

Committee: Planning Policy Working Group

Agenda Item

Date: 27 July 2015

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Title: Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

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Summary

1. The purpose of a Sustainability Appraisal is to improve the quality of the Local Plan by assessing its policies and proposals in a consistent and transparent manner and testing them against alternatives. It is an essential part of the Local Plan process and is produced in parallel with the Local Plan.
2. The first stage in preparing a Sustainability Appraisal is to produce a Scoping Report. This sets out the 'baseline data' and sustainability criteria against which the alternative options will be appraised.
3. There are currently two Scoping Reports. One published in 2011 for the Local Plan and one published in 2014 for the Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations DPD. The Council is now producing a new Local Plan which will incorporate Gypsy and Traveller site allocations and therefore a new Scoping Report has been prepared for consultation. A new Scoping Report can also incorporate any changes to other relevant policies, plans and programmes, sustainability objectives and baseline information.
4. The first sustainability appraisal using the criteria and framework set out in the scoping report will be of the Areas of Search and Scenarios.

Recommendations

5. That the Draft Scoping report is published for consultation in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement.

Financial Implications

6. To be met within existing budgets.

Background Papers

7. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

None

Impact

- 8.

Communication/Consultation	The Scoping Report will be published for consultation in accordance with the directive and the Statement of Community Involvement
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	The Local Plan will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	Producing an SA/SEA is national and international requirement.
Sustainability	The purpose of the Scoping Report is to set the framework to assess the sustainability of the Local Plan policies.
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

9. The requirement for a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) emanates from a national and international commitment to sustainable development as explained in Section 2.1 of the Scoping Report. The SEA originates from a European Directive requiring an assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. The Directive was transposed into English legislation in 2004. An SA is required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. It examines the effects of proposed plans and programmes in a wider context, considering all the likely significant effects on the environment, economic and social factors. Whilst the requirements to produce a SA and SEA are distinct, Government guidance considers that it is possible to satisfy the two requirements through a single approach, hereinafter known as a Sustainability Appraisal.
10. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) will be undertaken at each key stage in the Local Plan preparation as illustrated at section 2.2 of the Scoping Report in a flow chart taken from the Planning Practice Guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal. This illustrates the iterative nature of the sustainability appraisal process, informing the development of the Local Plan at each stage.
11. At each stage that the Council produces a document for consultation, starting with broad areas of search to the final Local Plan submitted for Examination it will have been subject to a sustainability appraisal to assess how the strategy, policy or site performs against the sustainability objectives, whether there are

any significant effects and mitigation measures which would lead to sustainability improvements. The results of the assessment at each stage will help the Council in developing preferred strategies and sites, in assessing reasonable alternatives, and refining policies to take forward into the next stage. At the conclusion of the process there will be a clear audit trail of how the Council arrived at its strategies, policies and sites, the selection of the alternatives considered and why reasonable alternatives were rejected.

12. A Sustainability Appraisal is not an exact science. It involves a balance of value judgments about how we manage the impact of the Local Plan on the environment.
13. The Scoping Report is the first step in the SA (Stage A) and establishes a framework for carrying out the SA of the Local Plan. It presents the proposed structure and knowledge base for the appraisal.
14. The scoping report includes a set of sustainability objectives which cover social, environmental and economic factors. They are listed in Table 2 (paragraph 3.4) of the scoping report.
15. The scoping report sets out the various sustainability frameworks necessary for the assessment of the emerging Local Plan's vision, objectives, spatial strategies, policies and site allocations. For these purposes, separate approaches and / or assessment frameworks have been developed.

A) The Appraisal of Broad Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios (section 4.1)

16. The assessment of Broad 'Areas of Search' and Strategic Scenarios has to reflect the strategic nature and scope of such areas. The appraisal will take the form of a narrative exploring the sustainability of each within known existing constraints and opportunities relevant to the general notion of the 13 identified Sustainability Objectives and on a broadly comparable basis.

B) The Appraisal of Policies (Section 4.2)

17. For each objective there are a number of key questions which are posed against the Local Plan policy. By answering these questions, the appraisal will be able to evaluate, in a clear and consistent manner, the nature and degree of impact, and whether significant effects are likely to emerge from the Plan's proposed policies. Table 4 (page 37) sets out the Key Questions.

C) The Appraisal of Sites (Section 4.3)

18. A slightly different approach is taken when it comes to assessing sites. Table 6 sets out a pro-forma which asks questions about sites which unlike the appraisal of policies includes spatial questions. For instance it asks about the site's location to designated sites (eg SSSI), and identified sites or zones (eg waste management facility, flood risk area); about the site's existing use or designation; its proposed use and type of development. This is not intended to be a detailed project-level assessment of each site but a strategic level assessment, highlighting those broad impacts of the sites to inform the plan

making process. It is this part of the SA which overlaps with assessing the suitability of sites through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

D) Appraisal of Strategic Sites/New Settlements (Section 4.4)

19. The appraisals of strategic sites/new settlements reflect the wider impact of such developments. The appraisal of strategic growth locations responds to their role as potential strategic allocations in line with the District’s objectively assessed need and Spatial Strategy options. This approach will enable alternative sites of a comparable scale within the District to be explored in line with the Local Plan context, encompassing additional broad sustainability criteria relevant to Garden Development principles in order to determine whether the most appropriate and sustainable sites and proposals are being progressed to the next stage.

E) Appraisal of Gypsy and Traveller sites. (section 4.5)

20. A framework which reflects the specific requirements of such sites as set out in Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (DCLG 2012) and Good Practice Guide on Designing Gypsy and Traveller sites (DCLG 2008) is used for Gypsy and Traveller sites and these are set out in Tables 8 and 9 (pages 68 and 72 respectively).
21. To comply with the SEA directive the Scoping Report and annexes will need to be published for a 6 week period of consultation with the three statutory consultation bodies (the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England) on the scope and level of detail within this report from which the Sustainability Appraisal is based. Other organisations listed on the Statement of Community Involvement (June 2015), Highways England and Essex County Council will also be directly consulted with. The documents will also be made available on the Uttlesford District Council’s website for wider consultation. The final Scoping Report will take into account the representations received and the framework will be used in the next stage of the Local Plan process which will be the Sustainability Appraisal of the Areas of Search. Details of the representations received and the response will be set out the Environment Report of that Sustainability Appraisal.

Risk Analysis

22.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That SA procedure has not been correctly followed	1. The Council is learning from its previous SA and taking on board advice sought from Planning Advisory	3. Local Plan found unsound	To seek advice from appropriate bodies such as Planning Advisory Service.

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1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.