

# Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment Adoption Statement



Listening Learning Leading

## Introduction

- 1) South Oxfordshire District Council adopted the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy DPD on Thursday 13 December 2012. This Adoption Statement has been prepared in accordance with regulations 16 (3) and (4) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, which require that a statement be produced on adoption of a plan or programme which sets out the following 'particulars':
  - How the environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme;
  - How the Environmental Report has been taken into account;
  - How opinions expressed during consultation have been taken into account;
  - The reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
  - The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.
- 2) The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) introduced a requirement to carry out Sustainability Appraisal (SA) as an integral part of preparing local development documents. Authorities are also required to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment of local development documents in accordance with the requirements of European Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive). Government advice is that both Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment can be carried out in a single appraisal process and this has been followed in the production of the appraisal.
- 3) This SA has been carried out in accordance with the following published government guidance:
  - A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Directive, ODPM, September 2005
  - Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local development Frameworks, ODPM, November 2005

## **Background**

- 4) The council published and consulted upon a proposed submission version of its core strategy in December 2011. The core strategy was then submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2011. When submitted it was accompanied with an SA consisting of the proposed submission version plus any changes as a result of the proposed submission consultation. Since then there have been a number of updates and further tests as a result of the Examination in Public (EiP) exploratory meeting and hearings.
- 5) The Secretary of State appointed Roy Foster MA MRTPI to conduct an independent examination through public hearings into the soundness of the core strategy and its supporting documents (the Examination in Public). As a result of the examination exploratory meeting and public hearings, a number of additional tests were carried out in the SA. In all, an SA or additional tests were produced at the following stages:
  - Issues and Options November 2007
  - Preferred Options March 2009
  - Proposed Submission December 2010
  - Submission March 2011 (update of the proposed submission version following consultation)
  - Core Strategy Schedule of Changes Publication July 2011 (tested changes as a result of the EiP exploratory meeting in May 2011)
  - Mid Examination Publication of Core Strategy Main Modifications February 2012 (tested changes as a result of the July and November 2011 EiP hearings)
  - Further Examination Publication of Core Strategy Main Modifications July 2012 (tested changes as a result of the May and June 2012 EiP hearings)
- 6) These documents were made available for the public and statutory bodies during the consultation period for each stage of the core strategy production. For clarity and ease of use the council has produced a final version of the SA made up of the proposed submission version plus all the subsequent additions.
- 7) In October 2012 the council published the inspector's Report on the Examination of the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy. It concluded that the core strategy and supporting documents are sound (subject to some main modifications).

## **How the environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme**

- 8) An integral part of preparing the core strategy has involved the iterative process of SA. The overall purpose of the SA is to evaluate the likely implications for sustainable development of the core strategy and reasonable alternatives to it. The aim is to inform the plan making

process and ensure the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the objectives and strategic policies of the core strategy.

- 9) The first stage of the SA was the production of a scoping report. The five tasks undertaken to develop the scoping report were as follows:
  - identifying other relevant policies, plans and programmes in sustainability terms that the council needed to be aware of in preparing the core strategy;
  - identification of sustainability issues and problems in the district;
  - collection of baseline information;
  - developing SA objectives to test options against (the SA framework); and
  - consulting on the scope of the SA.
- 10) The scoping report established 18 sustainability objectives which formed the SA framework. The draft report was published for consultation in January and February 2006 and amendments were made reflecting consultee's comments where appropriate. The SA scoping report was approved by the council in June 2006. The scoping report was later updated and approved by the council in February in 2009.
- 11) The issues and options core strategy published in November 2007 identified key environmental, economic and social issues for the district. These were gathered from a range of sources including research and specialist studies, relevant statistics, workshops with parish councils and individual meetings with stakeholders. Through this we generated a number of alternative options for a spatial strategy that could be tested against the SA framework.
- 12) The preferred options core strategy and accompanying SA built on the results of the issues and options stage. It set out our preferred approach for a spatial strategy and explained why the alternative options had been rejected. This included the environmental, economic and social considerations. The proposed submission SA tested any significant changes made following the preferred options stage.
- 13) This demonstrates that the SA was undertaken in parallel with development of the plan, so that all reasonable alternatives for achieving the plan's objectives were assessed for their sustainability effects.
- 14) Stakeholders were given opportunities to express their views on the SA and its objectives. This was also used to guide and inform the appraisal and plan preparation process. In this way, the most sustainable strategy and policies could emerge and be included in the final adopted plan. The SA therefore was an iterative and inclusive process that ensured environmental considerations as well as

economic and social considerations were integrated into the core strategy.

### **How the Environmental Report has been taken into account**

- 15) The SA process (the 'Environmental Report') has contributed to the development and refinement of the core strategy by providing a separate assessment of the sustainability of the council's proposed options and policies throughout the plan preparation process. Each SA report demonstrates how sustainability objectives have been taken into account at each stage, and integrated into the development of the core strategy.
- 16) Every section / topic area of the core strategy has its own background paper. The background papers explain how the strategy for that topic was developed and what considerations were taken into account. Each background paper has a section that explains how the SA informed the final strategy for the topic and how the findings of the SA were taken into account.
- 17) The background papers can be found at

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/evidence-studies>

### **How opinions expressed during consultation have been taken into account**

- 18) Public consultation was conducted throughout the preparation of the SA for the Core Strategy in accordance with the requirements of the SEA Directive, the relevant Regulations at the time i.e. Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004, the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008, the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 and our adopted Statement of Community Involvement.
- 19) At each stage of the Core Strategy preparation a copy of the accompanying SA was made available for consultation and public review. This was to allow opinion on the draft Core Strategy and accompanying SA to be expressed and be taken into account during the preparation of the two documents. At each stage the statutory consultation bodies i.e. Environment Agency, English Heritage and Natural England were consulted.

### **Issues and Options:**

- 20) In November 2007, the council consulted on its Core Strategy Issues and Options document and accompanying SA. Following this exercise a consultation statement was prepared. Additionally, all comments received as part of the consultation were summarised in a response

schedule. Both the statement of consultation and the response schedule were made available on the council's website. At this stage very few responses related to the SA.

**Preferred Options:**

- 21) In March 2009, the council consulted on its Core Strategy Preferred Options document and accompanying SA. Following this exercise a consultation statement was prepared. In addition to this, all comments received relating to the SA were summarised in a response schedule along with the council's response to these comments. The consultation statement and the response schedule were made available on the council's website.

**Proposed Submission:**

- 22) In December 2010 the council consulted on its Core Strategy Proposed Submission document and accompanying SA.

**Submission:**

- 23) On 18 March 2011 the council submitted its Submission Core Strategy to the Secretary of State. The submission included the Core Strategy Consultation Statement (Regulation 25) and the Core Strategy Consultation Statement (Regulation 30). The comments received in relation to the Proposed Submission Core Strategy SA are summarised within the Core Strategy Consultation Statement (Regulation 30). Furthermore, the council's response to the comments received as part of the Submission Core Strategy SA consultation was submitted to the Secretary of State.

**Changes Post Submission:**

- 24) Following the examination hearings in July and November 2011 there were a number of proposed modifications to the core strategy. Where relevant these proposed modifications were subject to SA and these were presented in a strikethrough version of the Core Strategy Submission SA (February 2012). Following the examination hearings in May and June 2012 there were also a number of proposed modifications to the core strategy. The modifications that were subject to SA were made available in a separate schedule to be read in conjunction with the strikethrough version of the Core Strategy Submission SA (February 2012). These were made available for comment on the council's website and the responses received were submitted to the Planning Inspector.

**The reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with**

- 25) The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (12) (2) requires environmental reports (SA/SEA) to consider any reasonable alternatives, taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme.

- 26) As part of the iterative SA process, the alternative options for the core strategy were individually tested against the sustainability objectives. The results of this were used at each stage in the process to inform the decision on which options should be taken forward as policies and which would require amendments or further mitigation measures, ultimately culminating in the adopted core strategy.
- 27) The SA report explains in detail the influence of the SA on selecting the various preferred options and the consideration of reasonable alternatives. The reasons for choosing the key preferred options for the housing and employment strategies in the core strategy were as follows:

### **The housing strategy**

- 28) The adopted core strategy plans for the number of houses set out in the South East Plan. The issues and options SA showed that providing more housing than identified in South East Plan could positively contribute to certain objectives, for example, by providing more affordable homes for people to live in and support the growth of the economy. However, there would be a significant negative impact on the district's open spaces and countryside because more greenfield land would be used. Other factors which informed the choice of this preferred option included the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, overwhelming public support and infrastructure delivery concerns. This preferred option was carried forward iteratively to the adopted core strategy.
- 29) The issues and options SA tested two different percentage splits between towns and rural areas for housing development outside of Didcot. The first was 80% of development towards the towns (Henley, Wallingford and Thame) and 20% of development towards the larger villages. The second was 60% towards the towns and 40% towards the larger villages. The SA stated that Concentrating 80 percent of development in Wallingford, Thame and Henley scored more positively in relation to improving accessibility to services and facilities and reducing harm to the environment and minimising pollution. Concentrating a higher proportion (40 percent) in the larger villages (and 60% in the towns) resulted in more housing and more positive effects in relation to maintaining the viability of services.
- 30) At preferred options, the SA showed that in general, the option for a strong network of settlements scores more positively than alternative options such as a new settlement, clustering around the towns, focusing development along public transport corridors and focusing growth around Oxford and Reading. This is because a good level of accessibility to services and facilities is provided across the district, including the more rural areas, and the option helps to promote the rural economy. Alongside the more strategic assessment of the settlement strategy, the SA tested different housing distribution strategies which included options such as allocating more housing to the market towns than the larger villages, allocating all of the new housing to the towns only, allocating

more housing to the larger villages than the towns and concentrating development in just one or two larger villages. The results of the SA showed that allocating housing to the towns only would have positive effects in relation to improving accessibility to services and facilities, minimising pollution, improving travel choice and reducing the need to travel. However, the benefits of this generally apply to the occupants of the new housing only. Focussing a proportion of new development in the larger villages would also help to support the viability of existing services in these villages and provide some affordable housing.

- 31) These findings influenced our choice of preferred option. Helping the viability of village services and providing affordable housing are important considerations and on balance we chose the option of allocating to both towns and larger villages with more to the market towns than the larger villages. The allocation on the basis of 60% to the towns and 40% to the larger villages was carried forward in the preferred options core strategy as this contributes greater to this positive effect identified of helping the viability of village services and providing affordable housing. This preferred option was carried forward iteratively to the adopted core strategy as there were no material changes significant enough to require retesting of the strategy.

#### **Location of strategic housing allocations for the towns**

- 32) For the locations of individual housing allocations in towns, sites were assessed against the SA framework and the results were considered for the final allocations. This is explained in greater detail in the SA report and the background papers for the individual settlements. The level of housing allocated particularly to Thame and Wallingford changed throughout the core strategy process. As a result the council conducted a further test in the SA post submission for Thame and Wallingford to assess the effect of the various allocations on the towns.

#### **The employment strategy**

- 33) For the amount of employment land to allocate in the core strategy, the options tested in the issues and options SA were to allocate enough employment land to satisfy the predicted future demand of businesses in South Oxfordshire, or to allocate more than this with the aim of reducing the level of out commuting from the district.
- 34) The options were refined further in the preferred options SA by testing the option to allocate the amount of land identified as required in the Employment Land Review together with an allowance for the South East Plan housing allocation; in combination with either allocating more employment land to achieve a 5% decrease in out commuting from 2001 to 2026; or allocating more employment land to achieve a 10% increase in high tech jobs from 2006 to 2026 or a combination of the two. The SA gave positive results for including additional land to reduce the level of out commuting but warned that care should be taken so that it does not

result in increased in commuting. For increasing in the number of high tech jobs in the district the SA stated that this can be achieved without needing a further increase in the allocation of more employment land. The notion of this option was therefore carried forward and the preferred option for the amount of employment land was a combination of all three options.

- 35) For the distribution of employment land the issues and options SA tested the options of allocating employment land within the four main towns and larger villages and encouraging the redevelopment of existing employment sites for employment uses; promoting development in just one or a limited number of towns; develop only large employment units; and allow the redevelopment of employment sites for other uses. The SA showed that there are both benefits to allocating land in towns as well a small proportion in the larger villages. Allocating in the towns promotes accessibility to employment while allocating in the larger villages would contribute towards maintaining and enhancing the rural economy. In light of this, the preferred option is to allocate most employment land in the towns but also to allocate a small quantity to the larger villages. This preferred option was carried forward iteratively to the adopted core strategy.

**The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.**

- 36) Through the SA process social, economic and environmental effects have been predicted and evaluated. The evaluation of effects determined whether they were likely to be significant or not. The monitoring process allows the actual significant effects of the implementation of the Core Strategy to be tested against those predicted in the SA. This is a valuable process, as it will help in ensuring that any problems arising during implementation of the core strategy can be identified, and future predictions made more accurately. It will also identify, at an early stage, any unforeseen impacts of implementation, allowing appropriate remedial action to be taken. The data can also be used to inform the baseline information for future plans.
- 37) The monitoring framework has been developed in conjunction with the council's Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) and the Implementation and monitoring framework of the core strategy policies in section 18 of the core strategy. The AMR currently reflects the local plan policies, however many of the indicators and targets can be carried forward to monitor the significant effects predicted in the SA. In addition the AMR for the core strategy will contain the indicators and targets established in section 18 of the strategy, which monitor the effects of the policies. Many of these will monitor issues highlighted by the predicted significant effects in the SA.
- 38) Therefore the monitoring framework has been developed for each predicted significant effect, establishing whether it can be monitored via



an existing indicator and target. These will either be from the existing AMR or the strategy's implementation and monitoring framework. If it could not be monitored via one of these existing mechanisms then a new indicator and target was established from either a contextual data source or a data source within the council if there was an appropriate dataset available. The indicators and targets are based on both quantitative and qualitative data.

- 39) The outcome of this assessment is shown in Appendix 5 of the SA report. In total there were 28 predicted significant effects that were not covered by an existing indicator and target. However, of these only 15 new indicators were required. These new indicators and the source of the information are shown in Table 1 below and these will be included in the AMR for the core strategy.

**Table 1: New monitoring indicators to be included in AMR**

Indicator	Target	Source of information for new indicators
% of working age adults in employment (by sector)	To maintain employment levels at or above the regional average	OCC contextual indicator
Carbon dioxide emissions per person per year	Reduction in the levels of carbon dioxide emissions per person in the District	National indicator - NI186
Delivery of housing through the planning system in smaller and other villages.	Number of completions in smaller and other villages including rural exception sites	Include an AMR indicator specifically for smaller and other villages using SODC data
House price to income ratio	Reduce the house price to income ratio	OCC contextual indicator
Mix of housing delivered by tenure, size and type in the strategic allocation in Thame	Net dwelling completions by tenure, size and type in Thame	Include an AMR indicator specifically for Thame using SODC data
Mix of housing delivered by tenure, size and type in the strategic allocation in Didcot	Net dwelling completions by tenure, size and type in Didcot	Include an AMR indicator specifically for Thame using SODC data
Monitor noise and light pollution complaints relating to strategic allocations	No increase in complaints regarding light or noise relating to any of the development sites laid out in the Core Strategy.	SODC environmental services
New business registration rate	Net increase in number of new business registrations in South Oxfordshire	NI171 - information to be gained from Economic development at SODC
Number of permission for non-residential development on out of town greenfield land excluding the allocated greenfield development in the site allocations DPD	No non-residential development to be permitted on out of town greenfield sites	SODC Planning Policy
Number of residential completions on green field land	No specific target	SODC data

Percentage of new residential development within 30 minutes public transport time of key services including GP, Hospital, primary school, secondary school, areas of employment and a major retail centre.	No specific target	No longer a national indicator - check with OCC if they can still monitor this
Rates of violent and vehicle crime	Reduced violent and vehicle crime rates	OCC contextual indicator
Travel to work by mode of transport	Reduce the use of cars to travel to work	OCC indicator (uses census data)
Trends in Place survey for responses to question - how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your home as a place to live?	Increasing satisfaction levels in place survey for people's home as a place to live	Place Survey data SODC
Trends in Place survey for responses to question - how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?	Increasing satisfaction levels in place survey for the local area as a place to live	Place Survey data SODC

40) Eight effects could not be monitored. These effects are shown in table 2 below. There were a number of individual reasons why these cannot be monitored. Mainly these are effects for which there is no data available to the Council to enable their monitoring. For example some were social effects for which there is no information available to monitor the perceptions the effect highlights, for example community cohesion.

**Table 2: Predicted significant effects that cannot be monitored**

Core Strategy Topic area	Predicted Significant Effect	SA Objective	Reason for not monitoring
Town Centres and Retail	Keeping retail uses in the town centres maintains a vibrancy and sense of community cohesion through a thriving economy and the opportunity to interact with friends and colleagues.	4	Social effect for which no data is available
Town Centres and Retail	A buoyant retail sector is a vital factor in attracting tourists to the attractive historic town centres. The rural economy benefits from a broad cross section of retail uses in the larger villages.	17	Unable to monitor effects on tourism
Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People strategy	The preferred approach will create the opportunity for interaction and will encourage stronger links with the wider community than an isolated settlement may encourage.	4	Social effect for which no data is available
		18	
Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity	An improved network and new resources will improve people's health, well-being, improved and additional facilities will also increase	3	Social effect for which no data is available

	opportunities for interaction and should improve community cohesion.	4	
Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity	The protection of existing and provision of new green infrastructure will help to ensure that development is resilient to the effects of climate change.	10	Unable to monitor this effect as an indirect benefit that is difficult to quantify.
Rural Areas	Could lead to new and enhancement of existing tourist attractions so encouraging the development of a buoyant sustainable tourism sector.	17	Unable to monitor effects on tourism

- 41) One effect for which unavailable data was not the key issue was the implication of the green infrastructure strategy on ensuring that development is resilient to the effects of climate change. This effect is an indirect consequence of green infrastructure and although it is widely acknowledged that there is a link, the impact on climate change is not something the council can monitor through a simple indicator.
- 42) This approach is compliant with the ODPM (2005) guidance for the SA in which it states that it is not necessary to monitor everything and that monitoring should be focussed on those significant effects that:
- indicate a likely breach of international, national or local legislation, recognised guidelines or standards;
  - may give rise to irreversible damage, with a view to identifying trends before such damage is caused; and
  - had uncertainty in the SA, and where monitoring would enable preventative or mitigation measures to be taken

## **Viewing the documents and further information**

You can view the core strategy, SA and all supporting documentation on the council's website at [www.southoxon.gov.uk/corestrategy](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/corestrategy) or at the council offices at:

South Oxfordshire District Council  
Benson Lane  
Crowmarsh Gifford  
Wallingford  
OX10 8NJ

They will also be available to view at all public libraries in the district during their normal opening hours.

You can also contact the planning policy team on 01491 823725 or at [planning.policy@southoxon.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@southoxon.gov.uk)