



**ROCHFORD
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT
FRAMEWORK:
Sustainability Appraisal/
Strategic Environmental
Assessment**

Non Technical Summary

**Rochford Core Strategy
Preferred Options Document**

October 2008



SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL
incorporating
STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT of
ROCHFORD'S
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK:

ROCHFORD CORE STRATEGY
PREFERRED OPTIONS DOCUMENT

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL
Non Technical Summary

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INTRODUCTION

- 0.1 This is the summary of the Sustainability Appraisal Report for Rochford's Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy (Preferred Options). It describes how the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process was used to assist in planning for the development and the use of land, as required by planning legislation and Government guidance. The SA assists sustainable development through an ongoing dialogue and assessment during the preparation of LDF Development Planning Documents (DPDs), and considers the implications of social, economic and environmental demands on land use planning.

THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

- 0.2 The LDF is the new system introduced by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and it takes the form of a portfolio of documents including DPDs (Core Strategy, Site Specific Allocations and Area Action Plans), the Statement of Community Involvement, and an Annual Monitoring Report. The Core Strategy sets the LDF's long-term Vision and Strategic Objectives for development planning and it considers the options available through the planning system to the Council and communities in the Rochford area. The Preferred Options Document sets out the Council's approach, intended to guide future change and development in the area. The Council is also preparing a Site Allocations DPD, Area Action Plans for Rochford and Hockley Town Centres, and a joint Area Action plan with Southend-on-Sea Borough Council for London Southend Airport.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL & STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- 0.3 Planning legislation requires that the LDF is subject to a SA, a systematic process that is designed to evaluate the predicted social, economic and environmental effects of development planning. European and UK legislation require that the LDF is also subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), a process that considers the effects of development planning on the environment. Government guidance advises that these two processes should be carried out together and outlines a number of stages of SA work that need to be carried out as the LDF is being prepared:

- Stage A: Setting Context & Scope
- Stage B: Developing Options & Assessing Effects
- Stage C: Preparing the SA Report
- Stage D: Consulting on the Plan & the SA
- Stage E: Monitoring Implementation of the Plan

- 0.4 The SA/SEA of the Rochford Core Strategy Preferred Options Document has been prepared in accordance with these requirements for SA/SEA.

THE CHARACTER OF ROCHFORD DISTRICT

- 0.5 Rochford District is rich in heritage and natural beauty, with many miles of unspoilt coastline and attractive countryside. The District is predominantly rural, which is reflected in the fact that 12,763 hectares are designated as Metropolitan Green Belt. The character of the District has a clear east-west divide. The east of the District is sparsely populated and predominantly contains areas at risk of flooding and of ecological importance. The west of the District contains the majority of the District's population, has better access to services and fewer physical constraints.
- 0.6 The service sector dominates the economy of the District with over three-quarters of those employed working in this sector. Although the District is predominantly rural, the proportion of local businesses involved in agricultural activities is low, compared to national and regional figures. The proximity of Southend-on-Sea and the relationship between this urban area and the predominantly rural Rochford District also has a considerable impact upon the characteristics of the District, in particular through contributing to the leakage of spending out of Rochford District. Southend also provides a range of employment opportunities and is within easy commuting distance of a large proportion of the District's population.
- 0.7 Housing demand is focused on the District's larger settlements of Rayleigh, Hockley and Rochford. There is a particular need for affordable housing; current need is not being met. Areas for development are limited by physical constraints, including areas at risk of flooding, areas protected for their landscape value, and areas protected for their ecological value. A number of these areas are of local, regional, national and international ecological importance, including those protected by the EU Habitats Directive.

SA SCOPING & ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- 0.8 During late 2005 a scoping process for Rochford was carried out by Essex County Council to help ensure that the SA covered key sustainability issues relevant to Rochford. Plans and programmes were reviewed and information was collated relating to the current and predicted social, environmental and economic characteristics of the areas. This information was updated in 2007-2008.

0.9 From these studies, the key sustainability issues and opportunities for the LDF and the SA were identified, as set out in the following table:

Key sustainability issues/ opportunities identified for Rochford District
The provision of quality and affordable housing to meet housing needs in the Districts settlements.
Improving services and connectivity to the sparsely populated eastern part of the district.
Taking account of environmental and physical constraints when accommodating new housing.
The protection of the District's biodiversity and landscape qualities; including opportunities for green infrastructure networks.
High levels of car ownership and limited public transport in many areas.
High levels of out-commuting to other districts and difficulties in competing with economies in neighbouring areas.
Opportunity to stimulate the local economy, including the rural economy, whilst recognising difficulties in competing with economies in neighbouring areas.
Opportunities to incorporate good practice sustainable design into new development, and minimise the carbon footprint of the District.

SA Framework

0.10 An SA Framework was compiled and included SA Objectives that aim to resolve the issues and problems identified; these are used to test the draft DPDs as they are being prepared. This was included in the SA Scoping Report that was sent to statutory consultees. Further updates to the SA Framework were made in 2008. Comments were invited and received from a number of these organisations, which helped to improve the SA Framework. The following is a revised list of the SA Objective Headings.

SA Objective headings	
1. Balanced Communities	8. Landscape & Townscape
2. Healthy & Safe Communities	9. Climate Change & Energy
3. Housing	10. Water
4. Economy & Employment	11. Land & Soil
5. Accessibility	12. Air Quality
6. Biodiversity	13. Sustainable Design & Construction
7. Cultural Heritage	

SA OF THE CORE STRATEGY

0.11 Each stage of the preparation of the Core Strategy was appraised systematically using the SA Objectives. Where significant adverse effects, including environmental effects, have been predicted, the SA sought where possible to identify means of offsetting these effects. Where it was considered that there were opportunities to enhance the sustainability of the proposals, recommendations were made. The appraisal recognised 6 categories of predicted effects, as illustrated in the following key.

Categories of sustainability effects	
Colour	Impact
++	Major Positive
+	Positive
0	No Impact
?	Uncertain
-	Negative
--	Major Negative

Appraisal of the LDF Core Strategy Issues and Options 2006

- 0.12 Issues and options were developed initially during early 2006 and were subject to SA in March 2006 by Essex County Council's environmental assessment team. This is reported in the Draft Core Strategy DPD SA/ SEA Environmental Report, issued in September 2006.

Appraisal of the LDF Core Strategy Preferred Options 2007

- 0.13 The development of Issues and Options, and the subsequent appraisals undertaken, informed the development of Preferred Options, which were subject to detailed SA by Essex County Council's environmental assessment team. This was reported in the June 2007 Core Strategy Preferred Option SA/ SEA Environmental Report. Rochford District Council has since significantly revised the Core Strategy Preferred Options Document during 2008.

Appraisal of the LDF Core Strategy Preferred Options 2008

- 0.14 The emerging Preferred Options for the Core Strategy were developed during spring/ summer 2008 and the document was subject to SA by Enfusion in October 2008. The vision and objectives were appraised and performed well against the majority of SA objectives. Each Preferred Option was assessed against the full SA Framework objectives. Where there were any potential adverse effects predicted for sustainability, or opportunities identified to improve the sustainability of the Core Strategy, recommendations were made.

Uncertainties

- 0.15 Throughout the development of the Preferred Options and the Sustainability Appraisal process, data gaps and uncertainties were uncovered. It is not always possible to accurately predict sustainability effects when considering plans at such a strategic scale. Impacts on biodiversity and cultural heritage, for example, will depend on more detailed information and studies at a site-level. And whilst climate change science is becoming more accurate, it is difficult to predict impacts likely to result from climate change, including synergistic effects. These uncertainties have been acknowledged in the appraisal

matrices, where applicable, and will be further considered at the submission stage.

Significant effects identified

0.16 The majority of policies were found to have significant positive sustainability benefits. The following table summarises the key positive effects identified:

Significant positive effects of the emerging Core Strategy	
Key relevant SA Objective:	Positive effects identified:
Housing	The plan will have significant positive effects through meeting the housing needs of the District, particularly affordable housing needs, and in locations where housing is most needed.
Accessibility, Climate Change, Air Quality	The plan responds to existing high levels of car ownership and accessibility issues, by including strong policies in support of public transport and through seeking to minimise out-commuting.
Balanced Communities	The plan provides an inclusive approach to infrastructure provision, with particular benefits for families, children and young people.
Balanced Communities, Healthy and Safe communities, Economy and Employment	The plan recognises the benefits of providing for and consulting with children and young people, and may assist in the retention of the District's young people, who can then contribute to the local economy.
Balanced Communities, Housing	The plan recognises the needs of Rochford's ageing population and seeks to accommodate those needs, for example through provision of lifetime housing.
Balanced Communities, Accessibility	The plan provides measures to regenerate rural communities including developing better connectivity between east and west.
Biodiversity, Landscape & townscape, Water, Land and soil	The plan recognises the distinctive landscape and biodiversity areas in the District, (including coastal landscapes and flood-prone areas) and takes an approach to development that minimises impacts on these areas through steering development toward the more developed western side of the District and existing settlements.
Economy & Employment, Balanced Communities	The plan will have positive effects for the economic regeneration of existing centres and the regeneration of rural communities.
Sustainable construction	The plan has a strong focus on sustainable design and construction, including consideration of travel plans, encouraging sustainable transport, and ensuring high level compliance with codes for sustainable construction.

0.17 Alongside the many positive effects of the plan, negative sustainability effects were also identified, generally as a result of the increased development proposed in the plan. These are outlined below:

Significant negative effects of the emerging Core Strategy	
Key relevant SA Objective:	Negative Effects identified:
Air Quality, Healthy & Safe Communities, Biodiversity, Water, Land & Soil	<p>The cumulative effects of increased development, including housing, employment development, the expansion of London Southend Airport and other infrastructure. These effects include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ increased air pollution (local and regional); ▪ direct land-take; ▪ pressures on water resources and water quality; ▪ increased noise and light pollution, particularly from traffic; ▪ increased waste production; ▪ loss of tranquillity ; ▪ implications for human health (e.g. from increased pollution); and ▪ incremental effects on landscape and townscapes. <p>It is noted that whilst policies relating to the overall amount of residential and employment development, and the support of the London Southend Airport are determined at a higher policy level in the East of England Plan, significant environmental effects are evident for Rochford District. It is important that these effects are recognised in the SA so that adequate mitigation can be set in place in the LDF.</p>
Climate Change and Energy/	An increase in the District's contribution to greenhouse gas production- this is inevitable given the amount of new development proposed, and includes factors such as increased transportation costs, embodied energy in construction materials and increased energy use from new housing and employment development.
Cultural Heritage Balanced Communities Landscape & Townscape	Less tangible effects of significant physical, economic and social changes for local communities, including impacts on cultural heritage, landscape, community cohesion and identify particularly in locations where there will be significant increases in development.

Mitigation and enhancement recommendations

0.18 An important role of the SA process is to provide recommendations for the mitigation of negative effects and enhancement of the positive effects identified in the appraisal process. These can then be carried

forward in the remainder of the plan-making process and can include further recommendations for other development plan documents (for example Area Action Plans) and for processes including development control and site master planning.

- 0.19 In preparing plan policies, Rochford District Council has already sought to mitigate the negative effects of development and maximise the opportunities presented, and are commended for the work undertaken to date. The SA process has made further recommendations for the plan and these often relate to the linkages between different issues that were identified as a result of the SA. For example, there are strong synergies between the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity, the development of greenways and other policies that aim to improve accessibility; and this could be further developed in the submission document.

Monitoring the Implementation of the LDF

- 0.20 Local planning authorities are required to produce Annual Monitoring Reports including indicators and targets against which the progress of the Local Development Framework can be measured. There is also a requirement to monitor the predictions made in the SA and Government advises Councils to prepare a Monitoring Strategy that incorporates the needs of the LDF and the SA. Rochford District Council is preparing a monitoring strategy that will incorporate the recommendations from this SA.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- 0.21 The SA of the Core Strategy Preferred Options has appraised the effects of individual policies, as well as the overall effect of the plan, including cumulative and incremental effects. The SA has found that the emerging Rochford LDF will make a significant contribution to sustainability in the District, with a particularly strong focus on meeting housing and community needs, enhancing accessibility and protecting the Districts natural environment. The key negative effects identified relate to increased housing and employment development and the expansion of Southend Airport. Whilst it is recognised that these actions have been determined at a higher policy level (i.e the East of England Plan), the SA has sought to make further recommendations to assist Council in mitigating the negative effects and enhancing the positive opportunities of this development for Rochford District.
- 0.22 This SA report, alongside consultation responses received, will be used to inform the preparation of policies in the Core Strategy Submission Document. Any significant changes made to the document will be subject to further SA, and a Revised SA Report will be published alongside the Core Strategy Submission Document.