

**WEALDEN DISTRICT (INCORPORATING PART OF THE SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK)  
Core Strategy Local Plan  
Sustainability Appraisal: Post Adoption Report**

**1. Introduction.**

Wealden District Council together with the South Downs National Park Authority adopted the Wealden District (incorporating part of the South Downs National Park) Core Strategy Local Plan in February 2013. The Core Strategy sets out the vision, and strategic planning framework for delivery of growth within Wealden up to 2027.

This statement has been prepared in accordance with the Regulation 16 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes 2004 and which transpose the European directive 2001/42/EC (the SEA Directive) into UK legislation. This requires a statement to be produced upon adoption of a plan to set out.

- a) How environmental considerations have been incorporated into the plan
- b) How the environmental report has been taken into account
- c) How opinions expressed through public consultation (on the SEA and SA process) have been taken into account
- d) Reasons for choosing the plan as adopted in the light of other reasonable alternatives dealt with
- e) The measures that are taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of implementation of the plan

Under the Planning and compulsory Purchase act 2004 (as amended) all development documents prepared by Local Planning Authorities must undergo Sustainability Appraisal (SA). The Core Strategy is the principal overarching development document within Wealden Districts Local Plan (formerly Local Development Framework). The purpose of the SA process is to ensure appropriate appraisal of the social, economic and environmental effects of the plan to help ensure decisions are made which secure delivery of sustainable development. Government guidance clarifies that a single SA can also incorporate the necessary requirements under European directive 2001/42/EC for a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

## **2. How environmental considerations have been integrated within the Plan.**

Environmental and sustainability considerations have been built into the Core Strategy process from the beginnings of its development. The sustainability appraisal process has performed a key role in providing a sound evidence base for the plan, for the testing of alternatives and has formed the evolution of the plan. The requirements of the EU Directive on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment and upon the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 have been incorporated into the sustainability appraisal exercise undertaken.

The SA scoping report was produced and consulted upon in 2006 and published in February 2007. This included the setting of an agreed set of sustainability objectives which drew upon the collection of baseline data covering a wide range of environmental parameters and identification of other relevant plans, programmes and sustainability objectives. An update and review of this scoping report was published in 2009, internally consulted upon in early 2010 and published in October 2010. A Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy Spatial Development Options was undertaken in 2009 and published for consultation in July 2009.

At each stage of the preparation of the Core Strategy policies have been tested against the agreed sustainability objectives and SA Framework to assess and evaluate the effects of the Core Strategy. As the Core Strategy evolved policies have been refined and ways of mitigating adverse impacts and maximising sustainability outcomes have been considered. A Sustainability appraisal report has been published at each stage of the plan making process culminating in the production of the final SA document which was submitted for examination alongside the Core Strategy.

## **3. How the environmental report has been taken into account.**

The SA scoping report and agreed set of sustainability objectives was independently reviewed by external consultants and also subject to consultation before adoption by the Council, with a wide range of bodies including English Nature, the Countryside Agency (bodies now combined as Natural England), The High Weald and South Downs AONB bodies, Environment Agency, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as English Heritage), East Sussex Country Council, the Highways Agency, Wealden Town and Parish Councils and the Local Strategic Partnership as well as the then Government Office for the South East (GOSE).

The Issues and Options document consulted upon in 2007 identified key spatial issues for the strategy, the options for addressing these and both sustainability and environmental implications. The document highlighted the principal sustainability implications associated with the broad range of matters being considered.

The SA of the council's Spatial Development Options was undertaken in 2009 and published for consultation in July 2009. The SA of alternatives for broad locations, spatial distribution, affordable housing and the economic strategy as well as the SA of the proposed rural settlement hierarchy was carried out between January and May 2010. Following further refinement and consideration of the evolving strategy the final amendments to the Development Document and Sustainability Appraisal were carried out between September and December 2010. This SA report was published alongside the Proposed Submission Core Strategy in February 2011 under (then) Regulation 27 and representations were invited on both the SA and Core Strategy. Following publication of the SA and Proposed Submission Core Strategy the comments received, including those from environmental bodies such as Natural England, were included as part of the package of submission documents. Further minor points of clarification were added to the strategy after the Regulation 27 publication to support the SA report that was then submitted alongside the Core Strategy for examination in August 2011.

#### **4. How opinions expressed through consultation have been taken into account.**

The SEA Directive requires responses to the consultation to be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme and before its submission to a legislative procedure or adoption. As set out at section three above the Council undertook independent validation of its scoping report and widespread consultation on this and an agreed set of sustainability objectives. Comments received from these bodies were used to help shape and further refine the framework used for the purposes of Sustainability Appraisal.

At all key stages of development the Core Strategy consultation documents, namely the development of the Spatial Development options, the Proposed Submission Core Strategy and the final Submission Core Strategy have been accompanied by both SA and Habitats Regulations (HRA) reports. Hard copies of all documents have been made available at the Councils offices and at a number of deposit points throughout the District, including local libraries and a number of Town and Parish Council offices. All relevant documents were made available and free to download on the council's website. Throughout the SA process there have been opportunities for public and stakeholder involvement and comment including through local drop in sessions and exhibitions of the emerging work.

Detailed reports on the responses received to these consultations together with recommendations for amendments or changes to the Core Strategy and SA work have been prepared for consideration by the relevant committees and sub committees of the council. All of these reports and meetings have been in the public domain and published on the Councils website together with copies of relevant minutes. Comments received during this process have ranged from general comments on the SA and strategy itself to more detailed comments on specific issues or areas of concern. All have been reported and considered in detail and used to inform development of the Core Strategy's strategic planning objectives, policies and proposals.

## **5. Reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted.**

The use of SA in developing the Strategy has enabled the Council to test and consult upon how well we are meeting our agreed sustainability objectives through the spatial strategy that has been developed. This testing through use of SA and through widespread consultation has resulted in an appropriate response to the key planning issues identified for the District. At the submission stage it was considered by the Council that the document represented an appropriate response to these issues when tested (again through the SA process) against a range of reasonable alternatives. The Strategy and supporting SA work confirmed that the document was in general conformity with the regional Strategy (the South east Plan) and had also had regard to the Wealden Sustainable Community Strategy produced through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and which had set out a number of guiding principles for consideration and implementation through the Core Strategy.

In developing the Core Strategy Local Plan it was important to consider a wide range of often competing aspirations and needs, housing (including affordable housing) needs and employment needs, Town masterplans, village and Parish Plans, Flood risk, climate change, environmental constraints as well as the broader requirements of the regional strategy. Through the SA reports produced in 2009 on the Spatial Development Options, and also through the SA of broad locations, spatial distribution, affordable housing, economic strategy as well as settlement hierarchy we were able to describe and assess these matters in greater detail to show how any particular option fared when assessed against another. The Core Strategy Local Plan that was finally submitted for examination has been informed by careful and continued assessment of the environmental and other effects of the spatial options considered – alongside reasonable alternatives.

In evaluating, rejecting and selecting particular options and ideas the council has considered the social, economic and environmental implications of its chosen plan and of these alternatives. Through the SA process the Core Strategy was found to perform well generally when assessed against the outcomes of the SA process and the Council's agreed set of sustainability objectives. In the final report received from the independently appointed Inspector he concluded that the Core Strategy Local plan is, subject to certain modifications "sound" and meets all legislative and procedural requirements. Wealden District Council and the South Downs National Park Authority have incorporated all of the Inspectors proposed modifications into the adopted Core Strategy Local Plan.

## **6. Measures to be taken to monitor the significant effects of the Plan.**

Having predicted and evaluated the significant effects arising from the Core Strategy the Council has produced and published a monitoring and implementation framework. This has been developed alongside and draws upon the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Housing Implementation Strategy and Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy. It was prepared for submission and focusses upon the strategic issues and activities required to deliver the Core Strategy. The council will also use its published Annual Monitoring Report and associated reporting process to identify the need to review any elements of the Core Strategy where monitoring has identified a sustained failure to meet agreed targets set or which may be necessary to meet changes in national policy. The AMR will be the principal mechanism for assessing the successful delivery, performance and effect of policies within the Core Strategy.

## **7. Conclusion.**

The early integration of the Sustainability Appraisal process in the development of the Core Strategy Local Plan, as adopted, illustrates how the plan has developed with sustainable development objectives at its core. The Core Strategy will contribute significantly to the delivery of sustainable development throughout the District and has been adopted, following independent examination, to ensure that it is a sound, effective, justified and deliverable strategy when assessed against the reasonable alternatives considered.

For further information regarding the Sustainability Appraisal process and to view documents in relation to the Core Strategy Local Plan please visit our website, [www.wealden.gov.uk](http://www.wealden.gov.uk).

