



Dacorum Local Development Framework Core Strategy – Consultation Draft

Sustainability Appraisal Report
Non Technical Summary

November 2010

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Non Technical Summary

Background

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been carried out on the Dacorum Draft Core Strategy to meet regulations¹, because it has the potential to produce significant environmental effects.

The main purpose of SEA is improve the environmental performance of a plan by assessing whether it is likely to result in any significant environmental effects (positive or negative). Recommendations as to how adverse effects can be avoided, offset or reduced, as well as how improvements can be made, should be suggested. A programme to monitor significant effects is required in order to check whether the SEA has been accurate in its predictions.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is required under other legislation relating to the new Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) being prepared by local planning authorities. This is in addition to SEA. The LDF guidance² merges the SA and SEA elements into a single process and therefore a joint SA/SEA process is being undertaken for the Core Strategy.

This Sustainability Appraisal Report (SA Report) documents the findings of the assessment of the Draft Core Strategy in order to give stakeholders and the public an opportunity to comment on the findings, at the same time as making any comments on the plan itself.

The Draft Core Strategy

Dacorum Borough Council are currently working on the preparation of the first in a series of Development Plan Documents that will form the Local Development Framework (LDF) for the Borough which is due to replace the current Local Plan.

¹ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Wales) Regulations (2004)

² Plan Making Manual: <http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=109798>

The Core Strategy includes the spatial vision and objectives for the Borough. It also contains the proposed spatial strategy, planning policies and strategic site allocations that are needed to achieve the strategy's objectives.

The SA/SEA Process

The assessment process is briefly described below and summarised in Figure NTS 1. The SEA Regulations require that the following topics are investigated: Air; Biodiversity; Climatic factors; Cultural heritage; Human health; Landscape; Material assets; Population; Soil; Water; and the interrelationship between these factors. The Sustainability Appraisal element of the process widens this to include consideration of additional social and economic issues.

Stage A - After documenting the sustainability characteristics of the area, and identifying any trends (i.e. is the situation getting better or worse?), the policy context of the Core Strategy was reviewed. From the outputs of these two initial tasks the key environmental issues and opportunities that exist in the Borough were identified, on which the assessment should focus. A series of SA/SEA Objectives were developed to concentrate the subsequent assessment process on these key issues.

Stage B - This stage involved predicting the effects that would result if the Strategy were implemented and then assessing whether any of these effects would be significant. Where potential adverse effects were identified measures to mitigate these effects were proposed.

Summary of the Core Strategy & SA Processes

Core Strategy	SA/SEA		
Begin Document Preparation	Compile baseline information; review of plans, policies and programmes; identify sustainability issues and problems Develop the SA Framework Consult on the scope	Establish the key issues Develop the SA Methodology Define objectives to assess the sustainability performance of the Strategy	SA/SEA STAGE A
Preparation of Issues and Options Preparation of Preferred Options, including consultation on Preferred Option	Assess the effects of the Issues and Options Assess the effects the Preferred Option Propose mitigation and enhancements	Determine which sustainability effects are significant Offset negative effects and maximise positive effects	SA/SEA STAGE B
Public consultation on Preferred Options Submission of Core Strategy to the Secretary of State Adoption	Production of the SA Report Consultation on the SA Report Update SA based on Submission SA Report Publish Final SA Report SA Adoption Statement	Make information available to stakeholders and members of the public Update assessment based on Submission Draft Document how the SA has influenced the development of the Strategy	SA/SEA STAGE C & D
Monitoring and Review	Monitoring of significant effects	Ensure predictions were accurate and mitigation is effective	SA/SEA STAGE E

Figure NTS 1: Summary of the SA/SEA Process

Stage C - The Sustainability Appraisal Report pulls together the results of all the assessment activities that have been undertaken by consultants Centre for Sustainability (C4S) and identifies monitoring activities that will check the accuracy of the assessment once the Strategy is adopted.

Stage D - This stage involves consultation on the SA Report with environmental bodies, key stakeholders and the public. The SA will then assess any significant changes to the Plan that are made after the consultation. At plan adoption, an SA Adoption Statement will be published which explains how the SA has influenced the plan making process and which finalises the monitoring arrangements.

Stage E - This stage takes place after the Core Strategy is adopted and covers the monitoring of the predicted effects.

Sustainability Issues and Objectives

The first stage of the SA/SEA focused on the identification of the sustainability issues in the Borough. A few of the issues identified are:

- There are some areas in the Borough where annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentrations continue to exceed the relevant Air Quality Objectives;
- Carbon emissions per capita for Dacorum are above the regional average;
- Light pollution is rapidly increasing and tranquillity is rapidly decreasing in the East of England;
- The percentage of houses built on previously developed land is high. However, previously developed land is a finite resource and might not be as readily available in the future, thus leading to greater pressure to build on greenfield sites;
- There are some issues with river water quality. In addition, over abstraction of water resources is an issue in the region;

- An ageing population means that there are fewer economically active people to support an increasing number of people coming up to retirement age;
- There is some social inequality within Dacorum. For example, life expectancy for men living in the least deprived areas is over 6 years longer than for men living in the most deprived areas;
- More than 1 child in 12 in Reception year is classified as obese. The level of children being physically active in school is worse than the England average. Also, more than 1 adult in 5 is obese;
- The overall number of noise complaints received by councils in Hertfordshire rose in 2008/09 with domestic noise being the largest source of complaint;
- The price of housing compared to earnings is an issue within the Borough, while additional population growth is likely to increase the pressure on affordable housing; and
- Levels of unemployment have increased significantly since 2007.

Further detail can be found in the main SA Report and its accompanying appendices.

Government guidance³ on how to undertake SEA recommends that objectives are developed that relate to the key issues, so that the assessment can use these objectives to focus on the prediction and assessment of the effects that are most important in an area.

These objectives were developed as part of the Scoping Report and updated following consultation on that report in order to take account of consultation comments. The broad objectives that have been used in this SA/SEA are:

1. To protect and enhance biodiversity
2. Maintain/enhance water quality and limit water consumption

³ A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (ODPM, 2005)

3. Ensure new developments do not increase flood risk
4. Minimise the loss of valuable soils
5. Reduce the emissions of CO2 and other greenhouse gases
6. Ensure development is 'climate change proof'
7. Achieve good air quality, especially in urban areas
8. Maximise the use of previously developed land
9. To use natural resources efficiently
10. To maintain and enhance historic and cultural assets
11. Conserve and enhance the landscape and townscape
12. Encourage healthy lifestyles
13. To deliver more sustainable patterns of development
14. Promote equity & address social exclusion
15. Ensure that everyone has access to good quality housing that meets their needs
16. Enhance community identity and participation
17. Reduce both crime and fear of crime
18. Achieve sustainable levels of prosperity and growth
19. Promote wider prosperity and fairer access to services
20. Revitalise town centres

Assessment of Issues and Options

The Council consulted on a short 'Emerging Issues and Options' paper in July 2005. Following an iterative process of analysis by the Council Officers and discussions with stakeholders, a set of more detailed options for the Borough were produced as the Core Strategy Issues and Options (May 2006). In accordance with ODPM Guidance and the Regulations, these Issues and Options were assessed against the SA Framework set at the Scoping Report stage. A Core Strategy Issues and Options SA Working note was produced in June 2006 and submitted for public consultation. A Supplemental Issues and Options Working Note (covering growth at Hemel Hempstead) was also published in November.

The Issues and Options SA identified positive, negative and uncertain affects for all identified options and made recommendations, wherever

appropriate to strengthen options to achieve a sustainable development. Detail on the Issues and Options assessments can be found in the main SA Report.

Assessment of the Emerging Core Strategy

Based on the Issues and Options SA, stakeholder responses, findings of local and regional studies and assimilation of further information on development Issues and Options, an Emerging Core Strategy was developed for consultation in June 2009.

Similar to the assessment undertaken at the Issues and Options stage, each of the plan elements of the Emerging Core Strategy (i.e. vision, objectives, place strategies, etc.) was assessed. Additionally, in August 2009, three housing growth options at Hemel Hempstead were also assessed. Further information on these two assessments can be found in the main SA Report.

A 'Working Draft Core Strategy' was produced for limited stakeholder consultation in July 2010, in order to test draft policy wording. This was subject to SA, as part of the ongoing iterative approach.

Assessment of the Draft Core Strategy

A draft Core Strategy has now been prepared taking into consideration all the iterations to the emerging options. Based on the methodology used in the early rounds of the SA, the assessment used the following scoring system:

Significance Assessment	Description
✓✓	Very sustainable - Option is likely to contribute significantly to the SA/SEA objective
✓	Sustainable - Option is likely to contribute in some way to the SA/SEA objective
?	Uncertain – It is uncertain how or if the Option impacts on the SA/SEA objective
–	Neutral – Option is unlikely to impact on the SA/SEA objective

x	Unsustainable – Option is likely to have minor adverse impacts on the SA/SEA objective
xx	Very unsustainable – Option is likely to have significant adverse impacts on the SA/SEA objective

The assessment of the Draft Core Strategy generally found that the policies are likely to have overall positive effects across the range of sustainability topics, with a number of significant positive effects having been identified. For example, in relation to the policies aimed at looking after the environment, significant positive effects have been identified for 'biodiversity', 'water quality/ quantity', 'greenhouse gas emissions', 'use of brownfield land', 'resource efficiency', 'historic & cultural assets' and 'landscape & townscape' objectives.

As a result of proposed level of housing and economic growth a number of adverse and uncertain effects have however also been identified. For example, there will inevitably be increases in level of land take which could have localised adverse effects on environmental factors, such as biodiversity, soils, and landscape & townscape. There are also likely to be increases in the level of water abstraction, which in an area already identified as 'over abstracted' could become a more significant issue over time. Housing development will result in an increase in greenhouse gas emissions from energy used in new housing and associated activities.

NB: The only significant adverse effect identified in the assessment is in relation to the Natural Growth Option (Option 3) and its potential effects on local landscape. However, although this was assessed as part of this SA Report, the option does not form part of the draft Core Strategy for consultation, but was included in the SA for purposes of comparison with the other two options that are being consulted upon.

The full results of this assessment can be seen in Table NTS 1.

Table NTS 1: Summary of Draft Core Strategy Assessment

Policies (Abridged)	Sustainability Appraisal Objectives																			
	Biodiversity	Water quality/quantit	Flood risk	Soils	Greenhouse gas emissions	Climate change proof	Air Quality	Use of brownfield	Resource efficiency	Historic & cultural assets	Landscape & townscape	Health	Sustainable locations	Equity & social exclusion	Good quality housing	Community Identity	Crime & fear of crime	Sustainable prosperity	Fairer access to services	Revitalise town centres
CS1: Distribution of Development	✓	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓	?	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
CS2: Selection of Sites; CS3: Managing Sites	✓ ?	-	-	?	✓	-	✓	?	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
CS4: Towns & Large Villages	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CS5 Green Belt; CS6: Small villages; CS7: Rural Area	✓	-	-	✓	✓ *	-	-	?	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
CS8: Sustainable Transport	✓	-	-	?	✓	-	✓	-	-	✓	✓ ?	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CS9: Management of Roads	?	-	-	*	✓ ?	-	✓ ?	*	-	-	?	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	?
CS10, CS11, CS12 & CS13: Design policies.	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
CS14, CS15, & CS16: Economy and Retail policies	?	-	-	*	✓ *	-	✓ *	✓	-	-	*	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓✓	✓	✓
CS17: Housing Programme																				
Option 1: 370 dpa (9,250 total)	?	* ?	-	*	* ✓	-	-	-	-	?	-	- *	-	* ✓	* ✓	?	-	* *	* *	?
Option 2: 430 dpa (10,750 total)	?	* ?	-	*	* ✓	-	* *	* *	?	?	*	? ✓	✓ *	* ✓	✓ ✓	?	?	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓
Option 3: Natural Growth: 500 dpa (12,500 total)	?	* ?	-	*	* ✓	-	* *	* *	?	?	**	? ✓	✓ *	* ✓✓	✓✓ ✓	?	?	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓
CS18: Mix of Housing; CS19: Affordable Housing; CS20: Rural Exception Sites	?	-	-	-	✓	-	-	-	-	-	?	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-

Policies (Abridged)	Sustainability Appraisal Objectives																			
	Biodiversity	Water quality/quantit	Flood risk	Soils	Greenhouse gas emissions	Climate change proof	Air Quality	Use of brownfield	Resource efficiency	Historic & cultural assets	Landscape & townscape	Health	Sustainable locations	Equity & social exclusion	Good quality housing	Community Identity	Crime & fear of crime	Sustainable prosperity	Fairer access to services	Revitalise town centres
CS21 & CS22: Gypsy and Traveller policies	?	-	-	-	-	-	-	?	*	-	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	?	-	✓	-
CS23: Social Infrastructure	?	-	-	*	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	*	✓	✓	✓	-	✓✓	-	-	✓	✓
CS24 – CS27: Natural Environment policies	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓✓	✓✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-	-	-	✓
CS28 – CS32: Carbon and pollution policies	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	?	?	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CS34: Infrastructure & Developer Contributions	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	-	-	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-	✓	-	-
Spatial Strategy: Hemel Hempstead	?	?	?	*	*	-	*	*	*	✓	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
	*	*		*	?		✓	✓	*	?	✓		*	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
CS33: HH Town Centre Design Principles	-	-	-	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	?	✓	✓	✓
CS34: Maylands Business Park	?	?	-	*	✓	-	✓	*	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
				*	?		?				?									
Spatial Strategy: Berkhamsted	?	✓	✓	*	*	-	?	*	*	-	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
		*		*	?			*	*											
Spatial Strategy: Tring	?	*	-	*	*	-	-	*	*	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
				*	*			*	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Spatial Strategy: Kings Langley	?	✓	-	*	*	-	-	*	*	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	?	✓	✓
	✓			*	*			*	*	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Spatial Strategy: Bovington	?	*	-	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
				*	*			*	*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Spatial Strategy: Markyate	?	✓	*	*	✓	-	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
	✓	*		?	*		*	*	*	✓	✓	*	✓	*	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Spatial Strategy: Countryside	✓	✓	-	*	✓	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	-	?	?	-
	*			*	✓					✓	*	✓	*	*	*	✓				

Mitigation and Recommendations

A key role of the SA/SEA is to provide recommendations as to how the sustainability performance of the plan can be improved. While undertaking the SA/SEA a range of recommendations were identified as to how the Core Strategy could maximise its performance against the range of sustainability topics. Some of the recommendations sort to mitigate potential adverse effects, whilst others looked to build on some of the opportunities presented within the Borough. The majority of these recommendations were taken on board as the Core Strategy developed into its current form.

Monitoring

The requirement in the SEA Regulations relating to monitoring focuses specifically on significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes, with a view to identify unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and be able to undertake appropriate remedial action.

Once the Core Strategy is adopted, its effects against a range of sustainability areas are to be monitored to allow action to be taken to reduce and/or offset any significant effects. Where possible this monitoring will make use of existing arrangements, particularly those being developed to monitor the performance of the Local Development Framework. It is therefore not appropriate at this time to develop a separate detailed monitoring programme for inclusion in this SA report. The final monitoring plan will be published in the SA/SEA Adoption Statement, alongside the adopted Core Strategy.

Next Steps

The publication of this SA Report signifies the start of the consultation process whereby key stakeholders and the public are given the opportunity to comment on the contents of both the Draft Core Strategy and the SA Report.

Following the end of the consultation, the SA will need to assess any substantive changes made to the Core Strategy prior to the Publication and Submission stages. Depending on the scale of changes these will either be provided as an addendum to the consultation SA Report, or as an updated SA Report.

Making your Views Known

This SA Report will be published for consultation alongside the Draft Core Strategy.

Copies of the SA documents can be found on the Council's website www.dacorum.gov.uk/planning, at local libraries or at Borough Council Offices subject to opening times.

Comments on the SA Report should be sent in writing to:

By email: spatial.planning@dacorum.gov.uk

By post: Spatial Planning Team
Strategic Planning and Regeneration
Dacorum Borough Council
Civic Centre
Marlowes
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
HP1 1HH

By fax: 01442 228771

Responses must be received by **5.15pm on Wednesday 15th December.**

All comments received will be publicly available. When the consultation period has finished, the comments received will be considered during the next stage of the SA/SEA process.