

# **Bedford Development Plan Bedford Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document**

## **SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCREENING**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to assess whether the Council's Bedford Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document should be subject to sustainability appraisal. Sustainability appraisal is the process of ensuring that a plan or policy contributes to sustainable development. There is an international and national commitment to achieving sustainable development, and this has been incorporated into laws, guidance and advice. One of the means by which sustainable development can be achieved is through the land-use planning process.

### **Background**

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that local development documents prepared as part of the Development Plan be subject to a process of sustainability appraisal.

In addition to the Government's requirement for a sustainability appraisal, EU Directive EC/2001/42 also requires that an assessment of the environmental effects of certain plans and policies (including planning documents) is undertaken. There is a large amount of overlap between the EU 'strategic environmental assessment' (SEA) and the UK sustainability appraisal process. Guidance on how the SEA requirements can be met whilst undertaking a sustainability appraisal is set out in the Government's online Planning Practice Guidance and in the earlier guidance *Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks*, 2005. Unless otherwise stated in this document it should be assumed that references to sustainability appraisal incorporate the requirements of SEA.

The Planning Act 2008 removed the requirement to prepare a sustainability appraisal report for supplementary planning documents. The reason for this is that it involved duplication, since supplementary planning documents have to be in conformity with an overarching Development Plan Document which had already been the subject of sustainability appraisal. The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 removes the blanket requirement, but advises that each supplementary planning document should be screened for whether there are impacts that have not been covered in the appraisal of the parent Development Plan Document or whether an assessment is required by the SEA Directive.

The online Planning Practice Guidance states that supplementary planning documents do not require a sustainability appraisal but may in exceptional circumstances require a strategic environmental assessment if they are likely

to have significant environmental effects that have not already have been assessed during the preparation of the relevant strategic policies.

Before deciding whether significant environmental effects are likely, the local planning authority will need to take into account the criteria specified in schedule 1 to the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and consult the consultation bodies defined in the regulations.

### **Bedford Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document**

The Bedford Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document will give guidance on the implementation of the following Bedford Local Plan 2030 policies:

- 28S – Placemaking
- 29 – Design quality and Principles
- 30 – The impact of development

which cover issues relating to design and placemaking including the following:

- The quality of design of development
- The relationship of development to its immediate setting and surrounding area
- Principles of good placemaking including the provision of green space, amenity spaces, facilities and sustainable travel
- Enhancement of public realm and biodiversity

The borough will continue to be a focus for growth and development. With renewed national emphasis on the quality of design and placemaking, this design guide will provide information and guidance on the diverse character of the borough and how to achieve well designed residential development that respects the existing context.

### **Objectives of the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

The SPD will provide general design guidance for residential development in the borough. It is proposed that the SPD will identify and provide an analysis of different character areas in the borough. The analysis of the rural area of the borough will be based on the character areas already defined in the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment. A small number of settlements from each rural character area will be selected for detailed assessment in order to develop a set of general design principles reflecting the local context. These principles will inform future decisions on coding for new development and building design

The urban area will similarly be divided into local distinctiveness areas based upon an analysis of existing development character. General principles will once again be prepared to provide guidance for future residential development.

The town centre has a conservation area. Because a detailed character assessment already exists for this area in the Conservation Area Appraisal, there is no need to include further detail in the Design Guide SPD.

### **Local Plan 2030 Sustainability Appraisal**

The policies upon which the SPD will give guidance have already undergone sustainability appraisal as part of the local plan-making process. At each stage environmental and sustainability considerations were integrated with the plan-making process through the publication of sustainability appraisal documents to inform public consultation. The sustainability appraisal process used a framework of objectives and decision-making questions to describe, analyse and compare the potential environmental and sustainability effects of the local plan. This framework is known as the “sustainability appraisal framework” and was developed and refined through consultation with the statutory environmental consultation bodies (the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England) through a Scoping Report.

The local plan’s objectives, policies, sites and reasonable alternatives were all appraised against the sustainability appraisal framework. In undertaking the sustainability appraisal in parallel with the local plan, the findings of the sustainability appraisal were integrated into the plan prior to the publication of each consultation stage. Comments on the sustainability appraisal were invited through each public consultation and where appropriate, changes were made to the sustainability appraisal documents or local plan to reflect the results of consultation. The Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England were consulted at each stage as statutory consultees and this ensured that the sustainability appraisal addressed the key environmental considerations required by the regulations. A copy of the Sustainability Appraisal Report is published on the Council’s website at [www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2030](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2030).

### **Assessment**

The principal question to be asked is whether the SPD is likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already have been assessed during the preparation of the relevant policies. Appendix 1 shows the results of the Council’s SEA screening for the Bedford Borough Design Guide SPD. This screening demonstrates that the SPD is unlikely to have significant effects on the environment.

The SPD does not set a framework for other projects or activities as such, rather it expands upon and provides guidance of existing adopted policy. It does not therefore influence other plans or programmes and nor does it raise new environmental issues. While it will seek to address environmental issues such as the setting of new residential buildings, the individual appraisal of the local plan policies concerned has already considered all environmental effects

and mitigated them wherever possible as part of the sustainability appraisal undertaken.

## **Conclusion**

As a result of the foregoing assessment, it is concluded that a sustainability appraisal of the document is not required. The proposed SPD provides no more than guidance on matters which are in adopted policy. It does not create new policy in itself or result in development that was not intended in the adopted policies. It is reasonable to assume that the SPD does not have any sustainability effects that were not envisaged in the original policies. It can similarly be concluded that a separate assessment to fulfil the requirements of the SEA Directive is not required.

## Screening Assessments of the Bedford Borough Design Guide SPD

The document “A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive” (ODPM, 2005), sets out eight criteria that should be taken into account when screening a plan or programme to determine whether it will require SEA.

SEA Screening Questions	Screening Assessment
1. Is the plan or programme subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?	Yes – the SPD is prepared and adopted by a local planning authority, Bedford Borough Council.
2. Is the plan or programme required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions?	No. However, the SPD has been produced to provide guidance on the design of development and placemaking. This will aid in the application of policies in the development plan.
3. Is the plan or programme prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use AND does it set the framework for future development consent for projects listed in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive?	Yes. The SPD is intended to provide further guidance to the Local Plan 2030, which is part of the planning policy framework for Bedford borough. The Local Plan 2030 has been subject to a full sustainability appraisal (including SEA). The SPD will not create new policy or land-use designations but will assist the interpretation of existing policy and provide general guidance on the design of future development.
4. Will the SPD, in view of its likely effects on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive?	No. The Local Plan 2030 was assessed under the requirements of the Habitats Directive. As the SPD will not change or add to policy, proposals or designations within the Local Plan it is considered that further assessment is not necessary as there would be no likely effects on European Sites.
5. Does the SPD determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a plan subject to Article 3.2?	No – the SPD will be a material consideration in the consideration of planning applications in the borough but will not allocate sites or determine their

	uses. It provides detailed guidance to adopted Local Plan policy.
6. Does the SPD set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)?	No. This framework is already set within the development plan . The SPD will provide further guidance on the application of relevant policies, within the Local Plan 2030.
7. Is the SPD's sole purpose to serve the national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget plan, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000-2006/7?	No.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment?	No. The purpose of the SPD is to provide guidance to assist in the interpretation of adopted policies in the Local Plan 2030. The policies to which the SPD relates were subject to SEA (incorporated within the SA) through the Local Plan preparation process. Therefore the SPD will not itself have any significant effects on the environment, and may assist in addressing potential negative effects identified in the SEA of the relevant adopted policies. See table below for detailed assessment.

### **Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment**

The table below assesses the likely significant effects of the SPD in relation to the SEA Directive Criteria as set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

<b>SEA Directive Criteria Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004</b>	<b>Summary of significant effects</b>	<b>Is there a significant environment al effect?</b>
<b>1. Characteristics of the SPD having particular regard to:</b>		
(a) The degree to which the SPD sets out a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size or operating	The SPD will not set a framework for other projects or activities - it is providing additional guidance on existing policies within the Local Plan 2030 that have been subject to SEA.	No.

conditions or by allocating resources.		
(b) The degree to which the SPD influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The SPD does not influence other plans and programmes as it sits at the lowest tier in the hierarchy of Local Plan documents.	No.
c) The relevance of the SPD for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	The SPD provides guidance on the interpretation of existing local policy along with national guidance, all of which promote sustainable development. The SPD does not introduce new policy.	No.
(d) Environmental problems relevant to the SPD.	There are no negative environmental issues associated with the SPD, moreover the SPD seeks where possible to achieve environmental improvements.	No.
(e) The relevance of the SPD for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example plans and programmes related to waste management or water protection).	The SPD will supplement the Local Plan 2030 and is not relevant to the implementation of Community legislation on the environment. It will provide supplementary guidance only.	No.
<b>2. Characteristics of the effects and area likely to be affected having particular regard to:</b>		
(a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	The SPD will provide general design guidance for future development. It offers guidance on the implementation of existing Local Plan 2030 policies, which have been subject to SEA.	No.
(b) The cumulative nature of the effects of the SPD.	The effects of the SPD will be largely beneficial- therefore any cumulative effects will also be beneficial, but within the scope of those identified in the SA / SEA of the Local Plan 2030.	No.
(c) The trans boundary nature of the effects of the SPD.	The SPD does not have any transboundary effects.	No.
(d) The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accident).	No risks to human health or the environment are envisaged to occur through the application of this SPD.	No.

(e)The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographic area and size of the population likely to be affected) by the SPD.	The SPD will apply within the administrative boundary of Bedford Borough Council.	No.
(f)The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected by the SPD due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• special natural characteristics or cultural heritage</li> <li>• exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values</li> <li>• intensive land use.</li> </ul>	The SPD provides guidance on the implementation of existing Local Plan 2030 policies, which have been subject to SEA. It does not propose any new development over and above that assessed within the Local Plan	No.
(g)The effects of the SPD on areas or landscapes which have recognised national Community or international protected status.	The SPD provides guidance on the implementation of existing Local Plan 2030 policies, which have been subject to SEA. It does not propose any new development over and above that assessed within the Local Plan	No.



