INTRODUCTION

South Kesteven District Council adopted the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) on 5 July 2010. The Core Strategy has been subject to Sustainability Appraisal throughout the process of its preparation.

REQUIREMENT TO PUBLISH THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT AFTER THE ADOPTION OF A DPD

European Parliament Directive 2001/42/EC requires councils to undertake strategic environmental assessment of plans. This has been incorporated into the process of preparing DPDs under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, and through guidance published by the ODPM (now DCLG) in November 2005.

The guidance requires Local Planning Authorities to produce a statement, outlining how sustainability appraisal has been taken into account, to accompany the adopted DPD.

Article 9 of the European Directive requires that authorities provide specific environmental consultees and the public with a statement summarising how environmental considerations have informed Plan, how the report and consultation responses have been taken into account. In this context, the specific environmental consultees are the Environment Agency, English Heritage and Natural England.

The terms of Article 9 of the Directive have been transposed into the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 which require that, following adoption of a DPD, a statement is published setting out the following:

- how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan;
- how the environmental report has been taken into account;
- how consultation responses have been taken into account;
- how relevant documents have been made available for inspection;
- why the plan has been adopted rather than other reasonable alternatives;
- how the significant environmental effects of implementing the plan will be monitored.

This statement sets out the Council's responses to the above.

THE FINAL SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL REPORT

The Council's Sustainability Appraisal Report was published with the Submission Core Strategy DPD. The Hearing Sessions of the Examination into the soundness of the Core Strategy DPD were held over seven days between 19 January 2010 and 17 March 2010.
The Inspector found the Core Strategy to be sound, provided a number of changes were made. She stated in her report that "none of these changes fundamentally alter the objectives or spatial strategy, raise new matters, or require further SA."

The principle changes related to detailed policy wording for clarification, the deletion of proposals for an interim Strategic Infrastructure Tariff, the deletion of "reserve targets" for employment land and "prescribed amounts and types of retail development for town centres". The specific percentage targets for on-site energy requirements have also been deleted. None of these changes will make further assessment necessary, although some of the wording has been updated to reflect the Inspector's changes.

HOW ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS HAVE BEEN INTEGRATED INTO THE PLAN

Sustainability Appraisal has been carried out at every stage of the Core Strategy preparation process:

- August 2005 - Strategic Environmental Assessment Report and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report published. This document was prepared by officers of South Kesteven District Council, in collaboration with consultants from Groundwork Lincolnshire. This document set out the context for the Sustainability Appraisal, baseline and key sustainability issues.
- May 2006 - Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy Preferred Options was prepared by consultants Scott Wilson.
- January 2009 - Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment Report published to accompany the Core Strategy Submission DPD. This report was prepared by officers of South Kesteven District Council.
- March 2010 - Sustainability Appraisal prepared to accompany revised Policy H3: Affordable Housing submitted to the Inspector as part of the Examination process. This report was prepared by officers of South Kesteven District Council.
- July 2010 - Final Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment Report prepared to accompany the adoption of the Core Strategy DPD. This report is substantially the same as the January 2009 report, updated to take account of the Inspector's changes.

HOW THE ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT HAS BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

The process of sustainability appraisal helped develop and refine the policies contained within the Core Strategy. A systematic and iterative process has been used to assess issues, objectives and options, which has enabled:

- the most suitable options to be selected;
- some options to be revised to make them more sustainable, and
- consideration of mitigation, where necessary, to address effects and achieve more sustainable outcomes.
The process started with the preparation of the Scoping Report and continued through the preparation of the subsequent revisions to the Core Strategy. These included Preferred Options (2006 & 2007) and Submission (2009).

HOW THE RELEVANT DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION

At each stage of the preparation of the Core Strategy all consultees, those submitting representations and the public, have been made aware of the publication of new documents through direct contact, newspaper notices and the Council's website. Hard copies of the documents have been made available at the District Council Offices in Grantham, the Area Offices in Stamford, Bourne and Market Deeping and the local libraries throughout the District (including the mobile library service).

The designated Consultation Bodies: Natural England (or its predecessors: the Countryside Agency and English Nature), the Environment Agency and English Heritage were informed of the publication of the appraisals and asked for their comments.

HOW HAVE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

The Regulation 30 (1) (d) and (e) statements set out how consultation responses and representations have been taken into account at each stage of the preparation of the Core Strategy.

- Scoping Report: consultation responses received from 10 organisations and these are set out in Appendix 6 of the SA report, together with the action taken.
- Preferred Options (2006): consultation responses received from three organisations and these are set out in Appendix 7 of the SA report, together with the action taken.
- Preferred Options (2007): five consultation responses received and these are set out in Appendix 8 of the SA report, together with the action taken.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE CORE STRATEGY AS ADOPTED IN LIGHT OF OTHER REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (12) (2) requires environmental reports to examine reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme.

In preparing the Core Strategy a range of options were developed, which form different ways of addressing key planning issues facing the District. These options were appraised against the SA Framework to test their sustainability. This is documented in Chapter 6 of the report. The results of the appraisal were taken into account as far as possible when developing the preferred approach. The economic, social and environmental effects of the preferred options were appraised and generally the options performed well. Mitigation measures were also identified where necessary.
The Inspector's Report states that SA Report sets out the baseline data, SA objectives, methodology and evaluation, together with likely significant effects and suggested mitigation. She states that "although the biodiversity aspect have been questioned, I do not regard the perceived shortcoming as so serious as to undermine the SA process." [¶ 2.3] The Inspector's Report confirms that the spatial strategy is supported by the SA as "it facilitates a sustainable pattern of development that supports both urban and rural communities in accordance with the spatial objectives." [¶ 3.14]

The adopted Core Strategy, therefore, represents an appropriate response to the key planning issues identified for the District. It has also been confirmed that it is in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy.

HOW THE SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN WILL BE MONITORED

Article 10 of the European Directive sets out the requirement to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans, to identify unforeseen adverse effects and to take remedial action. It acknowledges that existing monitoring arrangements may be used, if appropriate, with a view to avoiding duplication of monitoring.

The Core Strategy includes a monitoring framework which has regard to the need to submit to Government by 31 December of each year an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and which should focus on the achievement of delivering sustainable development, and the other impacts and trends of policy delivery. Specifically, the AMR has regard to:

- whether the strategy and policies of the Core Strategy and subsequent DPDs are delivering the intended outcomes;
- the Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal indicators;
- the monitoring requirements of the East Midlands Regional Plan; and
- the Government's Core Output Indicators and National Indicators.

The AMR, therefore, monitors the significant environmental, social and economic effects of the Core Strategy. Monitoring information in connection with the Sustainability Appraisal will be set out in the AMR. This will ensure that significant sustainability effects of implementing the plan are monitored to identify any unforeseen sustainability effects and enable remedial action to be taken. Proposals for monitoring key effects are set out at Chapter 8 and Appendix 1B &2 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report. The Annual Monitoring Report will be available to view on the Council's website.