

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan



Sustainability Appraisal Site Allocations Local Plan

Adoption Statement

July 2016

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1. Introduction

1.1 Sustainability Appraisal Background

1.1.1 The purpose of the Sustainability Appraisal is to promote sustainable development by ensuring that social, environmental and economic considerations are integrated into the Site Allocations Local Plan.

1.1.2 In preparing the Site Allocations Local Plan, the Council is required by European and National law to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Sustainability Appraisal (SA). The Government recommends that these are undertaken together and this process is referred to as the "SA". The SA assists the Council in preparing the Site Allocations Local Plan by:

- identifying the key sustainability issues facing the borough,
- predicting how the policies in the Site Allocations Local Plan will affect those issues; and,
- making recommendations to improve the sustainability of the Site Allocation Local Plan.

1.1.3 The SA aims to ensure that the Site Allocations Local Plan has positive impacts on sustainability objectives and that any potential negative impacts are avoided or mitigated.

1.1.4 The Sustainability Appraisal and all other documents referenced in this statement can be viewed on the Council's website at:
<http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-policy/development-plan-documents/site-allocations/examination-library>

1.2 Purpose of this Statement

1.2.1 In accordance with Regulation 16 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, this Statement describes:

- (a) how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Site Allocations LOCAL PLAN;

- (b) how the environmental aspects of the Sustainability Appraisal have been taken into account;
- (c) how opinions expressed in response to—
 - (i) the invitation referred to in regulation 13(2)(d);
 - (ii) action taken by the responsible authority in accordance with regulation 13(4), have been taken into account;
- (d) how the results of any consultations entered into under regulation 14(4) have been taken into account;
- (e) the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
- (f) the measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.

1.3 Structure of this Statement

1.3.1 This statement is structured such that the following chapters consider each of the 5 aspects in paragraph 1.2.1 summarised as follows:

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2. Integrating Environmental Considerations

- 2.1.1 Environmental considerations were integrated into the preparation of the Site Allocations Local Plan from the outset.
- 2.1.2 During collection of baseline evidence, environmental considerations were well documented in both the Site Allocations Local Plan and the SA. In addition, numerous environmental studies were commissioned including a landscape and ecological appraisal and a Habitats Regulations Assessment.
- 2.1.3 The SA Scoping Report documented relevant environmental considerations for the Borough and this was used to preparation of the Site Allocations Local Plan, including ensuring both the potential sites for allocation and the objectives of the Site Allocations Local Plan as a whole were tested against environmental objectives.
- 2.1.4 The stages of the Sustainability Appraisal can be represented by the following timeline.

Stage of SA	Stage of Site Allocations Local Plan	Main SA Aspects
SA Scoping Stage (June 2009 – Jan 2011)	Evidence collection and baseline review work	Forming objectives, devising method for scoring sites and testing the Site Allocations Local Plan objectives
SA Consultation Draft Report (March 2013)	Review of sites for allocation, preparation of report for consultation	Scoring sites and Site Allocations Local Plan objectives, rejecting sites and feeding back findings to the plan makers
SA Submission Report (Feb 2015)	Site Allocations Local Plan finalised. Submission version prepared ready for examination in Nov/Dec 2015	Updated to reflect consultation responses/recommendations and the scoring of new sites submitted late
SA Final Report (July 2016)	Site Allocations Local Plan complete and including modifications following examination	Updated to reflect modification following examination

3. Taking into Account Environmental Aspects

3.1.1 The environmental aspects of the Sustainability Appraisal were taken into account through the following methods:

- Environmental objectives were formulated based upon an extensive legislative and policy review and the collection of baseline data
- Both overarching Site Allocations Local Plan objectives and individual sites were tested and scored against these environmental objectives
- Scores and recommendations for mitigation were presented to plan makers and used in decision making when analysing the pool of sites
- To support this process, site visits were undertaken by officers with environmental qualifications and experience, and extensive mapping took place that considered the location of environmentally sensitive sites in relation to allocated sites
- Public engagement was an essential part of this process and included several rounds of formal consultation with statutory consultees and other interested environmental bodies.

4. Taking Opinions and Consultations into Account

- 4.1.1 It is a legal requirement that Local Authorities consult with statutory consultation bodies when deciding on the scope and level of detail of information that is to be included within the SA.
- 4.1.2 For this reason, the Scoping and Consultation Draft SA Reports were sent to Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency with instruction to respond within the 5 week consultation period.
- 4.1.3 In addition, numerous local organisations or interested parties were invited to comment. These included:
- All town and parish councils in the Borough
 - Developers
 - High Weald AONB Unit
 - Primary Care Trusts
 - South East England Partnership Board and Development Agency (no longer operating)
- 4.1.4 A summary of how the opinions received from these stakeholders and interested parties was taken into account is summarised in Appendix A of the SA Submission Report (Feb 2015).
- 4.1.5 Paragraph 4(d) of Regulation 16 requires an explanation of how the results of any consultations entered into with other EU Member States on transboundary-impacts have been taken into account in the Site Allocations Local Plan. This is not relevant to Tunbridge Wells Borough.

5. Reasons for Rejecting Alternatives

5.1.1 The process of allocating or rejecting sites is detailed on page 20 of the final SA and is summarised as follows:

- Identify the pool of sites
- Complete initial analysis and reject unsuitable sites
- Complete scoring and testing method on remaining sites
- Consider settlement and site analysis
- Consultation

5.1.2 The scoring and testing method used is described in paragraph 3.1.1 of this statement.

5.1.3 Alternatives considered and rejected in relation to potential impacts upon the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation were detailed in the Habitats Regulations Assessment.

6. Future Monitoring

- 6.1.1 Monitoring of indicators begun in 2016 with a full review and update of the environmental, social and economic baselines for the Borough. During this process, extensive data collection was collected and trends were reviewed. The data and information has been presented in a publically available Scoping Report that will accompany the evidence base for the new Local Plan (currently in preparation).

- 6.1.2 The baseline will be updated throughout the process of preparing the new Local Plan as new policy or strategy documents are published and legislation is updated. This is particularly relevant in light of the fact that the UK voted to leave the European Union in June 2016, and thus all EU Directives are likely to be replaced by national legislation in the near future.