

South Somerset Local Plan 2006 – 2028

Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment)

Adoption Statement

March 2015

Introduction

1. South Somerset District Council adopted its Local Plan 2006 – 2028 on 5 March 2015. The Local Plan sets out the long term vision and policies for delivering sustainable development in South Somerset.
2. This statement outlines how the Local Plan has been informed by Sustainability Appraisal (SA) throughout its preparation. Further information on the adopted South Somerset Local Plan 2006 – 2028 and accompanying SA Reports can be seen here: <http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-2006-2028/adopted-south-somerset-local-plan/>
3. The Local Plan is accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report which identifies its significant social, economic and environmental effects. Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) are both statutory requirements.¹ Government guidance advocates that SAs incorporate the requirements of SEA to ensure that potential environmental effects are given full consideration alongside social and economic issues.² This Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment) adoption statement has been prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Consistent with these regulations, this adoption statement includes:
 - How sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Local Plan;
 - How the Sustainability Appraisal report has been taken into account;
 - How the results of consultation have been taken into account;
 - Reasons for choosing the Local Plan as adopted, in light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
 - Measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant sustainability effects of the implementation of the Local Plan.
4. In addition, Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is a statutory requirement³ in order to assess the impact of the Local Plan on 'European Sites' (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Area, and Ramsar sites). The Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area/Ramsar is the only European Site within South

¹ Via Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, respectively.

² Planning Practice Guidance Reference ID: 11-001-20140306.

³ Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended).

Somerset, although 'Bracket's Coppice' Special Area of Conservation has also been considered in the HRA given its proximity to the district. The SA has taken into account the findings of the HRA.

How sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Local Plan

5. SA (incorporating SEA) has been carried out as an iterative and ongoing process to inform the Local Plan, which has ensured that sustainability considerations have been fully integrated into the Local Plan at all stages of its preparation. The first stage in the SA process involved preparing a Scoping Report, which contains a review of other relevant plans and policies, and baseline information. The Scoping Report also highlighted the key sustainability issues in South Somerset, such as a high quality historic environment; a generally prosperous district but with some pockets of deprivation; and low unemployment but with wages below the national average. This information was used to develop a series of sustainability objectives covering the range of social, environmental and economic considerations. Chapter 4 in the SA Report (2012) sets out the how the sustainability context, baseline, and issues were used to inform the SA framework of objectives and appraisal questions, included in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: SA objectives and appraisal questions

SA 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?

6. This framework of SA objectives was used to appraise the options for policies and proposals in the Local Plan at all stages (see Figure 2 below), from Issues and Options in 2008 to Main Modifications in 2014. The SA Report (2012) outlines the appraisal of options findings in Chapter 5, and the Proposed Submission Local Plan findings in Chapter 6, with further detail in the Appendices. The SA Addendums (2013, 2014) consider the Main Modifications.
7. The integration of sustainability considerations into the Local Plan has provided crucial evidence that the plan is the most appropriate strategy, when considered against reasonable alternatives.

How the Sustainability Appraisal report has been taken into account

8. The findings of the SA have informed the development of policies and proposals at each stage of Local Plan (initially known as the Core Strategy) preparation. The first stage was the 'issues and options,' published for consultation in March 2008, which considered various options for the scale and distribution of development in South Somerset, as well as thematic policy options. These options were appraised using the baseline, other relevant plans and policies, key sustainability issues and objectives, which were set out in the SA Scoping Report.
9. The issues and options were refined and developed into the 'draft Core Strategy (incorporating preferred options)' in October 2010, which set out the preferred approach for the scale and location of new development, alongside drafted thematic policies. An SA report was published for consultation at this stage which assessed the key sustainability effects of the various options, and informed the preferred options. The spatial strategy of focussing development at Yeovil and the Market Towns with limited growth at Rural Settlements performed best in the SA and was taken forward as the preferred option. Various options for the location of new development at the main settlements were considered and subject to SA, with the best performing location being incorporated as the preferred 'direction of growth'.

10. Consultation on the Proposed Submission Local Plan (2012) was accompanied by the 'formal' SA report (and Non-Technical Summary) which included the methodology (Chapter 3), framework (Chapter 4), key findings of the SA at each stage of the Local Plan preparation process (Chapters 5 and 6), and the monitoring indicators (Chapter 7), consistent with legislative requirements.⁴ An addendum to the SA was produced which provided an update to changes made as a result of public consultation on the Proposed Submission Local Plan, which was then submitted in January 2013 for Examination by a Planning Inspector.
11. During the Local Plan Examination, the Inspector's preliminary findings (July 2013) identified some issues of concern in the relation to aspects of the plan, including the SA findings for the directions of growth at Yeovil and Ilminster. Therefore, further SA work was undertaken through a 'compliance review' and re-drafted SAs for strategic growth options at Yeovil and Ilminster. The SA findings were a key determinant in identifying the Main Modifications for directions of growth at these two settlements, subject to public consultation in November 2013. The other Proposed Main Modifications were also subject to SA, with screening concluding that the modifications did not significantly alter the findings of the original SA work. The Local Plan Inspector's Report (January 2015) endorsed the approach taken by the SA.
12. The key preparation stages and the relationship between the Local Plan and SA process are outlined in Figure 2 below, demonstrating the SA documents that been taken into account in preparing the plan.

Figure 2: Local Plan and Sustainability Appraisal process

Local Plan Documents and Consultation	SA Documents and Consultation
Core Strategy Issues and Options (March 2008) Public consultation 7 March to 25 April 2008	SA Scoping Report Sent to statutory consultees and wider stakeholders 29 April to 03 June 2009
Area Based Workshops (Members, Town and Parish Councillors and other stakeholders) July 2009, Nov/Dec 2009, Jan 2010 & July 2010	SA Scoping Report (Sept 2009) incorporated changes as a result of consultation
Draft Core Strategy (incorporating Preferred Options) Public consultation 08 October to 03 December 2010	SA Report (Oct 2010) Public consultation 08 October to 03 December 2010
Proposed Submission Local Plan Public consultation 08 June to 10 August 2012	SA Report (June 2012) Public consultation 08 June to 10 August 2012
The Local Plan was Submitted to the Secretary of State on 21 January 2013	SA Addendum (Jan 2013) accompanied the Local Plan on Submission

⁴ Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (the 'SEA' Directive).

Proposed Main Modifications consultation document 28 November 2013 to 10 January 2014	Strategic Growth Options for Yeovil SA Report (Oct 2013); Proposed Main Modifications SA Report (Nov 2013) Public consultation 28 November 2013 to 10 January 2014
Submission of Proposed Main Modifications Submitted to the Secretary of State March 2014	SA Addendum Report (March 2014) Submitted alongside the Proposed Main Modifications to the Secretary of State March 2014
Main Modifications Consultation Document (August 2014) Public consultation 28 August to 10 October 2014	SA Addendum Report (August 2014) Public consultation 28 August to 10 October 2014
Submission of Main Modifications to the Secretary of State (November 2014)	SA Addendum Report (August 2014, with November 2014 update)
Local Plan Inspector's Report (8 January 2015), followed by adopted Local Plan (5 March 2015)	SA Adoption Statement (5 March 2015)

How the results of consultation have been taken into account

13. As indicated in Figure 2 above, SA findings have been consulted on throughout the various stages of preparing the Local Plan. The SA Scoping Report was subject to consultation with key stakeholders in April – June 2009. Appendix 1 of the Scoping Report details the comments that were received and how they were taken into account; highlighting amendments to the plans and policies review, monitoring indicators, and SA objectives as a result of the consultation responses that were received.
14. The SA report that was published for consultation alongside the 'draft Core Strategy (incorporating preferred options)' from October – December 2010 invited comments on the SA of 'issues and options' as well as the preferred options themselves. The Local Plan Consultation Statement (Appendix 8) sets out the consultation responses that were received at this stage, and how they have been taken into account. For example, some comments advocated a more 'dispersed' strategy for locating development across the district, but this was not carried forward due to negative impacts upon rural landscape character. Many responses were received in relation to the options for 'directions of growth' at the main settlements, which were taken into account when refining the options; for example, a direction of growth option at Somerton was reduced to minimise the landscape impact.
15. Comments made on the SA Report (June 2012) at 'proposed submission' stage are set out separately in Appendix 10 of the Consultation Statement, although references to the SA can be found throughout this appendix given the interrelationship between SA and decisions made in the plan itself. Any subsequent changes are documented within this appendix.

16. Following the Inspector's preliminary findings in July 2013, 'proposed main modifications' were subject to public consultation in November 2013 – January 2014, accompanied by SA reports. The SA Addendum Report (Appendix I, March 2014) documents how these responses were taken into account. Some of the resulting changes included more clearly setting out the sustainability implications of the proposed modifications, and a clearer explanation of how the decision-making criteria related to SA and the plan-making process.
17. A further SA Addendum was produced to accompany 'main modifications' consultation in August 2014, although no comments were received on the SA findings at this stage.
18. Finally, no request was received from another EU Member State on potential transboundary effects, so consultation of this nature was not required.⁵

Reasons for choosing the Local Plan as adopted, in the light of other reasonable alternatives

19. The SA has been a key part of the evidence that the Local Plan is the most appropriate strategy, when considered against reasonable alternatives. The SA Report (June 2012) sets out the various options considered, and the reasons for choosing the Local Plan, for the scale and distribution of growth, locations/sites for development, and across the five 'themes' (as explained in Chapters 5 and 6). For example, several options for the spatial approach to new development were considered, ranging from 75% of new development taking place at Yeovil, to just 25% at Yeovil. The overall strategy of directing around 50% of development to Yeovil, and around 50% elsewhere across the district was considered the most sustainable option by offering most economic benefits, enables a good level of accessibility to services and facilities, and helps to meet housing need where it is greatest at Yeovil.
20. The SA reports produced at 'proposed main modifications' stage set out the reasons for choosing the directions of growth at Yeovil and Ilminster.⁶ At Yeovil a reduced scale of development over two locations was selected for reasons including: improved deliverability/viability, reduced loss of Grade 1 agricultural land, and reduced landscape and heritage impacts.

Measures to monitor the significant sustainability effects of the implementation of the Local Plan

21. The monitoring process is integral to both plan making and SA. Monitoring is used to provide information on the characteristics of the district, assess the impact of policies, and identify whether the Local Plan strategy is delivering sustainable development.

⁵ Regulations 14(4) and 16(4)(e), Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

⁶ See Table 4.1, Strategic Growth Options for Yeovil SA report, October 2013; and Figure 3.2, Local Plan Proposed Main Modifications SA report, November 2013.

Regular monitoring ensures that unforeseen adverse effects can be identified and appropriate remedial action can be undertaken.

22. Chapter 7 of the SA Report (June 2012) sets out the significant effects of implementing the Local Plan, and identifies monitoring indicators that will be used to measure these effects. Some of the sustainability effects indicators include delivery of additional homes (including affordable housing), healthy life expectancy at age 65, and per capita carbon dioxide emissions.
23. The Council will regularly prepare an Authorities Monitoring Report (AMR) that will include information on the indicators, in order to ensure the ongoing monitoring of the significant sustainability effects of implementing the Local Plan.