

Publication of 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 outcome of public consultation on a draft Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report for the Runnymede 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. This stage 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 Runnymede 2040 Local Plan. The SA/SEA Scoping Report should also identify any issues and problems arising from the key messages and baseline information and how these can be addressed in the Runnymede 2040 Local Plan. The Scoping Report includes a Sustainability Framework, which will form the basis for the Sustainability Appraisal work on the forthcoming Runnymede 2040 Local Plan.

A draft version of the SA/SEA Scoping Report was open to public consultation for a period of five weeks from 22 April to 28 May 2022, including with the three consultation bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England). In total 18 representations were received and a summary of these with officer responses are set out on the Council's website with the Committee Agenda.

Given the representations received and a number of other material circumstances since consultation, a number of amendments are proposed to the Scoping Report. Amendments are shown as tracked changes in the final SA Scoping Report as attached at Appendix A and in the table at Appendix B. The key amendments are as follows:-

- Additional baseline information on green/blue infrastructure and green corridors in Section 3;
- Update to population data in Section 4 to account for first release of Census 2021 data;
- Addition of information from the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) on housing mix and identification of housing mix as an issue/problem in Table 4-2;
- Additional information on air quality monitoring station on Byfleet Road;
- Update to CO₂ emissions baseline following government's latest release of data;
- Recognition of A318 as a major local highway in the Borough;
- Addition of information on employment baseline and future baseline;
- Additional decision aiding criteria in SA Framework for SA Objectives 2, 4, 5 and 7 to strengthen consideration of climate change;
- Additional plans, policies, programmes and their key messages/objectives added to Appendix A for Water, Climate and Transport.

As such, this report seeks approval from the Planning Committee to publish the final SA Scoping Report, with the amendments as shown tracked in Appendix A and as listed in Appendix B, and to approve the Sustainability Framework, as the basis for undertaking the SA/ SEA Appraisal of the various stages of the forthcoming Runnymede 2040 Local Plan.

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

- i) PUBLISH the final Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report with the changes as shown tracked in Appendix A and listed in Appendix B.**
- ii) APPROVE the Sustainability Appraisal Framework, as set out in the Scoping Report, as the basis for the SA/SEA appraisal of the new Runnymede 2040 Local Plan at each stage of plan making.**

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 and the next iteration of the local plan 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 on the outcome of public consultation on a draft SA/SEA Scoping Report which was carried out for five weeks from 22 April to 28 May 2022.

2.2 A total of 18 representations were received, a summary of these with officer responses are set out on the Council's website with the Committee Agenda. Given the representations received and a number of other material circumstances since consultation of the draft Scoping Report, a number of amendments are proposed to the Scoping Report. Amendments are shown as tracked changes in the final SA Scoping Report as attached at Appendix A and in the table at Appendix B. The key amendments are as follows:-

- Additional baseline information on green/blue infrastructure and green corridors in Section 3;
- Update to population data in Section 4 to account for first release of Census 2021 data;
- Addition of information from the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) on housing mix and identification of housing mix as an issue/problem in Table 4-2;
- Additional information on air quality monitoring station on Byfleet Road;
- Update to CO2 emissions baseline following government's latest release of data;
- Recognition of A318 as a major local highway in the Borough;
- Addition of information on employment baseline and future baseline;
- Additional decision aiding criteria in SA Framework for SA Objectives 2, 4, 5 and 7 to strengthen consideration of climate change;
- Additional plans, policies, programmes and their key messages/objectives added to Appendix A for Water, Climate and Transport.

2.3 As such, this report seeks approval from the Planning Committee to publish the final SA Scoping Report with the amendments as shown tracked in Appendix A and as listed in Appendix B and to approve the Sustainability Framework, as the basis for undertaking the SA/SEA Appraisal of the various stages of the Runnymede 2040 Local Plan.

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.. The Sustainability Framework, as set out in the Scoping Report, will form the basis for carrying out the SA/SEA Appraisal of the new Runnymede 2040 Local Plan at each stage of plan preparation, having regard to the sustainability issues highlighted in the SA/SEA Scoping Report; The SA/SEA Scoping Report has been carried out in line with the provisions as set out in the Planning Practice Guidance Note (PPG) on SA/SEA.

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

(SEA Regulations). The content of the Scoping Report has had regard to Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations and the Government's PPG note on SA/SEA.

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 final SA/SEA Scoping Report, as attached at Appendix A to this 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 final SA/SEA Scoping report, as attached at Appendix A to this report, sets out current sustainability/environmental baseline information for Runnymede and how it is predicted to evolve over time, in the absence of the Runnymede 2040 Local Plan. Sustainability issues and problems have also been identified in the Scoping Report. These issues and problems will have implications for the Runnymede 2040 Local Plan, which will need to address them. The Sustainability Framework will form the basis for carrying out the appraisal of the new Runnymede 2040 Local Plan, having regard to the sustainability issues highlighted in the SA/SEA Scoping Report;

8. Other Implications

8.1 None.

9. Conclusion

9.1 Planning Committee is asked to RESOLVE to:

- i) **PUBLISH** the final Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report with the changes as shown tracked in Appendix A and listed in Appendix B.
- ii) **APPROVE** the Sustainability Appraisal Framework, as set out in the Scoping Report, as the basis for undertaking the SA/ SEA appraisal of the new Runnymede 2040 Local Plan at each stage of plan making.

(To resolve)

Background papers

Appendix A: Final SA/SEA Scoping Report with changes shown tracked

Appendix B: Table of amendments to SA Scoping Report