

Guidance Note: Sustainability Appraisals of Neighbourhood Plans

This guidance note has been prepared to assist Town and Parish Councils with undertaking Sustainability Appraisals of Neighbourhood Plans.

Process for undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal

The process of undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal is set out below.

Scoping

STAGE A: This stage sets the context of the assessment by identifying the baseline data and establishing the scope of the assessment.

1. Identification of relevant plans, policies and programmes. Any existing requirements that need to be taken into account or incorporated into the plan are identified.
2. Review of baseline information. Data about environmental, social and economic issues is collected, together with an indication as to how this may change in the future without the plan or programme under preparation.
3. Identification of Sustainability Issues. The review of plans and policies, together with the baseline information are used to identify the key sustainability issues which could impact the plan.
4. Development of the SA/SEA Framework. The assessment criteria used to assess the impact of the plan or programme.
5. Identification of initial plan options. Taking into account best practice initial identification of options and reasonable alternatives undertaken.
6. Consultation. On the scope and alternatives for assessment it is necessary to consult statutory consultees, that is Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency.

Assessment

STAGE B: This stage involves the assessment of the any likely significant effects of the plan policies (and any reasonable alternatives) on the key sustainability issues identified.

1. Finalisation of the Plan options and alternatives for testing
2. Testing the Plan Objectives against the SA/SEA Framework. The Plan Objectives are tested to ensure compliance sustainability principles
3. Evaluation of plan options and alternatives. The SA/SEA Framework is used to assess various plan options by identifying the potential sustainability effects of the plan and assist in the refinement of the policies.
4. Predicting and evaluating the effects of the plan. To predict the significant effects of the plan and assist in the refinement of the policies.

5. Consideration of ways to mitigate adverse effects and maximise beneficial effects. To ensure that all potential mitigation measures and measures for maximising beneficial effects that are identified.

6. Proposing measures to monitor the significant effects of implementing the Plan: To detail the means by which the sustainability performance of the plan can be assessed and monitored.

This assessment is used to feed into the development of a plan or programme to help ensure the most sustainable option is selected. The SA/SEA framework is also used to assess the sustainability implications of the draft policies and the results used to inform policy development.

Reporting

STAGE C: Preparation of the SA/SEA Report

1. The findings of the assessment together with how it has influenced the development of the plan are identified and set out in a draft environmental report together with the recommendations on how to prevent, reduce, or offset any significant negative impacts arising from the plan.

STAGE D: Consultation – seek representations from consultation bodies and the general public

1. This is an ongoing process. Consultation of the draft SA/SEA Report is undertaken into account and used to influence further iterations of the sustainability appraisal process.

Adoption and Monitoring

STAGE E: Monitoring

1. Following adoption of the Plan, the significant effects of implementing the plan are measured and any adverse effects are responded to. The results are fed into the future plans and sustainability appraisals.

Structure of the Scoping Report

When putting together an SA scoping report the following structure should be adopted:

1. Introduction and background
2. Methodology
3. Relationship to other relevant plans, programmes and strategies.
 - Here it will be necessary to summarise the relevant key aims and objectives of relevant documents which may impact on future development in neighbourhood planning area.
 - These should be categorised against the objectives of economic, social and environmental sustainability as promoted by the National Planning Policy Framework to demonstrate the plans and programmes reviewed are compatible with the aims of sustainable development.
 - Relevant documents to consider include DDC Core Strategy; DDC Land Allocations Local Plan; DDC Evidence Base <https://www.dover.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-Policy-and-Regeneration/Evidence-Base/Home.aspx>
4. Parish Portrait
 - Establish a social, economic and environmental baseline for the neighbourhood planning area based on local evidence. Relevant sources of information include:

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadHome.do?m=0&s=1494236151311&enc=1&nsjs=true&nsck=false&nssvg=false&nswid=1920>; Clinical Commissioning Group health profile of the District; Indices of Multiple Deprivation; DDC State of the District Report; KCC public rights of way maps; Strategic Housing Market Assessment; Economic Development Needs Assessment; Authority Monitoring Report; DDC Green Infrastructure Strategy; Landscape Character Areas; Heritage Strategy; Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (see <https://www.dover.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-Policy-and-Regeneration/Evidence-Base/Home.aspx> for studies).

5. Identify key issues and problems for the neighbourhood planning area
 - Stage A3 of the SEA/SA process requires the economic, social and environmental issues and problems within the plan area to be identified (based on a review of existing evidence) in order that the plan or programme can address them. This could comprise a simple table like the one illustrated below:

Indicator	Key Issues	Reference
Economic		
Social		
Environmental		

6. Sustainability Framework
 - To appraise the Draft Neighbourhood Plan it is necessary to develop a framework against which to appraise the policies in the NP. The framework needs to address all aspects of sustainable development i.e social, environmental and economic issues, although there may be overlaps.
 - If deemed appropriate, the SA Framework for the DDC Core Strategy could be applied to the NP, however, please be aware that this is now 7 years old and will be updated as part of the Local Plan review process.
7. Identification of initial plan options.
 - The vision and objectives of the NP will need to be appraised against the three themes of sustainability identified above to assess whether they are likely to have a positive or negative effect.
 - As part of this exercise it will also be necessary to identify and appraise reasonable alternatives.
8. Consultation.
 - It will be necessary to consult on the scope of the SA and alternatives for assessment. Here it is necessary to consult statutory consultees, that is Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency.

Examples of other Sustainability Appraisals of Neighbourhood Plans

<http://www.herstmonceuxparish.org.uk/Neighbourhood%20docs/Scoping%20Report%20final%20July%202016.pdf>

<https://www.bassetlaw.gov.uk/media/377352/Sturton-Ward-SA-Scoping-Report.pdf>

https://www.south-norfolk.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Easton_Neighbourhood_Plan_Sustainability_Appraisal_Scoping_Report_October_2016_%20v2.pdf

