

Post Adoption Environmental Statement

Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy 2008-2028: A Local Plan for Ribble Valley

Introduction

The Ribble Valley Core Strategy was adopted at a meeting of the Full Council on 16th December 2014. This Post Adoption Environmental Statement has been prepared in accordance with the following requirements:

- Regulation 16 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004
- Regulation 26 of the Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

It explains how environmental considerations have been incorporated into the Core Strategy, including how the Sustainability Appraisal /SEA has been taken into account; how the results of consultation have been taken into account; the reasons for choosing the adopted Core Strategy Development Strategy in the light of other reasonable alternatives considered; and how the significant sustainability effects of implementing the Core Strategy will be monitored. Full details of the SA process are set out in the Sustainability Appraisal report which accompanies the Core Strategy. (It is noted that consultations under regulation 14(4) of the Environmental Regulations in relation to Trans boundary consultations are not relevant to the Core Strategy).

Background

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004)(Section 19[5]) requires that local authorities must carry out a Sustainability Appraisal of development plans. The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal is to systematically appraise the social, environmental and economic effects of the strategies and policies in a local development document from the outset of the preparation process. This will ensure that decisions are made that accord with sustainable development principles.

Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) are required by European Directive EC/2001/42 (SEA Directive), The SEA Directive requires local planning authorities to carry out formal strategic environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which may have significant environmental effects. The SEA process ensures that opportunities for public involvement are provided and the significant environmental effects arising from policies, plans and programmes are predicted, evaluated, mitigated and monitored.

The SEA Directive was transposed into UK law by the Environmental Assessment Regulations for Plans and Programmes (July 2004). Those regulations and Government guidance have merged the SEA and SA processes to allow for a single joint Sustainability Appraisal (SA) to be carried out. This is reflected in the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) paragraph 165, which requires that for plan-making:

“A sustainability appraisal which meets the requirements of the European Directive on strategic environmental assessment should be an integral part of the plan preparation process, and should consider all the likely significant effects on the environment, economic and social factors.”

Throughout the remainder of this statement, reference to SA encompasses the requirements of a merged SA / SEA. The Core Strategy sets out at sections 1.22-1.26 how the Core Strategy links to the SA/SEA/AA.

How have environmental considerations been integrated into the Core Strategy and how have the results of consultation been taken into account?

Ribble Valley Borough Council is required by law to produce a Development Plan for the borough. This is titled the Ribble Valley Borough Council Core Strategy 2008-2028: A Local Plan for Ribble Valley.

The Core Strategy sets out the strategic planning considerations for the borough and includes strategic policies such as targets for housing and employment etc. It does not allocate land for development, apart from at one strategic site (the Standen site) south of Clitheroe. Instead it sets out broad locations for growth. Following the Core Strategy, a further document, the Housing and Economic Development DPD, will be produced which will sit alongside the Core Strategy and will allocate specific sites/ land for development.

As stated, the Core Strategy was adopted at a meeting of the Full Council on 16th December 2014. The policies in this document replace those that remained (saved policies) in the Ribble Valley Districtwide Local Plan (adopted 1998).

Environmental considerations have been taken into account throughout the preparation of the Core Strategy via the SA process. The integrated SA of the Core Strategy was a multi-stage process, as set out in the following sections.

Scoping Stage (alongside Issues and Options)

The SA Scoping Report for Core Strategy was initially published in October 2007. A scoping stage is required to propose and agree the appraisal methodology and collate the information needed to carry this out. The appraisal needed to be set within the context of existing plans and policies and an understanding of the current baseline situation was essential to predict effects and identify key sustainability issues and problems. The scoping report consisted of an examination of other relevant plans and programmes so that relevant sustainability objectives could be brought into the sustainability appraisal framework. This ensured that the appraisal took those objectives into account when assessing the sustainability of policies and proposals in the Core Strategy. The SA Scoping Report listed the plans or programmes that were identified as being relevant to Ribble Valley. This included relevant international, European, national, county and local plans and strategies.

Representations were made by all of the consultation bodies (English Heritage, Natural England and the Environment Agency), which stated that they had no comments to make on the SA at this stage.

Following a change to the 2004 Regulations in 2008, the Issues and Options stage was repeated, taking a slightly different form and published for consultation in August 2010. As a result it was felt that the Sustainability Appraisal scoping report needed to be refreshed to update the changes in the policy context and local characteristics. Therefore, an updated version of the SA Scoping report was produced, undertaken by consultants on behalf of the Council. The updated scoping report was, once was again, re-sent to the three statutory consultees, and also published on the Council's website for comment by other interested parties. Relevant comments were incorporated into the following stages of plan production.

SA Workshop

Following consultation on the Regulation 25 draft Core Strategy report, a SA workshop took place in August 2011. This assisted with assessing the sustainability of the potential Development Strategy options, which fed into the SA report. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) must be undertaken where there are anticipated significant environmental effects. As the Core Strategy covers a variety of issues over a large spatial area an SEA was required. The SA was combined with the SEA and a document produced which satisfied the requirements of both. This report is the SA Report of March 2012.

To ensure sustainability considerations were taken into account during the development of the preferred approach, the SA was undertaken whilst the policies were being written. This allowed policies to be amended in line with sustainability considerations where necessary.

Alternative Options stage

Consultation on the Regulation 25 Core Strategy generated a high level of interest and highlighted that further work on generating some additional, alternative Development Strategy options was necessary. Subsequently, five additional alternative Development Strategy options, presented as options A, B, C, D and E were developed, with letters being used rather than numbers to distinguish the options from each of the two consultations. Options 1, 2 and 3, which were presented at the Regulation 25 stage (between August and October 2010) also remained as potential options, creating 8 potential Development Strategy options in total. A discussion paper on the approach to the preferred option was published for consultation in December 2011 which set out the proposed Development Strategy for the Publication stage.

A Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening report was also produced during the preparation of the Publication Core Strategy. This approach ensured that the options, objectives and core policies in the Core Strategy avoided significant adverse impacts on protected sites of international importance which lie within a 15km radius of the borough boundary.

The evaluation of alternatives was a key part of the Core Strategy process. The SA is a key tool in undertaking this. The options presented at the Alternative Options stage were considered through the SA, which also considered a “do minimum” option. The assessment identified high level spatial priorities required to contribute to sustainable development. The SA identified strength and weaknesses in relation to each option (see section 4.3 of the SA report).

Publication stage

The publication version of the Core Strategy (Regulation 19) was published for a six week period of consultation from 4 May 2012 until 15 June 2012, along with the SA report. The HRA screening report was also published alongside this and also sent to the statutory consultees. The HRA concluded that the Publication Core Strategy was unlikely to have any significant effects on the European sites identified, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects and as such it was not proposed to undertake Appropriate Assessment. This position was supported by Natural England, however it was flagged up that the wrong Conservation Objectives had been used. This was subsequently rectified using the correct Conservation Objectives (HRA re-issued in March 2013).

In determining the Preferred Option, a number of factors were considered including: the findings from the evidence base; the SA assessment results; and the outcomes of the extensive consultation that had taken place. The preferred option was effectively a hybrid of two alternative options previously assessed. It sought to incorporate the strongest elements of Options D and B primarily whilst attempting to avoid potentially negative outcomes.

The Preferred Spatial Strategy Option, Development Management Policies and Key statements were assessed through the SA process (see sections 4.4. and 4.5 of the SA). The SA also specifically records whether recommendations resulting from initial appraisal of the Key Statements and Development Management policy were taken on board (Table 4-4 of the SA).

Submission stage

Core Strategy (Regulation 22) was submitted to the Secretary of State in September 2012 along with the final SA report and other supporting documents. An SA addendum was produced which accompanied this document, which incorporated comments made during the Publication stage consultation process. As part of this, within the SA addendum, the proposed changes to the Publication Core Strategy were presented and each change was identified as to whether the change was significant and whether it affected the assessment presented in the SA report. The findings of the addendum were that the majority of the proposed changes to the Publication Core Strategy were minor and therefore would not result in any alternations to the findings of the previous SA assessment. However, as indicated within the addendum, some of the proposed changes generated positive alternatives to the previous assessment results. Although these alterations were not considered to be significant, they demonstrate that the proposed changes to the Core Strategy strengthen it in terms of its sustainability. The previous assessment matrix for the preferred spatial strategy was therefore revised, however the results of the re-assessment remained the same as those previously reported, and only minor text additions and the removal of one of the previous recommendations was made. The SA Addendum concluded that overall the consultation process positively influenced the development of the Core Strategy.

The Examination hearings took place between 14th and 22nd January 2014.

Post-submission stage

Following submission of the Core Strategy, the appointed inspector advised that some of the supporting evidence needed updating and therefore the Examination was suspended (between January 2013 until July 2013) whilst evidence was updated and series of proposed changes to the submitted plan subsequently identified. As part of this, a review of the overall housing requirement for the borough was undertaken, with the conclusions indicating that the requirement figure should be updated. Following this, an SA of the proposed changes was undertaken and an addendum produced (published for consultation alongside the updated evidence in August 2013). This assessed how the conclusions of the existing SA report (and its update for the submission version) would change following the recent modifications to the Core strategy; how the conclusions of the existing SA report (and its update for the submission version) and the HRA report would change if either 5000 or 5600 homes were built instead of 4000. Also in response to PAS's comments, greater linkages were provided to the existing SA report in order to draw a full conclusion on the impact of a higher quantum of housing. It was proposed that the addendum of August 2013 should be read in conjunction with the previous SA and HRA reports.

The SA was discussed during the hearing sessions of the Examination in Public, which were held in January 2014. The Inspector specifically considered the matter of whether the formulation of the plan was based on a sound process of sustainability appraisal and the testing of reasonable alternatives.

Following these sessions, the appointed inspector advised the Council that the spatial strategy should be amended by making a 'main modification' to the document to add clarity regarding the 32 defined settlements based upon their sustainability, capacity to accept growth and other pertinent factors. In addition to this a number of other modifications were proposed. It was therefore important that these changes were reviewed to confirm whether or not the findings of the SA needed to be changed. The addendum therefore documented whether any of the proposed modifications would affect the assessment findings presented in the previous SA (and associated SA addendums) and provide an update to the SA report as necessary.

In addition to this SA addendum, a technical note of clarification was produced in relation to how the 'Longridge Adjustment' was dealt with (the re-apportionment of 200 units across the Tier 1 settlements) and a further SA addendum titled 'Revision of Assessment of Strategic Option E', which looked again at how one of the alternative options (Option E) had been assessed in the SA.

The proposed Main Modifications were consulted upon between 23rd May and 7th July 2014 and again between 25th July and 5th September 2014. The Planning Inspector's Report of findings and recommendations was received by the LPA on the 25th November 2014. The Inspector concluded that the Plan was sound subject to the Main Modifications being made.

Public involvement and consultation

A key component of the SA / SEA process is consultation of stakeholders. The consultation throughout the SA process has been in accordance with:

- Article 6 of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC
- Regulations set out in the Environmental Assessments of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004
- Regulations set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and earlier versions.

There have been four main stages of consultation at Scoping, Publication, Submission and Main Modifications stage, with further addendums (as set out above) produced within these stages.

Statements were prepared under the Planning Regulations which set out how previous stages of consultation shaped the Publication version of the Core Strategy (Regulation 17 Statement) and a summary of the issues raised at the Publication Stage (Regulation 22(1)(c)(v) Statement).

Reasons for choosing the Core Strategy as adopted in light of other reasonable alternatives

The Core Strategy provides detailed policies to manage individual development proposals in a way that meets local needs, both economic and social, while protecting the environment.

Following the Examination in Public, the Inspector concluded that with the recommended Main Modifications, the plan satisfies the requirements of Section 20(5) of the 2004 Act and meets the criteria for soundness in the NPPF. These tests included the test that the document must be the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives. As explained above, the assessment of alternatives was undertaken at the Alternative Options stage. The Inspector's Report specifically addresses the assessment of alternative options (paragraphs 22-25) and states that, "the SA provides a sufficiently robust evaluation of the Core Strategy against reasonable alternatives".

The Inspector's Report concludes that, "the SA has been carried out and is adequate" (para. 151).

Measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan

Monitoring is an ongoing process, integral to the implementation of the Core Strategy and a requirement of the SA process. The Council will monitor the effectiveness of the plan in delivering its objectives by assessing its performance against a series of indicators which are set out in Chapter 11 of the adopted Core Strategy. In addition, the SA Report (28 March 21012, section 5) sets out an outline monitoring framework and advice for monitoring the

significant effects of implementing the Core Strategy. These will be reported on through the Authority's Monitoring Report (AMR).

**Marshall Scott, Chief Executive
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