

Executive Summary

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is part of the emerging development plan for the Borough of Tunbridge Wells. LDFs are the new form of spatial development plan introduced by the Government's planning reforms in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). The LDF will replace the adopted Local Plan Review and set out the strategy for the way in which land is used and to guide new development in the Borough.

In order for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to promote sustainable development in the Borough in accordance with Central Government policy, a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the LDF will need to be undertaken. The SA will ensure all development plan objectives and policies are assessed for social, economic and environmental impacts and their overall contribution to sustainable development. This process also fully complies with the European Union SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) which provides for a high level of protection of the environment and contributes to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes.

This document describes the first stage of the SA; that is to set out the scope of the appraisal and the SA Framework for future assessment. The scope has been determined through a thorough review of planning documentation and the analysis of baseline data to identify key trends and key sustainability issues applicable to the Borough.

The economy of Tunbridge Wells Borough has been classed by the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) as advanced, high cost and high income. It is supported by a strong workforce with low unemployment. However, there is a mismatch between the skills of the Borough's population and the range and availability of local employment opportunities, leading to migration both in and out of the Borough. The Borough's higher than national gross household income average conceals wide differences. Social problems principally relate to a lack of affordable housing as the cost of housing remains high relative to average household incomes. Environmental issues centre on a large proportion of the Borough being protected for its landscape character and green belt status. Whilst the value of this resource requires a high level of protection, it poses certain constraints in terms of the availability of land for new development. The water supply, which increasingly is under threat of shortage, can threaten future development and cause adverse effects on wildlife, habitats and biodiversity. Traffic problems relate to over reliance on the car, coupled with insufficient sustainable (public) transport provision and poor cycling and walking facilities. The emerging LDF will seek to address all of these issues.

Sustainability objectives, targets and indicators derived from relevant national, regional and local plans, programmes and strategies have been identified. These are presented in a SA Framework through which policy options can be assessed. The key sustainability objectives are presented overleaf:

	Social	Environmental	Economic
SA Objectives	To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, sustainably constructed and affordable home	To improve efficiency in land use through the re-use of previously developed land and existing buildings, including re-use of materials from buildings, and encourage urban renaissance	To ensure high and stable levels of employment so everyone can benefit from the economic growth of the Borough
	To improve the health and well-being of the population & reduce inequalities in health	To reduce pollution (to land, air and soil) and maintain and improve the water quality of the Borough's rivers, and to achieve sustainable water resources management	To stimulate and sustain economic growth and competitiveness across the Borough
	To reduce poverty and social exclusion	To address the causes of climate change through reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.	To develop and maintain a skilled workforce to support long-term competitiveness of the Borough
	To raise educational achievement levels across the Borough and develop the opportunities for everyone to acquire the skills needed to find and remain in work	To conserve and enhance the Borough's biodiversity	
	To reduce crime and the fear of crime	To protect, enhance and make accessible for enjoyment, the Borough's countryside and historic environment	
	To improve accessibility to all services and facilities, including culture, leisure, recreation (CLR) facilities and a sustainable tourism sector	To improve travel choice, and to reduce the need for travel, particularly by car/lorry to reduce road congestion.	
		To reduce the impact of resource consumption by using sustainably produced and local products and reducing waste generation and disposal.	
		To increase energy efficiency, and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources in the Borough	

All LDF objectives and emerging policy options will be tested against the SA objectives above to ensure that all LDF objectives are ultimately sustainable and to inform the selection process for emerging options. This selection process involves widespread consultation including the public, and will allow the preferred options for the Borough to be identified as part of a later stage of the development plan preparation process.

This document has been published for consultation with both statutory and non-statutory consultees. Comments are welcome on all elements of this scoping process, including the approach / methodology, baseline data, broad issues and options facing the Borough, relevant plans, programmes and strategies, the SA Framework, individual objectives, targets and indicators and the structure of the final report. All written responses are to be posted or emailed to the addresses below and are requested before the end of the statutory five week consultation period (October 3rd 2005 to November 7th 2005).

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