

TOPIC PAPER 12: Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment

The way that the whole town develops in the future will be affected by planning decisions. Crawley Borough Council has started work on a new local plan that will help to guide development in Crawley over 15 years from 2014-2029.

This consultation period forms part of the early engagement, and further consultation stages are planned before the document is adopted in 2014. Comments received to earlier consultation periods, including to the Topic Papers in 2009, the Town Centre North Supplementary Planning Document and the Manor Royal Masterplan, will continue to be taken into consideration, alongside the technical evidence base, when formulating the Local Plan Preferred Strategy. The Preferred Strategy will be made available for a further period of consultation later in 2012.

This is your opportunity to shape the way the town develops and the council would appreciate and value any comments you have on this Topic Paper or any of the others that form part of this consultation.

Consultation Questions:

It is recommended that anyone interested in the SA/SEA or HRA processes refers to the consultation Scoping Report and Draft HRA Screening Report respectively, which are available as part of the consultation. Some questions that you might like to consider when reading the documents are set out below:

- SA1. Having read the HRA screening report, do you feel that Appropriate Assessment of the impact of the implementation of the Local Plan is required?
- SA2. Will our proposed methodology appraise the social, environmental and economic impacts of development proposals in line with the requirements for SA?
- SA3. Are there any other groups with an interest in development in Crawley who we should involve in the process? (See Appendix B for a list of proposed list of consultation partners)
- SA4. Are there any other issues you feel we should consider when developing the long term plan for development in the Borough?
- SA5. Do the proposed Sustainability Objectives cover all the issues that are important to consider when developing land or buildings in Crawley?
- SA6. Please make any suggestions for information you consider to be useful for the Council to monitor for assessing whether development is taking place in a sustainable manner.

Summary of Current Context:

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment

To help ensure that the Crawley Local Development Framework (LDF) is sustainable, a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has to be undertaken alongside all Local Development Documents (LDDs). An SA is a process that aims to predict and then assess the economic, environmental and social effects likely to arise from the adoption of a LDD.

The Council is also required by European Law to undertake another appraisal known as a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). An SEA is a process for identifying the environmental impacts likely to arise from an LDD. As both the SA and the SEA aim to predict and assess the impacts of plans, they are usually combined to avoid duplication. They are referred to as the SA/SEA.

In tandem with the topic papers (Nos. 1 – 12) prepared as part of the early engagement consultation stage for the Local Plan, an SA/SEA Scoping Report has been prepared. It is the intention that the SA/SEA Scoping Report will be used as the basis for appraising the Local Plan and proposes the methodology that will be used to do this.

A separate European Directive relates to the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora – the ‘European Habitats Directive’ (92/43/EEC). A Draft Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report has been prepared to accompany the SA Scoping at consultation. It sets out the sites designated at European level that are closest to Crawley, and concludes that on the evidence available, it is unlikely that development at Crawley will have a significant impact on the sites. Additional evidence gathered during the preparation of the Local Plan will be used to inform this opinion and further consultation will be undertaken to agree the scope of any further work with statutory stakeholders such as Natural England.

Habitat Regulations Assessment

The Council is also required to undertake a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). The purpose of a Habitat Regulations Assessment is to assess the impacts of a land-use plan against the conservation objectives of sites protected by European law. The assessment must determine whether the plan would adversely affect the integrity of the sites in terms of their nature conservation objectives. Where negative effects are identified, other options should be examined to avoid any potential damaging effects on the designated sites.

To accompany the Local Plan (previously referred to as the ‘Core Strategy Review’) a non-statutory consultation document, a Draft HRA Screening Report, has been prepared. The principle aim of this document is to ‘screen’ the potential for the Local Plan to impact, either alone or in combination with other plans, on the three European Sites within 15 kilometres of the Borough’s boundary, which are: Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Mole Valley to Reigate Escarpment SAC.

The main impacts of the Local Plan on the three European Sites are likely to be:

- Increased traffic to and through the sites – leading to increased air pollution, which could affect species that are sensitive to air quality (e.g. lichens); and
- Increased recreational visits – possibly with associated disturbance of fauna and impacts on the habitats (e.g. through trampling).

The Draft Screening Report concludes on the basis of the evidence available that there will be no significant effect on the sites as a result of Local Plan developments. However, Crawley will continue to assemble evidence as the proposals of the Local Plan are defined in more detail, and continue discussion with Natural England. If it is identified that an effect on the identified sites is likely, a full appraisal – known as an Appropriate Assessment – will be undertaken to ensure that the Local Plan does not impact upon the identified sites.

The Council will therefore look into providing further information in time for the next consultation period on the Local Plan, when a revised Screening Report will be issued.

Key Issues:

The SA/SEA itself has been split into Topic Areas incorporating specific Directives from the SEA, which cover similar ground to the Local Plan consultation Topic Papers, although some issues have been combined. Baseline data has been collected for each of the Topic Areas using the most up-to-date information known to the Council. This baseline data has been used to establish the key issues facing the Borough. This in turn enabled a number of objectives to be identified.

The sustainability objectives listed will be used to appraise the policy options considered as Local Development Framework policies are created and progressed. They will also help identify potential mitigation measures that might be appropriate to offset the impact of the policies in social, environmental and economic terms. The Topic Areas and sustainability objectives are as follows:

A Climate Change, Sustainability, Sustainable Design and Construction

Including: energy efficiency; flooding; air quality; noise; water; waste; climatic factors.

Objective One - To minimise climate change and local pollution through the promotion of low carbon and energy efficient transport and buildings; promotion of low/zero carbon and decentralised energy; low pollution technology and the reduction of waste

Objective Two - To adapt to the effects of climate change through the reduction of the risk of flooding and the amount of waste water; sustainable design of developments, and effective management of water resources

B Design and Heritage

Including: urban design; urban environment; cultural heritage.

Objective Three – To protect and enhance the valued built environment and character within the Borough through high quality new design and the protection of culturally valuable areas and buildings

C Housing

Including: housing need; aspirations; strategic development locations.

Objective Four - To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent and affordable home.

D Economy

Including: maximising benefits of Gatwick Diamond; vibrant town centres; strong economic growth.

Objective Five - To maintain, support and promote a diverse employment base that can serve the local and sub-regional and regional economy.

E Natural Environment

Including: countryside; landscape, biodiversity; greenways.

Objective Six – To conserve and enhance the biodiversity habitats, key landscape features, fauna and flora within the Borough.

F Transport and Infrastructure

Including: roads; rail; public transport; water; sewerage, Gatwick.

Objective Seven – To reduce car journeys and promote sustainable and

alternative methods of transport, whilst ensuring sufficient transport infrastructure is delivered to meet the requirements of the Borough.

Objective Eight – To ensure the provision of sufficient infrastructure to meet the requirements of the Borough.

G Population, Community Facilities and Open Spaces, Crime and Health of the Community

Including: demographics educational establishments; community halls; open space, sport and recreation provision.

Objective Nine - To promote healthy, active, cohesive and socially sustainable communities.

Objective Ten - To ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate in sport and to encourage active lifestyles.

Indication of Potential Direction:

Next Steps for the Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment

The responses received to this consultation period will be used to influence the SA/SEA that will be developed alongside the Local Plan. This will be used to appraise policies options and thereby inform the main document itself.

In relation to the HRA, the Council will seek to find further information relating to the impacts on the Ashdown Forest SPA / SAC in time for the next consultation period on the Local Plan.