



South Somerset District Council



Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Report Non-Technical Summary June 2012

Introduction

This is the Non-Technical Summary of the Sustainability Appraisal Report, incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment, for the 'Proposed Submission' South Somerset Local Plan.

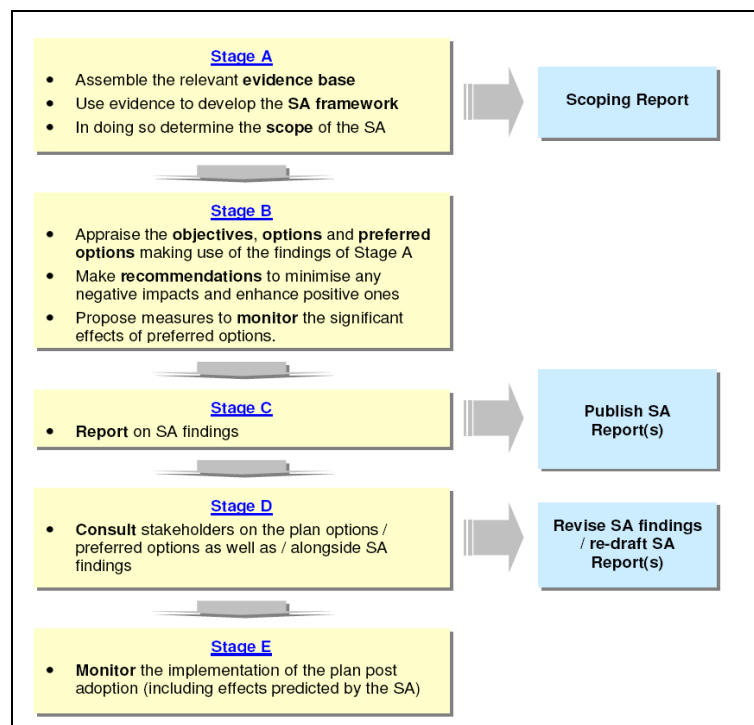
Sustainability Appraisal is used to assess key documents such as the Local Plan against a set of sustainability objectives. A key purpose of the assessment is to evaluate the likely significant social, economic and environmental effects of implementing the plan, along with any 'reasonable alternatives'.

The South Somerset Local Plan sets out the broad scale, type and location of future development in South Somerset. It also incorporates development management policies, which will be used when considering planning applications across the District.

How has Sustainability Appraisal been undertaken?

Government guidance on undertaking Sustainability Appraisal advocates a five-stage approach (see below) and this was followed for the South Somerset Sustainability Appraisal.

Figure 1: Simplified Sustainability Appraisal Methodology



Stage A - The Scoping Report

A Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report was prepared and published for consultation with stakeholders in April 2009. This set out the intended scope and level of detail to be included in the Sustainability Appraisal Report and included baseline information, key sustainability issues for the District and relationship with other key plans and programmes.

The South Somerset Local Plan is influenced in various ways by other plans and programmes that have been produced at an international, national and local level.

Appendix 1 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report sets out the plans and programmes that have been reviewed in developing the Sustainability Appraisal.

A huge range of information was gathered to establish a baseline and key sustainability issues for the Sustainability Appraisal. The sustainability baseline identifies the current social, economic and environmental state of South Somerset, and provides a basis for predicting and monitoring the effects of implementing the Local Plan. The key issues are summarised below, but these and the baseline are explained in greater detail in Section 4 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report:

Environmental

- Air quality is generally good, apart from at Yeovil, which is designated as an Air Quality Management Area.
- There are a range of important biodiversity areas, protected at a local, national and international level.
- There is a high quality historic environment.
- Flood risk is an issue for some parts of the District.
- Transport and travel patterns indicate a high level of car use that reflects the rural nature for much of the District, and the lack of public transport outside urban areas.
- Although CO2 emissions compare well with neighbouring areas, it is necessary to take measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Social

- Population projections indicate additional growth, particularly through elderly in-migrants to the District.
- In general, South Somerset is not deprived, but there are pockets of deprivation, particularly in the main urban areas.
- Crime levels are generally lower than regional and national figures.
- There are slightly higher levels of attainment at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE's than regional and national averages.
- More affordable housing is required to meet identified need.

Economic

- In general terms, the District is relatively prosperous with a growing economy, unemployment around half the national average, and a net increase in new businesses in recent years.
- The employment structure indicates a dependence on manufacturing sector.
- Wages are below national average.

Stage B - Developing alternatives and assessing effects

The Scoping Report was used to inform the Sustainability Appraisal Framework, which outlines the Sustainability Appraisal objectives and appraisal questions (see Figure 2: Sustainability Appraisal Framework, overleaf).

Figure 2: Sustainability Appraisal framework

Sustainability Appraisal Objective	Appraisal questions: will the policy / proposal / strategy help to...?
1. Improve access to essential services and facilities	...ensure high levels of accessibility to shops, schools, health/leisure facilities and other key services by walking, cycling, and public transport? ...reduce social exclusion?
2. Reduce poverty and social exclusion	...benefit particularly deprived areas?...encourage active involvement of local people in community activities? ...maximise opportunities for all members of society? ...maximise opportunities within the most deprived areas? ...reduce fuel poverty?
3. Provide sufficient housing to meet identified needs of the community	...increase the range, quality and affordability of housing for all social groups? ...reduce homelessness?
4. Improve health and well being	...improve access to high quality health facilities? ...reduce health inequalities? ...encourage healthy lifestyles through, for example, open space and green infrastructure provision?
5. Improve education and skills of the population	...improve qualifications and skills of young people and adults? ...promote life-long learning that is accessible to all? ...provide an increased supply of skilled workers to the economy?
6. Reduce crime and fear of crime	...reduce anti-social behaviour? ...reduce actual levels of crime? ...reduce the fear of crime?
7. Support a strong, diverse and vibrant local economy	...foster balanced economic growth? ...provide jobs for all with a diverse range of employment opportunities? ...ensure accessibility to work by walking, cycling and public transport? ...promote town and local centre vitality and viability? ...improve business development and enhance competitiveness? ...assist businesses in finding appropriate land and premises? ...promote sustainable tourism opportunities?
8. Reduce the effect of traffic on the environment	...reduce the need to travel? ...increase proportion of journeys made by non-car modes? ...reduce road traffic accidents? ...reduce the growth of congestion?
9. Protect and enhance the landscape and townscape	...protect and enhance the landscape and townscape and its local distinctiveness? ...reduce the amount of derelict, degraded and underused land? ...promote visual amenity? ...protect and enhance natural landscapes within the urban area, including recreational open space and green corridors?
10. Conserve and where appropriate enhance the historic environment	...conserve and enhance the cultural heritage, archaeological sites and remains, listed buildings?
11. Reduce contribution to climate change and vulnerability to its effects	...promote energy efficiency? ...encourage renewable energy? ...reduce carbon dioxide emissions? ...incorporate the principles of sustainable construction? ...make efficient use of water? ...consider the need to adapt to climate change?
12. Minimise pollution (including air, water, land, light, noise) and waste production	...improve and maintain air and water quality? ...minimise noise and light pollution, odour and vibration? ...minimise pollution of land and soil (including minimising loss of best and most versatile agricultural land)? ...reduce waste production and increase reuse, recycling and recovery of waste?
13. Manage and reduce the risk of flooding	...minimise the risk of flooding to people and property? ...promote the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS)?
14. Conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity	...protect and enhance wildlife habitats and sites of geological conservation interest? ...conserve and enhance species diversity, in particular avoiding harm to protected species? ...promote Green Infrastructure?

Sustainability Appraisal objectives provide a way in which the sustainability effects of the plan can be described, analysed and compared. Sustainability Appraisal has been undertaken as the South Somerset Local Plan has evolved, and formally recorded for each stage of the plan preparation process:

- Core Strategy Issues and Options (March 2008),
- Draft Core Strategy (incorporating preferred options) (October 2010), and
- 'Proposed Submission' Local Plan (June 2012).

Each policy and alternative option has been tested against the Sustainability Appraisal framework and the 'likely significant effects' of the plan assessed, using an indicative score, (outlined in Figure 3, below). Various effects have been considered, including secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects. These effects are identified in the 'commentary' column in the appraisal matrices set out in the Sustainability Appraisal Report Appendices.

Figure 3: Assessing the significance of effects - the scoring system

Score	Meaning	Symbol
Significant positive effect	The option / policy fully addresses the SA Objective and most of the appraisal questions, contributes significantly to the achievement of the SA Objective.	+ +
Positive effect	The option / policy broadly addresses the SA Objective but does not address the majority of the appraisal questions.	+
Neutral	The option / policy does not have any effect on the achievement of the SA Objective.	0
Negative effect	The option / policy detracts from the SA Objective or appraisal questions.	-
Significant negative effect	The option / policy detracts significantly from the achievement of the SA Objective and appraisal questions.	- -
Uncertain effect	There is an uncertain relationship between the option / policy and the SA Objective.	?

Stage C - Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report

The Sustainability Appraisal Report is a key output in the Sustainability Appraisal process. It sets out how Sustainability Appraisal has informed the Local Plan from 'Issues and Options' to the 'Proposed Submission' stage. The likely significant sustainability effects of the plan are highlighted, along with all 'reasonable alternatives' that have been considered in preparing the plan. The Sustainability Appraisal report also identifies the mitigation measures that have proposed to improve the sustainability of the plan.

The Sustainability Appraisal has been carried out by Officers in the District Council's Spatial Policy Team, with assistance from sustainability consultants from 'URS'.

Stage D - Consulting on the Sustainability Appraisal Report

The Sustainability Appraisal report must be available at the same time as the draft plan, and so is being published alongside the 'Proposed Submission' Local Plan. An 'interim' Sustainability Appraisal Report was also published at the 'Preferred Options' stage.

Stage E – Monitoring the significant effects of the Local Plan

The Sustainability Appraisal framework contains a number of indicators that will be used to monitor the significant effects of implementing the Local Plan – these indicators are set out in section 7 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report.

How has SA Influenced the South Somerset Local Plan to date?

Scale and Distribution of Development

The Sustainability Appraisal process has been instrumental in producing the Local Plan. Two key areas where Sustainability Appraisal has influenced the approach taken have been the scale and distribution of growth across the District.

The key Sustainability Appraisal findings of options considered for the scale of housing in South Somerset are summarised below:

Figure 4: Issues & Options - Scale of District-wide Housing Growth - Sustainability Appraisal findings

Policy	Sustainability Appraisal Objective and Score													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Levels of Development														
Option S1 (A) 13,600 dwellings (6,400 at Yeovil)	+	+	--	?	-	?	+	-	-	?/0	-	-	?/-	-
Option S1 (B) 16,600 dwellings (7,400 at Yeovil)	+	+	-	?	0	?	++	-	-	?/-	-	-	?/-	-
Option S1 (C) 19,700 dwellings (distribution undefined)	+	++	+	-	+	?	-	--	--	?/--	-	--	-	-
Option S1 (D) 19,700 dwellings (6,400 in Yeovil urban area & 5,000 Yeovil urban extension)	+	++	+	-	+	?	-	--	--	?/--	-	--	-	-
Option S1 (E) Growth in excess of 19,700 dwellings	+/?	++/?	++/?	-/?	+/?	?	-/?	--/?	--/?	--/?	-/?	-/?	-/?	-/?

Overall, Option S1 (B) performed best of the different levels of housing supply in sustainability terms, and was subsequently taken forward as the 'preferred option'. Although the option of 16,600 dwellings would mean an under provision of homes compared to the household projections at the time, evidence suggested that the economy could support that level of housing development rather than a higher provision. There were likely to be negative environmental effects but mitigation

measures such as high quality design, avoiding areas of important historic assets, and sustainable construction, would ensure these were limited.

Three options were proposed for the distribution of development in South Somerset outside Yeovil, as the Yeovil figure was to be determined by the Regional Spatial Strategy at the time.

Overall, Option 2 (see Figure 6 below) performs best in sustainability terms as it delivers the most sustainability benefits, and the fewest negative effects. The economic and social benefits would be spread more evenly under this option to those settlements where population, jobs, community services and facilities are concentrated, and there is most potential to use alternatives to the car.

The Sustainability Appraisal report that documented the findings of both the Core Strategy Issues & Options and Draft Core Strategy stages was published for consultation alongside the Core Strategy preferred options document. This process informed the Proposed Submission Local Plan. The key Sustainability Appraisal findings of these two stages are set out in more detail in section 5 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report, alongside mitigation measures arising from the appraisal at these stages.

Figure 5: Draft Core Strategy - Distribution of Housing Development - Sustainability Appraisal Findings

Policy	Sustainability Appraisal Objective and Score													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Distribution of Development														
Option 1 Business as Usual/Dispersed	-	-	+	0	-	?	+/-	--	-	-/?	--	-	?	-/?
Option 2 - Focus on Market Towns & Rural Centres	+	+	++	+	++	?	++	-	?/0	?/-	-	0	?	?/-
Option 3 - Concentrate all development in Market Towns	+	+	+/-	+/-	+/-	?	+/-	--	+/-	?/-	0	-	?	?/-

Mitigation Measures

As part of the Sustainability Appraisal process, mitigation measures have been recommended to minimise negative effects and maximise positive effects of policies and proposals. Chapter 6 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report details these in full, a few examples of which are included below:

- Where development is planned to occur, to prevent potential surface water flooding, a requirement for Sustainable Drainage Systems have been incorporated into Policy EQ2: General Development.
- Where development could impact upon European Protected Species, Policies EQ4: Biodiversity and EQ5: Green Infrastructure have been amended to require wildlife corridors and hedges to be maintained and existing networks of habitats to be strengthened via green infrastructure.

- To minimise the impact on the peripheral landscape of the Market Towns, through the loss of Greenfield land, development will be located in areas where the impact on the landscape is more acceptable.
- To protect against a large number of new care homes or other specialist elderly persons accommodation in the countryside (Policy HG6: Care Homes and Specialist Accommodation) was amended to require a clear justification for locating such proposals in the countryside.

What are the likely significant effects of the Proposed Submission Local Plan?

The 'Proposed Submission Local Plan' builds upon the previous stages, and the policies were appraised against the Sustainability Appraisal framework. Given the iterative nature of the process, alternative options were still considered and sustainably appraised even at this relatively late stage for some key issues: the scale of development at Yeovil due to the proposed revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies, further refinement of the Yeovil Sustainable Urban Extension, and potential options for a 'direction of growth' at Langport/Huish Episcopi after the status of this settlement was changed and there was a subsequent increase in the scale of development.

The Sustainability Appraisal Report provides a commentary on the sustainability performance of the 'Proposed Submission' Local Plan and concludes that it is broadly positive in its effects when compared against Sustainability Appraisal Objectives. Some key strengths of the Plan include:

- Focussing development on larger settlements, and Yeovil in particular, where existing businesses and workers exist will deliver social, economic and environmental benefits. Encouraging development where there is good accessibility to services and facilities, and where housing need is the greatest will be of social benefit and should support the economy, offering the best opportunities for sustainable travel.
- Sustainable development in Rural Settlements should have positive social, economic and environmental benefits by supporting existing and new services, housing and employment, which is appropriate to the scale and character of the settlement.
- Balancing the distribution of jobs and homes seeks to ensure more sustainable and self-contained communities that are better placed to offer a range of opportunities to all of their residents. The distribution of employment land allows residents to have the option to work locally, which raises the level of self-containment in settlements, reducing the need to travel and enabling local services and facilities to be supported.
- Provision of additional affordable housing can help to reduce poverty and social exclusion, improve health and well-being of those currently homeless or in sub-standard accommodation.
- Supporting rural businesses and creating jobs and prosperity in rural areas will create positive economic benefits. Whilst this may generate the need to travel, in reality the distances travelled by employees may be less than travelling to a Primary/Local Market Town or Rural Centre.
- Focussing development on Town Centres will help to make them and their local economies strong and vibrant, encouraging self-containment, reducing the need to travel, improving access to essential services and facilities and thereby reducing social exclusion.

- Promotion of sustainable transport and low carbon travel will deliver social, economic and environmental benefits. The social benefits include improving access to services/facilities, and walking and cycling that can encourage healthy lifestyles. There are also positive economic effects through less congestion, and supporting rail freight terminals. Low carbon travel also helps to minimise carbon dioxide emissions and therefore reduce South Somerset’s contribution to climate change, as well as air, noise and light pollution.
- Improving open space, outdoor play, sports, cultural and community facilities, and adequate local and strategic sports facilities enables everyone the opportunity to participate in play and leisure activities that should improve health and well being. The provision of open space should also have environmental benefits.
- The protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment.

Some weaknesses of the Plan include:

- Increase in car traffic as a result of additional development.
- House building and the delivery of employment/commercial land and activities will have an impact on the landscape and result in the loss of Greenfield land.
- Loss of Best and Most versatile agricultural land.
- Potential impact on biodiversity and flood events.

Figure 6:Matrix of Sustainability Appraisal of Proposed Submission Local Plan policies, below, provides an indication of the cumulative impact of the Proposed Submission Local Plan policies. It is notable that some adverse effects are likely from Objectives 8, 11, 12 and 14, with a wide range of potential positive effects, particularly for Sustainability Appraisal Objectives 1-7.

Figure 6:Matrix of Sustainability Appraisal of Proposed Submission Local Plan policies

Policy	Sustainability Appraisal Objective and Score													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Strategy														
SD1	SD1 has been screened out of the SA.													
SS1	+	+	++	+	++	?	++	-	?/0	?/-	-	-	?	?/-
SS2	+/-	+	+	+	+	?	+	-	-/?	?	-/?	-/?	?	?
SS3	+	++	+	+	+	+	++	-	?	?	+	+	?	?
SS4	+	+	+	?	0	?	++	-	-	?/-	-	-	?/-	-
SS5	+	+	++	+	++	?	++	-	?/0	?/-	-	-	?	?/-
SS6	+	0	+	+	+	0	0	+	0	0	+	0	+	0
SS7	+	+	0	+	0	+	0	+	+	+	0	+	0	0
Yeovil														
YV1	++	++	++	+	+	?	++	+	?	?	+	-	?	?
YV2	+	+	++	+	+/-	?	++	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
YV3	0	0	+	++	0	0	0	0	+	++	0	+	0	+
YV4	++	+	++	+	0	+	+	++	++	0	++	+	0	+
YV5	0	+	0	+	++	0	++	0	+	0	0	0	0	0
YV6	++	++	0	+	+	+	+	++	+	0	+	+	0	0

Market Towns	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
PMT1	++	++	++	++	+	+	++	++	0	++	+	-	0	-
PMT2	++	++	++	++	+	+	++	++	0	++	+	-	0	-
PMT3	++	+	+	+/-	+	?	+	+/-	+	0	+	-	0	-
PMT4	++	0	--	+	?	+	++	+	0	0	+	-	+	-
LMT1	+	0	++	+	0	+	++	+	+	+	+	-	+	-
LMT2 (Option 1)	+	+	++	+	+	?	+	0	-	-/?	-	-	0	0
LMT2 (Option 2)	+	+	++	+	+	?	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
LMT3	+	+	++	+	0	?	++	-	+	?	-	?	+	?
Economic Prosperity														
EP1	?	+	+	+	++	+	++	+	-	0	+	-	-	+
EP2	+	0	0	0	0	0	++	++	0	0	+	+	0	0
EP3	0	+	+	0	+	-	++	0	+	0	0	+	0	0
EP4	0	+	0	+	+	0	+	-/+	+	+	-	-/+	0	0
EP5	0	+	0	0	0	0	++	-	0	0	-	-	0	-
EP6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0	?	0	?
EP7	++	++	+	+	0	+	++	++	+	0	++	+	0	0
EP8	+	+	0	0	?	0	++	0	-	0	0	0	0	-
EP9	++	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	0	0	+	0	0	0
EP10	+	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	0	0	+	0	0	0
EP11	++	+	0	0	0	0	++	+	0	0	+	0	0	0
EP12	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EP13	+	0	0	0	0	0	++	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EP14	++	+	0	+	0	0	++	+	0	0	+	0	0	0
EP15	+	+	0	+	0	0	+	+	0	0	+	+	0	
Housing														
HG1	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+/0	-	0	0	0	+	+
HG2	+	+	0	+	0	+	0	+	+	+	0	+	0	0
HG3 & HG4	+	+	++	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0
HG5	0	+	++	+	0	+	?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HG6	+	+	+	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	-	0	0	0
HG7	++	++	+	+	+	?	?	-	0	?	?	0	+	0
HG8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0
HG9	--	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	0
HG10	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0
Transport and Accessibility														
TA1	++	+	?	+	?	?	+	++	+	0	+	+	0	?
TA2	++	+	0	+	+	-	++	++	0	0	++	?	0	0
TA3	++	++	0	++	+	+	+	++	?	0	++	++	0	0
TA4	+	+	0	+	0	?	+	++	0	0	+	+	0	0
TA5	++	+	-	+	?	0	+	+	+	?	+	+	0	+
TA6	+	+	0	+	0	0	+	+/?	?	0	+/?	+	0	0
Health and well being														
HW1	++	+	0	++	0	0	0	0	+/?	0	+	+/?	+/?	+/?
HW2	++	+	0	++	0	0	0	0	?	0	+	?	?	?
HW3	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Environmental Quality														
EQ1	0	+	0	+	?	?/+	+	+	?	?	++	+	++	+
EQ2	0	+	0	+	0	+	+	+	+	0	+	0	0	0
EQ3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	++	0	0	0	0
EQ4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	0	0	++
EQ5	+	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	+	++	++

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
EQ6	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	++	++	++	++
EQ7	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	++	0	0
EQ8	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	+

How can you comment on the Sustainability Appraisal report?

The Sustainability Appraisal report is being published for formal consultation alongside the 'Proposed Submission' Local Plan, with a view to informing the consultation. Consultees might also like to comment directly on the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal (given that its purpose is to inform plan-makers directly, as well as support consultation on the plan). Any comments on the Sustainability Appraisal report can be made on the representations form that accompanies the Local Plan.

If there are significant changes made to the plan subsequent to consultation, the District Council will need to consider whether a revised Sustainability Appraisal report needs to be prepared. Assuming there are no fundamental issues, the Local Plan and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal report, plus any representations, will be submitted to the Secretary of State for the independent Examination in the autumn of 2012. It is envisaged that the South Somerset Local Plan will be adopted in the summer of 2013.