Introduction

1.1.1 This document provides a short summary of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) carried out as part of the development of the Maldon District Council Local Development Plan. The main purpose of an SA is to consider significant positive or negative effects which the Plan, and alternative options, may have on the District’s society, economy and environment. As part of the SA we developed a structure for assessing issues associated with different policy options. The main Sustainability Appraisal Report (SAR) presents the findings of that assessment, which we carried out throughout the development of the Plan. The SA is being published to help inform comments on the Local Development Plan preferred options document.

Background

1.1.2 In November 2005, Maldon District Council (MDC) approved its Replacement Local Plan for adoption and commenced work on the production of a Local Development Framework (LDF). In April 2009, the Local Development Scheme (LDS) was produced which outlined the contents of the LDF. A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) was undertaken to inform the development of policies. However these documents were not progressed to consultation and submission.

1.1.3 In 2012 the LDF was updated and an SA undertaken of the Maldon Local Development Plan (LDP) Preferred Options draft. The LDP and the SA were sent out for public consultation in June 2012. However, the proposed housing growth was not sufficient to comply with governmental advice and further revisions were undertaken to the LDP. In 2013, a revised LDP was produced reflecting the increase in housing growth and including a number of new policies. This document reports on the findings and results of that SA process which was used in the development of the LDP.

1.1.4 This assessment and report has been prepared to fulfil statutory requirements for Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and involved the following stages:

- Identifying other plans, programmes and objectives (for example other districts’ LDPs, the Essex and Suffolk Shoreline Management Plan and international and national legislation);
- Understanding the social, environmental, and economic condition of the District (the baseline);
- Identifying key sustainability issues for the District;
- Outlining SA objectives against which to evaluate the LDP;
- Gathering consultation feedback on the proposed objectives;
- Assessing the ways in which the LDP policies are likely to affect social, environmental, and economic issues;
- Identifying measures to reduce or counteract any significant negative and maximise positive effects of the policies; and
- Proposing a strategy for monitoring the LDPs significant sustainability effects in Maldon District.

Sustainability Issues and Assessment Framework

1.1.5 An SA Framework of objectives, targets and indicators was developed in 2012 based on these key issues, relevant plans and programmes and baseline conditions for the District. It was consulted on with statutory agencies in a Scoping Report, and the final SA framework is the basis against which LDP policies have been assessed. The SA Framework includes 17 sustainability objectives, and no changes were required for the 2013 assessment. The objectives are:

1. To maintain and improve accessibility to services and facilities for all sectors of the community;
2. To provide and maintain an adequate level of good quality affordable housing of appropriate size, tenure, mix and location to meet local needs;
3. To promote healthier lifestyles, improve levels of health and wellbeing;
4. To reduce rural isolation and social exclusion geographically and demographically through encouraging viable and vibrant communities;
5. To protect and enhance the local townscape, heritage assets and their settings;
6. To protect and enhance biodiversity and important wildlife habitats;
7. To protect quality and levels of local water resources;
8. To minimise the risk and hazards of flooding by adapting to the impacts of climate change, including sea level rise;
9. To ensure efficient use of land and protect geodiversity, soil quality and mineral resources;
10. To reduce emissions of greenhouse gases;
11. To maintain air quality levels in line with national and/or WHO targets;
12. To maintain and improve public transport provision, promote sustainable modes of transport and reduce journey miles undertaken by car;
13. To reduce natural resource consumption;
14. To maintain and enhance the quality of the countryside, coasts, estuaries and local landscape character including the unique skylines;
15. To strengthen the local economy through supporting the growth and diversification of business sectors and improving the attractiveness of the District to investment in both urban and rural areas;
16. To develop and support sustainable tourism within the District; and
17. To support employment diversity to create jobs that matches the skills profile for the local population.

Sustainability of the Proposed Plan
1.1.6 In order to determine the overall sustainability of the proposed LDP, its objectives were tested against the seventeen SA objectives. The assessment concluded that the 2 sets of objectives were relatively compatible, although a number of the LDP objectives had the potential for conflict with some of the SA objectives. These included those relating to biodiversity, water resources, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and landscape character. However, no definite incompatibility was identified, and any impact was likely to be dependent on the nature and location of implementation.

1.1.7 The assessment of LDP policies has been iterative and in 2012 public consultation was undertaken which has helped the development of the new set of policies. Whilst a number of new policies have been added in the latest LDP, the majority of the policies are similar to the 2012 policies and these were amended during the 2012 SA. Therefore, the 2009 and 2012 SA processes have helped influence the current LDP.

1.1.8 The policies were individually assessed against the sustainability framework to highlight where the objectives were supported, or not. This involved predicting and evaluating the nature (positive, negative or neutral), scale and timeframe (short-term, medium-term or long-term) of the social, environmental and economic effects of each policy as they relate to each of the SA objectives.

1.1.9 The policies within the Maldon District Draft Local Development Plan support the range of sustainability objectives identified in the SA Framework. The policies, as a whole, offer significant positive effects on the environmental, social, and economic SA Objectives. This specifically relates to environmental objectives concerned with the protection of local townscape and heritage assets, and protection and enhancement of biodiversity and wildlife habitats. Major positive effects are also expected against social SA objectives on improving accessibility to services and facilities; meeting local house needs; promoting health and wellbeing, reducing rural isolation, and maintaining and improving public transport and sustainable transport modes. In relation to economics, major positive effects are anticipated for all three of the SA objectives. Also moderate positive effects are expected in relation to: minimising flood risk and adapting to the effects of climate change; ensuring the efficient use of land; and maintaining and enhancing the quality of the countryside.
1.1.10 As with the SA undertaken in 2012, the assessment of the policies found that there are three policies which are likely to have the most positive effects compared with the rest of the LDP policies. These are S1 (Sustainable Development), S3 (Place Shaping), and D2 (Climate Change and Environmental Impact of New Development). These policies had beneficial impacts across the social, environmental and economic objectives, seeking to protect and enhance the key features of the District as well as providing for the local population and economic community.

1.1.11 Policy S1 sets out the sustainable development goals for the District and contributes positively to each of the seventeen SA objectives. Through implementation of this policy there is the potential for ensuring extensive benefits for the natural environment over. The policy could create a healthy and competitive local economy and support the local population by providing housing growth which meets the needs of the District.

1.1.12 Benefits will also be achieved as a result of policy S3 which include:
- sustainable transport;
- public spaces for all;
- the encouragement of the development of community services and facilities; and
- an attractive landscape which benefits biodiversity.

1.1.13 Improved accessibility could lead to an increase in physical exercise and improve health levels. Further, an increase in walking and cycling could help to improve community unity, vibrancy of rural communities, and mental wellbeing. Indirect benefits may arise for health through a decrease in air pollution over time.

1.1.14 Policy D2 has a number of environmental benefits related to:
- reducing air quality;
- maintaining water resources;
- Enhancement of local biodiversity; and
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

1.1.15 These benefits will also have positive indirect effects on the improving community health levels. The provision of flood management measures will provide features of interest for the local population.

1.1.16 New policies included in this 2013 version of the LDP are likely to result in broadly positive impacts against the SA Objectives. Policies S4 and S6 which relate to garden suburbs in Maldon, Heybridge and Burnham-on-Crouch typically have positive impacts against the social objectives due to the provision of infrastructure, services and facilities. The more specific policies (e.g. D6 and I2) also have positive impacts with respect to social and environmental objectives.

1.1.17 Negative effects are still predicted, however, against SA objectives seeking to: protect quality of water resources; reduce emissions of greenhouse gases; maintain air quality; and reduce natural resource consumption. However, these effects are expected to be minor and are likely to be avoided, minimised or offset through the effective implementation of other policies.

**Compliance with the Habitats Regulations**

1.1.18 Alongside the SA, a Habitats Regulations Screening Assessment was carried out to consider the potential for likely significant effects – arising as a result of the implementation of the Plan - on the Blackwater Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site; Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar; Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar; Dengie SPA and Ramsar, and Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
1.1.19 The HRA concluded that there are not expected to be significant effects on the integrity of these international sites, alone or in-combination with other plans or programmes, as a result of implementing the Maldon District LDP.