

Consultation of Draft Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) Scoping Report for the 2040 Local Plan (Planning, Policy & Economic Development -John Devonshire)

Synopsis of report:

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the preparation of a draft Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report for the 2040 Local Plan.

SA/SEA is now an established mechanism for assessing the sustainability and environmental performance of plans and programmes such as the Runnymede 2040 Local Plan and is a legal requirement under the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations).

The first stage of SA/SEA is the scoping stage which seeks to understand key messages/objectives from other legislation and guidance, establish the baseline environment and how this might change in the future in the absence of the 2040 Local Plan. The SA/SEA Scoping should also identify any issues and problems arising from the key messages and baseline information and how these may be addressed in the 2040 Local Plan. The Scoping Report should also include a Sustainability Framework, which will be used to assess and analyse the sustainability/environmental performance of plan options and policies.

A draft version of the SA/SEA Scoping Report has been prepared in-house. The SEA Regulations require that when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the assessment the consultation bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England) shall be consulted for a period of 5 weeks.

As such, this report seeks approval from the Planning Committee to carry out consultation on the draft SA/SEA Scoping Report for a period of 5 weeks with the consultation bodies as well as taking the opportunity to consult with the general public as well. Consultation will run from 22nd April to 27th May 2022.

The draft SA/SEA scoping report:

- Identifies other relevant legislation/guidance and their sustainability/environmental objectives/key messages;
- Establishes the baseline environment across a number of topic areas;
- Predicts the evolution of the sustainability/environmental baseline in the absence of the 2040 Local Plan;
- From the key messages/objectives and baseline, identifies sustainability issues/problems the 2040 Local Plan should seek to address;
- Sets out the Sustainability Framework, against which the sustainability of plan options and policies will be assessed.

Recommendation(s): The Planning Committee is recommended to RESOLVE to:

- i) APPROVE the draft Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for public consultation for a period of five weeks.

1. Context of report

- 1.1 The preparation of Local Plan documents must be subject to an assessment of their sustainability and environmental performance through Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). A review of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan has commenced with it being expected that a partially updated Local Plan will be required, which will cover the period 2025-2040. Each stage of plan preparation must be accompanied by an SA & SEA assessment.
- 1.2 The requirement to undertake SA is set out in Section 19 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and SEA by the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations).
- 1.3 SA/SEA is an iterative process. The process helps to test evidence and also to develop plan options, preferred approaches and plan policies. Guidance on undertaking SA/SEA at each stage of plan preparation is set out in the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) note on SA/SEA.
- 1.4 The PPG note on SA/SEA identifies that the first stage of SA/SEA is scoping, which should be undertaken at the same time as the preparatory/evidence gathering stage of plan making. The note also identifies what must be included at the scoping stage and this includes:
- i) Identification of other relevant policies, plans and programmes, and sustainability objectives;
 - ii) Collection of baseline information;
 - iii) Identification of sustainability issues & problems;
 - iv) Development of the Sustainability Appraisal Framework;
 - v) Consulting with the consultation bodies on the scope of the sustainability appraisal report
- 1.5 Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations also sets out what must be included within an environmental report.

2. Report and options considered

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the preparation of a draft SA/SEA Scoping Report. A copy of the draft Scoping Report can be found at Appendix A.
- 2.2 The draft Scoping Report has been undertaken in line with the Government's guidance set out in the PPG note on SA/SEA and includes signposts to how it addresses the requirements of the SEA Regulations. The scoping report is set out in a number of topic/thematic areas, which roughly follow the themes set out in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations. The Scoping Report also identifies the baseline environment for each topic/thematic area and its predicted evolution, in the absence of the 2040 Local Plan.
- 2.3 How the scoping report addresses the PPG note on SA/SEA is as follows:
- Identification of other relevant policies, plans and programmes, and sustainability objectives – Section 2 of the report summarises the review undertaken of relevant policies, plans and programmes and their key messages/objectives. The full review is set out in Appendix A of the scoping report;
 - Collect baseline information – Sections 3 to 14 set out the baseline of the receiving environment and its predicted evolution in the absence of the plan;

- Identify sustainability issues & problems – Sections 3 to 14 identify sustainability issues and problems by topic/thematic area;
- Develop the Sustainability Appraisal Framework – Section 15 includes the Sustainability Framework. The SA Framework for the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan has been used as the basis for the 2040 Local Plan as it is largely considered fit for purpose. However, amendments are proposed to the Framework to reflect relevant policies, plans and programmes, baseline environment and the issues/problems identified. The changes proposed to the SA Framework from the 2030 Local Plan are highlighted in red text for ease of reading.
- Consult the consultation bodies on the scope of the sustainability appraisal report – The purpose of this report.

2.4 It is proposed that the draft SA/SEA Scoping Report, set out in Appendix A to this report, should be sent to the three consultation bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England) for consultation, for a period of five weeks, as required by the SEA Regulations. It is also considered that the opportunity should be taken to open the SA/SEA Scoping Report to public consultation at the same time. Consultation would run from 22nd April to 27th May 2022.

2.5 Following consultation, any responses received would be carefully considered and, where appropriate, changes made to the draft report. The final scoping report is expected to be issued in the Summer of 2022.

3. **Policy framework implications**

3.1 SA/SEA forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, rather than being part of the development plan itself. However, SA/SEA is a requirement of the plan making process and must be undertaken at each stage of plan preparation, including the preparatory/evidence gathering stages.

4. **Financial and resource implications**

4.1 Production of the draft SA/SEA Scoping has been undertaken in-house by the Planning Policy Team. Further iterations of the SA/SEA work will be undertaken by consultants on behalf of the Council and funded through the agreed Planning Policy budget for each financial year. There are no additional resource implications beyond those already provided for within the agreed Planning Policy budget.

5. **Legal implications**

5.1 The preparation of SA/SEA reports to accompany Local Plans is a legal requirement under Section 19 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Environmental Assessment of Plans & Programmes Regulations 2004.

6. **Equality implications**

6.1 The Council has a Public Sector Duty under the Equalities Act 2020 to have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation;

- b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a Protected Characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) Foster good relations between those who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share those characteristics;

in relation to the 9 'Protected Characteristics' stated within the Act.

6.2 The draft SA/SEA Scoping Report is not a policy document, rather it is evidence to support the Local Plan and, as such, has not been subject to equalities impact screening.

7. **Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications**

7.1 The draft SA/SEA Scoping report sets out current sustainability/environmental baseline information for Runnymede and how it is predicted to evolve over time, in the absence of the 2040 Local Plan. Sustainability issues and problems have also been identified in the Scoping Report. These issues and problems will have implications for the 2040 Local Plan, which will need to address them.

8. **Other Implications**

8.1 None.

9. **Conclusion**

9.1 Planning Committee is asked to RESOLVE to:

- i) **APPROVE** the draft Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for public consultation for a period of five weeks.

(To resolve)

Background papers

Appendix A: Draft SA/SEA Scoping Report