity	Justification	Sensitivity/ value summary
Landscape character sensitivity	LOW-MODERATE	
Sensitivity of natural elements: <i>Sensitivity of elements likely to be affected by residential/industrial change.</i>	Scattered small broadleaved woodlands and hedgerow trees Remnant heathland associations	Moderate
Sensitivity of cultural elements <i>Sensitivity of elements likely to be affected by residential/industrial change.</i>	Localised pastoral land use with sub-regular field pattern Clustered settlement pattern Little time depth	Moderate-Low
Landscape quality/condition <i>In terms of intactness, representation of typical character and condition (or state of repair) of elements contributing to character</i>	Generally disrupted landscape in declining condition Character area is not typical of the character type due to the urban-fringe land uses.	Low
Sensitivity of aesthetic elements <i>For example scale, level of enclosure, diversity, colour, form, line, pattern and texture of landscape.</i>	No significant aesthetic elements	Low
Visual sensitivity	HIGH MODERATE	
Visibility of landscape: <i>The probability of change in the landscape being highly visible.</i>	The rising topography and limited tree cover increase the visibility of this landscape.	High
Type and number of receptors: <i>Number of people likely to perceive change and their reason for being there.</i>	Residents – low number (within the landscape) Employees – moderate to high number (both within the landscape and adjacent urban edge of Bracknell)	Moderate
Mitigation potential <i>The likelihood that change could be mitigated</i>	Very little mitigation could be provided through the existing woodland cover.	High
Landscape value	LOW-MODERATE	
Presence of designations	Character area contains a Wildlife Heritage Site (local designation)	Moderate

Factors considered in judging landscape capacity	Justification	Sensitivity/ value summary
Other criteria	Not tranquil or remote due to the adjacent industrial development and major transport infrastructure. Normal to low scenic beauty as dominated by the adjacent industrial development. Typical agricultural landscape No identified cultural associations. Low nature conservation interest. Likely to have a low public value.	Low
Landscape capacity to accept change		MODERATE HIGH