

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review

Post Adoption Statement – June 2025

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (Regulation 16)

1. Introduction

The West Berkshire Local Plan Review (LPR) 2023 - 2041 was adopted by West Berkshire Council on 10 June 2025 and forms part of the statutory development plan for the District.

In accordance with Legislation¹, development plans must be subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) aims to predict and assess the economic, social and environmental effects that are likely to arise from implementing development plans. It is a process for understanding whether policies, strategies or plans promote sustainable development, and for improving them to deliver more sustainable outcomes.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) aims to predict and assess the environmental effects that are likely to arise from plans, policies and strategies, such as the Local Plan Review. It is a process for assessing and mitigating the negative environmental impacts of specific plans and programmes. For the purposes of the Local Plan Review the SEA process was incorporated into the SA Process.

Regulation 16 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (referred to as the SEA Regulations) sets out the requirements with regard to the post adoption procedures of the SA/SEA. This statement has been prepared in accordance with this regulation and sets out the following:

- a. How environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan;
- b. How the environmental report has been taken into account
- c. How opinions expressed in response to public consultation have been taken into account
- d. The reasons for choosing the Plan, as adopted, in light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
- e. The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Plan.

For clarity, the particulars of Regulation 16(4)(d) are not relevant in this case (how the results of consultations entered into under Regulation 14(4) have been taken into account).

¹ The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2004/1633/regulation/16/made> and the Planning and Compulsory purchase Act 2004 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/20/section/8>

The final SA/SEA Environmental Report and LPR are available to view on the Council's website: www.westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-review.

2. How environmental considerations have been integrated into the LPR

The SA/SEA process assesses environmental considerations and has been fully integrated into the plan-making process, with its findings being a key influence on the policy decisions made. The decision was taken at the beginning of the plan making process to incorporate the SEA and SA into a single process which would consider the environmental, economic and social effects that would be likely to arise from the options and subsequent policies being developed for the LPR.

Stages of the SA/SEA

The SA/SEA is made up of a number of different stages.

- Stage A, was the production of the Scoping Report, which was published for consultation in February 2018. The Scoping Report set out the background information and proposed strategic objectives used to appraise the LPR in the context of SA/SEA.
- Stage B is the development and refinement of options and policies and an assessment of the effects. This stage incorporates the development of the options and policies, the prediction and evaluation of effects of the options and the subsequent policies that make up the LPR, along with the consideration of any mitigation measures and way to maximise beneficial effects along the way.
- Stage C pulls together the findings of the earlier stages to create a draft SA/SEA Environmental Report which was published for consultation alongside the Emerging Draft of the LPR in December 2020.
- Stage D takes into account the consultation responses made to the emerging draft LPR and interim SA/SEA, and where changes are made to the policies or proposals in the LPR the SA/SEA is updated. The SA/SEA Environmental Report was published alongside the Proposed Submission LPR for consultation in January 2023. No significant changes were proposed as a result of the Proposed Submission consultation, therefore, there was no need for reassessment prior to submission of the LPR for examination. During the examination process a number of main modifications were proposed to the LPR. These were reviewed and the SA/SEA was updated where required.
- Stage E is the stage that takes place once the LPR has been adopted and involve monitoring of the LPR.

Environmental considerations have been fully assessed throughout the SA/SEA process. The SA/SEA has been fully integrated into the LPR plan making process by assessing and outlining the environmental effects of policy and site options and informing decisions on the final policies and sites to be taken forward. The SA/SEA has been updated and refined at each stage as a result of the consultation process (see Section 4 below).

3. How the SA/SEA Environmental Report has been taken into account

As demonstrated in Section 2, the SA/SEA is an iterative process that has been fully integrated into the plan-making process and has ensured that sustainability has been

at the heart of the LPR. At each state, the findings of the SA/SEA have been considered in developing the LPR.

The SA/SEA Environmental Report has been written so that it is clearly demonstrated how the sustainability objectives have been taken into account at each stage, and integrated into the development of the LPR. A consistent approach has been taken in the assessment of the options considered for the LPR, using the SA/SEA framework set out in table 5 of the SA/SEA Environmental Report.

In February 2018, the Council undertook a scoping exercise setting out the expected scope and content of the LPR. This was accompanied by the SA/SEA Scoping Report, which set out the SA/SEA Objectives and a Framework for assessing the reasonable alternatives to ensure consideration of sustainability issues relevant to the Plan and West Berkshire. In December 2020 the Emerging Draft LPR was published for consultation accompanied by the Interim SA/SEA. Options, including reasonable alternatives, were initially assessed in the Interim Environmental Report and refined and updated as part of the Proposed Submission SA/SEA. The chosen policy options were assessed (and updated where relevant) in the Proposed Submission and Proposed Main Modification versions of the SA/SEA.

Section 5 of the final SA/SEA sets out how the outcomes of the SA/SEA have been taken into account in determining and choosing the final policy options.

The SA is an iterative process and so the comments received from the consultation on the Scope, Emerging Draft and Proposed Submission version of the LPR fed into the development of the Submission LPR. As a result of the Proposed Submission no changes, requiring reassessment in the SA/SEA, were proposed.

Following the examination hearing sessions a number of Main Modifications were proposed, in addition to several Additional (minor) Modifications. These were reviewed and the SA/SEA updated where required, nonetheless, the modifications did not result in any significant changes to the outcome of the LPR.

The Inspector's Report was published on 25 April 2025. It concludes that with the recommended Main Modifications set out in the Report, the LPR is sound, legally compliant, meets the Duty to Cooperate and satisfies the requirements of Section 20(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) providing an appropriate basis for the planning of the District, including an adequate SA/SEA.

4. How the SA/SEA consultation responses have been taken into account

Public involvement through consultation is a key element of the sustainability appraisal process. During the development of the SA/SEA there are several formal stages of consultation. Informal comments received have also be taken into consideration.

At each stage of plan-making, the SA/SEA has been consulted upon alongside the LPR document, and in accordance with the SEA Regulations. Comments made on the SA/SEA have then been summarised and responded to for each iteration (Scoping Report, Interim SA/SEA Report, Proposed Submission and Proposed Main Modifications SA/SEA Report).

The Scoping Report was published in February 2018 and went out to consultation to the statutory environmental bodies for 5 weeks. The consultation responses received were taken into account and a summary of the comments made during the consultation and how they were taken into account is set out in Appendix 1 of the SA/SEA Environmental Report.

The Emerging Draft LPR included consultation on the Interim SA/SEA Environmental Report and took place in late 2020. A summary of all the responses received as part of this consultation, as well as how the Council responded to these and took them into account (including consultation responses on the SA/SEA) is included as Annex G – K of Appendix 1 to the Statement of Consultation.

The Emerging draft LPR consultation informed the preparation of the Proposed Submission version of the LPR and a number of changes were made. These changes were assessed and the SA/SEA updated where appropriate. The Proposed Submission consultation on the LPR (and accompanying SA/SEA) took place in early 2023. A summary of the consultation responses received as part of this consultation (including responses to the SA/SEA) is included as Annex M – Q of Appendix 2 to the Statement of Consultation.

Following the examination hearing sessions a number of Main Modifications were proposed to the LPR. These were assessed and the SA/SEA updated where appropriate. Consultation on the Proposed Main Modifications to the LPR (and accompanying SA/SEA) took place in December 2024 and January 2025. A summary of the consultation responses received during this consultation (including consultation responses on the SA) and how these have been taken into account in the production of the final LPR and SA/SEA, is set out in the Council's Report of Responses to Main Modifications Consultation (EXAM 67) and the Summary of Key Issues raised through consultation on Main Modifications (EXAM68) in the examination library. The modifications proposed do not have an impact on the overall sustainability of the Plan.

5. The reason for choosing the LPR as adopted, in light of other reasonable alternatives

The SEA Regulations require environmental reports (SA/SEA) to consider reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the Plan.

Section 5 of the SA/SEA Environmental Report (including Proposed Modifications) sets out the reasonable alternatives considered, and the reasons for choosing the final policy options and sites over other reasonable alternatives.

Overall, the reasons for choosing the strategy, objectives and policies within the LPR as adopted are that they deliver the most appropriate option to deliver sustainable development. The SA/SEA has been through the examination process conducted by an independent Inspector and is robust and proportionate.

6. The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the LPR

The Monitoring Framework outlined in Appendix 1 of the LPR will be used to monitor the impact of the Plan. The monitoring indicators are drawn directly from the strategic objectives of the LPR and targets within the Framework indicate how these objectives could be met. The Monitoring Framework is used to assess whether the policies of the LPR are achieving the objectives and policy outcomes, whether they are having any unintended consequences and whether they are still relevant or require a review. The Council will produce an Authority Monitoring Report with its conclusions.

Monitoring should also involve measuring indicators which enable any significant environmental effects to be monitored. Potential indicators have been proposed in the SA/SEA (see table 5) for each of the SA objectives and sub-objectives, drawing from existing sources to ensure the recording of data for the indicator is already established. The effectiveness of policies should be assessed against measurable targets. Some policies aim to deliver a qualitative rather than quantitative outcome and in such instances, it is appropriate to monitor whether the policy is delivering the intended trend of direction of travel. Monitoring of significant environmental effects will be integrated in the Authority Monitoring Report.

In many cases information used in monitoring will be provided by outside bodies. This has already been evidenced by the additional baseline information provided by the statutory environmental consultees during the LPR SA/SEA process.

Document Availability

The LPR, its accompanying Policies Map, its Adoption Statement, the Sustainability Appraisal Report, this Sustainability Appraisal Post Adoption Statement, the Inspector's Report and the Council's Schedule of Additional (minor) Modifications are available for public inspection free of charge on West Berkshire District Council's website: www.westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-review and at West Berkshire District Council Offices, Market Street, Newbury, RG14 5LD between the hours of 8:30am and 5:00pm on Mondays to Thursdays, and 8:30am to 4:30pm on Fridays.

If you would like a hard copy of the documents, these may be obtained by post where reasonably practical. Please contact the Planning Policy Team at the Council Offices, Market Street, Newbury, RG14 5LD or by phone on 01635 519111 or via email at planningpolicy@westberks.gov.uk. Charges will be on a cost-recovery basis.

If you have any queries relating to the LPR, SA/SEA Environmental Report, or this SA/SEA Post Adoption Statement, please contact the Planning Policy Team on the contact details above.