

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL ADOPTION STATEMENT

Introduction

This Statement provides a summary of the sustainability assessment of the Core Strategy. It has been prepared in accordance with Regulation 36 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 and with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (16)(3) and (4). This requires the local authority to set out:

- how sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Core Strategy;
- how the sustainability assessment has been taken into account;
- how the results of any consultations 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.

Following Examination hearings in April 2011, the National Park Authority's Core Strategy Development Plan Document was found sound by an independent Planning Inspector, subject to a number of changes. The Core Strategy was adopted by the Authority on 7 October 2011.

How sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Core Strategy

The Core Strategy is supported by a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), to ensure that the strategy accords with the principles of sustainable development, and an Appropriate Assessment (AA) to demonstrate that the policies in the plan do not harm European designated sites for nature conservation. Assessments were undertaken at all key stages of preparation, helping to influence the selection of options and confirming preferred approaches for the plan. A final SA report accompanied submission of the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State before Examination.

The SA for the Core Strategy sets out baseline information and identifies the main environmental and sustainability issues affecting the National Park. It identifies key higher-level plans and programmes which influenced the Core Strategy. 14 key sustainability objectives were developed against which the objectives of the plan and the policy options were assessed. The SA evaluated the likely implications of the Core Strategy for sustainable development and considered reasonable alternatives.

In the National Park it is essential to make sure that all policy development (including the use of tools such as SA/SEA appraisal) focuses on and prioritises the purposes of National Parks and the duties of National Park Authorities set out in the Environment Act 1995, since they guide strategic policy in the National Park Management Plan (NPMP) and the Local Development Framework (LDF). This approach has been supported consistently by national planning policy and is recognised in the Inspector's Report.

How the sustainability assessment has been taken into account

SA Reports have played a key part in the development of the Core Strategy by helping to identify and refine alternatives throughout its preparation.

The first draft Scoping Report in 2005 covered both the LDF and the NPMP, and was published for consultation with statutory consultees, various stakeholders and the public. Following this consultation process the Sustainability Objectives were considerably refined, and initial appraisal work was undertaken on some early options. In 2007 the Core Strategy and Management Plan processes were separated, and a review and verification of the 2005 report was undertaken purely for the LDF. This identified problems with the definition of key issues and some key gaps in the baseline data. A revised Core Strategy Scoping Report was produced and issued for consultation in 2008.

A number of documents have been offered for consultation during the preparation of the Core Strategy. In 2005 the Authority produced 'Help Shape the Future', a consultation document which explored shared issues facing the National Park and potential options for addressing them, to inform the LDF and NPMP. Subsequently an initial set of Issues and Options were produced in 2007, specifically for the LDF. Further Issues and Options were then developed in 2008, leading to a new consultation on Refined Options in 2009. SA review and assessment was undertaken at each stage to inform their development and assist consultation. A full SA assessment accompanied the 2009 document, using the SA framework developed through the scoping phase.

Following this a Preferred Approaches version of the Core Strategy was published in October 2009, again accompanied by full SA assessment. Findings at the Refined Options stage showed that a significant number of uncertainties still remained with regard to likely sustainability effects. The appraisal process at the latter stage was far more detailed than before, considering significant positive and negative effects, and also making an assessment of possible cumulative effects. The SA findings from this assessment of Preferred Approaches contributed to the development of the Submission version of the Core Strategy, and this had the effect of removing much of the earlier uncertainty.

Many points made during the SA process have related to style and clarity in the way that options and policies are presented in order to remove uncertainties over the kind of impact that might result from an emerging policy. Some negative matters identified for particular policy areas were dealt with by coverage in other parts of the plan.

How the results of any consultations have been taken into account

At each stage, SA reports and assessments were consulted on at the same time as the Core Strategy documents. In line with best practice and wishing to be as inclusive as possible, a wide range of consultees including the designated consultation bodies (the Environment Agency, English Heritage, and Natural England or its predecessors) were consulted.

- The Scoping Report (2008) was published for a six week consultation period (exceeding the requirement for a five week consultation in the SEA Regulations). Responses to the consultation are shown in Appendix A of the Submission SA Report.

- In the spirit of the SA process as iterative, ongoing and cyclic, a series of SA assessments were undertaken through the development and refinement of Issues and Options from 2005 to 2008. These iterations were made available to consultees to help inform their comments and contribute to the plan. A workshop was held with key stakeholders to present the work being done on the SA and to discuss the emerging findings.
- Refined Options and accompanying SA underwent a 12-week public consultation.
- Preferred Approaches and accompanying SA were offered for consultation for a 6-week period.

The findings of consultations at each stage have been fed back into the plan making process, as described in the Statement of Consultation which was published on Submission (Appendix 9 in the Statement of Consultation shows the development of policy through Refined Options – Preferred Options – Submission).

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

Reasonable alternative approaches to address the identified issues were considered and refined with the help of SA appraisal. Refined Options produced in November 2008, and Preferred Approaches in 2009, were both accompanied by full SA assessment. Findings at the former stage showed that a significant number of uncertainties still remained with regard to likely sustainability effects. The appraisal process at the latter stage was far more detailed than before, considering significant positive and negative effects, and also making an assessment of possible cumulative effects.

The Preferred Approaches were chosen based on consultation responses, findings from SA analysis and other evidence. SA appraisal suggested that the selected options were likely to have a positive effect on the SA objectives and SEA Directive topics. Relatively few significant adverse effects were expected, and these were likely to be relatively small scale, localised, and the result of policies that deliver significant benefits to other SA objectives. The SA findings from this assessment contributed to the development of policies taken forward into the Submission version of the Core Strategy.

Detailed information on the assessments is included in the Submission SA Report.

The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan

The Core Strategy will be monitored to assess data and trends, and to consider whether the approach continues to be the best one and that the policies are relevant and will be effective in achieving outcomes. The Submission SA Report suggested indicators relevant to each SA objective. The Core Strategy Delivery Plan has developed indicators for monitoring the success of Core Strategy policies in comparison with the estimated 'direction of travel'. Information will be provided in Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) produced by the National Park Authority.