

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for the Rutland Local Plan

SA Report Non-Technical Summary (NTS) to accompany
Regulation 19 consultation

Rutland County Council

October 2024

Quality information

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Revision History

Revision	Revision date	Details	Authorized	Name	Position
V1.0	01/10/24	Final version	01/10/24	N.C.B.	Technical Director

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1. Introduction

Introduction to SA

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in support of Rutland County Council's (RCC) emerging Local Plan. SA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating adverse effects and maximising the positives. SA of Local Plans is a legal requirement and is undertaken in-line with the procedures prescribed by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Structure of the SA Report / this NTS

In-line with the Regulations, a report (known as the SA Report) must be published for consultation alongside the draft plan that essentially "*identifies, describes and evaluates*" the likely significant effects of implementing "*the plan, and reasonable alternatives*".¹ The report must then be considered, alongside consultation responses, when finalising the plan.

More specifically, the SA Report should answer the following three questions²:

1. What has Plan-making / SA involved up to this point?
 - Including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.
2. What are the SA findings at this stage?
 - i.e., in relation to the draft plan.
3. What happens next?
 - What steps will be taken to finalise (and monitor) the plan.

The SA Report is structured in parts that each seek to address these three questions. This is a Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the SA Report, and it is similarly structured with chapters dedicated to each question.

The SA Report and NTS accompanies the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* document for Regulation 19 consultation.

The SA Report (and NTS) builds upon initial work undertaken in the Interim SA Report which accompanied the Preferred Options consultation in November 2023.

What is the Local Plan seeking to achieve?

The Local Plan seeks to establish a clear vision for the future of Rutland and sets out objectives for delivering that vision during the plan period. This provides the framework upon which the policies and proposals of the plan are built.

¹ Regulation 12(2) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

² See **Appendix A** for further explanation of the regulatory basis for answering certain questions within the SA Report, and a 'checklist' explaining more precisely the regulatory basis for presenting certain information.

The **vision** for the Local Plan is as follows:

“By 2041, the Local Plan will have helped Rutland to make the most of its location, natural features and historic assets to become a leading example of a modern rural county.

“The Local Plan will have supported the delivery of:

- *changes that improve people’s quality of life, address the impacts of climate change and the need to become carbon net zero*
- *a strong, competitive, and knowledge-based local economy that provides opportunity for indigenous and inward investment and where businesses and entrepreneurs’ flourish*
- *a range of high-quality housing that meet the county’s minimum housing need and which meets the needs of all sections of the community, including affordable homes, space for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Show people and homes which meet specialist needs*
- *healthy, sustainable, mixed communities with easy access to services and facilities by cycling, walking, public transport as well as by private vehicle*
- *development and change which also respects Rutland’s rural character and has enhanced the county’s sense of community and its unique rural identity*
- *protection and preservation of the natural environment and heritage assets and their setting; and*
- *appropriate infrastructure (particularly education, health, roads, and community facilities) to mitigate the impact of new development.*

“The market towns of Oakham and Uppingham will continue to thrive as vibrant destinations to shop, socialise and enjoy life – both for those who live locally and those who visit. They will continue to be the main focus for additional housing and employment growth, while their role as business locations, service and cultural centres for the county will have been enhanced.

“Beyond the towns, some planned development will have occurred in the 21 Larger Villages. Small scale, local, development will also have been permitted in the smaller settlements ensuring that our rural communities remain vibrant.

“The quintessential rural character of the countryside will have been protected and support given to rural diversification and adapting rural activities to meet the challenges of climate change, digitalisation and changing travel patterns.

“The development needs of communities, businesses and visitors will have been enabled taking particular account of:

- *climate change and the drive towards carbon net zero*
- *addressing health inequalities and improving the wellbeing of our communities*
- *addressing social and economic inequalities and promoting active travel routes*
- *the area’s internationally recognised natural, built, and historic environment; and*
- *the provision of adequate supporting infrastructure.”*

What is the scope of the SA?

The scope of the SA was established in March 2022 and provides the basis for the SA process and has been reviewed and updated in light of the responses received at scoping consultation. The scoping responses (along with comments on how these have been considered and addressed through the SA process) are presented in **Table D** within **Appendix B** in the main body of the SA Report.

The scope is summarised by a series of 19 SA objectives that form the structure for the assessment, under eight SA ‘themes’. Each option and proposal in the plan identified for SA has been assessed against each of these SA objectives. The main report (**Chapter 2**) includes the SA framework which provides assessment criteria and potential indicators to assist the assessment. The series of SA objectives (grouped by SA theme) are:

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

- SA1: Support the integrity of internationally, nationally and locally designated sites.
- SA2: Protect and enhance habitats and species in Rutland.
- SA3: Enhance understanding of biodiversity and geodiversity.

Landscape

- SA4: Protect and enhance the character and quality of Rutland’s landscapes, townscapes and villagescapes.
- SA5: Contribute to tranquillity and the quality of dark skies.

Historic Environment

- SA6: Conserve and enhance Rutland’s historic environment, including designated and non-designated heritage assets (and their settings).
- SA7: Conserve and enhance Rutland’s archaeological resource.
- SA8: Promote opportunities for enhancing the understanding of Rutland’s distinct historic environment.

Air, Land, Soil and Water Resources

- SA9: Deliver improvements in air quality in Rutland.
- SA10: Ensure the efficient and effective use of land.
- SA11: Manage Rutland’s water resources in a sustainable manner.

Climate Change

- SA12: Reduce the contribution to climate change made by activities within Rutland.
- SA13: Support Rutland’s resilience to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding.

Communities, Health and Wellbeing

- SA14: Provide everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing.
- SA15: Delivery of infrastructure to meet the foreseeable needs of the varied communities in Rutland.
- SA16: Support the quality of neighbourhoods as a place to live.
- SA17: Improve the health and well-being of Rutland's residents.

Transportation

- SA18: Promote sustainable transport use, encourage accessibility, and reduce the need to travel.

Economic Vitality

- SA19: Support sustainable economic development in Rutland.

2. Plan-making / SA up to this point

Introduction

In line with regulatory requirements, there is a need to explain how work was undertaken to develop and then appraise reasonable alternatives, and how the Council then considered the appraisal findings when finalising the Local Plan. **Part 1** of the SA Report is given over to:

1. Presenting the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with (summarised under the heading 'establishing reasonable alternatives' below).
2. Presenting a summary of the appraisal of the alternatives (summarised under the 'appraising reasonable alternatives' heading below); and
3. Explaining the Council's reasons for selecting the preferred approach (summarised under the 'developing the preferred approach' heading below)

Importantly, this work builds upon existing SA work undertaken at the Issues and Options stage (June 2022) and the Regulation 18 'Preferred Options Plan' stage reported in the Interim SA Report (November 2023). Alternatives at this stage do not repeat any alternatives work already undertaken to date, alternatives are explored considering feedback from consultation to date and the updated draft plan being presented for Regulation 19 consultation.

Defining reasonable alternatives

To support the development of the preferred approach for the emerging Local Plan (i.e., the spatial strategy), the SA process has considered a range of growth strategy options. This is with a view to understanding the relative sustainability merits of different potential spatial strategies for the Local Plan.

These growth strategy options have been developed based on strategic variables associated with the following two components:

- Different scales of growth; and
- Different locations of growth.

A discussion of these strategic variables is set out within **Chapter 6** in the main body of the SA Report.

Growth strategy options

An overview of the growth strategy options considered through the SA process is presented in **Table NTS1** below.

A more detailed breakdown of the spatial distribution of housing represented by each option, including in relation to key locations in Rutland, is presented in **Table 6.4** and subsequently mapped in **Figures 6.1 to 6.5** in the main body of the SA Report.

These options reflect existing and likely land availability in the county, as reflected by the outcomes of ongoing evidence base studies being undertaken to inform the Local Plan.

Table NTS1: Growth options considered as reasonable alternatives

Growth strategy option	Rationale
<p>Option 1: Oakham, Uppingham NP allocations, Quarry Farm and brownfield sites</p>	<p>This option would deliver 2,907 dwellings over the plan period. It is based only the 'constants' outlined above and is indicative of a minimum level of growth in Rutland.</p>
<p>Option 2: Oakham, Uppingham NP, Quarry Farm, brownfield sites and small greenfield sites in larger villages</p>	<p>This option would deliver 2,985 dwellings over the plan period. In conjunction with the assessment of Option 3, it will consider the principle of taking forward smaller vs. larger sites in the larger villages.</p>
<p>Option 3: Oakham, Uppingham NP, Quarry Farm, brownfield sites and medium greenfield sites in larger villages</p>	<p>This option would deliver 3,279 dwellings over the plan period. In conjunction with the assessment of Option 2, it will consider the principle of taking forward larger vs. smaller sites in the larger villages.</p>
<p>Option 4: Additional sites in Oakham, Uppingham NP, Quarry Farm, brownfield sites, small greenfield sites in larger villages and medium greenfield sites in larger villages</p>	<p>This option would deliver 3,821 dwellings over the plan period. It seeks to deliver additional growth by delivering the sites in both the smaller and larger villages in Rutland, whilst also delivering additional homes in Oakham (recognising the broad sustainability of Oakham as the county's largest settlement).</p>
<p>Option 5: Oakham, Uppingham NP, Quarry Farm, brownfield sites, small greenfield sites in larger villages and a new settlement</p>	<p>This option would deliver 3,985 dwellings over the plan period. It is in essence the same as Option 2, but with the addition of a new settlement. This is with a view to meeting higher housing numbers.</p>

Appraising reasonable alternatives

Presented below are the summary appraisal findings for the established growth strategy options. The detailed narrative explaining these findings is presented in **Chapter 6** of the SA Report.

SA theme		Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	Significant effect?	Uncertain	Uncertain	Negative	Negative	Negative
	Rank	1	2	3	4	5
Landscape	Significant effect?	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
	Rank	1	2	4	5	3
Historic Environment	Significant effect?	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
	Rank	2	3	4	5	1
Air, Land, Soil and Water Resources	Significant effect?	No	No	Uncertain	Negative	Negative
	Rank	1	2	3	4	5
Climate Change	Significant effect?	No	No	No	No	Negative
	Rank	1	2	3	4	5
Communities, Health and Wellbeing	Significant effect?	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Mixed
	Rank	4	3	2	1	5
Transportation	Significant effect?	No	No	No	No	Uncertain
	Rank	2	3	4	1	5
Economic Vitality	Significant effect?	No	No	Positive	Positive	Mixed
	Rank	5	4	2	1	3

Developing the preferred approach

This section explains the Council's preferred approach, considering the appraisal of reasonable alternatives in **Chapter 6** in the main body of the SA Report, and bringing it together with available evidence and Council and wider priorities.

The preferred approach for the Rutland Local Plan is to direct growth to sustainable locations within Rutland, primarily focused within the planned limits of development (PLD). Aligning with **Option 1** and **Option 2**, growth will be focused in Oakham, Uppingham (via Neighbourhood Plan allocations), Part of Stamford North (Quarry Farm), brownfield sites and small greenfield sites in larger villages. Specifically, provision is made in the new Local Plan for the delivery of at least 123 homes per annum (based on the standard housing method) with an additional allowance for flexibility. The new Local Plan therefore makes provision for 2,705 new homes distributed in accordance with the spatial strategy in Policy SS1. A total of 1,576 homes have been delivered via completions and commitments since 31st March 2021. Residual housing needs will be delivered via site allocations within the new Local Plan (see Policy H1), with growth primarily directed to the most sustainable locations within Rutland. This is further discussed within **Part 2** of this SA Report.

Consideration has also been given to:

- The constraints and opportunities within each settlement, with the results of the settlement assessment (see **Technical Annex 3**) indicating that no location is free from constraints.
- Site availability within settlements, as whilst a settlement may perform favourably from a sustainability perspective, there might not be any suitable and/or available sites reflecting the findings of the site appraisals (see **Technical Annex 2**).
- The fact that some settlements have arguably received their 'fair share' of development over recent years and have therefore over-delivered in terms of housing numbers.

With respect to Woolfox and St George's Barracks, whilst both sites represent large-scale growth opportunities for Rutland (including garden community potential), they are recognised as potentially longer-term opportunities for growth. There is an expectation that there may be some delivery on these sites within the emerging plan period (i.e., before 2041) (see Policy SS4). However, given the complexities of the sites, the new Local Plan proposes to explore these matters through a separate DPD, or as part of a targeted review of the new Local Plan in due course.

St George's Barracks (once vacated) would constitute a brownfield site of 'previously developed land' and a future opportunity area for between 350 and 500 homes. The new Local Plan does not seek to preclude development opportunities at this location, and a policy framework for the site is proposed through the new Local Plan.

It is recognised that housing targets for Rutland could increase in the coming months in light of the planning reforms proposed through the latest [NPPF consultation](#) (which closed in September 2024). The planning reforms include a proposal to reintroduce mandatory housing targets for local authority areas, including updated housing figures based on the revised housing calculation method set out in the consultation.

Reflecting the above, it is likely that Rutland County Council will commence an early review of the new Local Plan (once adopted) in order to appropriately plan for additional growth identified through the revised housing method.

3. SA findings at this stage

Introduction

Part 2 of the SA Report presents an appraisal of the draft plan, as published under Regulation 19 of the Planning Regulations. A series of narratives are presented under each SA theme, providing a commentary on the spatial strategy, county-wide policy provisions, cumulative effects, and overall conclusions (relevant to each SA theme – i.e., there is no systematic consideration of each individual policy, instead policies are drawn upon as relevant to the SA objective in question).

The appraisal identifies and evaluates ‘likely significant effects’ of the plan on the baseline, drawing on the ten SA objectives identified through scoping as a methodological framework.

The full appraisal findings are presented in **Chapter 8** in the main body of the SA Report. A summary of the appraisal findings is presented below.

Summary appraisal findings

The *Pre-Submission Local Plan* **performs favourably for the Biodiversity and Geodiversity SA theme** by providing appropriate protection to designated sites and habitats and species through its policy framework, whilst also supporting ecological connectivity through green and blue infrastructure improvements. Whilst the spatial strategy locates some growth near designated sites, habitats and species, the policy framework should serve to mitigate any adverse effects that might arise as a result of development. Providing any recommendations within the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) are also incorporated into the policy framework, **no significant effects** are predicted. It is important to recognise that the requirement to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) on sites, embedded by the Environment Act 2021, will also help mitigate potential significant negative effects and facilitate enhancements to ecological networks.

Uncertainty is noted under the Historic Environment and Landscape SA themes. This is because it is difficult to predict effects with regard to the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* as impacts on cultural heritage and landscape are largely dependent on the design and layout of development, which is unknown at this stage. Nevertheless, it is recognised that the policy framework seeks to mitigate adverse impacts on heritage assets and landscape character as a result of development.

With respect to the **Air, Land, Soil and Water Resources SA theme**, growth is largely contained within or in proximity to planned limits of development, which will help to safeguard areas of open countryside from inappropriate levels of development during the plan period. The *Pre-Submission Local Plan* has a particular focus on minimising waste and protecting mineral resources, and also seeks to incorporate nature-based solutions through the design of new development areas. Whilst the spatial strategy will inevitably lead to the loss of some BMV agricultural land, this is largely unavoidable due to the limited number of brownfield opportunity sites in Rutland. In light of this, **minor positive significant effects** are predicted at this stage.

Regarding the **Climate Change SA theme**, whilst growth in the county will ultimately lead to an increase in GHG emissions, this is largely unavoidable and when considering the global scale of climate change, relatively insignificant. Moreover, the

policy framework seeks to ensure that future development is associated with low embodied carbon emissions and is resilient to the impacts of climate change, such as increasing flooding. In light of this, **minor positive significant effects** are predicted at this stage.

The preferred approach within the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* is to direct growth to sustainable locations within Rutland, primarily focused within the planned limits of development (PLD). This approach is likely to deliver growth in locations which have the broadest range of services and facilities, and accessibility to public transport networks. The policy framework also seeks to deliver a suitable mix of housing, including provision for affordable housing and specialist accommodation for key demographics, which will support residents quality of life. Additionally, safeguarding employment sites and identifying additional sites for employment land will help to support the local economy and local job opportunities. On this basis, **positive significant effects are anticipated with respect to the Communities, Health and Wellbeing SA theme and Economic Vitality SA theme.**

Delivering a significant proportion of new homes in the main towns will support growth in the most accessible locations in Rutland with respect to public transport networks. The allocation at **Part of Stamford North (Quarry Farm)** for 650 homes is of a size which has the potential to deliver significant new transport infrastructure. In addition, the *Pre-Submission Local Plan's* policy framework supports active travel and public transport, including the connection of these networks to new development. It also supports EV charging infrastructure, which is important due to the rural nature of the county. In light of this, **positive significant effects are considered likely at this stage for the Transportation SA theme.**

Cumulative effects

Whilst the geographic scope of the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* only addresses the area covered by Rutland, the in-combination effects of new development proposed through the adopted or emerging Local Plans for the Local Planning Authorities adjoining or in close proximity to the county have the potential to lead to cumulative effects. This includes relating to adopted or emerging Local Plan documents for:

- Harborough
- Melton
- South Kesteven
- Peterborough
- East Northamptonshire
- Corby

As such, the in-combination effects of housing growth across these Local Planning Authority areas (and further afield) have the potential to lead to cumulative effects.

Furthermore, the combination of Local Plan proposals and other proposals and activities being taken forward in the wider area have the potential to lead to cumulative effects. Examples include:

- Proposed transport schemes in the county, including in Oakham town centre.

- The development of Stamford North (taken forward through the South Kesteven Local Plan) and upgrades to the A1/A606 junction.
- Minerals proposals.
- Proposals to increase visitor numbers to Rutland Water.
- Activities designed to enhance sub-regional green infrastructure networks.
- Melton Mowbray Distributor Road and urban extensions to Melton Mowbray.
- Urban extensions to Corby.
- Enhancements to the railway network in the county to increase capacity for freight, and implications for existing level crossings (including in Oakham).

In this context, potential effects (both positive and negative) which may occur as a result of the in-combination effects of the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* and other plans and proposals in the area include the following:

- Increases in traffic flows and congestion from the in-combination effects of development and capacity enhancements, with potential impacts on air and noise quality and landscape character. However, the in-combination effects of proposals on enhancing public transport and pedestrian and cycle infrastructure may help limit potential negative effects and secure positive effects in this regard.
- Cumulative impacts on ecological networks from the in-combination effects of new development and associated infrastructure on habitats and biodiversity corridors. However, enhancements to green infrastructure provision facilitated through the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* proposals and other projects in the area, as well as an increased focus on biodiversity net gain, have significant potential to support local, sub-regional and regional ecological networks.
- Impacts on regional housing demand from the in-combination effects of the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* and other Local Plans in the sub-region not meeting full local housing need.
- Impacts on flood risk from the in-combination effects of new development, including relating to surface water and fluvial flooding. However, the provisions of the NPPF and measures and policy approaches implemented through the relevant plans and proposals will limit the significance of effects.
- Changes in land uses resulting from the UK leaving the European Union, including associated with the replacement of schemes such the Common Agricultural Policy with new agricultural subsidy regimes.
- Improvements to accessibility resulting from the in-combination effects of enhancements to public transport and walking and cycling networks.

Regarding the development at Stamford North development, which is being taken forward through the new South Kesteven Local Plan, Part of Stamford North (Quarry Farm), which is allocated through the draft Rutland Local Plan, is dependent on the delivery of this development. In terms of in combination effects of the development at Stamford North with the remaining allocations being taken forward through the draft Rutland Local Plan, it is acknowledged that some of the key areas being taken forward for housing and employment are relatively close to Stamford North. This includes site allocations at settlements in proximity to Stamford, including

Emtingham and Ryhall. In this respect, there is potential for minor in-combination effects to arise from the development at Stamford North and new development being taken forward through the draft Rutland Local Plan.

In relation to the above, Policy H2 (Cross-boundary development opportunity – Stamford North) recognises the cross-boundary nature of this development by reiterating that a proposal for the development of Part of Stamford North (Quarry Farm) will only be supported where it is in accordance with an agreed Masterplan or Development Brief or as part of a comprehensive planning application for the whole of the Stamford North development area. This is expected to include (amongst other things) an appropriate full transport assessment and phasing plan for the entire site. This will help limit the in-combination effects of development at Stamford North and development which takes place elsewhere on traffic and congestion in the area, with associated benefits for air and noise quality and the health and wellbeing of residents.

As highlighted above, for many potential cumulative effects, the policy approaches proposed by the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* will help reduce the significance of these in-combination impacts. However, monitoring for the various Local Plans will be a key means of ensuring that unforeseen adverse environmental effects are highlighted, and remedial action taken where adverse environmental effects arise.

No additional mitigation measures or recommendations have been proposed relating to the potential effects identified. This reflects the carefully designed spatial strategy and robust policy framework which are put forward through the *Pre-Submission Local Plan*. It should be noted, however, that the policies put forward through the *Pre-Submission Local Plan* do not prevent the likelihood of negative effects taking place, including those highlighted in the SA Report for the proposed site allocations. Instead, they reduce the likelihood of significant negative effects resulting from new development in Rutland. It should also be noted that the delivery of housing allocations and employment provision in the county will require inevitable trade-offs to take place between the various environmental, social and economic elements which have been highlighted through the SA process to date.

Recommendations

Whilst no specific recommendations are made at this stage, it is recognised that there is a need for careful monitoring to ensure that development is delivered in line with the policy framework and objectives of the plan.

4. Next steps

Introduction

Part 3 of the SA Report summarises the next steps plan-making and the SA.

Next steps

This SA Report accompanies the *Pre-Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19 Publication Version)* document for subsequent examination.

At Examination, the Inspector will consider representations (alongside the SA Report) before then reporting back on the Local Plan's soundness or identifying the need for modifications. If the Inspector identifies the need for modifications to the Local Plan, these will be prepared (and undergo SA) and will then be subject to consultation (with an SA Report Addendum published alongside).

Once found to be 'sound', the Local Plan will be formally adopted by RCC. At the time of adoption, an SA 'Statement' must also be published.

Monitoring

Table 9.1 within the main body of the SA Report outlines suggestions for a monitoring programme for measuring the Local Plan's implementation in relation to the areas where the SA has identified significant opportunities for an improvement in sustainability performance to arise. It also seeks to monitor where uncertainties relating to the appraisal findings arose and suggests where monitoring is required to help ensure that the benefits of the Local Plan are achieved through the planning process.

It is anticipated that monitoring will be undertaken as part of the Council's annual monitoring process, as reported through yearly Authority Monitoring Reports. Any additional monitoring requirements, if deemed necessary through the final plan-making stages, will be identified in the SA Adoption Statement (produced at the time of adoption of the plan).

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