

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in support of the Thorpe Neighbourhood Plan

SA Report Update

Non-Technical Summary

June 2020

Quality information

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Revision History

Revision	Revision date	Details	Authorized	Name	Position
V1	31/05/19	Draft SA Report for QB informal consultation	MF	Mark Fessey	Associate Director, AECOM
V2	01/11/19	SA Report for Regulation 14 consultation	JD	Jon Dowty	Oneill Homer (on behalf of the Forum)
V3	01/04/20	Draft SA Report Update for QB review	LG	Linda Gillham	Thorpe Neighbourhood Forum
V4	26/06/20	SA Report Update for submission	As above	As above	As above

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Introduction

Background

AECOM is commissioned to lead on Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in support of the emerging Thorpe Neighbourhood Plan (TNP).

The TNP is being prepared by Thorpe Neighbourhood Forum, in the context of the adopted Runnymede Local Plan (2001) and the 2030 Local Plan, as proposed to be adopted. The TNP will be examined following the adoption of the RLP. Once 'made' it will form part of the statutory development plan and be used to determine planning applications in the designated area.

SA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to avoiding and mitigating negative effects and maximising the positives.

The TNP is at an advanced stage of preparation, with the 'pre-submission' version having been published for consultation, with the SA Report published alongside, in late 2019. The TNP has now been updated for submission to Runnymede Borough Council, with an SA Report Update alongside.

This is a Non-technical Summary (NTS) of the SA Report Update.

Structure of the SA Report Update / this NTS

SA reporting essentially involves answering the following questions in turn:

1) What has plan-making / SA involved **up to this point**?

- including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.

2) What are the SA findings **at this stage**?

- i.e. in relation to the draft plan.

3) What happens **next**?

Each of these questions is answered in turn below. Firstly though there is a need to set the scene further by answering the question 'What's the scope of the SA?'

What is the scope of the SA?

The scope of the SA is reflected in a list of topics and objectives, which, taken together indicate the parameters of the SA and provide a methodological 'framework' for assessment.

Table A: The SA framework

SA topic	SA objective
Environmental quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise and/ or mitigate all sources of air pollution, and ensure future residents are not affected by noise pollution.
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance all biodiversity and geological features and support overall ecological connectivity.
Climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the level of contribution to climate change made by activities within the Neighbourhood Plan Area • Support the resilience of the Neighbourhood Plan Area to the potential effects of climate change, including flooding.

SA topic	SA objective
Historic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect and enhance the historic environment within and surrounding the Neighbourhood Plan Area, including the Thorpe Conservation Area, other designated and non-designated heritage assets, their settings, and archaeological remains
Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect and enhance the character and quality Thorpe Village and greenspaces within and surrounding the NPA.
Land, soil and water resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, soil and mineral resources Use and manage water resources in a sustainable manner Promote sustainable waste management solutions that encourage the reduction, re-use and recycling of waste.
Population and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positively plan for existing and future residents' needs, including the needs of different groups in the community. Providing everyone with the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing and ensuring an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes, types and tenures. Promote accessible development in terms of local high-quality community services and facilities and access to public transport. Support continued low levels of deprivation and promote inclusive and self-contained communities.
Health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the health and wellbeing of residents within the Neighbourhood Plan Area, including through new opportunities for leisure and recreational facilities and green infrastructure improvements.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote sustainable transport use and reduce the need to travel.

What has plan-making / SA involved to this point?

An important element of the required SA process involves appraising (and consulting on) 'reasonable alternatives' in time to inform development of the draft plan.

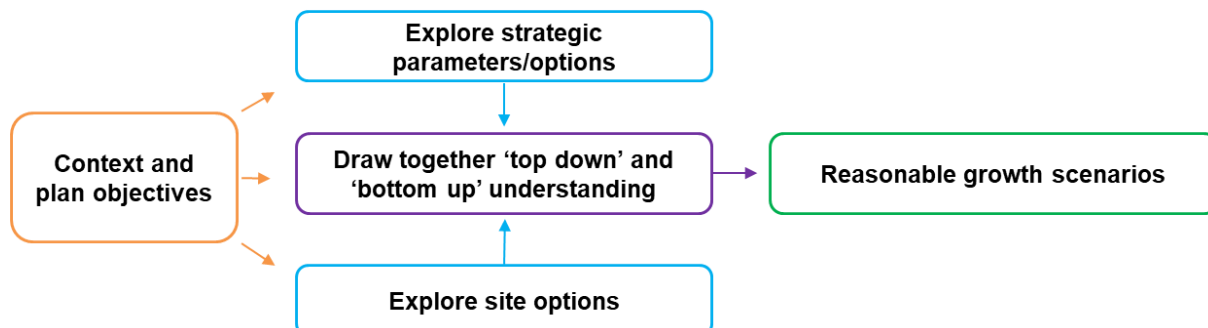
As such, Part 1 of the SA Report Update explains how work was undertaken to develop and appraise a 'reasonable' range of alternative approaches to the allocation of land for housing, or housing growth scenarios. Specifically, Part 1 of the report -

- 1) explains the process of establishing growth scenarios;
- 2) presents the outcomes of appraising the **growth scenarios**; and
- 3) explains reasons for selecting the preferred option, in light of the appraisal.

Establishing growth scenarios

The main report explains how growth scenarios were established subsequent to process of considering the strategic policy context ('top down' factors) and the site options in contention for allocation ('bottom-up' factors). Figure A presents a summary.

Figure A: Establishing reasonable growth scenarios



Ultimately three scenarios were established – see Table B - each involving allocation of a combination of two or more of the following sites:

- ID2 (Woodcock Farm) – is a small site located towards the west of the village, within the Local Plan proposed settlement boundary.
- ID32 (Coltscroft) – is a larger site located at the western extent of the village, within the Local Plan proposed settlement boundary. A variety of schemes have been considered on the site, but the growth scenarios explore just two, namely scheme (a) involving 24 homes; and scheme (b) involving 33 homes and a 72 bed carehome.
- ID44 (North) - is a large site located adjacent to the east of the Local Plan proposed settlement boundary, i.e. within the Green Belt. The proposal is to remove just a small proportion of the site from the Green Belt, sufficient to deliver 40 homes, and then to use the remainder of the site (which will remain in the Green Belt) to deliver a large park and a range of other community infrastructure.

Table B: The reasonable growth scenarios

Supply		Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
C3 completions and commitments		11	11	11
C3 commitments		3	3	3
C2 commitments		79	79	79
C3 allocations	ID2	7	7	7
	ID32a	24	-	24
	ID44 (North)	-	-	40
	ID32b	-	33	-
C2 allocation (at ID32)		-	72	-
Total C3 dwellings		45	54	85
Total C2 dwellings		79	151	79
Total "C3 deriving from C2"		44	84	44
Grand total (C3 and "C3 deriving from C2")		89	138	129

Appraising growth scenarios

Table C presents appraisal findings in relation to the three growth scenarios. Each row of the appraisal table below deals with one of the sustainability topics that comprise the SA framework. Within each the columns to the right hand side seek to categorise the performance of each option in terms of 'significant effects', using **red** (significant negative effect), **amber** (minor or uncertain negative effect), **no colour** (no significant effect), **light green** (minor or uncertain positive effect) and **dark green** (significant positive effect). Also “?” is used where there is uncertainty regarding whether effects will be overall positive or negative.

Table C: Summary appraisal findings

Objective	Scenario 1 ID2, ID32a	Scenario 2 ID2, ID32b	Scenario 3 ID2, ID32a, ID44 (N)
Environmental quality		Amber	
Biodiversity			Light Green
Climate change			
Historic environment		Amber	Amber
Landscape			?
Land, soil and water			
Population and community	?	?	Dark Green
Health and wellbeing			
Transport			

Beginning with Scenario 1, the appraisal predicts broadly neutral effects. There is a drawback in that the proportion of new dwellings deriving from C2 older persons accommodation would be significantly higher than the 31.5% envisaged by the 2030 Local Plan (indeed, it can be argued that the Local Plan housing requirement would not be met, for this reason); however, the significance of this drawback is unclear.

Scenario 2 performs poorly due to concerns with a high growth strategy at ID32, particularly from an air / noise pollution and historic environment perspective. It is also again the case that the proportion of new dwellings deriving from C2 older persons accommodation would be significantly higher than that envisaged by the 2030 Local Plan.

Scenario 3 is associated with pros and cons, and a notable uncertainty in respect of landscape impact, mostly resulting from the proposed allocation of ID44 to deliver 40 homes, a new park and other community infrastructure upgrades. The proposal is strongly supported from a 'population and community' perspective, and there is good potential to deliver a biodiversity net gain through targeted habitat creation / enhancement; however, the site falls within the Thorpe Conservation Area, and there are potentially some outstanding question-marks around landscape merits, e.g. the extent to which the housing part of the scheme would impact on openness and 'round-off' the village.

Establishing the preferred option

This section presents the Thorpe Neighbourhood Forum's reasons for supporting **Scenario 3**, in light of the appraisal presented above, consultation responses, and the various evidence base studies undertaken in the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan:

“The Neighbourhood Forum supports Scenario 3, namely the allocation of a package of three sites, two of which fall within the proposed Green Belt Inset boundary (ID2 and ID32a) and a further site (ID44 North) which will be allocated as a result of a ‘detailed amendment’ to the Green Belt boundary.

The starting point for the allocation of sites is to maximise the available previously developed land within the proposed Thorpe Green Belt Inset boundary identified in Scenario 1. However, while this scenario appraised relatively well across a range of objectives, it falls short of delivering sufficient homes to meet the needs of Thorpe nor would it deliver the full extent of community infrastructure needed in the area.

Scenario 2 includes an alternative option for the land at Coltscroft (ID32b) which includes a higher quantum of housing (C3) and a care home (C2). This option appraises poorly in relation to environmental quality due to its proximity to the M25. In relation to the historic environment, the development footprint would require land within the setting of West End Farm and at a density that would be out of character with the area. The development footprint would also include land currently identified as ‘amenity green space’.

Scenario 3 includes land north of Coldharbour Lane (ID44 North) which currently lies within the Green Belt. This option is appraised to have significant positive effects in relation to population and community given as it will secure community infrastructure to deliver a ‘sustainable pattern of development’ through enabling housing development and increase the delivery of housing above the minimum to meet local needs consistent with paragraph 138 of the NPPF. In addition, it offers opportunities to enhance biodiversity and green infrastructure more generally which in turn will contribute positively to biodiversity effects. It is considered that there are ‘exceptional circumstances’ to justify a ‘detailed amendment’ to the Green Belt through the Neighbourhood Plan, and a mechanism to enable the revised GB boundary to endure beyond the Plan Period.

While this appraisal finds all scenarios have their pros and cons, it is apparent that Scenario 3 performs well in terms of a number of sustainability objectives, which itself is a good indicator of an ‘appropriate strategy’. Scenario 3 will put in place an overall land supply sufficient (assuming no delays in delivery) to meet the requirements of Policy SD2 of the 2030 Local Plan, as proposed to be adopted, with an additional buffer to boost housing supply to deliver additional affordable homes to meet local needs. As important, is that it will also address the infrastructure needs of Thorpe to deliver the Plan's Vision and Objectives; leaving a legacy for the future.

In reaching this conclusion the Forum acknowledges that its preferred approach will require a detailed amendment to the Green belt boundary in line with the provisions of the NPPF. The Forum also acknowledges that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances justify such an alteration. It is considered that the provision of a new parkland and community facilities provide these exceptional circumstances to enable the release of land of a scale that falls within the parameters agreed with RBC.

Differences between the pre-submission and submission stages

As a result of the Regulation 14 consultation it became clear that it would not be possible to proceed with the allocation at Thorpe Park Farm (ID38) as the landowner could not confirm its availability. In addition, the Environment Agency published revised Flood Zone boundaries for Thorpe in November 2019 (as a result of the updated Chertsey Bourne Flood Study), which shows the site to be subject to flood risk, such that it fails the Sequential Test.”

What are the SA findings at this current stage?

Part 2 of the SA Report Update presents an appraisal of the submission version of the Draft TNP. Appraisal findings are presented as a series of narratives under the SA framework topic headings (see Table A, above). The following overall conclusion is reached:

The appraisal finds that the TNP should lead to significant positive effects in respect of Population and communities, on the basis that housing needs will be met and the proposed spatial strategy should secure delivery of a new park and a range of other community infrastructure upgrades, and minor positive effects in respect of Biodiversity and Climate change. However, minor negative effects are predicted in respect of the Historic environment, and certain question-marks are raised in respect of landscape impacts, safe walking and cycling and traffic congestion.

What are the next steps?

Part 3 of the Environmental Report answers the question – What happens next? – by discussing plan finalisation and monitoring.

Plan finalisation

Following submission the TNP and this SA Report Update to RBC all submitted documentation will be published for consultation and then subjected to Independent Examination by an appointed Examiner alongside consultation responses received. The Examiner will assess whether the plan meets the Basic Conditions for Neighbourhood Plans and is in general conformity with the Borough Local Plan.

Assuming that the examination leads to a favourable outcome the TNP will then be subject to a local referendum. If more than 50% of those who vote agree with the Neighbourhood Plan, then it will be 'made' part of the local Development Plan, alongside the Runnymede Local Plan.

At the time that the plan is made an SA Adoption Statement will be published that presents, amongst other things, 'measures decided concerning monitoring'.

Monitoring

The SA Report must present 'measures envisaged concerning monitoring' (Schedule 2(9) of the SEA Regulations).

The Draft Plan appraisal highlights a particular concern in respect of impacts to the historic environment, which will need to be a focus of further consideration as part of forthcoming work to finalise the plan, and then as part of work to consider planning applications at the development management planning stage. It is not clear that there is necessarily a need for a focus on monitoring historic environment impacts, although the possibility of monitoring the integrity of the Thorpe Conservation Area periodically could be explored.

It is important to note that monitoring of a range of planning and sustainable development issues/objectives is already undertaken by RBC.

