

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Vale of White Horse District Local Plan Part 2

**Interim SA Report
Non-technical Summary**

March 2017

DOCUMENT DETAILS

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Introduction

AECOM is commissioned to undertake Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in support of the emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2). LPP2 will allocate land for development, and also present policies (district-wide and site-specific) to guide future planning applications. Alongside Local Plan Part 1 (LPP1), which was adopted in December 2016, it will establish a planning framework for the District up to 2031.

SA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating adverse effects and maximising the positives. SA for Local Plans is a legal requirement, in-line with the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive.

At the current time, a 'Draft Plan' version of LPP2 is published under Regulation 18 of the Local Planning Regulations, and an 'Interim SA Report' is published alongside. The Interim SA Report aims to inform representations, and subsequent plan-making work (see the discussion of 'next steps', below).

This is a Non-technical Summary (NTS) of the Interim SA Report.

Structure of the Interim SA Report / this NTS

SA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:

1. What has plan-making / SA involved up to this point?
 - i.e. in the run-up to preparing the Draft Plan.
2. What are the appraisal findings at this current stage?
 - i.e. in relation to the Draft Plan.
3. What are the next steps?

Each of these questions is answered in turn below. Firstly though there is a need to set the scene further by answering the question 'What's the scope of the SA?'

What's the scope of the SA?

The scope of the SA is essentially reflected in a list of sustainability objectives. Taken together, these objectives indicate the parameters of SA, and provide a methodological 'framework' for appraisal.

Sustainability objectives, issues and questions (the SA framework)

Sustainability objective
1. Provide sufficient suitable homes including affordable homes.
2. Ensure the availability of high-quality services and facilities in the Vale's towns and rural areas.
3. Reduce the need to travel and Improve provisions for walking, cycling and public transport.
4. Improve the health and well-being of Vale residents.
5. Reduce inequality, poverty and social exclusion, and raise educational achievement and skills levels.
6. Support a strong and sustainable economy within the Vale's towns and rural areas.
7. Improve and protect the natural environment including biodiversity, water and soil quality
8. Protect the cultural heritage and provide a high-quality townscape and landscape.
9. Reduce air, noise and light pollution
10. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the use of resources and improve resource efficiency
11. Increase resilience to climate change and flooding

PLAN-MAKING / SA UP TO THIS POINT

An important element of the required SA process involves appraising ‘reasonable alternatives’ in time to inform development of the draft plan, and then publishing information on reasonable alternatives for consultation alongside the draft plan.

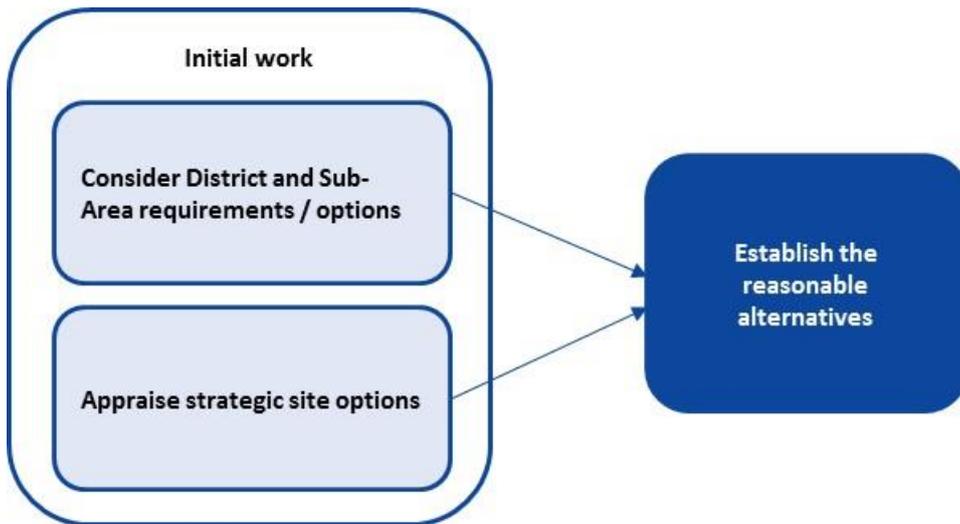
As such, Part 1 of the Interim SA Report explains how work was undertaken to develop and appraise a ‘reasonable’ range of alternative approaches to site allocation. Specifically, Part 1 of the report -

- 1) explains the process of **establishing** the reasonable alternatives
- 2) presents the outcomes of **appraising** the reasonable alternatives
- 3) explains reasons for **establishing** the preferred option, in light of the appraisal.

Establishing reasonable alternatives

The main report explains how reasonable alternatives were established subsequent to two stages of initial work – see figure.

Establishing reasonable alternatives



The reasonable alternatives ultimately arrived at are presented in the table below. At this point it is important to state clearly that the figures relate to the number of homes to be provided for through LPP2 allocations. In addition to LPP2 allocations there are other sites that are ‘commitments’, including sites within planning permission and sites that are allocated through Local Plan Part 1.

The reasonable alternatives

Sub-Area	Location	Option 1 Reliance on large sites	Option 2 Less reliance on large sites	Option 3 Least reliance on large sites	Option 4 The preferred option
Abingdon and Oxford Fringe	Dalton Barracks	1350	525	200	1200
	E of Kingston Bagpuize	600	600	600	600
	N of Marcham	250	250	250	400
	SE of Marcham	0	0	0	120
	S of Abingdon	0	525	200	0
	East Hanney	0	150	150	130
	Steventon	0	150	150	0
	Kingston Bagpuize	0	0	350	0
	Cumnor	0	0	150	0
	Wootton	0	0	150	0
South East Vale	Harwell Campus	1000	400	250	1000
	W of Harwell	150	150	150	100
	Milton Heights	250	550	0	0
	Rowstock	0	0	700	0
	NW of Grove	0	0	0	300
Western Vale	0	300	300	0	
Total		3,600	3,600	3,600	3,850

Appraising reasonable alternatives

Summary appraisal findings are presented within the table below. Within each row (i.e. for each of the topics that comprise the SA framework) the columns to the right hand side seek to both categorise the performance of each option in terms of ‘significant effects’ (using red / green) and also rank the alternatives in relative order of performance. Also, ‘ = ’ is used to denote instances where the alternatives perform on a par (i.e. it not possible to differentiate between them).

Summary alternatives appraisal findings

Summary findings and conclusions				
Objective ¹	Categorisation and rank			
	Option 1 Reliance on large sites	Option 2 Less reliance on large sites	Option 3 Least reliance on large sites	Option 4 The preferred option
Homes	3	3		2
Services and facilities		2	3	3
Movement		4		
Health	=	=	=	=
Inequality and exclusion	=	=	=	=
Economy	=	=	=	=
Natural environment	=	=	=	=
Heritage		3	4	2
Landscape		3	4	
Pollution		2	2	2
Climate change mitigation	=	=	=	=
Climate change adaptation	=	=	=	=

¹ A decision was made to ‘split’ landscape and heritage, i.e. give stand-alone consideration to each issue.

Summary findings and conclusions

	Categorisation and rank			
	Option 1 Reliance on large sites	Option 2 Less reliance on large sites	Option 3 Least reliance on large sites	Option 4 The preferred option

Conclusions

The appraisal shows Option 1 to perform best in terms of the greatest number of objectives, primarily because it would involve concentrating growth at a small number of large sites.

Option 4 also performs well, and performs notably better than Option 1 in terms of ‘housing’, as it reflects the latest understanding of housing delivery potential at Dalton Barracks, and proposes some additional smaller sites that could deliver early in the plan period. However, Option 4 performs worse than Option 1 in terms of ‘Pollution’ (due to air quality concerns at Marcham) and also ‘Services and facilities’ (due to a school capacity constraint at Marcham).

Options 2 and 3 perform poorly in terms of a number of objectives, including ‘Pollution’ as development of the South of Abingdon site ahead of a new bypass road would worsen traffic congestion and air quality within Abingdon Town Centre. Option 3 would involve reliance on the most number of sites, which would have positive implications from a ‘Housing’ perspective, but negative implications in terms of: ‘Landscape’ (allocation at Rowstock being a key issue); ‘Heritage’ (issues would result from allocation at South of Abingdon, Cumnor and Wootton, plus high growth at Kingston Bagpuize); and ‘Services/facilities’ (issues would potentially result from high growth at Kingston Bagpuize, given distance to a GP facility). Option 3 is identified as preferable to Option 2 in terms of ‘Movement’ on the basis that Evaluation of Transport Impacts (ETI) work, and also because Option 2 assumes a focus of growth at Milton Heights, a location where there are infrastructure constraints.

Establishing the preferred option

The following text is the Council’s response to the alternatives appraisal, i.e. reasons for supporting the preferred option (Option 4) in-light of the alternatives appraisal.

“The proposal is to allocate sites through LPP2 to complement those set out in LPP1. The proposal is for the Local Plan 2031 (Parts 1 and 2) to ‘fully’ meet the objectively assessed need for housing arising from the Vale of White Horse district (20,560 homes) and from neighbouring authorities (2,200 homes) and deliver an additional 1,400 homes within the South East Vale Sub-Area in accordance with the ‘spatial strategy’ and support infrastructure delivery.

The proposed LPP2 allocations are fully consistent with the ‘spatial strategy’ set out in LPP1 and support the housing requirements identified for each of the three sub-areas in the Part 1 plan. The appraisal of alternative approaches to allocation presented above (Table 7.1) highlights that the proposed package of allocations performs well in a number of respects. Issues are highlighted in terms of ‘access to services and facilities’ (specifically primary school capacity), ‘heritage’ and pollution (specifically the matter of air quality), all of which are site specific issues that can be addressed through further work subsequent to consultation.

It is also noted that Option 1 performs well, in terms of a number of objectives, because it involves concentrating growth at a small number of larger sites. The Council will examine further the potential to rely on a small number of larger sites, although the benefits would need to be balanced with the need for a range of sites that deliver throughout the plan period.”

APPRAISAL FINDINGS AT THIS STAGE

Part 2 of the Interim SA Report answers the question – *What are appraisal findings at this stage?* – by presenting an appraisal of the Draft Plan. Appraisal findings are presented as a series of narratives under the ‘SA framework’ headings, with each narrative ending in a concluding paragraph.²

Homes

The LPP2 spatial strategy performs well, in that the quantum and distribution of homes should ensure that housing needs are met at various scales (Oxfordshire Housing Market Area, Vale of White Horse District and specific areas / settlements), and help to ensure a robust housing trajectory across the plan period. However, there will be a need for further work to confirm deliverability at several sites – most notably Dalton Barracks.

The housing focused Development Policies perform well, and should appropriately compliment the Core Policies. In particular, detail is added in support of Core Policy 22 (Housing Mix) and Core Policy 26 (Accommodating Current and Future Needs of an Ageing Population). There is also a need to consider the effect of all other proposed Development Policies, in that requirements on developers can affect viability and in turn rates of housing delivery; however, a Viability Assessment has been completed, and determined that the effect of Development Policies in combination will not be to overly burden the development industry.

In conclusion, the Draft Plan is predicted to result in significant positive effects.

Services and facilities

The LPP2 spatial strategy performs well, in that development is directed to sites/locations where there should be good potential to support accessibility to services and facilities; however, there remain some issues/uncertainties, including primary school capacity.

The ‘community facilities’ focused Development Policies perform well, and should appropriately compliment the Core Policies. In particular, detail is added in support of Core Policy 7 (Providing Supporting Infrastructure and Services).

In conclusion, the Draft Plan performs well in most respects; however, effects are mixed. The positives are not likely to be ‘significant’ in that the plan is not expected to deliver new community infrastructure of strategic importance, i.e. infrastructure that will serve to address an existing issue, as opposed to ‘consuming the smoke’ of the new development (although there is the potential to explore the option of a new secondary school at Dalton Barracks). The negatives are also not likely to be ‘significant’, recognising the potential for further work to explore means of addressing primary school constraints.

Movement

The LPP2 spatial strategy performs well, in that development is directed to sites/locations in accordance with the LPP1 broad spatial strategy and the settlement hierarchy, and concentrations of growth will help to secure/maintain funding for transport infrastructure and services (notably, a concentration of growth in the Science Vale will contribute to the established Science Vale Strategic Infrastructure Package, and Dalton Barracks will contribute to funding for upgrades to the Lodge Hill A34 junction). However, not all proposed sites are located directly on a strategic transport corridor.

The ‘transport’ focused Development Policies perform well, and should appropriately compliment the Core Policies. In particular, detail is added in support of Core Policies 33-36. A number of other policies also have positive implications for ‘movement’ objectives, including those that relate to retail / town centres, and those that relate to green infrastructure.

In conclusion, effects remain uncertain at this stage. There is a need for further work, including detailed Evaluation of Transport Impacts (ETI) that takes account of opportunities for additional transport infrastructure upgrades and other mitigation measures.

² A decision was made to ‘split’ landscape and heritage, i.e. give stand-alone consideration to each issue.

Health

The spatial strategy performs well, in the sense that allocation of Dalton Barracks should lead to delivery of a new Country Park.

The Development Policies perform well, and should appropriately compliment the Core Policies, which seeks to provide for good health through Core Policy 37 (Design and Local Distinctiveness), Core Policy 45 (Green Infrastructure) and the sustainable transport policies.

In conclusion, the Draft Plan performs well; however, it is not clear that there is the potential to conclude significant positive effects, recognising the wide ranging nature of health determinants.

Inequality and exclusion

The spatial strategy has few implications for the achievement of 'inequality and exclusion objectives'. However, the Development Policies will play an important role in this respect, in particular through their support for addressing specialist housing needs.

In conclusion, the Draft Plan performs well but significant effects are not predicted.

Economy

The LPP2 spatial strategy performs well, given a focus of housing growth in the Science Vale, and at Harwell Campus in particular (albeit at the expense of some employment land). It may transpire that some small scale employment uses can be delivered at the Dalton Barracks site.

The 'employment' focused Development Policies perform well, and should appropriately compliment the Core Policies. In particular, detail is added in support of Core Policies 28-32, which cover: Change of Use; Further and Higher Education; Development to Support the Visitor Economy; and New Development on Unallocated Sites and for Retail Development and other Main Town Centre Uses.

In conclusion, the Draft Plan is predicted to result in significant positive effects.

Natural environment

The spatial strategy performs well in that there is a focus of growth in the South East Vale, where there are fewer biodiversity constraints; however, there are a number of site specific issues that will require further consideration. Most importantly, the HRA has been able to conclude that LPP2 will not lead to likely significant effects on Cothill Fen SAC or Oxford Meadows SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

There are no dedicated biodiversity focused Development Policies proposed, recognising that LPP1 sets out to protect and enhance biodiversity through Core Policies 45 and 46; however, proposed policies on 'Watercourses' and 'The Wilts and Berks Canal' are supportive of biodiversity and green infrastructure objectives.

In conclusion, the Draft Plan performs well, although effects are mixed. There will be a need for mitigation measures, and in this respect it is notable that a Green Infrastructure Strategy is in preparation. On the assumption that mitigation will be put in place, it is possible to conclude that significant negative effects are not likely.

Heritage

The spatial strategy performs well, in that growth is focused primarily at locations that are relatively unconstrained; however, a large scheme to the east of Kingston Bagpuize gives rise to some concerns, given proximity to the conservation area.

The heritage focused Development Policies perform well, and should appropriately compliment the Core Policies. In particular, detail is added in support of Core Policy 39 (The Historic Environment).

In conclusion, the Draft Plan performs well, although effects are mixed. There will be good potential for mitigation through masterplanning, design and landscaping measures, and on this basis significant negative effects are not likely.

Landscape

The spatial strategy performs well in that careful account of landscape capacity has informed the site selection process, and as such the majority of proposed allocations are relatively unconstrained in this respect. Nonetheless, there are some site-specific issues, including at Harwell Campus, which lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB (albeit the site is an existing employment allocation, and good potential to avoid impacts through careful masterplanning and design has been established).

The Development Policies perform well, and should appropriately compliment the Core Policies. In particular, detail is added in support of Core Policy 37 (Design and Local Distinctiveness) and Core Policy 44 (Landscape).

In conclusion, the Draft Plan performs well, but there remain some uncertainties ahead of further work. Significant negative effects are not predicted, recognising that there is much potential to examine landscape closely through site specific work ahead of plan finalisation.

Pollution

The proposal to focus growth at Marcham gives rise to significant concerns, given that one of the District's three designated Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) is found here. In other respects the spatial strategy performs well, including on the basis that no allocations are proposed in locations that would lead to worsened traffic congestion within the Abingdon Town Centre AQMA.

The pollution, environmental quality and amenity focused Development Policies perform well, and should appropriately compliment the Core Policies. In particular, detail is added in support of Core Policy 37 (Design and Local Distinctiveness) and Core Policy 43 (Natural Resources).

In conclusion, it is appropriate to 'flag' the potential for the plan to result in significant negative effects, given the Marcham AQMA issue. This matter will need to be examined in detail, ahead of plan finalisation.

Climate change mitigation

Focusing on the matter of minimising per capita CO2 emissions from the built environment (as opposed to emissions from transport), the proposed spatial strategy performs well in that there is a concentration of growth at larger sites, potentially leading to opportunities to design-in low carbon infrastructure. However, there is little certainty, at this early stage.

No proposed LPP2 Development Policies are focused on climate change mitigation / low carbon development, recognising that a strong policy framework is provided by Core Policy 40 (Sustainable Design and Construction) and Core Policy 41 (Renewable Energy). See also the discussion above, regarding the performance of policies in terms of 'Movement' objectives.

In conclusion, effects are uncertain. Further work should examine the capacity of sites to deliver low carbon infrastructure. Significant effects are not predicted, recognising that climate change is a global issue (and hence local actions can have only limited effect).

Climate change adaptation

The spatial strategy performs well in that areas at risk of flooding are set to be avoided. Other climate change adaptation issues relate to water resources and water quality, and in this respect there is a need to await the findings of a detailed Water Cycle Strategy.

No proposed LPP2 Development Policies are focused on flood risk, water or other climate change adaptation related issues. However, the policies discussed above as performing well in 'Biodiversity' terms are relevant.

In conclusion, the Draft Plan performs well; however, significant effects are not predicted.

CONCLUSIONS AT THIS CURRENT STAGE

The appraisal finds the Draft Plan to perform well in terms of the majority of objectives, with ‘significant positive effects’ predicted in terms of ‘Housing’ (as objectively assessed housing needs should be met) and ‘the Economy’ (given the proposed high growth strategy within Science Vale). However, significant negative effects are predicted in terms of ‘Pollution’, given a risk that growth focused at Marcham would worsen traffic congestion within the designated Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). Issues or uncertainties are also highlighted in terms of ‘Movement’ (given a need for further evidence through Evaluation of Transport Impacts, ETI); ‘Services and Facilities’ (given a need to explore means of ensuring sufficient primary school capacity) and ‘Landscape’ / ‘Biodiversity’ (given several site specific issues that will need further work, including in relation to the avoidance/mitigation of AONB impacts at Harwell Campus).

Next steps

Part 3 of the SA Report answers– *What happens next?* – by discussing plan finalisation and monitoring.

Plan finalisation

Subsequent to the current consultation, the Council’s intention is to prepare the Proposed Submission version of the Plan for publication. This will be the version of the plan that the Council believes to be ‘sound’ and intends to submit to the Government for Examination in Public. The SA Report will be published alongside the Proposed Submission Plan, with a view to informing representations.

Subsequent to publication stage, the main issues raised will be identified and summarised by the Council, who will then consider whether the plan can still be deemed to be ‘sound’. Assuming that this is the case, the plan (and the summary of representations received) will be submitted for Examination. At Examination a government appointed Planning Inspector will consider representations (in addition to the SA Report and other submitted evidence) before determining whether the plan is sound (or requires further modifications).

If found to be ‘sound’ the plan will be formally adopted by the Council. At the time of Adoption an ‘SA Statement’ will be published that sets out (amongst other things) ‘the measures decided concerning monitoring’.

Monitoring

At the current time, there is a need only to present ‘measures envisaged concerning monitoring’. A proposed monitoring framework is presented within Appendix H of LPP1, and links to Policy CP47 (Delivery and contingency). The LPP1 monitoring framework should provide a good basis for monitoring the effects of LPP1. The appraisal of Draft LLP2 presented above serves to suggest that there might be a focus on monitoring indicators relating to air quality.