

Plan for Stafford Borough Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement

Incorporating the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment
and Habitats Regulation Assessment

June 2014
Stafford Borough Council

1. Introduction

The preparation of the Plan for Stafford Borough has taken place over several years with involvement of key stakeholders throughout. An Examination of the Plan for Stafford Borough was carried out by an independent Planning Inspector, Mr Stephen Pratt, who held hearing sessions from the 23rd October to the 1st November 2013. Following the hearing sessions the Council proposed and consulted on a number of Main Modifications.

The Council received the Inspector's Final Report on 11th June 2014; the Report determined that the Plan for Stafford Borough was sound, subject to the Main Modifications. The Report states that Stafford Borough Council has carried out adequate Sustainability Appraisal at all stages during the preparation of the Plan, including at the Main Modifications stage, and has undertaken adequate Habitats Regulations Assessments to the satisfaction of Natural England. Sustainability Appraisal is a process whereby the social, economic and environmental effects of plan implementation are assessed and alterations suggested where necessary.

The Council is required, under Regulation 16 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 to, as soon as reasonably practicable after the adoption of a plan for which Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment has been carried out, to make a copy of the Plan publicly available alongside a copy of the Sustainability Appraisal report and a Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement. The Council must also inform the public and consultation bodies¹ about the availability of these documents.

The Plan for Stafford Borough and all Adoption documentation (including the SA Adoption Statement) will be available to view online, at the Borough Council offices and at local libraries throughout the Borough.

Background

In preparing the Plan, the Council undertook a parallel process of Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal. The Council also fulfilled its duties under the Habitats Regulations.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) are requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The Regulations incorporate the requirements of the European Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, transposed into UK legislation through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

¹ The Consultation bodies are Natural England, The Environment Agency and English Heritage

The Plan for Stafford Borough has been prepared in full compliance with all SA / SEA regulations. This Adoption Statement will set out how SA findings have been taken into account and integrated into the Plan, how consultation responses have been taken into account, how reasonable alternatives were considered and finally identify the measures to be taken to monitor significant effects.

The Habitats Regulation Assessment is covered separately under section 7 of this Statement.

2. How the environmental and sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Plan for Stafford Borough

The Plan for Stafford Borough has been produced in several stages, with on-going consultation and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) at each stage. In accordance with good practice, Stafford Borough Council has carried out SA and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) collectively as one assessment at each stage of Plan production. The table in Appendix 1 shows how each of the requirements of the SEA directive have been met.

The SA process has been guided by the SA Framework which was established in 2007, in the SA Scoping document. The SA Framework has been applied to each document throughout the production of the Plan for Stafford Borough, to ensure that the policies in the final Plan are sustainable. The table below shows the stages of document production, the related SA report and the stage of the SA process each relates to, with references to the relevant Examination Library documents shown in brackets.

Local Plan Stage	Related SA document and Examination Library Reference	SA/SEA Stage
Prior to commencement	SA Scoping Report (H13)	Stage A - Setting the context, objectives, baseline and scope for the SA
Development Strategy and Principles for Settlement Development	SA Vol. 1 Borough-wide Development Strategy (H10)	Stage B - Developing and refining plan options (SA Commentary)
Issues and Options	SA Vol. 2 Issues and Options (H7)	Stage B - Developing and refining plan options (SA Commentary)
Draft Core Policies	SA Report Draft Publication (H4)	Stage C - Appraisal of the social, economic and environmental effects of the plan (SA Report)
Local Choices	SA Strategic Policy Choices (H2)	Stage B - Developing and refining plan options (SA Commentary)
Publication	Revised SA Report Publication (A10)	Stages C & D - Appraisal of the social, economic and environmental effects of the plan (SA Report) and Consulting on the plan and the SA Report

Publication (Planning Strategy)	Revised SA Report Addendum (A12)	Stages C & D - Appraisal of the social, economic and environmental effects of the plan (SA Report) and Consulting on the plan and the SA Report
Main Modifications	SA of Main Modifications Addendum (O1.4)	Stages C & D - Appraisal of the social, economic and environmental effects of the plan (SA Report) and Consulting on the plan and the SA Report
Adoption	SA Adoption Statement	Stage E - Monitoring the implementation of the plan

Following a staged production process allows the findings from the SA process at each stage to be fed into the next iteration of the Plan. This ensured the robustness and sustainability of the Plan, as any potential issues were raised and addressed during the Plan production.

The process was further strengthened by on-going consultation. Each SA document was released for consultation alongside the associated Plan production document, allowing stakeholders to comment on any key sustainability issues.

3. How the Sustainability Appraisal reports have been taken into account

At each Plan making stage the SA process predicts the impacts and implications of the development strategy and each individual policy. Each aspect of the Plan was evaluated against the SA Framework to establish how well it performed in sustainability terms.

The Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report sets out the full details of how the SA process and outputs were taken into account. A brief summary is provided below.

Local Plan Stage	Related SA document and Examination Library Reference	SA/SEA Influence
Prior to commencement	SA Scoping Report (H13)	The Scoping Report established the SA framework which would be applied throughout the SA process. It also identified baseline data to be used as the basis for prediction and monitoring of environmental and other sustainability effects.
Development Strategy and Principles for Settlement Development	SA Vol. 1 Borough-wide Development Strategy (H10)	<p>The SA appraised the 6 broad development strategy options outlined in the Plan for Stafford Borough - Borough Wide Development Strategy, along with a 'business as usual' approach against the SA objectives.</p> <p>The most sustainable option was to provide development at Stafford, Stone and the principal settlements, as these locations provide greater employment, housing and public transport opportunities. Continuing with the policies in the Stafford Borough Local Plan would not provide adequate provision of employment and housing required to meet the needs of the Borough.</p>
Issues and Options	SA Vol. 2 Issues and Options (H7)	The SA compared the Plan objectives and the SA objectives, resulting in several amendments to the Plan objectives, mainly relating to mitigation of adverse impacts, requiring high quality design that reflects local character. The SA recognised the difficulty in appraising broad locations and

		instead provided general settlement based observations and offered a range of recommendations and development principles that should be reflected in any options taken forward.
Draft Core Policies	SA Report Draft Publication (H4)	The SA considered the development strategy, the strategic locations and the draft policies. It assessed 52 policies and recommended wording changes to 15 of these. The SA also considered the cumulative impacts of the policies in the Plan.
Local Choices	SA Strategic Policy Choices (H2)	Following the intended abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the replacement of Planning Policy Statements with the National Planning Policy Framework, the Strategic Policy Choices set out various options for consideration before the Plan was published. The SA appraised the Strategic Policy Choices. It concluded that the preferred settlement strategy and the preferred levels of development for housing and employment were appropriate. It recommended a flexible approach to affordable housing (with a minimum of a 30% requirement). Seeing as the Plan will not contain development boundaries for all settlements the SA suggested that a criteria based policy is adopted, with the opportunity to introduce development boundaries where considered necessary as this would allow for development to take place in advance of an allocation document being adopted.
Publication	Revised SA Report Publication (A10)	The SA of the Publication version of the Plan recommended four further wording changes to policies. It also sets out the SA monitoring framework, this establishes the monitoring and mitigation measures that will be employed to ensure that identified uncertain effects of policies do not turn into negative effects.
Publication (Planning Strategy)	Revised SA Report Addendum (A12)	Through the process of seeking representations on the Publication Plan an alternative site was submitted, which had not previously been appraised as a

		<p>reasonable alternative. Also, the Sustainability Appraisal did not make explicit consideration of the development potential of land west of the M6 in Stafford or land south west of Stone. The SA addendum appraised these extra sites. It found that none of the sites demonstrate a more sustainable option than the three Strategic Development Locations for Stafford and one Strategic Development Location for Stone identified in the Publication Plan.</p>
<p>Main Modifications</p>	<p>SA of Main Modifications Addendum (O1.4)</p>	<p>The SA considered the proposed main modifications to the Plan. Only three of the main modifications result in changes to the SA findings as reported in the Revised SA Report. None of the changes to the SA scores result in further likely major (significant) effects (either positive or negative) being introduced in relation to any of the SA objectives. Similarly, none of the previously identified likely major (significant) effects of the Plan have been removed as a result of the modifications.</p>

4. How opinions expressed through public consultation have been taken into account

The Regulations require that Local Authorities consult stakeholders at various stages of the SA process. Stafford Borough Council made all Sustainability Appraisal documents available for public comment at each stage of the Plan making process.

The following organisations and individuals responded to the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report:

- Sport across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- Mr T Midgeley
- Advantage West Midlands
- Local Agenda 21, Stafford Borough Council
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Stafford Gospel Hall Trust
- English Heritage

The following organisations and individuals responded to the Sustainability Appraisal Commentary Volume 1:

- English Heritage
- Mr J Eld
- Centro - WMPTA
- Government Office for the West Midlands
- CAMRA
- The Environment Agency

The following organisations and individuals responded to the Sustainability Appraisal Commentary Volume 2:

- Environment Agency
- Mrs L von Elbing
- S Mellenchip
- Eccleshall Parish Council
- Mrs A Vaughan
- Evans, Stott & Boote Families, c/o First City Ltd
- B B Apps
- Ms A Margetson

The following organisations and individuals responded to the Sustainability Appraisal Report:

- Environment Agency
- Natural England

The following organisations and individuals responded to the Sustainability Appraisal accompanying the Strategic Policy Choices:

- Environment Agency
- Ilr G Meddings

- Mr F Biard
- Mr D Turner
- Mrs V Darlington
- Mr and Mrs Bramall
- T Thatcher
- Mrs A Murphy
- Mr M Smith
- Mr C J Leather
- Mr M Tweed
- Natural England

Details of the responses to these SA documents can be viewed in section vii of the Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report. This section also shows any changes which were made to the Sustainability Appraisal as a result of comments received.

The following responded to the Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report:

- Environment Agency

The following organisations and individuals responded to the Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report: Addendum:

- Natural England
- Staffordshire Police
- Mr J Harbottle
- Creswell Parish Council
- Network Rail
- Castle Homes and Properties Ltd.
- Environment agency
- Maximus Strategic

Details of the responses to these SA documents can be viewed in the online consultation portal <http://staffordbc-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/>.

In addition, Stafford Borough Council has prepared a Submission Consultation Statement (A14 in the Examination library) which sets out how consultation was carried out throughout the production of the Plan for Stafford Borough. It explains who was consulted, how they were consulted and a summary of their comments, and any changes made to the Plan in light of these.

5. Reasons for choosing the Plan for Stafford Borough as adopted in light of other reasonable alternatives considered

The SA process was used throughout the development of the Plan for Stafford Borough to help guide decisions on which options were taken forward. There has been iterative and on-going scrutiny of the reasonable alternative options, both for the development strategy and its supporting policies. The adopted document reflects the most sustainable and deliverable approach to future development within the Borough, when judged against the other alternatives considered.

The range of reasonable alternatives considered was mainly dictated by national (and in the early stages of Plan production, regional) objectives. The initial development strategy options were developed with regard for these wider parameters of reasonable alternatives. The broad development strategy options were rigorously assessed against the SA framework. The most sustainable option was to provide development at Stafford, Stone and the principal settlements as these locations provide greater employment, housing and public transport opportunities.

The proposed locations for growth options around each of the settlements were then assessed against the SA framework. The SA process identified which options would result in positive, negative or uncertain effects. This assessment assisted in selecting the preferred options.

In a similar approach to the assessment of development options the specific wording of supporting policies was assessed against the SA framework, with a number of suggested wording changes were proposed and incorporated into the Publication version of the Plan.

Following the intended abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the replacement of Planning Policy Statements with the National Planning Policy Framework, Stafford Borough Council carried out further SA of options to reflect the altered parameters of reasonable alternatives.

Through the process of seeking representations on the Publication Plan an alternative site was submitted, which had not previously been appraised as a reasonable alternative. Also, it was felt that the SA process had not made explicit consideration of the development potential of land west of the M6 in Stafford or land south west of Stone. The SA addendum appraised these extra sites.

The Council is confident that all alternative options have been appraised in the production of the Plan for Stafford Borough as adopted.

6. Monitoring

The Regulations require Local Authorities to monitor the likely significant effects of the implementation of the Plan. The purpose of monitoring is to address both likely significant impacts and unforeseen effects of implementation of the Plan, to enable appropriate remedial action if unexpected negative effects occur.

The Plan for Stafford Borough sets out, in Appendix E, a comprehensive monitoring framework for the policies in the Plan. The monitoring framework set out in the Plan for Stafford Borough corresponds with that of the SA monitoring framework detailed in section 6.1 of the Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report.

The performance of the Plan and its policies will be assessed annually against the monitoring framework and reported in the borough's Authority Monitoring Report. The monitoring reports will be made available on the Council's website.

7. Habitats Regulations Assessment

A full Habitats Regulation Assessment has been carried out on the Plan for Stafford Borough. A series of mitigation measures have been included in the Plan to protect the integrity of the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation.

Work relating to the Habitat Regulations Assessment of the Plan for Stafford Borough began in 2007 when a screening opinion was produced. The screening opinion concluded that *it was not certain whether the effects identified were significant and / or likely but following the precautionary principle, the next stage of the Habitats Regulations Assessment, the Appropriate Assessment stage will be carried out in relation to The Plan for Stafford Borough to clarify on issues of significance*. Natural England were consulted on the screening opinion and concluded that the report was adequate for its purpose.

Further evidence was then gathered to investigate the possible effects, which were air quality, water quality and quantity and impacts from visitor recreation.

Taking into account the mitigation measures included within the policies of the Plan it is not considered that implementing the Plan will have a significant effect on the integrity of Cannock Chase SAC.

In terms of air quality and water abstraction this conclusion is based on evidence and discussion with the Environment Agency and the implementation of Policy N6 within the Plan for Stafford Borough. It is important that possible effects are still monitored through the plan monitoring process, and the plan is reviewed if necessary.

In relation to the various impacts of visitor use the conclusion is based on the implementation of Policy N6 and the intention by the Cannock Chase SAC Partnership to produce a visitor impacts mitigation and implementation plan. It is imperative that the mitigation and implementation plan is in place as soon as The Plan is adopted, to ensure that mitigation is provided at the right time in the planning application process. It is important that the implementation of mitigation, along with reviewing the condition of Cannock Chase SAC is carried out on a regular basis.

8. Conclusion

This Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement has been prepared to fulfil the Council's obligations under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

As detailed within this Statement, Stafford Borough Council has fully complied with the SA, SEA and HRA requirements in producing the Plan for Stafford Borough.

9. Appendix 1

All references to sections are to sections of the Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report (A10 in the Examination library).

Environmental Report: Compliance with the requirements of the SEA Directive	
Preparation of an environmental report in which the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme, and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated. The information to be given is (Art. 5 and Annex 1):	The Revised Sustainability Appraisal Report
a) An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.	Section 2.7 and Section 3
b) The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme.	Section 3.1 and Technical appendices
c) The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.	Technical Appendices
d) Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC.	Section 3, Appendices 2 v
e) The environmental protection objectives established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.	Section 3
f) The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects).	Appendices 1 i and iv
g) The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme.	Appendices 1 i Section 6
h) An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information.	Appendices 1 v and vi

i) A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10.	Section 6.1
j) A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.	Non technical summary
The report shall include the information that may reasonably be required taking into account current knowledge and methods of assessment, the contents and level of detail in the plan or programme, its stage in the decision-making process and the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process to avoid duplication of the assessment (Art. 5.2).	Technical appendices and Section 4.1
Consultation: authorities with environmental responsibility, when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information which must be included in the environmental/sustainability appraisal report (Art. 5.4)	Appendices 2 vii
authorities with environmental, social or economic responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the draft plan or programme and the accompanying environmental / sustainability appraisal report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2)	Appendices 2 vii
other EU Member States, where the implementation of the plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment of that country (Art. 7).	Not applicable
Taking the environmental/ sustainability appraisal report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making (Art. 8)	Appendices 2 vii Appendices 1 v and vi
When the plan or programme is adopted, the public and any countries consulted under Art.7 must be informed and the following made available to those so informed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the plan or programme as adopted • a statement summarising how environmental, social and economic considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental/sustainability appraisal report of Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of consultations entered into pursuant to Art. 7 have been taken into account in accordance with Art. 8, and the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and • the measures decided concerning monitoring (Art. 9) 	This Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement

Monitoring of the significant environmental, social and economic effects of the plan's or programme's implementation (Art. 10)	To be included in the Annual Authority Monitoring Report
Quality assurance: environmental/sustainability appraisal reports should be of a sufficient standard to meet the requirements of the SEA Directive	Section 1