

GUIDE TO SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

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Entec

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PLANNING FOR PEOPLE AND PLACES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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GUIDE TO SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL
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GUIDE TO SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

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Foreword

I am very pleased to write a Foreword to this *Guide to Sustainability Appraisal*, which is both timely and welcome.

When used as an integral and transparent element of plan preparation, sustainability appraisals are very useful tools which can help achieve integration between social, environmental and economic objectives.

Their use is becoming increasingly popular in different sectors and at different levels of the plan-making process, and they are set to gain greater prominence when existing development plans are superseded by local development frameworks.

The Royal Town Planning Institute's draft policy statement on sustainable development endorses the use of sustainability appraisals as an effective way of helping incorporate sustainable development into the plan-making process.

In addition, under the Government's proposals for reform of the planning system the significance and weight given to sustainability appraisals will increase considerably if the achievement of sustainable development is confirmed as the statutory purpose of planning.

This guide will be useful to all those who wish to know more about sustainability appraisal and are seeking examples of good practice. I commend this guide to practitioners.

Michael Haslam
President, Royal Town Planning Institute
October 2002

Making Effective Use of Sustainability Appraisals

This guide presents a review of sustainability appraisal as a tool for integrating the concept of sustainable development into planning decision-making. We consider its role in the development of plans, strategies and proposals, provide guidance on current good practice, and consider the trends and research that are shaping the development of this relatively immature field.

Sustainability appraisals are becoming increasingly common in the planning process. They are being used to appraise regional strategies, development plans and other policy documents, as well as a growing number of major development projects. There is little up-to-date guidance relevant to the many different circumstances in which sustainability appraisals are being used. The methodologies for undertaking sustainability appraisals are evolving as new and better developed techniques are employed.

There is a clear overlap between the techniques of sustainability appraisal and those used for other forms of strategic and project level assessment. In a planning context the strongest link is likely to be with the emerging techniques for strategic environmental assessment (SEA), as both seek to help inform decision-making by providing information on the potential implications of policies, plans or projects. The UK has until 2004 to implement EU Directive 2001/42/EC,¹ which requires certain plans and programmes to be subject to SEA. These plans and programmes will include the proposed 'local development frameworks' and 'regional spatial strategies', for which sustainability appraisal will also be required. Because of the complementary ambitions and application of SEA and sustainability appraisal, the sustainability appraisal methodology presented in this guide takes account of some of the principles in the EU Directive, although how the Directive is to be implemented in Britain has yet to be finalised.² The Office of



Sustainability appraisals must consider the contribution of a plan towards achieving vibrant and safe communities

the Deputy Prime Minister is due to publish guidance on sustainability appraisal sometime in 2003, which will take into account the implications of SEA.

We believe that it is sensible to try to combine techniques for SEA and sustainability appraisal to achieve a more integrated approach to evaluation. As well as taking advantage of good practice in both these disciplines, an integrated approach would result in significant practical efficiencies and ensure the provision of consistent information to decision makers. Therefore, our approach in this guide is to embody key elements of SEA practice into sustainability appraisal wherever this is appropriate.

It is hoped that this guide will help disseminate some of the principles of current good practice, based on Entec's experience of carrying out a wide range of appraisals.

The Role of Sustainability Appraisal

What is sustainability appraisal?

Sustainability appraisal is the process by which the performance of a plan, strategy or proposal is assessed in sustainability terms. In the UK the process generally involves assessing the relationship with a defined set of sustainable development objectives. The closest to an official definition of sustainability appraisal is the following:

‘A systematic and iterative process undertaken during the preparation of a plan or strategy, which identifies and reports on the extent to which the implementation of the plan or strategy would achieve environmental, economic and social objectives by which sustainable development can be defined, in order that the performance of the strategy and policies is improved.’³

Sustainability appraisal is a judgmental exercise that uses the expertise of the appraisers, together with available supporting information, to assess how the proposed plan, strategy or proposal is aligned with each sustainable development objective. In this way, aspects which may require further consideration or revision are identified, and recommendations are made for improving sustainability performance. Sustainability appraisal is an iterative process, and the outputs from an appraisal are used in future revision of policies and proposals, which are then subject to further appraisal, leading to a continued improvement in sustainability performance.

Defining sustainable development

This is a regularly debated topic area; however, for several years a definition in common use in the UK has been that identified in the Government’s Strategy for Sustainable Development.⁴ This states that at the heart of sustainable development is the simple concept of **ensuring a better life for**

everyone, now and for generations to come. Sustainable development, as defined by the Government, is the integration of social, economic and environmental objectives. The UK Sustainable Development Strategy lays out the four objectives that need to be met, at the same time, to bring about long-term improvements in people’s quality of life:

- social progress that meets the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth.

Box 1 presents extracts from the UK Strategy. It makes it clear that sustainable development is more than just consideration of environmental issues, and the importance of achieving objectives simultaneously is emphasised.

Why undertake a sustainability appraisal?

Sustainability appraisals help to ensure that plans, strategies and proposals take into account the principles of sustainable development. The process permits a qualitative assessment of a plan, strategy, or proposal against independent sustainable development objectives. However, the objective of sustainability appraisal should not be to ‘score’ performance, but rather to work closely with policy makers, project designers and decision makers to help improve sustainability performance and to make explicit the nature of any trade-offs that may be required.

The use of sustainability appraisals is a formal requirement in only two parts of the English planning process, namely in the preparation of regional planning guidance and related strategies, and in the preparation of the London Plan. However, despite a lack of legislative requirement, many local

planning authorities are also undertaking sustainability appraisals of their statutory development plans. Sustainability appraisal in this context is being used as an extension of environmental appraisal and is being carried out in accordance with planning guidance which states that:

'The same methodologies used for environmental appraisal can be developed to encompass economic and social issues. The Department has issued advice on how this might be done in *Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice* (DETR, 1998) and local authorities are encouraged to consider using this guidance to extend appraisal so that it covers all four sustainable development objectives.'⁵

Although the guidance does not use the term sustainability appraisal, the reference to environmental, social and economic considerations in the environmental appraisal process is in effect sustainability appraisal in all but name.

The National Assembly for Wales has issued advice to local authorities that they should carry out a full sustainability appraisal of their development plans. The Assembly has also recently published a good practice guide on sustainability appraisal.⁶

The use of sustainability appraisals for specific development proposals is not a regulatory requirement, although they are being increasingly used for major projects. Where such appraisals are undertaken it is generally at the behest of the promoter of the development, probably for two reasons – to improve the sustainability performance of the project, and to help secure planning and other regulatory consents.

Sustainability appraisal is also an established technique for certain Ministry of Defence projects. In July 2000 the Secretary

Box 1 Extracts from the UK Sustainable Development Strategy

Sometimes discussion of sustainable development, particularly in richer countries, has focused mainly on environmental limits. But economic and social boundaries must also be recognised...

*We are all familiar with the idea of **economic capital**, and the need to conserve it. Families save money for a rainy day; businesses invest in order to expand and flourish; local and central governments lead the way in investing in schools, hospitals and roads.*

*Our **social capital** consists of the skills and knowledge, health, self-esteem and social networks of people and communities in the UK. The failure of urban renovation schemes of the recent past, which concentrated on physical investment alone – for example some 1960s and 1970s housing estates – demonstrate the importance of building social capital as well as bricks and mortar.*

***Environmental capital** provides the third side of the triangle. We cannot protect every bit of the environment for ever; in some cases individual development decisions will require trade offs between economic, social and environmental objectives. But it is important to seek opportunities to achieve objectives simultaneously...*

Throughout this Strategy, the emphasis is on developing our economic and social capital while exercising sound stewardship over our environmental capital.

of State for Defence launched a policy statement committing the Ministry of Defence to carrying out environmental appraisals of all new policies and programmes. In practice, a more holistic approach has been undertaken, with the use of

sustainability appraisals becoming increasingly common for major defence schemes. For example, Entec has undertaken sustainability appraisals of major defence proposals at a series of military establishments around Salisbury Plain – the proposals are part of the Government's Strategic Defence Review.

The benefits of undertaking a sustainability appraisal

Where a sustainability appraisal is used effectively it can make a very positive contribution to plan-making. For example, in the case of the Entec appraisal of the draft London Plan, the appraisal was carried out in three iterations of draft versions of the plan before the final published version. The appraisal results from the early iterations helped in the formulation of specific policies in the plan targeted at achieving a more sustainable future for London (see the case study on page 14).

A number of the benefits of undertaking a sustainability appraisal are identified below:

- Sustainability appraisals provide a social, economic and environmental context to planning decisions and policy formulation in a balanced and effective way.
- Sustainability appraisals help with decision-making in the planning process. For example, they can help with the selection of development options for inclusion in a local plan or can help to determine a planning application.
- Sustainability appraisal methods of recording information (notably the use of matrices) provide a detailed log of individual decisions and provide transparency to decision-making.
- Above all, sustainability appraisals can help result in improved plans, strategies and proposals that have increased regard for sustainable development principles.

Existing weaknesses in sustainability appraisal practice

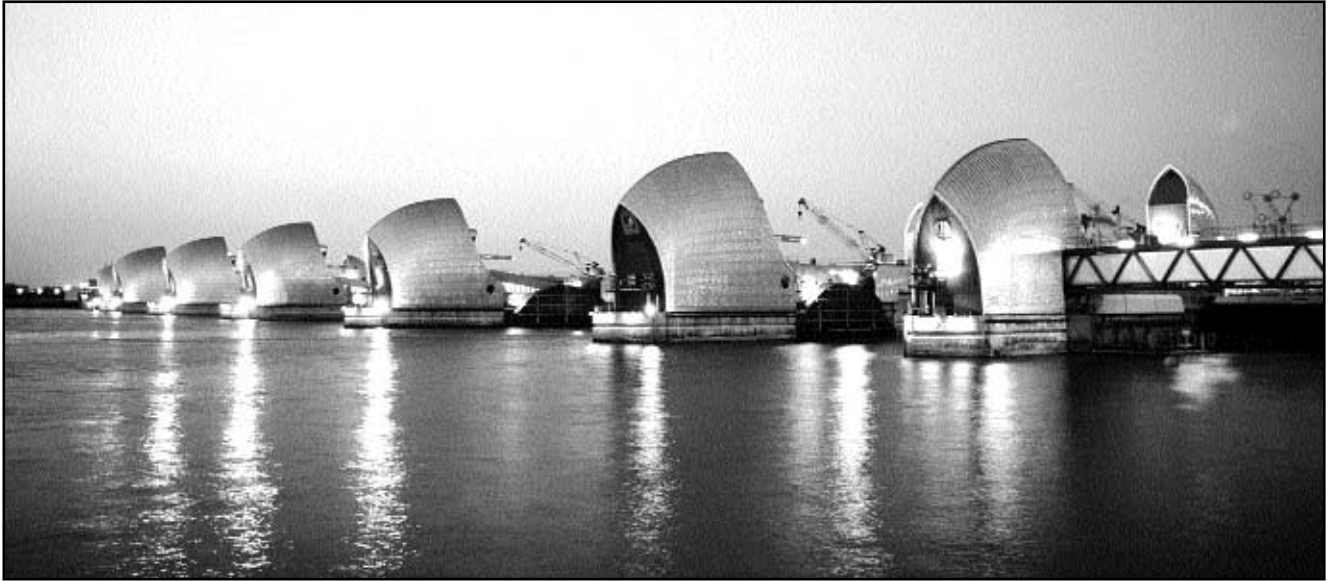
Sustainability appraisal is often not used optimally as a decision-making tool. It is clear that in some instances sustainability appraisals are undertaken after a plan or strategy has been largely written, by which time there may be little opportunity for the appraisal to be used effectively to improve sustainability performance.

Other weaknesses include:

- Appraisals are sometimes not undertaken by a team independent of the plan development process, which may lead to questions being raised about the objectivity of the appraisal.
- Sustainability appraisals have sometimes been undertaken as a 'one-off' exercise, and thus the opportunity is lost for continuous improvement in sustainability performance – made possible through an iterative approach.
- There is a lack of consistent methodology as there is no up-to-date guidance directly relevant to many of the circumstances in which sustainability appraisals are being undertaken.
- Sustainability appraisals are almost wholly of a qualitative nature. This qualitative approach can lack objectivity if the process is not appropriately managed. The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution recently identified the lack of quantification in sustainability appraisals and the 'poor science' involved in their environmental analyses as being an issue of concern.⁷

Guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on sustainability appraisal, expected in 2003, and the dissemination of good practice through avenues such as the publication of this guide will help address these weaknesses.

Carrying Out an Appraisal



Flood risk is an increasingly important element in the appraisal of spatial strategies

Sustainability appraisals have been used as a planning tool for some years. However, there is no consistent methodology and only limited up-to-date guidance, and thus there is considerable variation in approaches. This section of the guide draws on current best practice and has been prepared to assist those considering undertaking a sustainability appraisal, whether for a plan, strategy or an individual proposal.

The official guidance for sustainability appraisals for regional planning guidance (RPG)³ focuses on three basic principles:

- **process** – sustainability appraisal is a process to test and improve plans and strategies over time: it must therefore be iterative and interactive;
- **objectives-led** – the process must be objectives-led so that the appraisers can be specific about what sustainable development means; and

■ **independence** – the process must be independent, which is achieved by having:

- independently agreed sustainability objectives; and
- an independent appraisal team – i.e. the appraisal should be undertaken by those not internal to the plan-making process; however, on-going dialogue between the appraisal team and policy makers is essential.

Sustainability appraisal should be an integral part of the strategy or policy-making process or project design. Initial scoping tasks consider whether the scope of the issues addressed by the strategy, policy or project is appropriate, while the later appraisal stages consider the future implications – with the aim of the appraisal being to constructively comment, and present recommendations on improving sustainability performance.

Box 2 Example sustainability appraisal framework

Sustainability objectives	Criteria
Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone	
1 To ensure that everyone has the opportunity of a decent and affordable home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Availability of affordable and private sector housing 2 Accessibility of housing 3 Energy efficiency in housing stock / fuel poverty 4 Quality of housing stock
2 To improve the health and well-being of people and reduce inequalities in health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Protection of health 2 Health improvement 3 Equity – reducing health inequalities
Effective protection of the environment	
3 To protect and enhance existing biodiversity and natural habitats, and create new wildlife habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Conservation of biodiversity 2 Enhancement of biodiversity 3 Maintenance / restoration of habitats (land management) 4 Creation of new habitats 5 Biodiversity / wildlife education 6 Impact on relevant biodiversity action plan
4 To reduce road traffic and congestion through reducing the need to travel by car and improving travel choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Reduced road traffic (personal and freight) 2 Increased support for more sustainable forms of transport 3 Reduced need to travel
Prudent use of natural resources	
5 To reduce waste generation and disposal, and achieve sustainable management of waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Minimise waste production 2 Reduce waste disposal 3 Sustainable waste management (waste hierarchy)
6 To increase the proportion of energy generated and consumed in the region from renewable sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Increased production of renewable energy 2 Increased consumption of renewable energy sources as a total proportion of energy use
Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment	
7 To ensure that people have access to quality employment and occupation opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Availability of employment opportunities 2 Quality of employment opportunities 3 Social inclusion 4 Support facilities (for example flexible working practices, child care)
14 To invest to secure future prosperity and quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Investment in infrastructure 2 Investment in R&D 3 Investment in social capital 4 Equitable distribution of wealth 5 Investment in the housing stock

The process is iterative, and it is therefore sometimes necessary to go back and review previous tasks as the plan, strategy or proposal evolves.

The approach presented here is based on current best practice and draws on the 2001 EU Directive on SEA.^{1,2}

The key tasks are summarised below.

Task 1: Development of the appraisal framework

This initial stage is critical to the appraisal process as the framework provides the basis against which the performance of the plan, strategy or proposal is assessed. Government good practice guidance for appraisal framework development recommends the use of objectives.

The objectives set out in the regional sustainable development frameworks and strategies provide a useful basis for developing the appraisal framework. These objectives reflect both regional priorities and the overarching national strategy, and are developed in consultation with regional stakeholders. These objectives can, however, be amended as appropriate if they are felt to not wholly reflect the local priorities and needs of the plan, strategy or proposal. In addition, the objectives should be achievement (outcome) orientated – thus regional objectives should be revised if this is not currently the case.

We would also recommend the use of criteria that clarify the scope of each of the objectives. It may also help to devise project-specific questions in testing the performance of the plan, strategy or proposal being appraised. The questions should reflect the key relationships between the objective and

the plan being appraised, and can incorporate relevant national or regional policy or targets (for example the National Air Quality Strategy). Together these elements make up a comprehensive appraisal framework. Example objectives and criteria are shown in Box 2.

Other important issues to consider when developing the appraisal framework

The broad scope of sustainability means that it can usefully incorporate aspects from other assessment tools, where these are relevant to the plan, strategy or proposal being appraised. Two techniques that are broadly applicable to planning processes are from the related fields of health impact assessment (HIA) and rural proofing.

Health impact assessment (HIA)

Health impact assessment can be defined as:

‘The estimation of the effects of a specified action on the health of a defined population.’⁸

HIA has been endorsed by central government as the appropriate tool to be used by local decision makers to assess the impact of major new policies, programmes and projects on health. HIA is based on a holistic, social model which defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease. The HIA process is similar to that currently used for sustainability appraisal, and the two can be effectively integrated by the inclusion of health-related objectives and criteria within the sustainability appraisal framework. HIA also promotes the increased use of evidence to support assessments (this is discussed further in ‘The Future of Sustainability Appraisal’ section, starting on page 18). An example of how HIA can be incorporated into a sustainability appraisal is given by Entec’s appraisal of the South East Regional Transport Strategy.⁹

Rural proofing

The Rural White Paper commits the Government to ensuring that policies take account of specific rural circumstances and needs. Rural proofing (a Countryside Agency initiative) is now part of the formal policy-making process.¹⁰ This means that, as policies are developed, policy makers should assess whether their policies are likely to have a different impact in rural areas from that elsewhere; and what policy adjustments or compensations might be made to reflect rural needs and circumstances. The concept of rural proofing can be incorporated within a sustainability appraisal by inclusion of objectives and criteria relating to rural issues within the appraisal framework.

An example of how specific consideration of rural issues can be taken into account in a sustainability appraisal is given by Entec's appraisal of Yorkshire Forward's Regional Economic Strategy.

Task 2: Testing the appraisal framework

To ensure that the framework provides a sound basis for the appraisal, it should be tested for compatibility with the four sustainable development objectives identified by the Government. This approach is commensurate with established best practice. Each sustainable development objective should be assessed against each of the Government's objectives. The relationship should be recorded as:

- compatible;
- no relationship;
- incompatible; or
- uncertain.

The relationship is recorded as uncertain if a framework objective could work towards or against a broad Government

objective, depending on how it was implemented. The reasons for uncertainty or incompatibility should be stated, and if possible the objective should be amended and re-assessed.

Task 3: Defining the baseline

The definition of the baseline is a standard element of many assessment tools (for example EIA and the EU Directive on SEA). It is equally appropriate for sustainability appraisal but to date is infrequently applied. A baseline assessment involves looking at the existing environmental, social and economic characteristics of the area being appraised, and how these might develop without intervention. The advantage of defining a baseline prior to undertaking an appraisal is that it enables the evaluation of significance from a position of knowledge about current performance and priorities.

The SEA Directive requires an assessment of (Annex I refers):

'(b) the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;

...

'(d) any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme, including in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;

'(e) the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level that are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.'

Accurate baseline information is useful for ensuring that a defined 'start point' is used. Baseline information should be

Box 3 Integration of appraisal objectives and baseline information

Appraisal objective	Baseline information needs	Summarised baseline information	Evolution of the baseline under a 'do nothing' scenario	Data sources and further information
1				
2				
3				

drawn together to form a characterisation of the area that is relevant to the plan, strategy or proposal being considered. Possible sources of baseline information include data sets and reports held by local authorities, regional assemblies, regional development agencies, government regional offices and public health observatories.

Baseline information can be integrated into the sustainability framework as shown above in Box 3. This provides a clear baseline position from which to consider the impacts of the plan, strategy or proposal being appraised.

Task 4: Scoping the plan, strategy or proposal

This task is derived from the Government's good practice guide and incorporates the EU Directive on SEA, which requires consideration of the relationship of a policy or plan with relevant regional and national policies. The task involves reviewing the content of the plan, strategy or proposal for breadth of coverage of the framework objectives and of relevant policy. The purpose of the task is to provide an early 'health check' by assessing:

- consistency with, and coverage of, regional and national policies;

- whether the plan, strategy or proposal fully addresses all the appraisal objectives; and
- the internal consistency of the plan or strategy.

This task is conducted as early as possible to provide time for the comments to be incorporated into the continuing development of the plan, strategy or proposal being appraised.

Comparing the plan, strategy or proposal with regional and national policies

Relevant extracts from planning policy guidance notes and other government policy statements such as white papers are identified, and the plan, strategy or proposal is scoped for coverage and compatibility with these policies. The purpose of this task is to identify gaps in content and areas of inconsistency.

Assessing the scope of the plan, strategy or proposal against appraisal framework objectives

This activity assesses the extent to which the plan, strategy or proposal supports the appraisal framework objectives. If there are any gaps in support for the objectives, consideration should be given to whether or not the gaps should be addressed.

Box 4 Comparative appraisal of options

Appraisal objectives	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Comments
Objective 1	→	←	→	Option 2 moves marginally away from objective 1. Consider amending by ...
Objective 2	◇?	◇?	◇?	The performance of all of the options against objective 2 is uncertain because ...
Objective 3 etc.	→ →	→	→	Option 1 moves significantly towards achievement of objective 3 because ...

Checking for internal consistency

This activity identifies tensions within the plan, strategy or proposal which may mean that sustainability aspirations are unachievable. The aim is to minimise such tensions and so avoid the need for different aspects of policies, plans or proposals to be weighed against each other in future decisions.

Task 5: Appraisal of options

This entails appraising different options against the appraisal framework objectives. The process is recommended in the Government's good practice guide and is also a requirement of the SEA Directive (Article 5). The SEA Directive requires consideration of the significant likely effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme, and of **reasonable alternatives**. Given the need to consider how the environment will develop without intervention, one of the options considered should be 'business as usual'. For the purpose of this option it is assumed that existing policies, programmes and projects continue.

Each option is appraised against each of the appraisal framework objectives using an appraisal matrix. The matrices

act as a tool to structure reporting, rather than as a replacement for thinking! The results of the appraisal for each option should be recorded using the following measures:

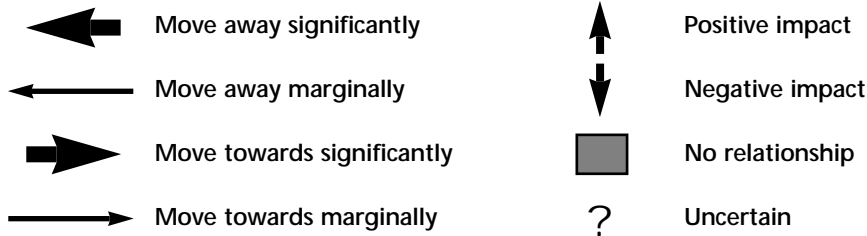
- **Direction of effect:** Is the aspect under consideration moving towards or away from the achievement of the appraisal objective?
- **Scale of effect:** Will any effect be marginal or significant?
- **Timing of effect:** Will the effect manifest itself in the short term or the long term?
- **Geographic scale:** Will there be any trans-boundary effects (for example impacts at a national or international level)?
- **Rural/urban:** Will there be differential impacts for rural and urban environments?
- **Cumulative effects:** Will there be any cumulative effects arising from the interactions of policies and proposals?

The comparative options appraisals can then be put into one combined matrix (see Box 4). In the event of there being no options appraisals, the reasons for this should be recorded in the appraisal report.

Box 5 Model of appraisal matrix used in appraisal of the draft London Plan

Example matrix used to appraise each policy

SD objectives	Geographic scale				
	London		Regional	National	International
	Within plan period	Beyond plan period			
Objective 1					
Objective 2				?	?
Objective 3 ... etc.					
Objective 33					
Overall commentary					



Task 6: Appraisal of policies and proposals

This is the most significant component of the appraisal – it can take several days! It entails undertaking a full appraisal of each policy and proposal against each of the framework objectives,

as recommended in the Government's good practice guide. Each of the policies and proposals should be appraised against the appraisal objectives using a matrix and similar appraisal method to that described above for options. Box 5 is a model of the matrix used in the appraisals of the draft London Plan.

Case Study

Sustainability appraisal of the draft London Plan

There is a regulatory requirement for the London Plan to be subject to a sustainability appraisal (Town and Country Planning London Spatial Development



The GLA City Hall is an exemplar building for sustainable development

Strategy Regulations 2000). The relevant guidance (GOL Circular 1/2000) states that the appraisal should be carried out independently at each stage in the preparation of the Plan.

The appraisal framework was drawn up in consultation with key London stakeholders and appraisals were undertaken iteratively during the development of the Plan. Future revisions to the Plan will also be subject to appraisal. The appraisal process helped ensure that sustainable development is central to the draft Plan – notably the Plan has overarching policies addressing sustainable development issues. Overall the appraisal concluded that the draft Plan was commendable and will make a substantial contribution to achieving a more sustainable future for London and to achieving the Mayor's vision for London as an exemplary sustainable world city.

The draft London Plan sustainability appraisal can be downloaded from the GLA website – <http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/mayor/strategies/sds/sustainability.jsp> ■

A round table session is often the most appropriate and rewarding forum for this task (see below for more details of this approach).

Individual site proposals and specific development projects are appraised in the same way as described above. However, for major proposals comprising a number of components it is beneficial to identify individual elements for separate consideration. The appraisal should then be carried out for each element and the outcomes used collectively to present an overall judgement of each proposal as a whole. This approach was undertaken by Entec in the appraisal of proposals to increase the capacity of Stansted Airport (see the case study example on page 16). An example of how proposals might be broken up is detailed in Box 6. Site-specific data can readily be used to inform the appraisal of proposals.

In addition to appraising the plan, strategy or proposal, it is usual that the appraisal team presents recommendations on how to improve sustainability performance. These recommendations are often the most useful output for the plan/proposal development team. This appraisal task may be repeated a number of times to appraise revised versions of the plan or proposal.

Task 7: Reporting

Reporting of the appraisal process must be transparent, such that those not involved in the appraisal can fully understand the process. Commentary for the appraisal of each policy should be sufficient such that others can follow the reasoning behind judgements, and identify the evidence or assumptions. It is also helpful if the policy and proposal matrices are made available with the published report. The requirements of the

Box 6 Suggested proposal appraisal breakdown

Physical	Construction activities, and the extraction, manufacture and transportation of materials Planning, design and operation of on-site developments Planning, design and operation of off-site developments (including those directly and indirectly associated with the proposal)
Human	Activities taking place within proposal sites Activities taking place within sites directly or indirectly associated with proposal sites
Movements	Movement of people to and from the proposal sites Movement of goods to and from the proposal sites

SEA Directive are also relevant, and when applied to sustainability appraisal include the need for:

- a non-technical summary of the results of the appraisal;
- the appraisal report to be published with the plan or proposal being appraised; and
- a statement within the plan or proposal document that sets out how the results of the appraisal have been used to inform the decision-making process and why the preferred plan or proposal has been selected.

The report of the appraisal process should provide a summary of the main sustainability aspects of the plan or proposal (both positive and negative) and recommendations for ways in which the document could be improved. Key appraisal matrices should be included as appendices to the main report.

The appraisal team

Appraisals are not uniformly conducted throughout the UK. All of the appraisal tasks can theoretically be undertaken by one person or a team, with or without peer review. However, early selection of an appropriate team is critical to ensuring

optimum benefit from the appraisal process. The two teams normally involved in a sustainability appraisal are set out below.

The plan development team

This team is responsible for developing the plan, strategy or proposal that is to be appraised. Development team members should be closely involved in the appraisal process to inform the process, and to ensure that they understand and can make use of the appraisal findings.

The appraisal team

This team is responsible for conducting the appraisal and should be independent of the plan, strategy or proposal being appraised. The team should have some knowledge of the plan, strategy or proposal being considered, and expertise in a broad range of sustainable development issues. Ideally, the team would comprise individuals from a range of specialist backgrounds.

In appropriate cases it may also be helpful to have a peer review of the appraisal methodology and outputs.

Case Study

Sustainability appraisal of proposed development at Stansted Airport



Review of the sustainability implications of increasing passenger capacity at Stansted Airport included consideration of noise, employment, air quality and development in rural areas

Entec was appointed by BAA to carry out a sustainability appraisal of proposals to increase the capacity of Stansted Airport from around 15 million passengers per annum (MPPA) to around 25 MPPA. The appraisal objectives were based on a set of draft objectives that were developed by reference to national, regional and local sustainability objectives and subsequently refined and amended by consultation with a Sustainability Review Group comprising local and regional stakeholders. The

appraisal considered the sustainability performance of several elements of the proposed development, such as construction activities, site operations, air travel and staff and passenger travel. The appraisal findings were used internally by the BAA development team to enhance the sustainability performance of their proposals, and were also submitted to the local planning authority to provide an overview of the proposal's performance against the broad range of sustainability topics. ■

Task allocation and use of round table sessions

Task allocation

A number of the tasks can be informally undertaken by the plan development team, or by individuals within the appraisal team. However, the formal sustainability appraisal should be independent and should be carried out by a team of at least two people.

Round table sessions

Round table sessions are usually the most effective method of undertaking a number of the appraisal tasks – particularly tasks 5 and 6 above.

The advantages of a group undertaking the appraisal are:

- It helps to ensure consistency.
- Perceptions and values that underpin the appraisal are debated, providing greater opportunity to test and challenge assumptions and outputs.
- A range of skills can be utilised.

Members of the plan, strategy or proposal development team should attend the appraisal in order to gain an understanding of the appraisal process, and to provide any necessary background information.

Preparation before holding round table sessions is key to their success. Collation of an evidence base can help to ensure that discussions are more informed.

Consultation

Consultation is an important element in the development of any plan, strategy or proposal, and effective consultation can help improve the quality of a sustainability appraisal and also

increase the understanding and ownership of its findings. In carrying out consultation it is important to balance the advantages of consultation (for example a diverse range of views and a wider understanding of the appraisal process and its findings) with the resource implications and time that may be required.

Again the SEA Directive can provide some guidance on the scale of, and process for, consultation. The Directive's requirements should be seen as a minimum, and in some circumstances there may be a case for a broader and more in-depth processes.

The SEA Directive requires that consultation is undertaken with 'relevant authorities' but it leaves each EU member state to define who these are. Recommended consultees include statutory bodies, other public agencies, non-governmental organisations and others with a legitimate interest in the topic area.

When the requirements of the SEA Directive are applied to sustainability appraisal there is a need for consultation on:

- the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the appraisal (i.e. the nature of the appraisal framework); and
- the draft plan or programme and the accompanying appraisal – at this stage the public should also have opportunity to comment on both.

A task or steering group could be formed to facilitate each of these tasks. This provides a forum for debate and encourages continuity in the appraisal process. Consultees should cover the four broad objectives of sustainable development (i.e. relating to the economy, society, the environment and natural resources).

The Future of Sustainability Appraisal



Traffic is one of the biggest causes of poor air quality

Sustainability appraisals are now an established tool in the plan preparation process, and they are becoming increasingly important in appraising major development proposals. It is clear that in the plan-making process the influence of sustainability appraisals has been highly significant in leading to the inclusion of policies and proposals which have helped improve sustainability performance.

For the future, there is no doubt that the significance of sustainability appraisals will increase as the Government's new planning system and the SEA Directive are implemented. The techniques used in sustainability appraisals will also continue to develop, with greater use of evidence-based approaches and quantification and as the technique is used more widely for appraising projects.

Planning reform

Sustainable development is at the heart of the Government's proposals for reform of the planning system which were

announced by the Deputy Prime Minister on 18 July 2002.¹¹ The Government proposes to include a statutory purpose for planning, which may require all those carrying out functions under the planning acts to have regard to the need to achieve sustainable development. If this idea is carried forward, planners will have a legal responsibility to address sustainable development – this will require planners to do things differently, and new planning techniques will be needed. The significance and weight given to sustainability appraisals will increase considerably under a planning system which has the achievement of sustainable development as its statutory purpose.

Under the proposed reform of the planning system 'local development frameworks' are to replace the current system of structure and local plans and unitary development plans. The new system will require all local development frameworks to be subject to sustainability appraisal, and thus the use of sustainability appraisals will increase as the new system is implemented.

The impact of the SEA Directive

As indicated above, there is an overlap between the techniques of sustainability appraisal and other forms of environmental assessment. The SEA Directive is particularly relevant in that it provides guidance on techniques for the assessment of plans and policies. This is indicated in the stated objective of the SEA Directive, which is to:

‘provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development...’^{1,2}

The major differences between the two processes are in their scope and depth of coverage of environmental issues. Sustainability appraisal has a wide scope, covering social, economic and environmental topics. SEA, in contrast, is primarily focused on environmental issues, which it covers in greater depth.

There is clear opportunity for the two processes to be combined to create a single process, but the feasibility and mechanisms for this to be achieved have yet to be established. A dual system of separate SEA and sustainability appraisal should be avoided as this may lead to confusion, duplication and inefficiencies. The draft guidance on the implementation of the Directive does suggest an approach which has the potential to combine SEA and sustainability appraisal, although this has yet to be properly tested.

Increased use of evidence

Although sustainability appraisal is a qualitative technique, the use of an evidence base to support judgements would make

Case Study

Sustainability appraisal of Chelmsford Borough Local Plan 2001-2011

In 2000 Chelmsford Borough Council identified a requirement for the ongoing appraisal of its emerging local plan. Entec was commissioned to appraise both the emerging policies and a range of possible site allocations for major mixed-use development.

The appraisal considered the contributions that the policies and allocations could make to sustainable development against a series of objectives and criteria which were developed in conjunction with the Borough Council. The method of appraisal included a number of round table meetings where members of Entec’s sustainability team appraised individual policies, supported by officers from the Borough Council who provided the contextual and background information. The conclusions provided in the first appraisal were used by the Borough Council to inform the development of policies and in the identification of appropriate sites for development. Further appraisals of the plan and sites adopting the same methodology were carried out at the draft and revised draft deposit stages. The result of this iterative approach has been the production of a local plan with strong sustainability credentials. ■

the process much more robust. Drawing on approaches used by other assessment tools such as HIA, where an explicit link to the evidence base for a given judgement is made, sustainability appraisals are likely to be increasingly able to point to research evidence to support their conclusions. An example of this might be evidence on a link between

background noise and educational achievement. However, in seeking to make sustainability appraisals more evidence based, consideration should be given to the time and resource implications of doing so. It is more important for an appraisal to deliver timely information to a decision maker than it is to seek or wait for evidence on a particular topic and thereby miss the opportunity to contribute to a decision.

Increasing quantification

Linked to the potential for an evidence base to support judgements made in an appraisal there may be potential to improve the process further by the use of quantitative measures for certain factors where measurement is possible and data are available – for example air quality.

Project appraisal

Examples have been given in this guide of where sustainability appraisals have been used for the appraisal of major projects. The use of appraisals in this way is still in its infancy. There is no current requirement for major projects to be subject to sustainability appraisal, although this could well change in the future. The advantage of such an approach is that it does enable the social, economic and environmental implications of a project to be explored, offering potential for sustainability performance to be improved. There is likely to be an increase in the use of sustainability appraisals for major projects as promoters use the technique to demonstrate the credentials of their projects, and as decision makers use the technique to help inform their decision-making.

Conclusions

Sustainability appraisals are an effective tool in helping improve the sustainability performance of plans, strategies and proposals.

The technique is still in its infancy, and methodological developments will continue to take place as experience increases. It is hoped that readers will find this guide useful in identifying examples of good practice.

Sustainability appraisals will become increasingly significant through the implementation of the Government's planning reforms, which have the achievement of sustainable development as their central focus.



Sustainability appraisals must consider potentially conflicting objectives such as those relating to energy and resource use and landscape quality

References

- 1 Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment is available at <http://www.europa.eu.int>
- 2 Draft guidance on the implementation of Directive 2001/42/EC is available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister website at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/consult.sea>
- 3 *Good Practice Guide on Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Planning Guidance*. Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London, 2000. Available from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister website at <http://www.planning.odpm.gov.uk/gpgsarp/index.htm>
- 4 *A Better Quality of Life: a Strategy for Sustainable Development in the United Kingdom*. Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London, May 1999
- 5 Planning Policy Guidance Note 12: *Development Plans*. Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, London, 1999. Para. 4.16
- 6 Available on the National Assembly for Wales website at <http://www.wales.gov.uk>
- 7 *Environmental Planning*. Cm 5459. Twenty-third Report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. The Stationery Office, London, 2002. Para. 7.46
- 8 A. Scott-Samuel: 'Health impact assessment – theory into practice'. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 1998
- 9 See the South East England Regional Assembly website at http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/regional_policies/transport/regional_strategy/index.html
- 10 *Rural Proofing – Government Policy Makers' Checklist*. Countryside Agency, Cheltenham. See the Countryside Agency website at <http://www.countryside.gov.uk/ruralproofing>
- 11 *Making the System Work Better – Planning at Regional and Local Levels, and Sustainable Communities: Delivering through Planning*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London, July 2002

Entec

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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TCPA

TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ASSOCIATION

Since its foundation in 1899 the Association has been at the forefront of the planning movement, attracting a following of forward-thinking organisations and individuals who influence and formulate policy locally and nationally. It has had a major and enduring influence on the worldwide development of planning policy, law, and practice.

The Association's main priority today is to promote its concept of environmental planning as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development. The TCPA is not a single-issue organisation: it occupies a unique niche, overlapping with those involved in the development industry, the environmental movement, and those concerned with social responsibility.

Above all, the Association prides itself on creative thinking and developing practical environmental solutions through its extensive networks. It has excellent contacts with senior politicians and policy-makers and a membership with a wide range of backgrounds; and it offers regular opportunities to exchange ideas through special working groups, conferences, and publications, including the monthly journal *Town & Country Planning*. Membership is open to all.