

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This document is the summary of the Sustainability Appraisal Report for Dartford's Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy (Preferred Policy Approaches). 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 jointly for the two Councils. The timescale for preparing development documents is now different and SA's are being carried out separately for each Borough area. This summary report focuses on progress in Dartford, although much of the information will also be of relevance and strategic importance for Gravesham.

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 Policy Approaches Document sets out the Council's approach, aiming to make the most efficient use of land. The Council is also preparing a Site Specific Allocations DPD and two Area Action Plans for Dartford Town Centre and the Northern Gateway.

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. Dartford's Core Strategy has been prepared in accordance with these requirements for a SA/SEA.

THE STAGES OF SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

- 5 Government's guidance requires 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

- 6 Stages A, B and C of the SA were carried out between January 2005 and June 2006.

THE CHARACTER OF DARTFORD BOROUGH

- 7 Dartford Borough is located in the North West of Kent and occupies a unique strategic location. It is adjacent to London and is within the Thames Gateway area. With the opening of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, Ebbsfleet will become a major new commercial centre. The main settlements are Dartford, Stone, Swanscombe, and Greenhithe, with Dartford being the main centre for employment, although approximately 50% of the working population works outside the Borough due to its proximity to London¹.
- 8 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 and dormitory towns, 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..
- 9 Those areas of the Dartford and Gravesham Boroughs which are located to the north of the A2, constitute the 'Kent Thameside' regeneration area of the Thames Gateway. During the 1980s and 1990s, this area experienced economic repercussions from the decline of the traditional industries such as mineral extraction, manufacturing and port-based activities. The Thames Gateway Partnership is coordinating regeneration of the entire Thames Gateway, and Regional Planning Guidance (RPG 9a, 2001) identified Kent Thameside as one of the largest areas for development in the Thames Gateway. This has been confirmed in the recently-submitted South East Plan, (SEERA, 2006). Consequently, a challenging growth agenda has been set for Dartford (and Gravesham) with regard to housing allocations, job creation, and provision of supporting infrastructure and services.

¹ Dartford Borough Local Plan Review 2003.

SA SCOPING & ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- 10 During early 2005 a joint scoping process for Dartford and Gravesham was carried out to help ensure that the SA covered the key sustainability issues that are relevant to the development planning system in Dartford and Gravesham. Relevant plans and programmes were reviewed to develop a wider understanding of issues and priorities, together with a description of the current and predicted social, environmental and economic characteristics of the areas.
- 11 From these studies, the key sustainability problems, issues and opportunities identified are mostly associated with the high levels of growth in employment and housing proposed for the area as part of the regeneration planned for the Thames Gateway. Particular issues include affordable housing, local employment, environmental and design standards for development, protection of environmental quality, car usage, public transport and accessibility.

CONSULTATION AND PREPARING THE SA FRAMEWORK

- 12 An SA Framework was compiled and included a list of 19 SA Objectives that aim to resolve the issues and problems identified. These SA Objectives were used to test the draft DPDs as they were being prepared.

SA Objectives:

1. Balanced Communities	7. Sustainable Design and Construction	13. Cultural Heritage
2. Integrated Communities	8. Environmental Health	14. Minerals
3. Accessibility	9. Employment	15. 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

- 13 This approach and the proposals for testing the development planning process developed into a 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, and these were incorporated into the SA Framework.
- 14 Each stage of the preparation of the Core Strategy was appraised systematically using the SA Objectives. A strategic-level appraisal was undertaken of the Vision, Strategic Objectives and Issues. A more detailed appraisal was undertaken of the Strategic Topics and Options and Preferred Policy Approaches. This recognised 6 categories of predicted effects, each represented by a different colour, as illustrated in the key below.

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 or unknown 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

- 15 Where it was considered that there were opportunities to enhance the sustainability of the proposals, recommendations were made. These were primarily with respect to minimising the negative sustainability impacts arising from increased population and employment growth, and managing the social, cultural and environmental changes that are likely to accompany that growth.

APPRAISAL OF THE LDF VISION AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 16 In October 2005, Enfusion appraised the Vision and Strategic Objectives, which set out the scope and intentions for the LDF. The Strategic Objectives were subsequently revised and streamlined by the Council and Enfusion re-appraised them in April/May 2006. The Vision was 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. However once these were revised in April/ May 2006, the SA process found that the revised Strategic Objectives progressed fewer of the SA Objectives than the original draft did. Consequently, it is recommended that further revisions be made to progress the SA objectives, these include *Land and Soil Quality*, *Biodiversity*, and *Cultural Heritage*. It is also recommended that more work is undertaken to address the following SA Objectives *Water*, *Flooding*, *Balanced Communities*, *Integrated Communities* and *Employment*. Issues relating to the mitigation and adaptation to Climate Change could be given further consideration in the preparation of policies in the Core Strategy Submission Document.

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

- 17 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 then carried out. Key recommendations included:

- The need to integrate new strategic developments with existing development and communities, maximising benefits for the whole of the Borough and ensuring the LDF progresses all components of the regeneration of the Borough together.
 - The LDF could play a key role in promoting the waterfront as a resource for leisure and culture and could help to deliver cultural sites, facilities and learning resources that are accessible to all.
 - Whilst it is essential that the LDF actively progresses and addresses the opportunities and challenges associated with accommodating extensive growth on the strategic sites, the housing needs and quality in existing areas must also be dealt with.
 - The LDF should require sustainable construction measures in all new build housing to ensure careful use of resources.
- 18 Following on from the consultation and SA of the Issues Paper, the Council prepared a list of nine Strategic Topics that were considered of key importance to the direction of the LDF:
- How much growth is needed?
 - Where will growth be located?
 - How can employment growth be balanced with housing growth?
 - What type of housing is needed?
 - How much land is required?
 - How can sustainable communities develop?
 - What type of community and retail facilities are needed to allow local communities to flourish?
 - How can better use of the riverfront be achieved?
 - How can the Borough's assets and residents' health be protected?
- 19 Two to four Options were identified for each Strategic Topic and were assessed in relation to their comparative sustainability against the SA Objectives, with recommendations made as to the most sustainable Option in each case. In all but one of the nine Strategic Topics, the Preferred Policy Approach being progressed by the Council was also preferred from a sustainability viewpoint. For the Strategic Topic relating to the level of housing growth in the Borough, the SA found that the most sustainable option was a lower level of growth than that advocated in the Council's Preferred Option. However, this sustainable Option was discounted by the Council as it is contrary to Regional guidance and the emerging South East Plan.
- APPRAISAL OF THE LDF CORE STRATEGY PREFERRED POLICY APPROACHES**
- 20 The development of Issues, Strategic Topics and Options, and the subsequent SA undertaken, informed the development of 76 Preferred Policy Approaches, which will be further developed into policies in the Core Strategy Submission Document, due to be adopted in 2008. The Preferred Policy Approaches were then subject to a detailed SA, with suggestions made for the

mitigation of negative effects, where appropriate. Where available, evidence from the SA Scoping Stage and from other researched sources has been used to justify the prediction of effects. The key findings and recommendations arising from the SA of the Preferred Policy Approaches are listed below, and are grouped by key policy areas.

21 **Housing**

- The Council's plans to absorb a maximum of 15,500 dwellings in the period 2006 to 2026, in the urban area, poses a number of challenges in sustainability terms; however it also provides some opportunities. Concentrating growth in the urban area will ensure a more compact and energy efficient urban form.
- However, the level of planned growth is predicted to place significant strain on resources (particularly water resources), increase energy usage and waste production and has the potential to increase pollution.
- It is recommended that housing policies ensure the provision of a better mix of dwelling size, type, density and tenure within developments to meet changing demographics and an increase in single-person households. Policies could also promote adaptable housing to meet the needs of an ageing population (i.e. homes that can be adapted for the less mobile), and housing to provide for the immediate needs of elderly and disabled persons.
- The policy approaches provide for a suitable level of affordable housing, and aim to give people independence in the housing market, which will assist in reducing poverty and social exclusion.

22 **Employment**

- The policy approach to employment will have positive sustainability effects by aiming to balance the number of jobs and homes in the Borough, which will assist in reducing out-commuting to London.
- The focus is on mixed-use development, in both existing built-up areas (including in areas that will support the regeneration of the Dartford Town Centre and the riverfront) and in a new commercial centre around Ebbsfleet Station. This will help support a shift away from car use to more sustainable forms of travel.
- Consideration should be given to how new employment development can best benefit surrounding communities to assist in their regeneration, including the shared use of facilities, and physical and community linkages.

23 **Design**

- The policy approaches advocate a design-led approach, which will also encourage development that is of high quality and respects the local character and cultural heritage of Dartford.
- A standards- based approach is recommended, with minimum standards prescribed for sustainable energy, waste and water management as this can have a positive effect on the eco-efficiency of new development.

- Design approaches should also incorporate matters relating to accessibility and social inclusion- ensuring layouts that enhance accessibility for all and increase opportunities for social interaction and connectivity.

24 **Infrastructure**

- The policy approaches have a strong focus on requiring the timely provision of infrastructure to support new development, which is supported.
- However there could be a stronger focus on minimising the environmental effects of new infrastructure (through, for example promoting more Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) and maximising community benefit.

25 **Culture, Sport and Education**

- The policy approaches locate new cultural and sporting facilities north of the A2. This may disadvantage communities living in the south of the Borough, and there is a need to ensure that locally-based resources are provided for all residents, and that sporting and cultural facilities are well served by public transport networks across the Borough.
- There is opportunity to further consider culture and sport-led regeneration - in particular, the opportunities for new development to fund facilities in existing areas. For example, a facility in Swanscombe could cater for both new and existing communities and would have positive regenerative effects.
- The policy approaches encourage establishment of a higher or further education facility in the Borough. This will assist in creating local employment, improving educational levels and opportunities for local people, reducing local skills deficits and attracting employers to the area.

26 **Transportation and Access**

- The policy approaches on transport progresses positively on most SA Objectives and performs particularly well on the objectives relating to balanced communities, integrated communities, accessibility, public health, sustainable design, energy and air quality. They promote a holistic approach to transportation and support the development of, and continued viability of a local public transport network. The approaches are likely to have positive benefits through enhancing accessibility across the new development areas.
- The encouragement of green travel plans and site-based maximum parking standards proposed in the policy approaches are forms of demand management that should limit car travel, hence providing opportunities for long-term improvements in air quality, a reduction in fuel-dependency and minimising greenhouse gas emissions.

27 **Retail and Town Centre**

- The policy approach to retail development is consistent with Government Policy as it will promote and enhance existing centres, particularly Dartford Town Centre, and encourages a wide range of retail services in sustainable locations, with good access to public transport.

- It is recommended that the policy approach give further consideration to residential development in the town centre, and consider policies to ensure that diversity and vitality in retail offer is maintained and further encouraged.

28 **Development and the Riverfront**

- The policy approach of redeveloping the Riverfront may have a positive effect through regenerating the Riverfront, allowing the return of contaminated land to productive use and reducing the presence of polluting industries.
- There are significant concerns regarding the impacts of development on biodiversity, particularly changes to water quality and flow and impacts on estuarine environments, which may be exacerbated by Climate Change. Further policies should consider the need for managed retreat and migration of habitats.
- Redevelopment will need to be managed sensitively to minimise the impact on heritage and townscapes, particularly Dartford's industrial and maritime heritage. The community should be actively involved in determining which parts of this heritage should be maintained and referenced in new development.
- Flood risk is a particular issue for Dartford and further policy will need to be developed to minimise risk.

29 **Green Belt/Green Grid/Biodiversity**

- The policy approaches on the Green Belt and countryside and villages generally performs well against the SA Objectives; in particular it will have positive effects on preserving the landscape and tranquillity of the countryside.
- The creation of a Green Grid is strongly supported. It will assist in promoting social inclusion and community ownership by providing spaces for informal recreation and socialising. It will also enhance accessibility and provide alternatives to travel by car, improving the health and well-being of the community. Its implementation may also assist in mitigating air pollution and offsetting greenhouse gases by providing 'green lungs' for the Borough of Dartford.
- Further consideration could be given to the role of the Green Grid in protecting and enhancing biodiversity and the riverfront environment, and in Climate Change mitigation and adaptation (to sea level rise, habitat loss and increased flooding events). Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems can also play a key role in supporting the Green Grid and this role could be mentioned in the policy wording.
- The policy approaches on Biodiversity and the Dartford Marshes are strongly supported, but could be better linked to the Green Grid policy approach.

- 30 Due to timing constraints the recommendations from the SA of the Preferred Policy Approaches have not yet been considered by the Council, but they will

be available to inform the preparation of policies in the Core Strategy Submission Document, the Site Specific Allocations and the two Area Action Plans.

CONCLUSIONS

- 31 The SA of the Core Strategy for Dartford's LDF has found that the emerging Core Strategy policies 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 emerging South East Plan.
- 32 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.
- 33 Therefore, in order to accommodate the proposed levels of housing and employment growth in the most sustainable manner, it is strongly recommended that stringent generic Development Control policies be prepared to control the sustainability impacts of this growth and to minimise the overall impacts. In particular, these should relate to air quality, waste, water and energy usage, and should cover all forms of development. It may be that more detailed Sustainability and Design Guidance is required to ensure the highest possible standards are met.
- 34 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. This would ensure that further development in Dartford addresses the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy.²

MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LDF

- 35 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.
- 36 The Council intends to develop one set of 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 have assisted in developing indicators and targets for monitoring, which will contribute to the overall Monitoring Strategy for the LDF.

² United Kingdom Sustainable Development Strategy, 2005

NEXT STEPS

- 37 In carrying out the SA of the Core Strategy, Enfusion has identified a number of recommendations. They will be used to inform the preparation of policies in the Core Strategy Submission Document. Enfusion will then carry out a further SA, to determine whether the last stage of policy refinement has progressed the SA Objectives further 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 LDF

- 38 If you would like any further information or if you have any comments on the SA of the Core Strategy Preferred Policy Approaches we would be grateful to receive them. Your views are important and the Council needs to receive them by 24 August, 2006. Comments should be sent to the Policy (Planning) Team by post or e-mail.

Post to:

Policy (Planning) Team
Dartford Borough Council
Home Gardens
DARTFORD
Kent
DA1 1BR

Email: ldf@dartford.gov.uk