

# Non Technical Summary

## Introduction

Spelthorne Borough Council is preparing, in accordance with new legislation, a new Local Development Framework (LDF), to replace its existing Local Plan (Adopted 2001), which will guide development and influence the direction of change in the Borough for the period to 2026. The first two Development Plan Documents (DPDs) to be prepared under this new process are the Spelthorne Development Plan – Core Strategy and Policies (DPD) and the Spelthorne Development Plan – Allocations (DPD). The first sets out the Council's strategic and general development policies while the second sets out details of a range of site allocations.

An essential consideration in the production of these documents is the effect of policies and proposals on the environment and people's quality of life. Each document has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and the EU Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment. The key principle of sustainability is to ensure that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability Appraisal identifies the likely impacts of policies and proposals on social, environmental and economic interests to help achieve an approach to development which maximises the benefits to sustainability or, where adverse impacts may occur, identifies appropriate mitigation.

The full Sustainability Appraisal Report and Appendices provide information on the predicted significant impacts of the plans and proposals. It is designed to make available objective information and to show how sustainability appraisal has informed the decision making process.

This Non Technical Summary sets out the process and key findings of the Sustainability Appraisal of the two DPDs.

## Scope of the Sustainability Appraisal

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is integral to the new plan making process. At the outset a Scoping Report was prepared and published for consultation in March 2005. Its purpose was to clarify the significance and influence of other policies and plans, to identify key issues and to clearly establish the baseline of social, economic and environmental evidence to support the new plan. A Progress Report was published in September 2005 to accompany the Issues and Options consultation at the next stage of the process.

A set of Sustainability Appraisal Objectives was established by which to assess the social, economic and environmental performance of the different plan options. The objectives, policies and proposals of the two DPDs have been tested in order to identify the extent to which each DPD supports each SA Objective and the extent to which any potential benefits may be maximised. Conversely, testing also identifies areas of conflict and possible harm that may arise from the pursuit of any particular options or site allocations and whether any changes to the plan could be made to avoid or mitigate such harm.

## Consultation

Consultation has been undertaken throughout the process with other government bodies, community groups and other organisations with special interests. Full details of consultation responses are set out in Appendix 8 to the main report. Some key issues identified through this process included:-

- Transport, accessibility and congestion
- Air quality
- Risk from flooding
- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity
- Providing affordable housing

Further information has been gathered and background reports produced on these and other subjects to inform both the plan making process and the prediction of likely impacts.

## Developing and refining options

There are different ways of meeting the needs of people who live and work in Spelthorne. Various options for steering development and addressing key issues were proposed during consultation in September 2005. Each of these options was assessed against the SA objectives and the likely impacts recorded. The outcomes informed the process of determining a strategic approach to development, the nature of detailed policies and the selection of sites to take forward as allocations.

## Appraisal of the Core Strategy and Policies Development Plan Document (DPD)

The Core Strategy and Policies DPD identifies the Council's approach to guiding the location, amount and type of development in the Borough. Seven strategic policies are proposed and these are supported by detailed policies.

### Strategic Policy SP1: Location of development

The need to make the best use of previously developed land, to reduce the risk and impact of flooding, to support a more sustainable approach to transport and accessibility and to protect and enhance biodiversity, are key objectives of the DPD. The need to use land efficiently and to maintain the role and function of existing centres has, however, brought conflict since some of the most accessible centres lie within areas liable to flood. Appraisal has found that where development may be allowed as an exception, proposals should identify how improvements to reduce the risk of flooding can be secured. More information is available in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.

In combination with Strategic Policies SP6 and SP7, and Policies EN1 to EN22, the strategy is predicted to make effective use of existing urban land, protect greenfield land and important habitats whilst avoiding flood risks.

## **Strategic Policy SP2: Housing provision**

Strategic Policy SP2 and the detailed housing policies HO1 to HO7 support improving health, building community relationships and, combined with Policy SP1, improving accessibility and provision of services for all the community.

Appraisal found that by specifying areas for high density housing within a range of development densities the DPD would strongly support the objective of meeting the South East Plan housing requirement of 151 dwellings per annum for the Plan period. In this way sufficient development can be achieved in urban areas without the need for developing on greenfield sites during the plan period.

Appraisal raised concern about the requirements for affordable housing affecting the financial viability of development sites. Independent valuation advice however has indicated that a threshold of ten dwellings should not affect viability and that below that threshold there is scope for seeking a level of financial contribution. Appraisal found that any reduction in the current target of 40% of all housing to be in the affordable category would not address the extent to which the needs of people who cannot afford market housing remain unmet.

## **Strategic Policy SP3: Economy and employment land provision**

The Economy and Employment Land Study reports that the current level of economic activity in the Borough can be maintained whilst allowing some existing employment land to be redeveloped for housing, although intervention would be necessary to avoid the loss of too many sites. Strategic Policy SP3 sets out a strategy, supported by Policies EM 1 and EM2 that seeks to maintain the overall level of employment and meet needs for land by supporting the renewal and improvement of employment floorspace and supporting initiatives to improve skills. Policies SP3 and SP4 have been strengthened to ensure areas which provide services at a neighbourhood level are not lost unnecessarily.

Appraisal has resulted in text being added to Strategic Policy SP3 identifying the specific intention to seek opportunities to improve skills of local workers, although it is recognised that this will be achieved by working with other agencies led by Surrey County Council.

## **Strategic Policy SP4: Town centres and retail development**

The locational strategy aims to maintain and strengthen the role of Staines as a local/regional centre and protect neighbourhood service provision. The Retail Study shows there is scope to improve shopping provision further in Staines and that there is land that could be developed without infringing flooding constraints. The risk of flooding, however, requires policy to identify the need to consider 'betterment' through redevelopment whereby the risk of flooding is reduced as a consequence of new development.

Some respondents to consultation opposed further growth and for many this is linked to concerns about traffic congestion. The Transport Statement predicts that the strategy and specific site allocations are likely to reduce traffic movements overall. Appraisal has emphasised the importance of monitoring travel patterns and accessibility needs to ensure this objective is delivered.

## **Strategic Policy SP5: Meeting community needs**

Appraisal found that the most sustainable option would be to require contributions to infrastructure as well as protecting existing facilities and services. Concern is raised,

however, that this may have an adverse impact on viability, particularly given that a developer may also be required to provide a proportion of affordable housing. However, the importance of ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with development is considered to be overriding.

Strategic Policy SP5 also seeks to ensure community services are provided to meet needs. This is a key element in helping to maintain and improve health, building community relationships and improving services for the elderly for the long term. Policy CO1 consolidates the overall spatial strategy by directing development to locations with good access to facilities and seeking to ensure new development delivers adequate services.

### **Strategic Policy SP6: Maintaining and Improving the Environment**

Strategic Policy SP6 sets the basis for a step change towards sustainable development, supported by Strategic Policy SP7 and Policy CC1 that refer to the recently issued Code for Sustainable Homes.

Appraisal notes the importance of seeking to identify opportunities for delivering open space and environmental benefits together. The focus of Strategic Policy SP6 is to safeguard existing historic and natural assets and seek improvements to areas of poor quality environment, including measures to improve air quality. Site allocations will identify specific opportunities to deliver environmental benefits including accessible open space. Policies EN1 to EN22 consolidate this by requiring protection to a range of environmental interests, identifying environmental parameters and providing specific criteria against which to judge development proposals.

This set of policies provides a reasonable level of certainty that significant adverse impacts would not occur on the environment with respect to Green Belt land, open space, important natural habitats, landscape, including the River Thames, harm from flooding and climate change.

### **Strategic Policy 7: Climate change and transport**

Appraisal recommended that a stronger lead was taken for sustainable design such that the demand for energy could be reduced and the provision of renewable energy increased. Strategic Policy SP7 and Policy CC1 refer to the recently issued Code for Sustainable Homes, including specific reference to addressing flood risk and delivering renewable energy. Appraisal noted, however, that the policy was appropriately balanced to allow some flexibility. In requiring measures to reduce the need to travel by car, for example, flexibility in implementation helps to ensure the costs to any individual developer are not too onerous given other requirements such as affordable housing and flood risk protection which may be a higher priority.

Appraisal identified potential adverse impacts resulting from the Airtrack proposal on the environment and through disruption to the functioning of Staines Town Centre. The route has been safeguarded in the plan although the scheme is not supported by the Council unless it can be demonstrated that the adverse impacts can be overcome.

## Appraisal of the Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD)

Appraisal of 27 sites against the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives has informed the identification of sites to meet the development needs of the Borough. The Economy and Employment Land Study has found that there is no need for new areas to be designated for employment use and that the redevelopment for housing of some employment sites which are not well located would be sustainable. Nine housing sites on previously developed land, a mixed redevelopment for residential and retail in Staines town centre, and a site to be used for open space are included in the Allocations DPD. Most of the sites not taken forward as allocations are located in the Green Belt and are therefore contrary to the approach of national and strategic policy. The appraisal considers their 'greenfield' nature to mark them as less sustainable on the basis that there is more likely to be a loss of habitat and less likely to support sustainable transport. Sites have also been rejected in terms of proximity to key services, air quality issues and noise issues.

The allocated sites comply with the strategy of avoiding harm to the most important natural habitats and reducing congestion. Some of the sites selected do not, however, meet the sequential test on flood risk. Appraisal has recommended that for any site in this category, the reasons why the site should be treated as an exception should be clear. It is considered that these sites are in the most accessible parts of the Borough and their development would support the role and function of the major centres. In addition a flood risk assessment would be necessary to identify whether appropriate mitigation can be provided such that the level of flood risk after development is an improvement on the current situation.

For all sites, surveys would be required to ascertain any need for remediation of contaminated land prior to development, whether there is any archaeological interest and whether important habitats or species are present.

## Monitoring

An Annual Monitoring Report will be produced with the aim of recording information to assess the effectiveness of the DPDs in delivering sustainable development. This will inform future decision making in relation to the key issues and will identify the need to revise any particular policies. Monitoring will also consider whether new or better information is available for future Local Development Documents to fill gaps in data and provide a link to project level EIA.

## The next steps

The two DPDs submitted to the Secretary of State will be the subject of an independent examination to test the "soundness" of the plans. An appointed Inspector will consider all aspects of the DPDs and supporting evidence, including the Sustainability Appraisal Report and produce a report with binding recommendations. Any amendments required would then be made before the DPDs are adopted.