

Committee: Planning Policy Working Group

Agenda Item

Date: 29 September 2015

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Title: Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment of Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios Consultation

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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 appended Environmental Report Non-Technical Summary is a summary of the sustainability appraisal of the Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios. The full appraisal is set out in the Environment Report and Annexes A and B. All documents are available on the website at www.utlesford.gov.uk/backgroundstudies . The appraisal will assist the Council in ensuring that the emerging Local Plan is justified and has been assessed against reasonable alternatives.
3. As the Areas of Search and Scenarios are strategic in nature and scope, the appraisal compares them on the basis of their differences rather than each's respective suitability.
4. The findings of the sustainability appraisal, especially the highlighted impacts of growth in the Areas of Search will influence the emerging spatial strategy.
5. The Sustainability Appraisal process has been reviewed through [Scrutiny](#) on 10 September 2015 and the comments made by the Planning Advisory Services who undertook the review have been taken into account as set out in Appendix A to this report.

Recommendations

6. That the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios Consultation is published for consultation alongside the Issues and Options Consultation Questionnaire.

Financial Implications

7. To be met within existing budgets

Background Papers

8. 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

Communication/Consultation	The report will be published for consultation
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 Environmental Report is to assess the sustainability of the Local Plan
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

9. Members will recall from the discussion on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report at the Working Group meeting of 27 July that there are 4 steps in the appraisal of the Local Plan. These are shown in the diagram below. The Council is currently at Step 2 and this report discusses the Sustainability Appraisal of initial options which are the Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios.



10. Sections 3 to 7 of the Non-Technical summary appraises the Areas of Search, starting with the new settlement options, followed by Saffron Walden, edge of Bishop's Stortford, Great Dunmow and finally Key and Type A villages. The Areas of Search are broad areas with no specific site boundaries and the scale of development in each broad location is not known.
11. Section 8 of the Environmental Report appraises the Strategic Scenarios. The appraisal of the Strategic Scenarios explores the options for the distribution of growth over different settlement types. Seven different scenarios are appraised to identify constraints and opportunities.
12. As these areas of search and scenarios are strategic in nature and scope, it is not possible to appraise them in specific detail. The appraisal of the 'areas of search' and scenarios 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 15 identified Sustainability Objectives and on a broadly comparable basis only. This is summarised in the Non-Technical Summary in the form of a series of bullet points considering the potential issues to overcome and the likely benefits.
13. The conclusions of the appraisal of the Areas of Search are set out in section 9.1 of the Non-Technical summary. It concludes that new settlements are likely to have comparatively less constraints than extensions to existing settlements and villages or, more specifically, they have better scope to mitigate negative impacts on site. However proportionate expansion of the existing settlements which is mindful of the constraints could be particularly important in meeting the housing needs in the earlier stages of the plan period.
14. The conclusions of the appraisal of the Strategic Scenarios are set out in section 9.2 of the Non-Technical summary. It concludes that no single

scenario can be guaranteed to meet the current identified and future needs of the District in a wholly sustainable manner.

15. Section 9.3 the Non-Technical summary recommends that with the results of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) the Council can look to developing the strategic scenarios into more defined spatial strategy options. New Settlement Areas of Search should be assessed in line with Garden Settlement principles and it is important that a more detailed and comparable level of evidence is collected for the assessment of any specific sites put forward in preferred areas. Similarly it is important that the Council develops a more detailed evidence base surrounding additional constraints at the local level, for the more detailed assessment of smaller scale options in subsequent iterations of the Local Plan.
16. Section 10 of the Non-Technical summary sets out the next steps in preparing a draft Local Plan. It recognises the evidence that the Council is already working on – the mapped data and working with specialist (on issues such as highways and flooding). An audit of the available data will identify any gaps which may need to be filled through further evidence gathering. Section 9.3 recommends the additional evidence required on the areas of search. All this work will be used to formulate a vision, objectives, a spatial strategy, strategic policies and development management policies. The Sustainability Appraisal process will assess these forthcoming elements of the Local Plan and assist in the development of reasonable alternatives for consideration. The Draft Local Plan will contain the preferred options and be published for consultation alongside the Sustainability Appraisal of these preferred options. In addition the reasons why other reasonable alternatives to options previously considered have not been taken forward will be included to ensure that at each stage of the Sustainability Appraisal and Local Plan, the reasons behind the Council’s choices are clear.
17. The Sustainability Appraisal process has been reviewed through [Scrutiny](#) on 10 September 2015 and the comments made by the Planning Advisory Services who undertook the review have been taken into account as set out in Appendix A to this report.

Risk Analysis

18.

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.