

SA OF DARTFORD CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This is the summary of the Sustainability Appraisal Report for Dartford's Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy (Preferred Options). It describes how the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process was used to assist in planning for the development and the use of land, as required by planning legislation and Government guidance. The SA assists sustainable development through an ongoing dialogue and assessment during the preparation of LDF Development Planning Documents (DPDs), and considers the implications of social, economic and environmental demands on land use planning.
- 2 Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils are working together closely on the SA and consultants Enfusion were commissioned in January 2005 to progress the SA work for the two Councils. After initial joint working, the two Boroughs are now undertaking the SA work separately to reflect the different timescales in the preparation of their LDFs.

THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

- 3 The LDF is the new system introduced by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and it takes the form of a portfolio of documents including DPDs (Core Strategy, Site Specific Allocations and Area Action Plans), the Statement of Community Involvement, and an Annual Monitoring Report. The Core Strategy sets the LDF's long-term Vision and Strategic Objectives for development planning and it considers the options available through the planning system to the Council and communities in the Dartford area. The Preferred Options Document sets out the Council's approach, intended to guide future change and development in the area. The Council is also preparing a Site Specific Allocations DPD and an Area Action Plan for Dartford Town Centre.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL & STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- 4 Planning legislation requires that the LDF is subject to a SA, a systematic process that is designed to evaluate the predicted social, economic and environmental effects of development planning. European and UK legislation require that the LDF is also subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), a process that considers the effects of development planning on the environment. Where significant adverse effects are predicted, the SEA aims to identify means to avoid or

mitigate such effects. Government guidance advises that these two processes should be carried out together and requires the LDF to be subject to a SA incorporating SEA. The guidance outlines a number of stages of SA work that need to be carried out as the LDF is being prepared:

- Stage A: Setting Context & Scope
- Stage B: Developing Options & Assessing Effects
- Stage C: Preparing the SA Report
- Stage D: Consulting on the Plan & the SA
- Stage E: Monitoring Implementation of the Plan

- 5 The SA/SEA of the Dartford Core Strategy Preferred Options Document has been prepared in accordance with these requirements for SA/SEA.

THE CHARACTER OF DARTFORD BOROUGH

- 6 Dartford Borough is located in the North West of Kent and occupies a unique strategic location adjacent to London and within the Thames Gateway area. The main settlements are Dartford, Stone, Swanscombe, and Greenhithe. Approximately 60% of the working population works outside the Borough due to its proximity to London. With the opening of Ebbsfleet International Station in late 2007, Ebbsfleet is set to become a major new commercial centre.
- 7 The Borough is characterised by its historic environment and its location by the Thames and Darent Rivers. The area has other important environmental assets including riverside marshes which are characteristic of the highly valued habitats of the Greater Thames Estuary. To the south of the main urban areas, undulating countryside rises towards the South Kent Downs. This area, populated by villages, features areas of high agricultural and landscape value. The Dartford area, therefore, includes a contrast of landscapes, from estuarine to semi-upland countryside, in addition to the townscapes.
- 8 Those areas of the Dartford and Gravesham Boroughs which are located to the north of the A2, constitute 'Kent Thameside', one of the largest areas for development in the Thames Gateway. The draft South East Plan, (SEERA, 2006) sets a challenging growth agenda for Dartford (and Gravesham) with regard to housing allocations, job creation, and provision of supporting infrastructure and services.

SA SCOPING & ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- 9 During early 2005 a joint scoping process for Dartford and Gravesham was carried out to help ensure that the SA covered key sustainability issues relevant to Dartford. Plans and programmes were reviewed and information was collated relating to the current and predicted social, environmental and economic characteristics of the areas.
- 10 From these studies, the key sustainability issues and opportunities identified were associated with the high levels of growth in employment and housing proposed for the Thames Gateway. Issues included affordable housing, local employment, high design standards for development, protection of environmental quality, car usage, public transport and accessibility. The scoping information was updated in early-mid June 2007.

CONSULTATION AND PREPARING THE SA FRAMEWORK

- 11 An SA Framework was compiled and included 19 SA Objectives that aim to resolve the issues and problems identified, and are used to test the draft DPDs as they are being prepared. This approach and the proposals for testing the development planning process was written up into an SA Scoping Report that was sent to a wide range of organisations and also made available on the Council's website. Comments were invited and received from a number of these organisations, which helped to improve the SA Framework. Further updates to the SA Framework were made in 2007. The following is a revised list of the SA Objectives.

SA Objectives:

1. Balanced Communities	7. Sustainable Design and Construction	13. Cultural Heritage
2. Integrated Communities	8. Environmental Health	14. Minerals
3. Accessibility	9. Economy & Employment	15. Climate Change & Energy
4. Public Health	10. Landscape	16. Air Quality
5. Phasing of Supporting Infrastructure	11. Land and Soil Quality	17. Waste
6. Housing	12. Biodiversity	18. Water
		19. Flooding

SA OF THE CORE STRATEGY

- 12 Each stage of the preparation of the Core Strategy (including Vision, Strategy Objectives, Issues, Strategic Topics and Options, Preferred Policy Approaches 2006 and Preferred Options 2008), was appraised systematically using the SA Objectives. Where significant adverse effects, including environmental effects, have been predicted, the SA sought where possible to identify means of offsetting these effects. Where it was considered that there were opportunities to enhance the sustainability of the proposals, recommendations were made. The

appraisal recognised 7 categories of predicted effects, each represented by a different colour, as illustrated in the following key.

Categories of Sustainability Effects:

DG	Development actively encouraged as it would resolve an existing sustainability problem
LG	No Sustainability constraints and development acceptable
B	Neutral effect
?	Uncertain effect
Y	Potential sustainability issues; mitigation and / or negotiation possible
O	Problematical and improbable because of known sustainability issues; mitigation or negotiation difficult and / or expensive
R	Absolute sustainability constraints to development

APPRAISAL OF THE LDF VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 13 At a number of stages in the development of the plan Enfusion appraised the emerging LDF Vision and Strategic Objectives. This process began in October 2005, with appraisal undertaken of further iterations of the Vision and Objectives in April/May 2006 and November 2007. The Vision is considered to provide a sustainable and positive overall aim for land use planning in Dartford. The Strategic Objectives were also found to provide an appropriate context for the Core Strategy. Overall the LDF Vision and Strategic Objectives were found to have positive implications for sustainable development in the Borough.

APPRAISAL OF THE LDF CORE STRATEGY ISSUES, STRATEGIC TOPICS AND OPTIONS 2006

- 14 An SA of the issues raised in a consultation document published by Dartford Borough Council in August 2005 ('A Postcard from the Future – Making Dartford a Good Place to Live') was undertaken in 2005. Following on from this, the Council prepared Strategic Options which were then appraised by Enfusion in relation to their comparative sustainability against the SA Objectives. This is reported in the Core Strategy Preferred Policy Approaches SA Technical Report, issued in June 2006.

APPRAISAL OF THE LDF CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED POLICY APPROACHES 2006

- 15 The development of Issues and Options, and the subsequent appraisals undertaken, informed the development of Preferred Policy Approaches, which were subject to detailed SA. This was reported in the June 2006 Core Strategy Preferred Policy Approaches SA Technical Report. The report detailed a considerable number of recommendations for the Core Strategy. These were considered in the preparation of the new Policy Approaches in 2007-8.

APPRAISAL OF THE LDF CORE STRATEGY STRATEGIC OPTIONS 2008

- 16 In 2007, the Council revisited the development of Strategic Options, with consideration given to the previous SA. These new Strategic Options were subsequently appraised in November-December 2007. The Sustainability Appraisal results and recommendations were then taken forward by the Council in the development of Preferred Options.

APPRAISAL OF THE LDF CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS 2008

- 17 A further SA was considered necessary of the Preferred Options 2008 and was undertaken in December 2007-January 2008. Many of the effects identified were positive, relating to the positive economic and social effects of the Regeneration of the Borough. Other positive effects include the protection of the Green Belt and Dartford Marshes, the return of contaminated land to productive use, and increased connectivity through the promotion of public transport, walking and cycling. Negative effects were found to relate to the overall population growth, rather than any specific Policy Approach. The Policy Approaches contain a number of measures to mitigate these effects, and further suggestions were made, where appropriate.

Secondary, Cumulative and Synergistic Effects

- 18 When considered as a whole, the emerging Core Strategy policies were found to have both positive and negative secondary, cumulative and synergistic sustainability effects. Positive benefits of the emerging plan include: enhanced opportunities to adapt to climate change through increased green spaces and strong policies on water conservation; an increase in the availability of housing, particularly affordable housing; the enhanced attractiveness of the borough, through returning contaminated land to good use and increasing green spaces; and better connectivity within and between areas, with positive benefits for community integration, air pollution, and climate change.
- 19 Potential negative cumulative affects were identified, which primarily result from the increase in population and consequent increased demand for resources, use of infrastructure and generation of impacts on air and water. These include negative effects on air quality from

construction and increased vehicular movement, and an increase in the use of water and energy resources. However, policy approaches within the plan, for example those relating to sustainable transport water and energy, have been prepared with these impacts in mind, and the approaches now pay particular attention to mitigation to address these matters.

Uncertainties

- 20 Throughout the development of the Preferred Options and Sustainability Appraisal process, data gaps and uncertainties were uncovered. In particular, there remain uncertainties about flooding impacts and the phasing of water supply and wastewater treatment. It is not always possible to predict sustainability effects when considering plans at such a strategic scale. Impacts on biodiversity and cultural heritage, for example, will depend on more detailed information and studies at a site-level. And whilst climate change science is becoming more accurate, it is difficult to predict impacts likely to result from climate change, including synergistic effects. These uncertainties have been acknowledged in the appraisal matrices, where applicable, and further studies are being undertaken to inform the submission stage document.

CONCLUSIONS: SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS AND THE DIFFERENCE THE SA PROCESS HAS MADE

- 21 The SA of the emerging Core Strategy has found that the Preferred Approaches will make a significant contribution to the progression of Sustainable Development objectives for Dartford, within the context of the high levels of population and employment growth proposed for the Borough in the Draft South East Plan.
- 22 In the previous SA of the Core Strategy Preferred Policy Approaches (2006) it was noted that the *'cumulative effect of development and an increased population could lead to significant effects on the use of energy and water resources, increases in air pollution and increases in greenhouse gas emissions contributing to global climatic changes. It was also noted 'that rapid population growth can also lead to significant physical, economic and social changes, including impacts on cultural heritage, landscape, community cohesion and identity.'* There was also a risk of alienating existing communities, who may not benefit from the increased growth.
- 23 These issues have been highlighted throughout the Sustainability Appraisal process, with recommendations made for improvements to policies and mitigation measures suggested. The current Preferred Options document reflects those recommendations, and provides policies that seek to enhance and maximise opportunities for sustainable regeneration and offset the potential negative effects.

- 24 The Council is to be commended on its revised approach, as reflected in the current Preferred Options document. The approaches have a strong focus on sustainable development, with excellent policies on water and energy conservation, sustainable transport, infrastructure provision, design and the promotion of green space. When combined, they provide extensive opportunities to enhance health, wellbeing, economic and social opportunities and the distinctive environment of Dartford Borough.
- 25 The SA Report of the Preferred Options in 2006 found that '*the key challenge for the Borough in the preparation of its LDF will be to minimise the sustainability impacts arising from increased population and employment growth, and manage the social, cultural and environmental changes that are likely to accompany that growth*'. In its revision of the Preferred Options document, it is considered that the Council has taken a very thorough approach to addressing this matter.
- 26 The SA report also suggested that '*The level of growth proposed in Dartford Borough over the next 20 years provides an excellent opportunity for Dartford to develop best practice in sustainable and high quality design.*' Again the recent revision of the Preferred Options document has made positive steps forward in ensuring this will occur, and the Council are to be commended on this approach.

MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LDF

- 27 Dartford's LDF is designed to be an on-going, iterative process, in which all sections are kept up to date through a rolling process of public involvement, monitoring and, where necessary, adjustment. The monitoring of the significant effects of any plan of this type is seen as essential by the European SEA Directive, and the Council believes that all stakeholders should have an early opportunity to be part of the process.
- 28 The Council is developing indicators to meet the monitoring requirements for both the LDF and SA processes. The key sustainability issues identified in the SA Scoping Report, including consultation, and the SA of the Core Strategy will assist in the development of indicators and targets for monitoring, contributing to the overall Monitoring Strategy for the LDF.

NEXT STEPS

- 29 This SA report, alongside consultation responses received, will be used to inform the preparation of policies in the Core Strategy Submission Document. Any significant changes made to the document will be subject to further SA, and a Revised SA Report will be published alongside the Core Strategy Submission Document.

**FURTHER INFORMATION AND HOW TO COMMENT ON THE SA REPORT
AND THE CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED OPTIONS**

- 30 If you would like any further information or if you have any comments on the SA of the Core Strategy Preferred Options we would be grateful to receive them. Your views are important and the Council needs to receive them by 13 March 2008. Comments should be sent to the Policy (Planning) Team by post or e-mail.

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