



Woking Local Development Documents

Core Strategy Publication Document

Executive Summary - Sustainability Appraisal Report

July 2011

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Sustainability Appraisal Report (SA) assesses the environmental, economic and social implications of the policies of the Core Strategy Publication Document for Woking Borough. It enables an objective assessment of each policy or proposal and the contribution it makes towards sustainable development of the Borough. It also enables weaknesses in the Core Strategy Publication Document to be identified and appropriate mitigation measures introduced to make them as sustainable as it can possibly be.
- 1.2 The SA Report is a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The Report also encompasses the requirements of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive).
- 1.3 The SA has been carried out as an integral part of the Core Strategy process and it will form an important evidence base to demonstrate that sustainable development is at the heart of the Core Strategy and has influenced key decisions at each stage of its process.
- 1.4 A Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening has been carried out as a separate document to complement the SA. A copy can be obtained on request from the Planning Policy Team and it is also on the Council's website (www.woking.gov.uk).

2.0 The Sustainability Appraisal Framework

- 2.1 The policies of the Core Strategy Publication Document were assessed against the objectives of the SA Framework. The SA Framework has been used to provide a consistent basis for describing, analysing and comparing the sustainability effects of the objectives, options, various policies and proposals of the Core Strategy Publication Document. The SA Framework is objective-led and hence includes a set of objectives to be achieved by the various elements of the Framework.

Table 1 is the SA Framework and the objectives that it seeks to achieve.

Table 1

1.	to provide sufficient housing to meet the needs of sections of the community in a sustainable manner
2.	to improve the health and wellbeing of the community
3.	to reduce the risk of flooding;
4.	to create and maintain safer and more secure communities
5.	to encourage opportunities for decision making and information for all
6.	to create and sustain vibrant communities
7.	to make best use of previously developed land and buildings
8.	to ensure that air quality continues to be improved;
9.	to conserve and enhance biodiversity
10.	to protect/enhance the natural, archaeological, historical environment and cultural assets and landscape;
11.	to maintain agricultural soil quality
12.	to reduce the causes of climate change and prepare for its impact
13.	to reduce the impact of consumption of resources by using sustainably

	produced and local products
14.	to reduce waste generation and disposal and achieve sustainable management of waste
15.	to maintain and improve the water quality and achieve sustainable water resources management
16.	to increase energy efficiency and energy generated from renewable sources
17.	maintain high levels of employment, encourage high quality low impact development and education for all
18.	to provide a range of commercial development opportunities to meet the needs of the economy and support and enhance the economies of town and local centres
19.	to minimise the adverse impacts of emissions from transport;
20.	to improve public transport and use. Reduce congestion by providing jobs/services close to where people live or where they can access them by public transport.

3.0 Key conclusions of the SA (this is grouped under appraisals of objectives, appraisal of options and Appraisal of policies)

3.1 Appraisal of objectives

3.1.1 The Council has been concerned to ensure that the objectives of the Core Strategy have direct bearing on the issues and challenges that will be facing the community during the period of the Core Strategy. The extent to which the objectives assist in meeting the overall goal of sustainable development is fundamental to the performance of the Core Strategy.

3.1.2 The appraisal revealed that majority of the objectives makes significant contribution towards achieving sustainable development in the Borough and consequently, towards delivering the vision for the Core Strategy. There is only one instance where conflict exists between an objective and an element of the SA Framework. The need to protect the purpose of the Green Belt is an important objective of the Core Strategy. However, this could severely restrict the ability of the Council to identify sufficient sites to deliver its development needs. It is suggested that if a Green Belt site is to be released for development, the Council will have to demonstrate that it will not undermine the overall purpose and integrity of the Green Belt.

3.1.3 Many of the objectives have neutral impacts on the objectives of the SA Framework and this is worth noting too.

3.1.4 Although not a requirement of the EU Directive or the process for carrying out an SA, an objective compatibility appraisal has also carried out. A key reason for doing this is to ensure that no single objective is substantially undermined or compromised in order to achieve another objective. In majority of case, the objectives are mutually supportive of each other and complement each other to deliver the overall vision of the Core Strategy. Based on this assessment, there is no evidence that the pursuit to achieve one objective will undermine any of the other if appropriate mitigation measures could be secured.

3.1.5 There are a few instances where conflict exists between the objectives. These are mainly related to the objective of concentrating development at the main urban centres where key facilities and service are available and the potential implications on air quality. This will mainly arise from increased traffic. There is

no doubt that the main urban centres are the most sustainable locations for development. However, such an approach to development has its implication that has to be addressed. The need to promote public transport, walking and cycling would be critical if development is to be concentrated at the main urban centres. Also, the manner in which major employers are required to manage the travel needs of their staff will be a key contributory factor to addressing this conflict.

3.2 Appraisal of alternative options

3.2.1 Appraisal of alternative options is an integral and an important task of the Core Strategy process and the SA process. The policies of the Core Strategy must be justifiable. In particular, it should be the most appropriate strategy when considered against all reasonable alternatives. The assessment of these options through the SA process ensures that this is done in a consistent manner. It also ensures that the preferred options for the Core Strategy are those that deliver the most sustainable development for the community.

3.2.2 The Issues and Options document identifies various options for addressing the key issues facing the Borough. These were a subject of an extensive public consultation exercise. The options were refined, taking into account comments that were received during the consultation period. The Corporate Policy Team led on the appraisal of the options to ensure a high degree of objectivity. The Planning Policy Team recognises the importance of ensuring that the options are objectively appraised. The preferred options forms the foundation blocks of the policies of the Core Strategy and it is important that they are subject to appropriate scrutiny. Details of the appraisal of options are a separate background document. A copy of this can be obtained from the Planning Policy Team on request. It needs to be emphasised that whilst many of the issues have distinct options to appraise, there are a number of them where for clearly stated reasons no distinct options were identified. In these instances, specific preferred approaches were assessed.

3.2.3 The appraisal of options was carried out with the view to gauge their impacts on the SA Framework. The outcome is a set of preferred options. A summary of the preferred options are listed below in no particular priority order:

- Most new development to be concentrated in urban areas with a relative small percentage of the housing to be provided in the form of urban extension to meet the need for family homes;
- Green Belt releases should be allowed to meet development needs;
- Town Centre boundary should be revised inwards;
- Focus future office development within the town centre and encourage redevelopment of outmoded and outdated town centre office space to cater for future needs. Encourage redevelopment of outmoded and outdated office space in industrial estates.
- Implement revisions to the shopping area boundary;
- Major remodelling of the town centre;
- Revise the hierarchy of centres;
- Redevelopment to be allowed at West Byfleet District Centre;
- Modest growth to be allowed in local centres;
- Introduce Community Infrastructure Levy;
- New development should be focused in areas that are most accessible by public transport;
- An improved interchange should be developed in/near Woking Town Centre;

- New development should provide travel plans setting out how additional journeys will be managed;
- Major development should be sought in and around Woking Railway Station;
- New development should provide cycle parking;
- Developer contributions should be sought towards cycle improvements;
- Improve cycle and pedestrian routes through design of new development.
- A housing target of 292 new dwellings per year should be adopted for the Core Strategy

4.0 Sustainability Appraisal of the policies of the Draft Core Strategy

- 4.1 The Core Strategy follows a distinct thread that links its component parts. It has a clear vision that sets out what the Borough would look like by 2027 and a set of objectives that links the overall vision to the detailed policies. It also has a set of policies to deliver the objectives and a clear path for its implementation. They collectively provide a consistent and coherent strategy to address the challenges facing the Borough until 2027. The Core Strategy includes 24 policies.
- 4.2 The SA has been carried out as an integral part of the Core Strategy process with an in-built mechanism for informing the development and refinement of the policies.
- 4.3 Most of the policies when implemented will have positive impacts on sustainable development. For example, the provision and distribution of housing will have significant impacts upon the well being of the community. Similarly, sustainable economic development will ensure and enhance a vibrant local community. However, this appraisal has also revealed that there are some policies that conflicts with the objectives of the SA Framework. These include:
- The provision and concentration of housing development at the main urban centres and its impacts on air quality, particularly impacts from increased traffic. This can be mitigated by promoting public transport, walking and cycling;
 - The provision of housing and employment development and their impacts on energy consumption. High standards of sustainable construction will need to be enforced and where relevant development should be made to connect to energy efficient sources.
 - Impact of the provision of family homes on the reuse of previously developed land. The provision of family homes might not be suitable in high density flatted accommodation at the main urban centres. Urban extensions might be suitable alternative.
 - The preservation of the Green Belt and the restriction it puts on land for development. Any release of Green Belt land for development should ensure that it does not undermine the purpose of the Green Belt.
 - Policies to promote employment development show a conflict with the need to minimise air pollution. Travel Plans should be encouraged to manage the travel needs of employees.
 - Development has positive impacts. However, it could potentially increase the risk of flooding. The allocation of sites for development should be informed by the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.
- 4.4 The policies of the Core Strategy are carefully balanced to provide adequate mitigation measures to address potential conflicts. Most of the conflicts are either short or medium term and could be resolved in the long term by appropriate mitigation measures. For example, the Transport and Accessibility

policy of the Core Strategy seeks to promote public transport, walking, cycling and Travel Plans. There are also other specific measures that can be introduced at the planning application stage. This will depend on the merits of each individual application. These can collectively combine to overcome the air quality issues that are associated with the concentration of most new development at the main centres.

4.5 The performance of the policies of the Core Strategy will also be influenced by how well they are phrased with respect to their clarity and intent in their meaning. In this regard, the test would be having policies that are:

- Written in simple and user friendly language but at the same time meeting all its technical requirements.
- Clear on what it seeks to achieve.
- Concise and unambiguous.
- Strategic in nature and conform to all requirements.

5.0 Recommended Mitigation to inform the Core Strategy

- Development should be located at the main urban centres where facilities and services are readily available. However, care should be taken to ensure that impacts on air quality are addressed. Transport policy should emphasise the use of public transport, walking and cycling. Employers should be encouraged to prepare Travel Plans to manage the travel needs of their staff. Furthermore, development should be supported by adequate infrastructure to minimise the need to travel and distance travelled.
- Any release of Green Belt land for development should ensure that it does not undermine its overall purpose.
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment should be a central requirement as a matter of principle to guide the allocation of sites for development.
- Development impacts on sensitive sites should be adequately mitigated.
- There should be effective policies to manage the efficient use of energy and water and to minimise the impacts of development on climate change.
- Development, in particular, housing provision should be designed to meet the needs of all sections of the community when it is justified by evidence.

6.0 Linkages with other strategies of the Council

6.1 The Core Strategy is one of a number of Council strategies and documents that seek to achieve a similar goal of sustainable development. In this regard, the Core Strategy does not sit in isolation but should be looked at in the wider context of the Council's overall drive to create a sustainable community for Woking. The Core Strategy has strong links with many of these documents and a number of them are listed in the delivery sections of the Core Strategy because they are identified as delivery mechanisms for the Core Strategy. Others such as the Sustainable Community Strategy provide a context for the preparation of the Core Strategy. A list of the relevant ones includes:

- Sustainable Community Strategy
- Housing Strategy.
- Climate Change Strategy.
- Pitch and Play Strategy.
- Green Space Development Strategy.
- Cultural Strategy.
- Public Art Strategy.
- Town Centre Management Initiative.

7.0 Monitoring the effects of the Core Strategy

- 7.1 PPS12 emphasises that 'A Core Strategy must have clear arrangements for monitoring and reporting results to the public and civic leaders'. Each policy of the Core Strategy includes a section that sets out how it will be monitored and reviewed. The outcome of the monitoring will be reported in the Council's Annual Monitoring Report that will be prepared and submitted to the Secretary of State at the end of each year. It will also be made available to the public by publishing it on the website. The outcome of the monitoring will inform any future review of the Core Strategy and determine any necessary action that might be required to address any concerns.

8.0 Consultation

- 8.1 The SEA Directive and the Planning Act both recommends public involvement in the SA process. Furthermore, they expect the outcome of public consultation to be taken into account. It is also a requirement that designated consultation bodies in the UK are consulted at each relevant stage of the SA process. These bodies are:
- English Heritage.
 - Natural England.
 - Environment Agency
- 8.2 The Council has an adopted Statement of Community Involvement that sets out how it will consult the public on planning documents. All these requirements have been followed in preparing the SA Report.
- 8.3 There has been extensive internal consultation. The preparation of the SA has been a corporate effort with the Planning Policy Team coordinating it.
- 8.4 It is intended that the SA Report of the Core Strategy Publication Document will be published for full public consultation to give the public a final opportunity to input into the process.

9.0 Next Stages of the process

- 9.1 The SA Report will be published alongside the Core Strategy Publication Document for public consultation. This will be to allow the public the opportunity to comment on the SA Report and to highlight any new information that need to be taken into account. All comments will be analysed and used to inform further review of the SA Report. The document together with any representations that will be received will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination.
- 9.2 When the Core Strategy is adopted, all statutory consultees and the public will be informed about how the SA has influenced the policies of the Core Strategy. This will be set out in the form of a report that will be in the public domain.

10.0 Conclusion

- 10.1 The SA Report is fundamental to the preparation of the Core Strategy. The Council has a statutory duty to prepare an SA of the Core Strategy. This SA has been prepared to meet the requirements of the EU Directive and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. It addresses all the key stages and tasks in the Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Framework (ODPM, November 2005). The SA has been prepared as an integral part of the Core Strategy process and its outcomes has helped define and refine the policies of the Core Strategy. The preferred options that formed the basis of the policies of the Core Strategy were

assessed using the SA Framework. The Council is satisfied that the appraisal achieves its central goal of striking a good balance between the environmental, economic and social implications of the Core Strategy.

- 10.2 The outcome of the SA has demonstrated that the Core Strategy will make a positive contribution towards achieving sustainable development in the Borough. Where there are conflicts, appropriate mitigations measures are suggested, which are taken into account in developing the policies of the Core Strategy.
- 10.3 Overall, the implementation of the Core Strategy will help create a sustainable community for Woking Borough.