

Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan Sustainability Appraisal

Sustainability Appraisal Statement

January 2019

Quality information

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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Sustainability appraisal (SA) is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of a draft plan, and reasonable alternatives; with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising the positives before the Plan is finalised.
- 1.1.2 This document is the SA (incorporating the Strategic Environmental Assessment) Statement to accompany the adoption of the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan.
- 1.1.3 The SA statement describes the process, how the findings of the SA were taken into account and informed the development of the Plan, and the monitoring indicators that will be applied to check the accuracy of predicted effects and to monitor progress against sustainability objectives.
- 1.1.4 A parallel process of SA was undertaken alongside plan-making. AECOM was commissioned to support the Leicester and Leicestershire Councils and the Local Enterprise Partnership in undertaking the SA process.
- 1.1.5 It is a requirement that SA involves a series of procedural steps. The final step in the process involves preparing a 'statement' at the time of plan adoption.
- 1.1.6 The aim of the SA Statement (i.e. this document) is to present:
1. The 'story' of plan-making / SA up to the point of adoption
Specifically, the Regulations¹ explain that there is a need to: "summaris[e] how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental report... the opinions expressed... and the results of consultations... have been taken into account... and the reasons for choosing the plan... as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with."
 2. Measures decided concerning the monitoring of plan implementation.
- 1.1.7 This Statement considers (1) and (2) in turn.

¹ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004)

2 The Plan making ‘story’

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 This section gives consideration to each of the main plan-making / SA steps in turn. It is typical for the plan-making / SA process to involve numerous iterations of the draft Plan, and this was the case with the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan.

2.2 Key plan making milestones

- 2.2.1 This section briefly outlines the key milestones throughout the plan-making process and the key elements of the Plan that were developed during each stage.

2016 - Strategic Growth Statement

- 2.2.2 A report was produced that set out the scope of the work for the preparation of the Strategic Growth Plan. This included; defining current characteristics of the area and opportunities and challenges for the future, high level ambitions and objectives for the plan, the scope of the evidence base, and spatial options that could be considered for the distribution of growth. A consultation on the draft Strategic Growth Statement was undertaken from 5th August to 16th September 2016.

2018 - Draft Strategic Growth Plan

- 2.2.3 The draft Plan set out the broad locations for growth and the infrastructure needed to deliver it. The draft Plan further outlined a strategy for four key focus areas: delivering new housing, supporting the economy, identifying essential infrastructure and protecting our environment and built heritage. The draft plan was consulted upon between 11th January and 10th May 2018.

2018 - Revised Strategic Growth Plan

- 2.2.4 A revised Plan was published in September 2018 following changes in response to a range of factors including: issues identified through the consultation process, new evidence and policy (for example the revised NPPF). The revised plan was then agreed by a Members Advisory Group and formally approved by each constituent Local Authority.

2.3 SA Preparation alongside the Plan

- 2.3.1 This section outlines the key stages and outputs from the SA process and how they related to the preparation of the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan.

Scoping

- 2.3.2 The start of the SA process was to prepare and consult on an SA Scoping Report. The statutory consultation bodies (Historic England, the Environment Agency, and Natural England) were consulted between 25th August and 29th September 2017. Following

consideration of the comments received, the scope of the SA was 'determined' and has provided the baseline position against which appraisals have been undertaken.

- 2.3.3 The scope was revisited and updated throughout the plan-making process in light of new evidence. All scoping updates were presented in SA Reports that were made available for consultation with the statutory consultation bodies as well as a wider range of stakeholders.

February 2018 - Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Draft Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan

- 2.3.4 An interim SA Report accompanied the draft Plan. The report included an updated scoping section, and explored potential alternatives for the following key topics:

- Amount of housing growth; and
- Housing distribution.

- 2.3.5 The SA Report also appraised the draft Plan 'as a whole' to understand the sustainability effects of the strategy and the potential for mitigation and enhancement.

September 2018 - Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Revised Leicester and Leicestershire Growth Plan

- 2.3.6 The SA Report presented an updated appraisal of the potential alternatives and the Plan 'as a whole', focusing on any amendments following consultation.

3 How has the SA influenced decision making?

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Essentially, SA must feed-into and inform plan-making in two ways:

1. Appraisal of alternatives and draft policies should inform preparation of the draft Plan.
2. The SA Report, and consultation responses received during the draft Plan / SA Report consultation, should inform plan finalisation.

3.1.2 This section briefly discusses the key elements of the SA process, and how the findings were fed-into the Plan making process. There is a focus on explaining how sustainability considerations have been taken into account and influenced plan-making, including as a result of alternatives appraisal, site assessments, policy appraisal, and consultation on Plan / SA documents.

3.2 Influencing the strategy

3.2.1 The primary influence of the sustainability appraisal on the development of the strategic growth plan relates to the identification and appraisal of reasonable alternatives.

3.2.2 In this instance, the alternatives were focused upon consideration of broad locations for growth across Leicester and Leicestershire.

3.2.3 The appraisal of six distribution alternatives and two growth scenarios helped to identify potential negative and positive effects associated with growth in particular locations at different scales.

3.2.4 Subsequently, these findings were taken into consideration when the Growth Plan was being finalised. It is noted that the SA findings broadly support the preferred strategy, as it would generate the most benefits in terms of employment and housing growth.

3.2.5 The focus of growth at key areas of economic growth and infrastructure capacity is also likely to reduce the length of car trips, and encourage sustainable modes of travel (particularly where there are strong rail and bus links into the City). In terms of environmental effects, the preferred approach does not generate any major negative effects and performs better or the same as the alternatives in this respect.

3.3 Reasonable alternatives

3.3.1 The alternatives tested throughout the plan-making process are outlined below, with outline reasons as to why the preferred approach was selected in light of alternatives. Ultimately a hybrid approach was selected, which reflected elements of each alternative, in particular alternative 4.

Alternatives	Rationale
1.Focus on the urban periphery	Substantially higher levels of growth in the City and urban periphery are considered to be inappropriate as they could lead to loss of vital open space and could stifle economic growth by overloading the Cities infrastructure.
2.Market town focus	Focused growth at market towns (which both of these options involve) would not take full advantage of economic opportunities and strategic infrastructure upgrades.
3.Employment-led	
4.New settlements	The broad approach of option 4 has formed the basis for the growth strategy (but also drawing from elements of the other distribution options as appropriate).
5.Trends	Rejected primarily in terms of the focus on rural settlements, which would lead to unsustainable patterns of growth, in particular greater travel distances and car use.
Hybrid option	Prepared to take advantage of significant new infrastructure capacity that is close to the anticipated key economic growth points.

3.4 Influencing the principles

3.4.1 The strategy is supported by guiding principles and priorities, to help steer Local Authorities towards high quality strategic growth. The implications of the strategy viewed alongside these guiding principles were explored in the SA, with recommendations made for improvements and mitigation.

3.4.2 The key measures identified are summarised, with a commentary on how the Strategic Planning Group responded (i.e. how the SA influenced the Plan). The underlined text, demonstrates the key actions that were proposed in response to the recommendations. In some instances, the Strategic Planning Group deemed that changes were not necessary, and so no particular action was taken.

Recommendations	Response and influence
<p>Develop a green infrastructure strategy to identify how links between the City and the A46 corridor could be strengthened, ensuring that wildlife habitats are better connected.</p>	<p>A Landscape and Green Infrastructure Study informed thinking on the draft and revised versions of the Plan. This work will be taken forward in more detail as decisions are made, in Local Plans, on potential development sites.</p>
<p>it would be beneficial to highlight a commitment to establishing the infrastructure to support electric vehicles</p> <p>It would be beneficial to ensure that strategic sites are well— served with public transport connections and cycling and walking routes into urban areas.</p>	<p>The two highway authorities (Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council) are preparing a Strategic Transport Plan to provide an overall context for Local Transport Plans, statutory Local Plans and other strategies. This will consider the merits of a wide range of green transport measures including public transport, electric vehicles and other green transport measures and the infrastructure that is needed to support them.</p>
<p>Positive effects could be generated by setting a policy framework that supports the protection, diversification and modernisation of rural businesses.</p>	<p>The future of rural areas will be addressed in Local Plans. There is a need to balance the need for agriculture and food production with the diversification of local economies.</p>
<p>Given the proposed concentration of growth at a series of large scale developments (which ought to be more viable for decentralised energy schemes), the Plan could set out a commitment to achieving low carbon development and explore how separate developments can be linked together to create better opportunities for sustainable developments.</p>	<p>Climate change is recognised as an important consideration in the context of sustainability. The scope of work for the Strategic Growth Plan, however, has been clearly articulated since the outset i.e. to focus on housing, employment, infrastructure and environmental protection. Climate change is a matter that is being addressed in Local Plans/Local Plan reviews and in the context of site specific development proposals.</p>

3.4.3 As a general point, it was highlighted (through the SA) that the environmental elements of the strategy could be strengthened. In response, the Strategic Planning Group set a clearer strategy for the achievement of high quality design and environmental enhancement as a central theme of the strategic plan. This also responded to consultation comments that suggested similar changes ought to be introduced.

4 Monitoring

4.1.1 There is a need to set out the monitoring measures that will be used to monitor the effects of the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan, and whether these correlate to those identified in the SA Report. Monitoring also allows for unforeseen effects to be identified early, and to help understand why predicted positive or negative effects might not be occurring in reality.

4.1.2 The following table sets out the monitoring indicators against each of the SA themes presented in the SA Report. These indicators are unchanged from those identified in the final SA Report.

Sustainability Topic	Monitoring Indicators
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net loss/gain in designated habitats (ha). • Ecological enhancement schemes delivered at strategic sites. • Ecological water quality. • Establishment of a green infrastructure strategy.
Health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Net change in open space provision. • Number of new health care facilities delivered. • Access to local green space. • Change in levels of deprivation in the top 20% areas. • Achievement of air quality objectives.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates of housing delivery. • Percentage of affordable housing delivered. • Availability of land for strategic development opportunities in the key locations.
Economy and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gross Added Value Leicester and Leicestershire. • Unemployment rate. • Retention of working age population. • Changes in the levels of deprivation. • Change in numbers of people employed by sector.
Transport and travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and proportion of homes within walking distance of key public services, recreational opportunities and public transport services. • New / expanded public transport services secured through strategic development. • Average annual traffic flows. • Average trip length to access employment.
Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in the amount of carbon emissions generated from transport (per capita).

Sustainability Topic	Monitoring Indicators
Landscape and land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of best and most versatile agricultural land lost to development by grade. • Number of allotments established at strategic development sites. • Landscape character assessments undertaken to identify sensitive parcels of land at key growth areas.
Cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of or change in the significance of designated heritage assets. • Townscape and landscape character assessments completed. • Amount of derelict land restored (ha). • Heritage assets removed or added from the 'at risk' register. • Net loss/gain of open space in Leicester City.
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of new development within flood zones 2 and 3. • SUDs schemes incorporated into new developments.
Minerals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of development within Minerals Safeguarding Areas (ha). • Potential sterilisation of minerals at strategic development sites.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1.1 This SA Statement demonstrates that a robust SA process has been progressed alongside plan-making, with appraisal findings feeding-in to decision-making at numerous junctures.
- 5.1.2 The SA Report demonstrably complies with the SEA Regulations and was published alongside the revised version of the plan in 2018, presenting all of the information required by Regulations. The report served to inform representations on the plan, and then served to inform plan finalisation.
- 5.1.3 Updates to the SA Report were also undertaken in response to changes to the Plan. This did not lead to a material change to the findings of the SA Report.
- 5.1.4 As a non-statutory plan the Strategic Growth Plan has not been subject to independent examination. However, the partnership preparing the SGP has followed a robust and iterative SA process that has informed each version of the emerging plan.
- 5.1.5 Reasonable alternatives have been considered and the preferred spatial strategy has had regard to the testing of strategic options for the distribution of long term growth.
- 5.1.6 The final plan incorporates updates that result from this and the public consultation processes. It was agreed by the Member Advisory Group on 24 September 2018 and subsequently was formally approved by each on the constituent local authorities during autumn 2018. Thus, whilst not a Development Plan Document the plan has been prepared to satisfy the SEA Regulations, and demonstrate good practice. Critically, this has included consideration of reasonable alternatives and recommendations for improvement.

