

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL****REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE****STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP1: Prosperous City; SP5: Attractive and Inclusive City****CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services, CIO3: Efficient and Effective Council; CIO4: Improving Partnership Working to Deliver 'One City'.****1.0 Purpose of the Report**

1.1 This report provides a background to the roles and functions of both the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Sustainability Appraisal as tools to deliver the Local Development Framework. It further sets out how the Council is applying both mechanisms into the land use planning process.

**2.0 Background***The Local Development Framework*

2.1 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council is required to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF will replace the current Unitary Development Plan (adopted in 1998). As the statutory development plan for the city, the LDF will be the starting point in the consideration of planning applications for the development or use of land. Furthermore, it will be a fundamental document in delivering the key spatial objectives of the Sunderland Strategy and the emerging Economic Masterplan.

2.2 The LDF will comprise three principal Development Plan Documents :-

- The Core Strategy setting out the broad strategic policies for the development of the City;
- An Allocations Development Plan Document that will allocate specific parcels of land for both development (eg housing and employment) and protection (eg Green Belt and nature conservation sites);
- The Hetton Downs Action Area Plan that will provide the development framework for the area's long-term sustainable improvement and regeneration.

*The Strategic Environmental Assessment*

2.3 The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive was introduced by the EU in 2001 and was subsequently transposed into British law by the *Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004*. The Directive requires a formal environmental assessment of public plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. Authorities which prepare and/or adopt such plans or programmes must prepare a report on :-

- Its likely significant environmental effects;
- Consult environmental authorities and the public; and
- Take the report and the results of the consultation into account during the preparation process and before the plan or programme is adopted.

2.4 SEA is therefore a compulsory requirement for all LDF documents, but it may apply to other Council Plans and Programmes such as the Local Transport Plan.

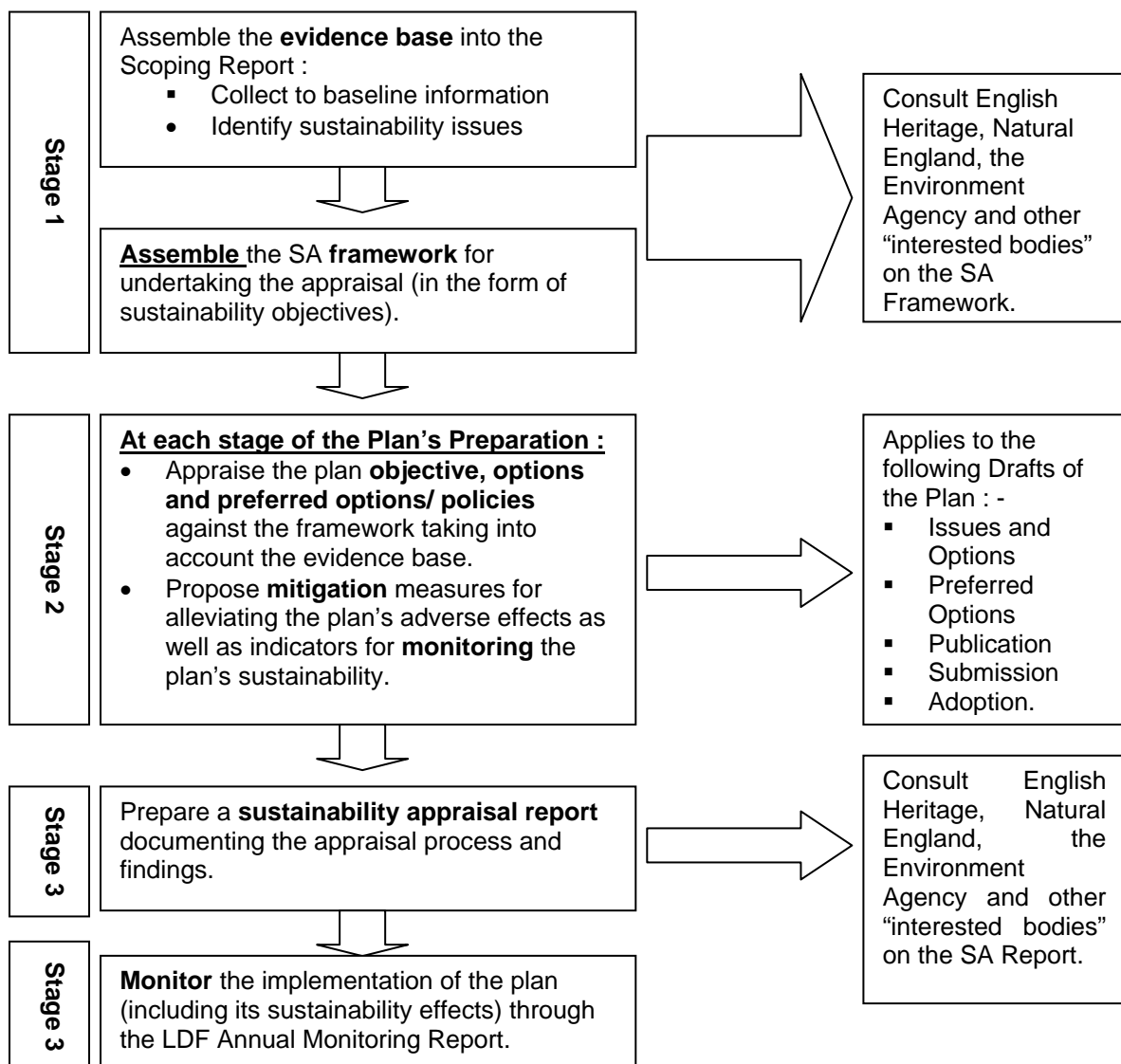
*The Sustainability Appraisal*

2.5 The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) was introduced under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The purpose of the SA is to promote sustainable development through an appraisal of the economic and social as well as environmental sustainability in the preparation of Development Plan Documents. Therefore, the SA process fully incorporates the requirements of the European Directive and therefore there is no need to carry out a separate SEA.

**3.0 The Sustainability Appraisal Process (incorporating the SEA requirements)**

3.1 The SA process is seen as an continuous exercise that is undertaken throughout the preparation of the Development Plan Document. Figure 1 below outlines the broad stages of undertaking the SA.

**Figure 1 : Stages of the SA process.**



### *The SA Scoping Report*

- 3.2 The topics identified by the SEA Directive, which must be incorporated into the Scoping Report are : -
- Air
  - Water
  - Soil
  - Biodiversity
  - Population
  - Human Health
  - Climate
  - Material Assets
  - Cultural Heritage
  - Landscape
- 3.3 Additional topics which are included to extend the appraisal to cover the social and economic effects are less prescriptive and can be based on local circumstances. In the Sunderland case, they have included issues relating to : -
- The Local Economy including retail
  - Transport
  - Housing
  - Education
  - Crime
  - Open Space
  - Deprivation

### *The SA Framework*

- 3.4 The sustainability issues identified through the baseline Scoping Report are tackled through the SA Framework. The Framework is central to the SA process as it sets out overarching sustainability objectives by which the social, economic and environmental effects can be described, analysed and compared.
- 3.5 Given the importance of this stage, it is a requirement to consult with the three statutory bodies and other interested bodies as outlined in Figure 1, to ensure the areas covered and objectives defined are fit for purpose.

### *The Sustainability Appraisal Report*

- 3.6 The SA Report formally documents the appraisal process and findings as the Development Plan Document is published. An SA Report must be produced at every stage of the plan's preparation.
- 3.7 The purpose of the Appraisal Report is to predict the effects of the plan. This involves appraising the individual and collective affect of the policies against the objectives set out in the SA Framework. The Appraisal assesses the sustainability of the policy and understands any deficiencies the policy may have. Once these deficiencies are identified, the SA Report proposes mitigation measures to make the policy acceptable or makes recommendations to improve the beneficial effects of the policy. Where appropriate, any mitigation or amendments required are included within the relevant policies at the time of the plan's publication.

3.8 The SA Report must also include proposals for monitoring to help ensure that the effects of the plan are measured. Monitoring of the effects is undertaken annually through the completion of the LDF Annual Monitoring Report.

#### **4.0 Sustainability Appraisal in Sunderland**

4.1 In May 2005, the specialist consultancy firm Scott Wilson (Scotland) Ltd were first appointed by the Council to undertake in full the SA of Alteration No. 2 of to the Unitary Development Plan (Central Sunderland) and the LDF Core Strategy. The SA work on Alteration No. 2 was completed with its adoption in September 2007. For the Core Strategy, Scott Wilson (Scotland) Ltd's full SA involvement was carried up to and including the Preferred Options Draft (December 2007).

4.2 The SA process has become more refined nationally since its inception in 2004. It has become increasingly clear that the SA process should be integrated into the everyday working practice of policy development. Under the 2005 arrangement, whereby Scott Wilson (Scotland) Ltd prepared all the reports, Planning and Environment officers were at arms length from the SA practice.

4.3 In January 2009, working arrangements with Scott Wilson (Scotland) Ltd were formally reviewed. Instead of producing the full reports, they now act as the Council's advisers on SA and provide expertise on the process.

4.4 An officer steering group (comprising officers from the Planning and Environment Service, City Services and Corporate Policy), meets monthly and is chaired by Scott Wilson (Scotland) Ltd.

4.5 Planning and Environment officers are now fully responsible for the compilation of all SA material and in this role, the Consultants now act as both a 'critical friend' and independent validator to the process.

4.6 These new arrangements follow best practice, and have shown positive benefits in terms of providing officers with the skills and capacity to undertake the work required. It will also deliver cost savings to the Authority. It is anticipated that as the Council's competence in the SA further increases, the involvement of the Consultants in the SA process would diminish.

4.7 In addition, given that the baseline SA Scoping Report / Framework was prepared in 2005, it was deemed necessary to update the Framework against new and more up to date information, taking on board any other best practice that has been established since then. Under these new arrangements, the SA Scoping Report and SA Framework (which is contained in a single document) were formally reviewed and consulted upon in before adoption in August 2009. This now provides the baseline for all Development Plan Documents within the City's emerging LDF. A copy of the revised SA Scoping Report has been placed in the Members' Library and is available from the Council's internet [www.sunderland.gov.uk/ldf](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/ldf)

4.8 The Council has also produced an SA Report in relation to the recent consultation in to the Alternative Spatial Strategies for the Core Strategy. which was validated by Scott Wilson.

- 4.9 The next SA report will be produced in March 2010. This will critically appraise the Core Strategy revised Preferred Options Draft .
- 4.10 Separate SA Reports will also be produced for the other Development Plan Documents using the SA Framework.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

- 5.1 Sustainability Appraisal incorporates Strategic Environmental Assessment and is a requirement of plan preparation under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 5.2 It aims to promote sustainable development in the planning system through the integration of environmental, social and economic effects of the strategies and policies in a DPD from the outset of the preparation process.
- 5.3 The SA will play an important part in demonstrating if the Development Plan Document is sound by ensuring that it reflects the sustainability objectives outlined in the SA framework. The results of the appraisal will contribute to the reasoned justification of policies.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

- 6.1 It is recommended that Members note the issues outlined in the report.