

Report Summarising the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) of the Draft Core Strategy One District –One Vision.

Contact Details: Juliet Strathern
Designation: Senior Policy Planning Officer
Ext. No: 2559
E Mail Address: juliet.strathern@braintree.gov.uk

Background Papers: Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment
Financial Implications: No
Equalities Implications: Yes
Legal Implications: No
Options: To note the contents of this report.
Risks: N/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report considers the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Draft Core Strategy One District – One Vision. It provides a summary appraisal of the growth locations and policy options and concludes with recommendations which should be considered in preparing the next stage of the Core Strategy.

Recommendation

To note the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Draft Core Strategy One District –One Vision and to undertake the following action in response to the Appraisal and Assessment:-

- 1. Ensure policies of the Core Strategy are ‘locally distinctive’ to the Braintree District and recognise the local policy needs of Braintree.**
- 2. Undertake an ‘Infrastructure’ Assessment to identify how development will be supported, timing and funding.**
- 3. Established the proposed phasing of development in the Core Strategy.**
- 4. Include a policy that identifies a hierarchy of town and retail centres in District.**
- 5. Include clearer guidance on flood risk in District, commitment to sustainable drainage systems, energy efficiency and sustainable construction methods.**
- 6. Identify targets and indicators for delivery of policies within Core Strategy and clarification of proposed monitoring framework.**

Report Summarising the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) of the Draft Core Strategy One District –One Vision

Background

The SA/SEA of the One District- One Vision Core Strategy consultation document has been produced by the Spatial Planning Group of Essex County Council acting as consultants to Braintree District Council. The report should not be interpreted, or otherwise represented as the formal view of Essex County Council.

A combined Sustainability Assessment/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) has been undertaken on the ‘One District – One Vision’ Options Consultation to assess and predict the economic, social and environmental effects that are likely to arise from it’s implementation.

The purpose of undertaking the SA/SEA at this stage of the process is to identify potentially significant sustainability effects arising from the contents of the Consultation document. The outcome of this stage of the Appraisal is designed to assist the plan preparation process, and with the responses to the consultation, to inform the plan preparation of future stages of the Core Strategy. The Core Strategy Submission document will be subject to additional appraisal before examination, to take account of proposals and amendments that may arise from the consultation and this SA/SEA.

Sustainability Appraisal Objectives

Fifteen sustainability objectives were identified to appraise the Consultation document as follows:

1. Create Safe Environments which do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion.
2. To provide everyone with the opportunity to live in a decent home
3. To improve the health of the Districts residents and mitigate/reduce potential health inequalities.
4. To promote town centre vitality and viability.
5. To achieve sustainable levels of prosperity and economic growth.
6. To conserve and enhance the biological and geological diversity of the environment.
7. To promote more sustainable transport choices.
8. Promote accessibility.
9. To improve the education and skills of the population.
10. To maintain and enhance cultural heritage and assets within Braintree.
11. To reduce contributions to climatic change.
12. To improve water quality.
13. To reduce the risk of flooding.
14. To improve air quality.
15. To maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes and townscapes.

SUMMARY OF APPRAISAL OF POLICY OPTIONS

Proposed Policy	Summary of Appraisal
CS1 – Promoting Accessibility for All	The proposed policy supports sustainability objectives relating to transport and environmental protection. However the mechanisms for delivery and implementation of the strategy would benefit from further elaboration.
CS2 – The Natural Environment	The policy addresses the protection of the natural environment, and supports sustainability objectives especially with regard to quality of life, biodiversity and landscape. The policy could be enhanced to incorporate minimisation of flood risk, surface water run-off and the incorporation of sustainable drainage systems. The extent to which there are impacts on the management of the natural environment will also depend on the detail of other Development Plan Documents that should be subject to separate SA/ SEA.
CS3 – The Built Environment	The proposed policy positively addresses sustainability objectives. However there is no reference to flood risk, and management of surface water run-off. Furthermore the policy as worded lacks specificity to Braintree District Council which could be addressed as the policy is refined through the plan preparation process.
CS4 – The Development of the Economy of the Braintree District	Reference to CS2 supports economic development within the proposed environmental framework in so far as policy CS2 meets sustainability objectives. The policy could benefit in sustainability terms through reference to sustainable transport measures.
CS5 – Distribution of Employment	The Council needs to be satisfied that the employment land provision will be adequate for the plan period. Individual sites proposed would need to be subject to separate sustainability appraisals.
CS6 – The Rural Economy	The proposed policy supports economic sustainability objectives but potentially conflicts with environmental objectives, especially those which are related to the use of private motor vehicles. The policy would benefit from a strategy to deal with the potential relocation of operations which increase in scale to more sustainable locations.

	Similarly attention should be paid to the cumulative impact of small developments.
CS7 – Town Centres and Regeneration	The strategy proposed locates regeneration and development in the most sustainable locations. Separate assessment of the proposed sites for regeneration and development would be required.
CS8 – Housing Provision and Delivery	The policy broadly accords with the sustainability objectives especially with regard to quality of life, however the sustainability of specific allocations will require separate appraisal. Reference to the use of previously developed land and development being within the settlement boundaries would help to clarify the policy wording with regard to location. With regard to design the policy would benefit in sustainability terms through the inclusion of reference to energy efficiency and sustainable drainage systems.
CS9 – Services and Facilities	The proposed approach accords well with the sustainability objectives. However, further assessment of individual sites would be required to ensure that at the site specific level, the policy delivers sustainability objectives.

SUMMARY OF APPRAISAL OF GROWTH LOCATIONS

Mixed Use: Land to North West of Braintree – off Panfield Lane

- Consideration should be given to layout at this location to ensure proposed uses were appropriately distributed.
- Quality of life of potential residents could be positively or negatively impacted by location, layout, positioning of servicing infrastructure for proposed employment uses and new football stadium within location.
- Private motor vehicle and sustainable transport measures need to be considered from the outset to ensure peak flows for uses proposed would not impact on other uses, individually or combined.
- Development would need to be designed to minimise impact on special landscape designation, Panfield Hall and ancient woodland and preserve, enhance visual amenity.
- Flood risk assessment would need to be carried out.
- Capacity of schools and hospitals would need to be investigated prior to allocation.
- Public transport provision in area would need to be increased.
- Phasing schedule to ensure delivery of infrastructure and facilities in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Investigation into improvement of A120 close to Braintree town will need to be undertaken prior to allocation of site.
- Options regarding flexibility of delivery at this location should be explored prior to allocation.

Mixed Use: Land to the south west of Witham – off Hatfield Road

- Safe pedestrian access should be created from development to surrounding areas to encourage use of more sustainable transport methods for residents.
- Currently capacity issues at Junction 21 of the A12 to south west of the location, no slip road for traffic travelling to and coming from north.

Traffic could contribute to increased congestion and have adverse impact on air quality.

- Potential impact on surface water run off localised flooding and water quality both on location and downstream, including environmentally sensitive areas in Blackwater Estuary, would need further analysis when plans become more detailed.

Mixed Use: Land to the north east of Witham – off Forest Road in parish of Rivenhall

- Development is over 800 metres from town centre and train station and is not currently served adequately by existing public transport. Extensions to existing bus routes or creation of new services to accommodate the development should be explored. Lack of public transport could increase short car journeys, increasing congestion, pressure on parking and negatively affecting air quality.
- Provision of a pedestrian/cycle route across railway would give good access to employment areas and alternative route to town.
- Consideration should be given to potential traffic increases in traffic passing designated Local Wildlife Site of Old Rectory Meadows as result of development.
- Potential impact on surface water runoff localised flooding and water quality both on location and downstream would require further analysis when plans become more detailed.

Single Use: Braintree – land to west of A131 at Great Notley

- A131 creates a barrier between the development and Great Notley which could increase private car use should sufficient public transport links not be provided.
- The B1 and B2 use classes proposed for Business Park could provide a more balanced employment structure.
- Country Park is a valuable local asset and any development would be expected to have minimal impact on site, both in terms of visual amenity through use of border treatment and preservation of natural habitats.
- Three listed buildings exist at southern edge of growth location and detailed proposals would have to maintain their setting and integrity.

Single Use: Witham – land to north east off Eastways (within Rivenhall)

- Transport infrastructure requirements would need to be investigated prior to allocation to ensure that access by private car and commercial vehicles could be adequately accommodated.
- Sustainable transport measures would need to be explored.
- Potential for upgrade cycle/foot link between Eastways and housing development to north which could be funded through new development.
- Development location comprises Greenfield land on edge of Witham contributing to physical and visual separation. Development would need to be accompanied by sensitive boundary treatment.

Conclusion

Braintree District Council, in considering the responses of the consultation on the consultation document and when preparing the next stage of the Core Strategy, is recommended to consider following points:

1. As currently phrased, many of the proposed policies could apply to any area, and lack Braintree District specificity. Consideration should be given to how the policies can be worded to relate to the local policy needs of Braintree.
2. The document does not set out the proposed settlement distribution for the District.
3. The housing and employment provision policies would benefit from reference to the provision of infrastructure necessary to support development with an indication of timing and funding.
4. The document does not set out the proposed phasing for development within the district or the timing of necessary infrastructure to support development of phases.
5. The consultation document does not set out a policy that identifies a hierarchy of town and retail centres in the district or provide guidance on the future role, development or accessibility of such sites.
6. Overall the document would benefit from clear guidance on flood risk in the District and a firm commitment to sustainable drainage systems. Similarly a commitment to energy efficiency and sustainable construction methods throughout development would assist sustainability objectives.
7. Clarification will be required as to the proposed monitoring framework and identification of indicators and targets for the delivery of the policies within the Core Strategy.

Juliet Strathern Senior Policy Planner