

North West Leicestershire Local Plan

Sustainability Appraisal

*Sustainability
Statement*

October 2017

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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Sustainability appraisal (SA) is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of a draft plan, and reasonable alternatives; with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising the positives before the Plan is finalised.
- 1.1.2 This document is the Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating the Strategic Environmental Assessment) Statement to accompany the adoption of the North West Leicestershire Local Plan. The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Statement describes the process, how the findings of the SA were taken into account and informed the development of the Local Plan, and the monitoring indicators that will be applied to check the accuracy of predicted effects and to monitor progress against sustainability objectives.
- 1.1.3 A parallel process of SA was undertaken alongside plan-making. AECOM (formerly URS) was commissioned to support North West Leicestershire in undertaking the SA process.
- 1.1.4 It is a requirement that SA involves a series of procedural steps. The final step in the process involves preparing a 'statement' at the time of plan adoption.
- 1.1.5 The aim of the SA Statement (i.e. this document) is to present –
1. The 'story' of plan-making / SA up to the point of adoption
Specifically, the Regulations¹ explain that there is a need to: “summaris[e] how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental report... the opinions expressed... and the results of consultations... have been taken into account... and the reasons for choosing the plan... as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with.”
 2. Measures decided concerning the monitoring of plan implementation.
- 1.1.6 This Statement considers (1) and (2) in turn.

2 *The Plan making ‘story’*

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 This section gives consideration to each of the main plan-making / SA steps in turn. It is typical for the plan-making / SA process to involve numerous iterations of the draft Plan, and this was the case with the North West Leicestershire Local Plan.

2.2 Key plan making milestones

- 2.2.1 This section briefly outlines the key milestones throughout the plan-making process and the key elements of the Plan that were developed during each stage.

June – September 2014: Local Plan Consultation: My say (Regulation 18)

- 2.2.2 Work commenced on the Local Plan when the Council sought the public’s views on the scope and broad content of the new Local Plan. It provided an opportunity to seek views at an early stage in the process, and to seek views from a wide range of interests, to inform the Council’s preparation of the Local Plan.

November 2014 – January 2015: Draft Limits to Development and Town Centre Boundary Consultation (Regulation 18)

- 2.2.3 One of the first stages in the preparation of the Local Plan was to review the Limits to Development boundaries of the districts sustainable settlements and the Town Centre boundaries.

September 2015 – November 2015: Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18 Consultation)

- 2.2.4 The Council undertook public consultation upon the first draft Local Plan.
- 2.2.5 The Plan contained a vision and objectives, and a range of supporting policies. The main areas covered were as follows:
- The spatial strategy
 - Design
 - Housing
 - Economy
 - Infrastructure and services
 - Environment
 - Heritage
 - Climate change

July 2016 – August 2016: Publication Local Plan Consultation (Regulation 19)

- 2.2.6 At this stage, the Plan that had been prepared had responded to feedback from a number of ‘Regulation 18 consultations’ and iterations of the sustainability appraisal. Though it was not the ‘final’ Plan, it was the version that the Council intended to submit to the Secretary of State for Examination. Rather than seeking comments on the content and direction of the Plan, the focus of this consultation was on whether the Plan had been prepared in accordance with legal requirements and met the tests of soundness.

January and March 2017: Examination in Public

- 2.2.7 The Inspector conducted a series of public hearings as part of the examination process. The main hearings opened on Thursday 5 January 2017 and ran until 16 January 2017. A further two day hearing was held on 21-22 March to allow for a discussion on the implications of the new Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) and a series of proposed main modifications, which had all been published after the January hearings.

June – July 2017: Consultation on Modifications

- 2.2.8 In response to new evidence, and representations made at Hearings, the Independent Planning Inspector appointed on behalf of the Secretary of State (Mr Brian Sims BSc CEng MICE MRTPI) requested that the Council undertake consultation on a number of Main Modifications (reference - EX/101). The Council held consultation on the Modifications between June 12th and 24th July, 2017.

October 2017: Inspectors Report

- 2.2.9 Following agreement upon the Modifications (which involved some further minor changes to detailed policy wording by the Inspector), the Inspector issued a final report on the North West Leicestershire Local Plan on the 13th October 2017. The Inspector concluded that the Plan was ‘sound’ provided that Modifications were made as recommended.

2.3 SA Preparation alongside the Local Plan

- 2.3.1 This section outlines the key outputs from the SA process and how they related to the preparation of the Local Plan.

Scoping – September 2014

- 2.3.2 The start of the SA process was to prepare and consult on a SA Scoping Report. A number of consultation bodies and other stakeholder bodies were consulted on the Scoping Report in September-October 2014, with the report being finalised in February 2015 to take account of feedback. The scope was updated again at subsequent stages of plan making, including the draft Plan Consultation in July 2015. All scoping updates were presented in interim or the Final SA Reports that were made available for consultation with the statutory consultation bodies as well as a wider range of stakeholders.

Interim SA Report – July 2015

2.3.3 The Interim SA Report in July 2015 accompanied the first draft Local Plan. The Interim report included an updated Scoping section, and assessed the impact of the following reasonable alternatives:

- Strategic approaches to :
 - Housing growth
 - Housing distribution
- Site allocations for housing and employment;
- Affordable housing

2.3.4 An appraisal of draft Plan policies was also undertaken with a series of mitigation and enhancement measures suggested.

SA Report - June 2016

2.3.5 The 2016 SA Report accompanied the Pre-submission version of the Local Plan that was subsequently submitted to government for independent examination. The SA Report appraised a range of alternative approaches to the delivery of the Local Plan strategy for the following topics (building upon the work presented in the interim SA Report):

- Strategic approaches to :
 - Housing growth
 - Housing distribution
- Site allocations and options in Ashby de la Zouch
- Site allocations and options in Coalville
- Site allocations and options for employment land
- Affordable housing

2.3.6 The SA Report also appraised the Local Plan ‘as a whole’, looking at individual policies, site allocations and the overall strategy to understand the sustainability effects and the potential for further mitigation and enhancement.

SA Report Update – December 2016

2.3.7 Following consultation on the SA Report, it was updated (before Examination hearings) to reflect feedback received. The updates were focused upon the following three elements; to take account of mineral consultation zones; to appraise site options in Measham; to confirm correct appraisal scores for sites A5 (Housing) and E17 (Employment).

SA Report Addendum – June 2017

2.3.8 An SA Addendum was prepared presenting an appraisal of the proposed Main Modifications as proposed to be published by the Council. This document presents an appraisal of each modification individually as well as the ‘the Plan as modified’, thereby updating the appraisal findings presented within the SA Report.

- 2.3.9 The Proposed Main Modifications did not serve to change the broad conclusions in the SA Report (that the Plan effects were broadly positive with no significant negative effects identified). However, the Plan was predicted to perform less well in respect of 'economy and employment'.
- 2.3.10 The SA Report Addendum was made available for consultation alongside the Main Modifications. Though the SA Addendum was referenced as evidence in responses to the Main Modifications, its content or approach was not challenged.
- 2.3.11 Though there were also a series of Minor Modifications, the changes were minor and did not alter the detail of any policies. It was therefore determined to be unnecessary to appraise the Minor Modifications in the SA.

SA Report Addendum (Update) – October 2017

- 2.3.12 The Inspector's final schedule of recommended Main Modifications was published as an appendix to his report in October 2017. Some amendments to the wording of MMs had been made following the previous iteration of modifications (which were subject to SA in June 2017). The changes were relatively minor, and did not lead to any significant changes to the SA findings. The SA addendum was updated in October 2017 to reflect these further minor changes.

3 How has the SA influenced decision making?

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Essentially, SA must feed into and inform plan-making in two ways:

1. Appraisal of alternatives and draft policies should inform preparation of the draft plan.
2. The SA Report, and consultation responses received during the Draft Plan / SA Report consultation, should inform plan finalisation.

3.1.2 This section briefly discusses the key elements of the SA process, and how the findings were fed into the Plan making process. There is a focus on explaining how sustainability considerations have been taken into account and influenced plan-making, including as a result of alternatives appraisal, site assessments, policy appraisal, and consultation on Plan / SA documents.

3.2 Influencing the spatial strategy

3.2.1 To inform the development of a preferred spatial strategy, several reasonable alternatives were established and appraised in the SA.

Housing growth

3.2.2 Three alternatives were established and appraised to understand the sustainability implications of different levels of growth.

- Rely upon commitments, completions and windfall development to meet objectively assessed housing needs.
- Allocate additional land to meet objectively assessed housing need
- Plan for higher levels of growth than the objectively assessed housing need.

The SA of these options demonstrated that the preferred approach (allocate additional land to meet the revised objectively assessed housing needs) was broadly the most well-balanced in terms of sustainability.

Housing distribution

3.2.3 Following the preferred growth strategy being agreed upon, the Council explored how the additional housing could be distributed. The SA helped to influence this process by aiding in the options identification and in the appraisal of each reasonable alternative.

3.2.4 The following reasonable alternatives were identified, which covered targeted development in one or two settlements, to more dispersed approaches.

- A. Focus on Coalville Urban Area
- B. Focus on Ashby-de-la Zouch
- C. Focus on the main towns

- D. Dispersal
- E. Focus on Coalville and Ashby-de-la Zouch

3.2.5 The SA findings showed merits for each approach (with the exception of D), and helped the Council (along with other evidence) to come to a decision upon the preferred strategy (a focus upon Ashby de-la-Zouch).

3.3 Influencing site allocations

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

- 3.3.1 Following the decision to focus growth in Ashby de-la-Zouch, it was considered necessary to identify sites for allocation. To help inform the choice of sites, a range of reasonable site options for housing (Eleven sites) were appraised in the SA.
- 3.3.2 A strict 'criteria based' appraisal methodology was applied to each site option to determine the sustainability implications.
- 3.3.3 The SA findings helped to influence the allocation or rejection of sites in Ashby.

Coalville

- 3.3.4 Although the preferred strategy (Alternative B) did not include development in Coalville; the Council had deemed it appropriate to consider how it should deal with the two outstanding housing allocations within the existing adopted Local Plan.
- 3.3.5 Four alternative site options were tested in the SA to help in the decision making process.

Employment sites

- 3.3.6 The Council identified a residual requirement of approximately 6 hectares to meet the (at the time) identified needs of 96 ha over the plan period. To help influence the allocation of appropriate land, the SA tested twenty reasonable site options.

3.4 Influencing policy content

- 3.4.1 Once draft policies had been written, these were appraised against the SA framework to identify potential positive and negative effects. At this stage, the SA also identified a series of mitigation and enhancement measures, which were then considered by the Council when finalising the policies. Table 16.1 Q in the SA Report sets out the issues identified in the SA, the recommendations made by AECOM and the Council's response. In some instances this led to a change to policy wording, whilst in others, the Council felt that issues would be dealt with adequately by the Plan.

3.5 Influencing the Main Modifications

- 3.5.1 Further sustainability appraisal was undertaken at this stage to understand the implications of the proposed Main Modifications. This involved a consideration of potential alternatives, though none were found to be reasonable. The Modifications were also subjected to appraisal both individually, and also considered 'as a whole'.

3.5.2 No mitigation or enhancement measures were identified throughout the appraisal process at this stage. This is largely due to the fact that the proposed Main Modifications in themselves have been made to enhance positive effects and to mitigate any negative effects.

4 Monitoring

4.1.1 There is a need to set out the monitoring measures that will be used to monitor the effects of the local plan, and whether these correlate to those identified in the SA Report. Monitoring also allows for unforeseen effects to be identified early, and to help understand why predicted positive or negative effects might not be occurring in reality.

4.1.2 The following table sets out the monitoring indicators against each of the SA themes presented in the SA Report. These indicators are unchanged from those identified in the final SA Report (EX/37).

Sustainability Theme	Monitoring Indicators
Housing	Annual number of housing completions and percentage of annual targets/projections. Annual number of affordable dwellings delivered and percentage of target.
Health and wellbeing	Net change in the amount of open space. Financial contributions to open space provision. Net loss / gain in community facilities. Health profile monitoring
Communities, towns and village centres	Vacancy rates in town and village centres.
Economy and employment	Employment land lost to other uses. Number of visitors / day trips to visitor attractions. Commuting trends.
Travel	Financial contributions towards transport infrastructure improvements. Ratio of workplace- based employment to residence based employment. Proportion of new housing developments within 400m of a bus stop/rail station, primary school. Peak time congestion and traffic count monitoring. Public transport use monitoring.
Climate change: low carbon energy	Renewable energy capacity installed by type. Domestic emissions per capita (tonnes).

Sustainability Theme	Monitoring Indicators
Climate change: Flooding	<p>Number of strategic flood risk assessments undertaken.</p> <p>Applications granted contrary to Environment Agency advice.</p> <p>Net change in surface water run-off rates.</p>
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	<p>Net loss / gain in priority habitats and local wildlife sites.</p> <p>Biodiversity enhancement secured through new development.</p> <p>Habitat Regulations Assessments undertaken.</p> <p>Development requiring compensation and % with appropriate schemes secured.</p>
Landscape and land	<p>Community perception of changes to their settlements.</p> <p>Landscape character assessments undertaken.</p> <p>Development permitted in the countryside (Ha)</p> <p>Financial contributions towards enhancements in the National Forest.</p> <p>Net loss of best and most versatile agricultural land.</p>
Built and historic environment	<p>Conservation Area Assessments – Changes in character compared to previous assessments.</p> <p>Change in the number and condition of heritage assets ‘at risk’.</p> <p>Community perception of changes to their settlements.</p> <p>Feedback on customer experiences at Ashby Castle.</p> <p>Planning conditions established to ensure that significant effects on the setting of Ashby Castle are minimised during construction and occupancy of the development at Money Hill.</p>
Natural resources	<p>Cost of waste disposal per capita.</p> <p>Levels of recycling, composting and reuse.</p> <p>% of housing developments achieving water efficiency standards.</p>
Pollution	<p>Air quality monitoring.</p> <p>Achievement of water framework directive targets.</p>

5 Conclusions

- 5.1.1 This SA Adoption Statement demonstrates that a robust SA process has been progressed alongside plan-making, with appraisal findings feeding-in to decision-making at numerous junctures. The SA Report demonstrably complies with the SEA Regulations, and was found to be adequate by the Inspector.
- 5.1.2 Several reports having been published for consultation alongside Local Plan documents in order to help ensure informed and effective consultation. Most importantly, the SA Report was published alongside the 'Publication' version of the plan in 2016, presenting all of the information required by Regulations. The report served to inform representations on the plan, and then served to inform plan finalisation.
- 5.1.3 Updates to the SA Report and the preparation of SA Addenda were also undertaken in response to proposed changes / Modifications to the Plan. This did not lead to a material change to the findings of the SA Report.
- 5.1.4 The Inspectors Final Report (October, 2017) states that despite challenges raised through consultation; an adequate SA process has been undertaken which meets legal requirements.
- 5.1.5 In particular, the likely environmental effects of the policies and allocations of the Plan, and latterly the recommended MMs, were evaluated accordingly, with no finding of any unmitigated impact.

