



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY
BOROUGH COUNCIL:
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN
2006-2021**



DEPOSIT DRAFT PLAN

**SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL (SA)
STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT (SEA)**



**NON-TECHNICAL
SUMMARY (NTS)**

JANUARY 2009

Prepared by:



enfusion



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|--------------------------|--|----------|
| <i>date:</i> | January 2009 | |
| <i>prepared for:</i> | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council | |
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INTRODUCTION

- 0.1 This is the summary of the Sustainability Appraisal Report for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's Deposit Draft Plan. It describes how the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process was used to assist in planning for the development and the use of land, as required by planning legislation and Welsh Assembly Government guidance. The SA assists sustainable development through an ongoing dialogue and assessment during the preparation of Local Development Plan (LDP) and considers the implications of social, economic and environmental demands on land use planning.

THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 0.2 The LDP is the new system introduced by in Wales under Part 6 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). The LDP forms the statutory development plan for a local authority area. The plan should include a vision, strategy, area-wide policies for development types, land allocations, and where necessary policies and proposals for key areas of change and protection. The LDP system seek to achieve: the integration of sustainable development into plan making through Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment; effective community involvement in plan making; a more streamlined approach to plan making; producing plans that are strategic, concise and distinctive.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL & STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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

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

- 0.4 The SA/SEA of the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough's Local Development Plan has been prepared in accordance with these requirements for SA/SEA.

THE CHARACTER OF RHONDDA CYNON TAF

- 0.5 Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) covers an area of the South Wales Valleys, stretching from the Brecon Beacons National Park in the north to the outskirts of Cardiff in the south. It comprises a mixture of urban, semi-urban and rural communities, situated in a varied countryside of valleys, mountains and lowland farmland. It is the second largest local authority in Wales, covering 424 square kilometres, and with a population of 231,946 (2001 Census).
- 0.6 The population of RCT overall has remained largely unchanged since 1991, however, there is significant local variation which has seen the population in the valleys and to the north decline by 5% while population in the southern areas has increased by 10%, drawn by the greater accessibility and economic opportunities present in the south of the County Borough. Rhondda has a legacy of terraced housing stock (52.9%) and a significant disparity in house prices which for comparable properties are 60% higher in the south. Empty properties are an issue in the north, which is also the greatest area of deprivation, and there is shortfall of affordable housing (870) across the County Borough.
- 0.7 There are also identified disparities in economic output between the north and south of the County Borough. An overall figure of 73% of residents economically active is underlain by higher proportions of economically active individuals in the south and above average levels of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance in the north. Of the 38,400 people residing in RCT, 19,000 commute to Cardiff to work.
- 0.8 RCT has a varied and characterful landscape that is important for nature conservation with significant areas of semi-natural habitat and high levels of habitat diversity, protected through local, national and European designations. The County Borough also has 16 conservation areas and 366 listed buildings.

SA SCOPING & ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- 0.9 During early 2006 a scoping process for the SA was carried out to help ensure that the SA would cover the key sustainability issues that are relevant to the development planning system for Rhondda Cynon Taf. Relevant plans, programmes and other baseline information were reviewed to develop a wider understanding of issues and priorities, together with a description of the current and predicted social, economic and environmental characteristics of the area. This information was updated in 2008.

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

| Key sustainability Issues/ opportunities identified for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council |
|---|
| Potential for increased flooding in low lying areas. |
| Issues of water supply in dry summers and decreases in water quality arising from inadequate drainage systems. |
| High levels of out commuting and reliance on the private car for transportation. |
| Development pressures on areas of cultural or archaeological heritage that are not protected by statutory designations. |
| Increased roads development and access routes. |
| Increasing levels of deprivation, ill health and drug related crime. |
| Depopulation and loss of economic activity from the valleys and northern area. |
| Opportunity to stimulate the local economy, through increased tourism |
| Opportunities for renewable energy projects – range of scales and technologies. |

SA Framework

- 0.11 An SA Framework was compiled and it included SA Objectives that aimed to resolve the issues and problems identified; these were used to test the draft plan as it was being prepared. This was included in the SA Scoping Report that was sent to statutory consultees. Comments were invited and received from a number of these organisations, which helped to improve the SA Framework. The following is a list of the SA Objective Headings.

| SA Objective headings | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Housing | 9.. Landscape |
| 2. Culture & heritage | 10. Biodiversity |
| 3. Communities | 11. Water |
| 4. Health | 12. Climate Change |
| 5. Economy | 13. Energy |
| 6. Employment | 14. Land & soils |
| 7. Transport | 15. Waste |
| 8. Built Environment | 16. Minerals |

SA OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 0.12 Each stage of the preparation of the Deposit Draft Plan was appraised systematically using the SA Objectives. Where significant adverse effects, including environmental effects, have been predicted, the SA sought where possible to identify means of offsetting these effects, including through the revision/ amendment of policies. Where it was considered that there were opportunities to enhance the sustainability of the proposals, recommendations were made. The appraisal recognised 7 categories of predicted effects, as illustrated in the following key.

| Categories of Sustainability Effect | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| DG | Development actively encouraged as it would resolve an existing sustainability problem |
| LG | No Sustainability constraints and development acceptable |
| B | Neutral effect |
| Y | Potential sustainability issues; mitigation and /or negotiation possible |
| O | Problematical and improbable because of known sustainability issues ; mitigation or negotiation difficult and /or expensive |
| R | Absolute sustainability constraints to development |
| ? | Unknown effect |

Appraising the Preferred Strategy Strategic Policies (2006)

- 0.13 The Preferred Strategy contained 12 strategic policies. Each policy was subject to a detailed appraisal using the SA Framework informed by the wider LDP evidence base and the baseline information developed at scoping stage. Recommendations made by the initial Sustainability Report (Dec 2006) were incorporated by RCT in the next stage.

Appraising the Preferred Strategy Spatial Options (2006)

- 0.14 The Draft preferred Strategy identified five strategic options for spatial development and was subject to initial sustainability appraisal by Enfusion Ltd. The Sustainability Threshold Assessment (STA) method was used to provide a strategic overview of the performance of the five options (Trends Based Strategy, Local Needs Strategy, Consolidation Strategy, Sustainable Growth Strategy, Growth/Local Needs Strategy). The appraisal was undertaken using professional judgement and relevant evidence base and baseline data.

Appraising the Preferred Strategy Site Allocations Method (2006)

- 0.15 An SA was undertaken of the proposed Candidate Site Assessment Methodology, to determine whether the methodology used was compatible with the SA Framework and a robust and defensible methodology from a sustainability perspective. The recommendations of the SA were reported in full in the initial Sustainability Report (2006).

HRA Screening of the Preferred Strategy

- 0.16 The HRA Screening of the Preferred Strategy was undertaken in accordance with available official WAG guidance and current best practice. The approach combined a plan and site focus to consider the potential impacts of the LDP proposals on the conservation objectives of identified European sites.

Appraising the Deposit Plan 2008

- 0.17 The Deposit plan was developed, taking into account the findings and recommendations of the iterative SA; this included SA of Topic Papers

developed by RCT to inform the policies presented in the Deposit Plan. The Deposit Draft Plan policies were then further appraised using the SA Framework of Objectives for Sustainability and the key findings and recommendations are highlighted in [Section 5] this Report.

Appraising the Deposit Plan Site Allocations 2008

- 0.18 The two stage Candidate Site Assessment Method (CSAM) process was developed and refined by the Council with assistance from Enfusion Ltd in 2006, using the SA Framework. The CSAM incorporates the SA Framework and this process was used by the Council in the selection of sites for the Deposit Draft Plan. Enfusion undertook additional SA of the Strategic Sites proposed and provided a strategic appraisal of the non-strategic sites as part of the overarching Core Strategy appraisal. The key findings and recommendation are summarised in [Section 5] this Report.

Habitats Regulations Assessment/ Appropriate Assessment

- 0.19 The HRA Screening for RCT's LDP (Dec 2006) recommended that further 'Appropriate Assessment' be carried out in relation to one European Site (Blaen Cynon SAC). This more detailed analysis was undertaken in parallel with the SA/SEA process, with reference to consultation comments from the statutory body CCW. The full assessment analysis and findings are presented in a separate report accompanying the LDP.

Uncertainties

- 0.20 Throughout the development of the Deposit Draft Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal process, data gaps and uncertainties were uncovered. It is not always possible to accurately predict sustainability effects when considering plans at such a strategic scale. Impacts on biodiversity and cultural heritage, in particular given the specific sensitivities identified for RCT, will depend on more detailed information and studies at a site-level. Additionally, whilst climate change science is becoming more accurate, it is difficult to predict impacts likely to result from climate change, including synergistic effects. These uncertainties have been acknowledged in the appraisal matrices, where applicable, and will be further considered at the submission stage.

Significant effects identified

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

| Significant Positive Effects Emerging from the LDP | |
|--|---|
| Key relevant SA Objective: | Positive effects identified: |
| Housing | The plan will have significant positive effects through meeting the housing needs of the County Borough, particularly affordable housing needs, and in locations where housing is most needed through the explicit focus on 'local needs'. |
| Transport Climate Change, | The plan responds to existing high levels of car ownership and accessibility issues, by including strong policies in support of public transport and through seeking to minimise out-commuting. |
| Communities Economy | The plan provides an inclusive approach to infrastructure provision, with particular benefits existing communities (families, the elderly). |
| Balanced Communities, Transport | The plan provides measures to regenerate identified areas of deprivation, in the Northern area of the County Borough and their communities including developing better connectivity through improved transport routes. |
| Biodiversity, Landscape, Water, Land and soil | The plan recognises the distinctive landscape and biodiversity areas in the County Borough (which provide both constraint and opportunity) and takes an approach to development that minimises impacts on these areas through steering development toward existing settlements and to areas of brownfield land that will benefit from regeneration. |
| Economy, Employment, Communities | The plan will have positive effects for the economic regeneration of existing centres particularly in the Northern Strategy Area and provides opportunities to reduce out commuting. |
| Built Environment Climate Change | The plan has a strong focus on sustainable design and construction, including consideration of travel plans, encouraging sustainable transport, and ensuring high level compliance with codes for sustainable construction. |

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

| Significant Negative Effects Emerging from the LDP | |
|--|---|
| Key relevant SA Objective: | Negative Effects identified: |
| Biodiversity, Landscape, Water, Waste, Communities, Health. | The cumulative effects of increased development, including housing, employment development, the development of other infrastructure, in particular major road scheme. These effects include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ pressures on local and national biodiversity designations; |

| Significant Negative Effects Emerging from the LDP | |
|---|---|
| Key relevant SA Objective: | Negative Effects identified: |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ increased air pollution (local and regional); ■ direct land-take; ■ pressures on water resources and water quality; ■ increased noise and light pollution, particularly from traffic; ■ increased waste production; ■ loss of tranquillity ; ■ implications for human health (e.g. from increased pollution); and ■ incremental effects on landscape and townscapes. <p>It is noted that whilst some policies relating to development (e.g. the dualling of the A465 Heads of Valleys Road) are determined at a higher policy level by WAG, the environmental effects of development must be taken into account by the LDP to ensure mitigation is adequate.</p> |
| Climate Change, Energy | An increase in the District's contribution to greenhouse gas production- this is inevitable given the volume of new development proposed, and includes factors such as increased transportation costs, embodied energy in construction materials and increased energy use from new housing and employment development. |
| Cultural and Heritage, Communities Landscape | Less tangible effects of significant physical, economic and social changes for local communities, including impacts on cultural heritage, landscape, community cohesion and identify particularly in locations where there will be significant increases in development. |
| Water | <p>The cumulative effects of development affecting surface runoff, water flow and the potential to exacerbate flood risk where development is concentrated in valley areas.</p> <p>The increased levels of water demand resulting from new development.</p> |

Mitigation and enhancement recommendations

- 0.23 An important role of the SA process is to provide recommendations for the mitigation of negative effects and enhancement of the positive effects identified in the appraisal process. These can then be carried forward in the remainder of the plan-making process and can include further recommendations for other development plan documents (for example Supplementary Planning Guidance) and for processes including development control and site master planning.
- 0.24 In preparing plan policies, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council has already sought to mitigate the negative effects of

development and maximise the opportunities presented, and they are commended for the work undertaken to date. The SA process has made further recommendations for the plan and these often relate to the linkages between different issues that were identified as a result of the SA. For example, there are strong synergies between the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity, the development of open space and cycle networks and the maintenance of valued landscape integrity, which is of high value to local communities and offers potential for future tourism opportunities.

Monitoring the Implementation of the LDP

- 0.25 Local planning authorities are required to produce Annual Monitoring Reports including indicators and targets against which the progress of the Local Development Plan can be measured. There is also a requirement to monitor the predictions made in the SA and the Welsh Assembly Government advises Councils to prepare a Monitoring Framework that incorporates the needs of the LDP and the SA. Rhondda Cynon Taf has prepared a monitoring framework for the LDP and it is recommended that the targets and indicators proposed for the SA are incorporated in this Framework.

Statement on the Difference the SA/SEA process has made

- 0.26 The Sustainability Appraisal has been carried out on draft plan documents in an iterative and ongoing way. The findings have helped inform the preparation of the LDP by making suggestions for mitigating identified adverse effects and enhancing possibilities for enhancing positive effects through changes to the wording in policies and recommendations for new policies where appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- 0.27 The SA of RCT's Deposit Draft Plan has appraised the effects of individual policies, as well as the overall effect of the plan, including cumulative and incremental effects. The SA has found that the Deposit Draft Plan will make a significant contribution to sustainability in the County Borough, with a particularly strong focus on addressing the respective housing, community and economic needs of the Northern and Southern areas, whilst seeking to protect the County Borough's valued natural environment, landscape and cultural heritage. The key negative effects identified relate to the pressure of housing and economic development, including for new infrastructure in areas where there are identified natural environment and flooding constraints. The SA has sought to make recommendations that assist the Council in mitigating the negative effects and enhancing the positive opportunities of development across the County Borough.
- 0.28 This SA report accompanies the draft LDP which will be placed on deposit for 6 weeks during February and March 2009 for consultation. After the close of consultation the Council will advertise alternative

sites proposed by representors and seek comments on those sites in July 2009. The Council will then consider representations and produce a final consultation report, which will be examined by the Planning Inspectorate alongside all the representations the deposit LDP and its evidence base including the Sustainability Appraisal Report. If recommendations or changes are made to the LDP following the examination then it may be necessary to amend the SA report prior to adoption.