

Sustainability Appraisal of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043

Regulation 19 SA Report

Volume 1 of 3: Non-Technical Summary

Client Review Version
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LEPUS CONSULTING
LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY, PLANNING & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability Appraisal of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043

Volume 1 of 3: Non-Technical Summary of the Regulation 19 SA Report

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this report

- N1. West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) has appointed Lepus Consulting Ltd (Lepus) to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043. The appraisal also meets the legal requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). It considers the likely social, economic and environmental effects of the Plan to help ensure that it supports sustainable development and identifies opportunities to avoid or reduce adverse effects.
- N2. Local Plans are prepared through a series of stages set out in planning legislation. Earlier stages involved considering different options for accommodating future development across the district. The Plan has now reached the Publication Stage (also known as the Regulation 19 stage), where the Council is seeking representations on the version of the Plan it intends to submit for independent examination.
- N3. The Regulation 19 Sustainability Appraisal Report explains how the Plan has been assessed and how sustainability considerations have informed its preparation. This Non-Technical Summary (NTS) provides an overview of that assessment, highlighting the likely sustainability effects of the policies and site allocations included in the Plan.
- N4. This document is Volume 1 of the Sustainability Appraisal and should be read alongside Volume 2 (Main Sustainability Appraisal Report) and Volume 3 (Appendices), which provide further detail on the assessment process and findings.

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan

- N5. The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043 has been prepared by WODC to establish a comprehensive planning framework for managing growth and development across the district to 2043. It replaces the adopted Local Plan 2031 and provides the spatial strategy, policies and site allocations needed to deliver sustainable development while responding to the district's environmental, social and economic challenges.
- N6. Addressing the climate and ecological emergency is a central consideration of the Local Plan. The Plan seeks to support the delivery of new homes, employment opportunities and infrastructure whilst ensuring that development contributes towards achieving net zero carbon emissions, supports nature recovery, enhances biodiversity, protects the district's valued landscapes and historic environment, and promotes healthy, inclusive and resilient communities. The Plan has been informed by an extensive evidence base, Sustainability Appraisal and consideration of reasonable alternatives through previous stages of consultation.
- N7. The Local Plan identifies a settlement hierarchy, spatial strategy and priority growth locations alongside strategic and development management policies that guide where and how development should take place. It seeks to balance meeting West Oxfordshire's identified development needs, including contributing towards Oxford City's unmet housing need, with protecting the district's distinctive rural character, nationally important landscapes and heritage assets. Once adopted, the Local Plan will form part of the

statutory development plan for West Oxfordshire and will provide the basis for determining planning applications across the district in accordance with national planning policy.

The West Oxfordshire Local Plan

- N8. The West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043 sets out the Council's vision for how the district should grow and develop over the period to 2043. It replaces the adopted Local Plan 2031 and provides the planning framework that will guide decisions about where new development should take place and how it should be designed. The Plan includes planning policies and allocates land for new homes, employment, infrastructure and other forms of development.
- N9. The Plan aims to support sustainable growth while responding to some of the district's most important challenges, including climate change, nature recovery, housing needs and economic development. It seeks to reduce carbon emissions, protect and enhance biodiversity, conserve the district's landscapes and historic environment, and create healthy, inclusive and resilient communities. The Plan has been informed by a wide range of technical evidence, consultation with communities and stakeholders, and Sustainability Appraisal carried out throughout its preparation.
- N10. The Local Plan sets out a spatial strategy that identifies where future development should be focused, together with planning policies that will guide decisions on future planning applications. It aims to meet the district's housing, employment and infrastructure needs, including making a contribution towards Oxford City's unmet housing need, whilst protecting the qualities that make West Oxfordshire distinctive. Once adopted, the Local Plan will become part of the statutory development plan and will be used by the Council when determining planning applications across the district.

What is Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment?

- N11. Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a process used to assess the likely effects of a Local Plan as it is being prepared. It considers the Plan's social, economic and environmental impacts so that potential benefits can be maximised and any adverse effects avoided or reduced wherever possible. The process helps ensure that sustainability is considered throughout plan preparation rather than only once the Plan has been completed.
- N12. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the environmental component of the appraisal process. It focuses on the likely effects of the Plan on the environment and is required by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations. In England, SA incorporates the requirements of SEA, enabling environmental, social and economic issues to be considered together. The appraisal also considers reasonable alternatives, helping to explain why the Council's preferred approach has been selected.
- N13. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires Sustainability Appraisal to be undertaken for Local Plans. Together, SA and SEA provide an important evidence base for plan-making and help demonstrate that the Plan has been prepared in a robust and transparent way.
- N14. Sustainable development is commonly defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Achieving

sustainable development requires a balanced approach that recognises the relationship between society, the economy and the environment (see **Figure N.1.1**).

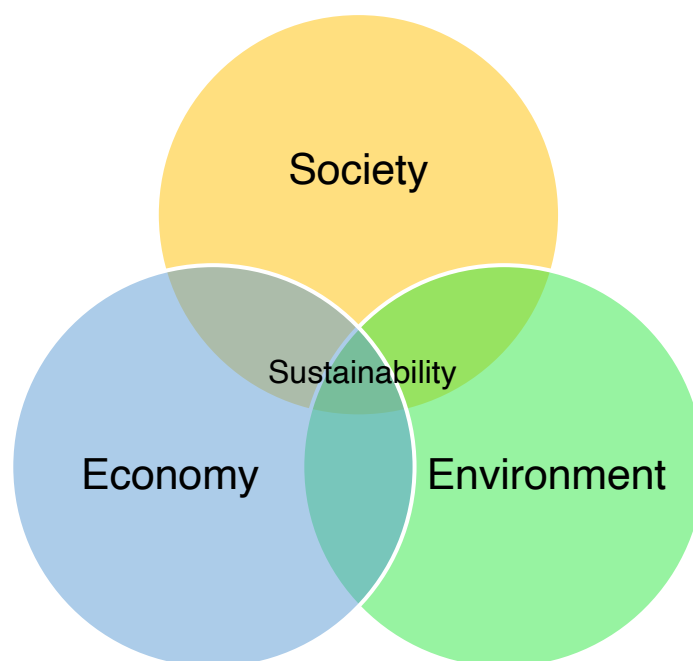


Figure N.1.1: Sustainable development

- N15. The West Oxfordshire Local Plan has reached the Publication (Regulation 19) stage of the plan-making process. At this stage, the Council is consulting on the version of the Plan that it intends to submit for independent examination. This is illustrated at Stage C in **Figure N.1.2**.

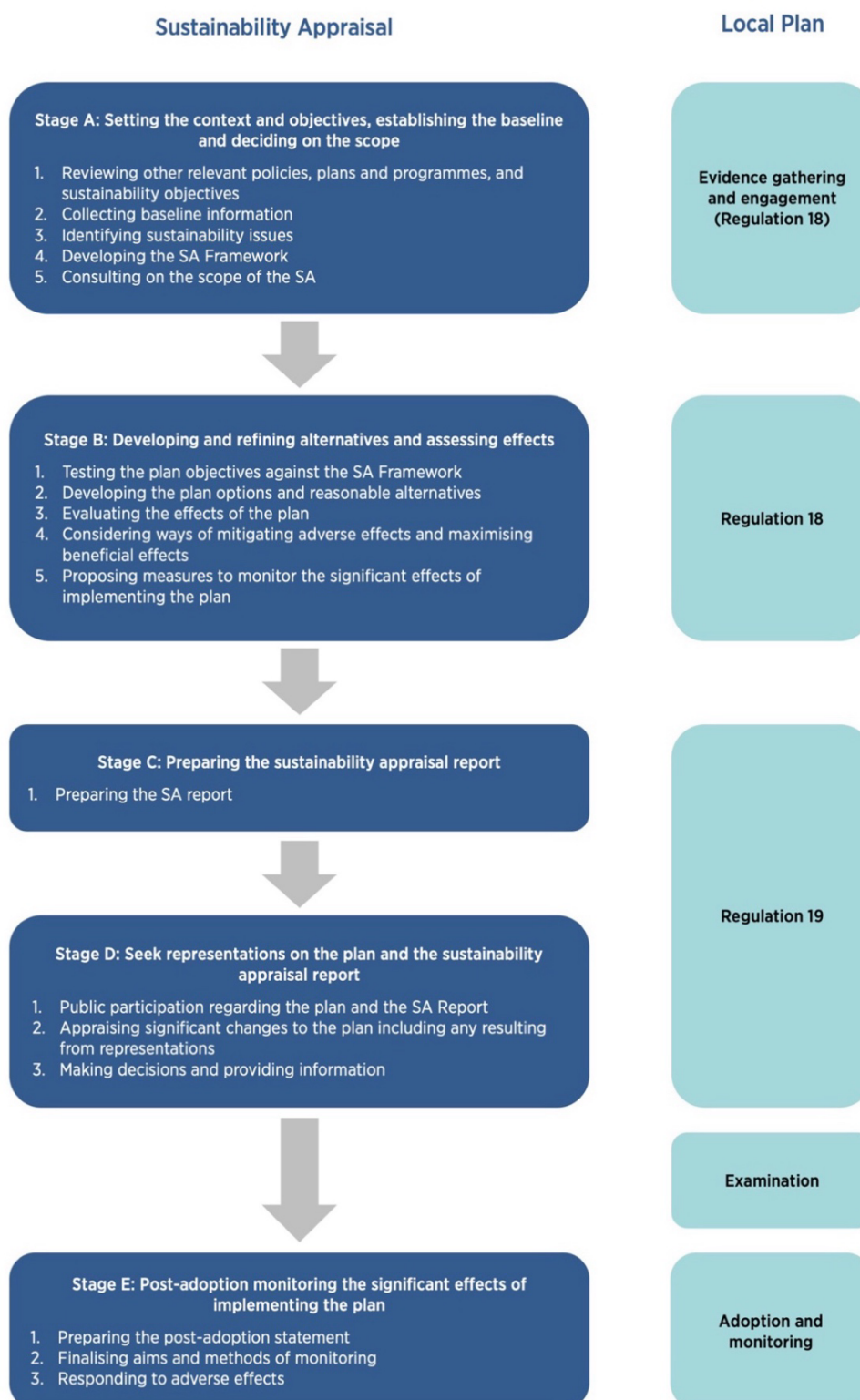


Figure N.1.2: Sustainability Appraisal and the Local Plan process

West Oxfordshire Local Plan Area

- N16. **Figure N.1.3** shows the administrative boundary of West Oxfordshire. It is a primarily rural district, with the three main towns of Witney, Carterton, and Chipping Norton, alongside numerous smaller settlements. The City of Oxford lies adjacent to the district to the east, with a small proportion of Oxford's Green Belt falling within the district.

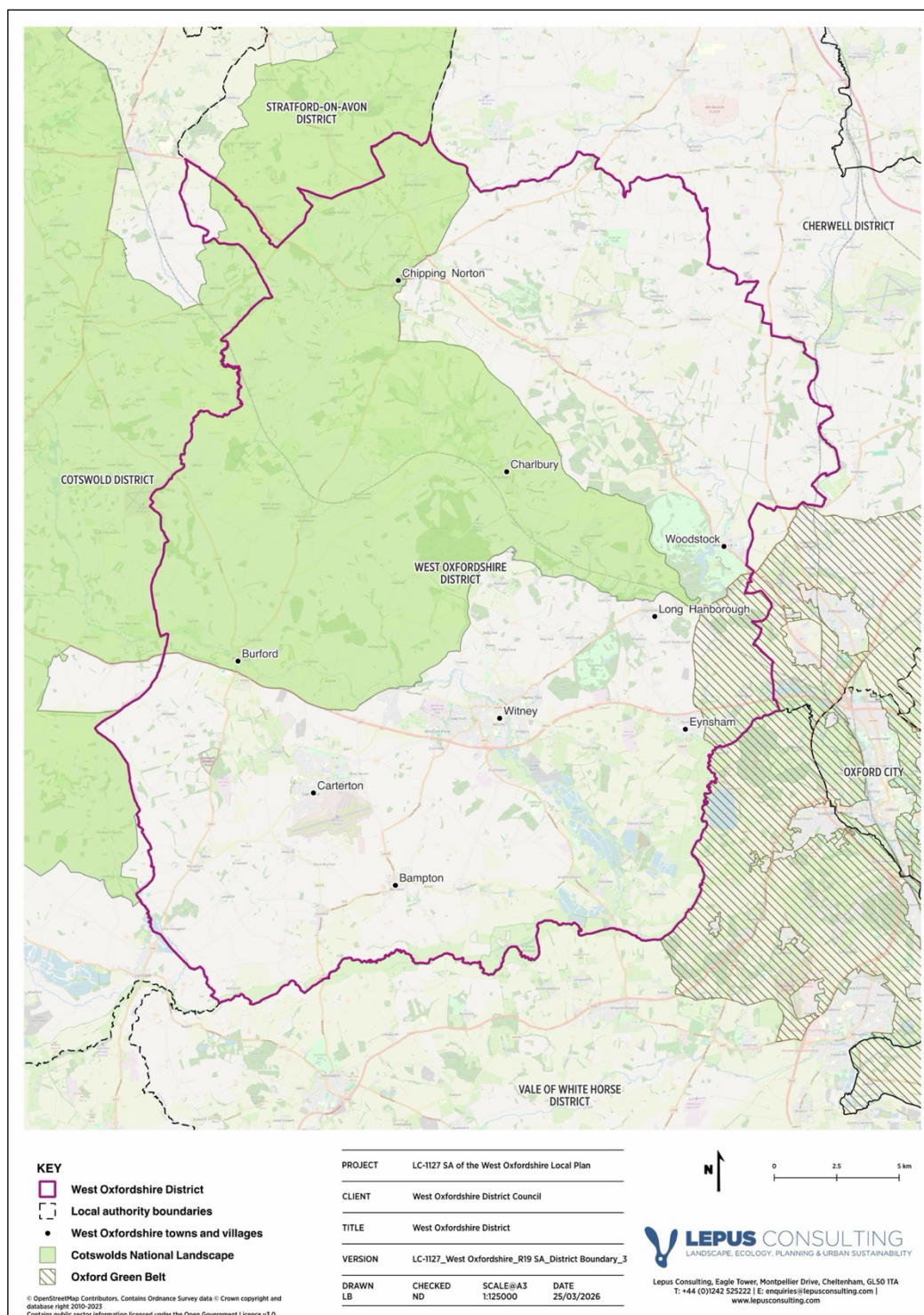


Figure N.1.3: West Oxfordshire Local Plan area

The SA process alongside the West Oxfordshire Local Plan

- N17. **Figure N.1.4** provides an overview of the stages that have been undertaken during the preparation of the Local Plan and accompanying SA outputs, summarising the purpose and content of each.
- N18. Each stage included consultation with the statutory bodies for SA/SEA (Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency) as well as public consultation with other stakeholders and interested parties. Comments received were considered during the preparation of the SA outputs (see **Appendix C**).

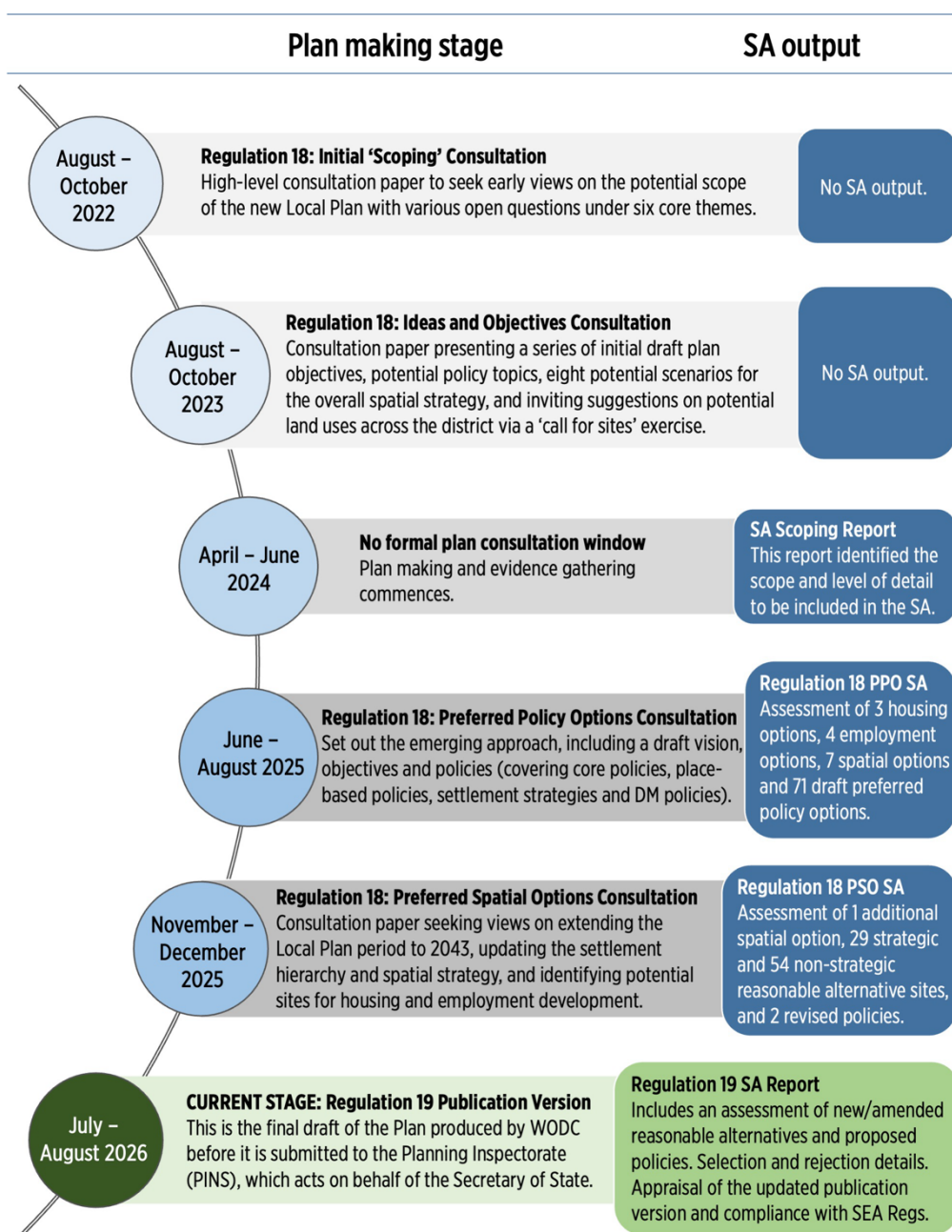


Figure N.1.4: The West Oxfordshire Local Plan and SA process so far

2 Purpose and content of the Regulation 19 SA Report

About the Regulation 19 SA Report

- N19. The Regulation 19 SA Report presents the overall findings of the SA of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan, which is composed principally of 68 policies, 8 strategic allocations and 9 non-strategic site allocations. The SA Report summarises the SA process to date and has been prepared to help inform the examination stage of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan.
- N20. The purpose of the SA of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan is to:
- Identify, describe and evaluate the likely sustainability effects of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan proposals and their reasonable alternatives;
 - Inform the Council's decision making and preparation of the Local Plan; and
 - Provide an opportunity for statutory consultees, interested parties and the public to offer views on any aspect of the SA.

Structure of the Regulation 19 SA Report

- N21. The SA of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan is presented in three volumes:
- N22. **Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary (NTS)** (this document) provides a summary of the Regulation 19 SA.
- N23. **Volume 2: Main SA Report** contains the following chapters:
- **Chapter 1** presents an introduction to this report.
 - **Chapter 2** sets out information about the Local Plan and the SA process to date.
 - **Chapter 3** presents the evolution of the environment without the Local Plan.
 - **Chapter 4** sets out the SA methodology.
 - **Chapter 5** presents details of the reasonable alternatives considered throughout the SA process.
 - **Chapter 6** presents details on the preferred approach as set out in the Local Plan.
 - **Chapters 7 to 15** set out the likely significant effects on the environment, per SEA topic.
 - **Chapter 16** summarises the cumulative effects identified.
 - **Chapter 17** sets out a range of monitoring recommendations for the Local Plan.
 - **Chapter 18** summarises ways in which the SA has influenced the Local Plan throughout the plan making process, including through recommendations made in the SA.
 - **Chapter 19** outlines the conclusions, residual effects and next steps

N24. **Volume 3: Appendices.**

3 Baseline and key sustainability issues for the West Oxfordshire District

Overview

- N25. The Sustainability Appraisal has considered the environmental, social and economic context for the Local Plan. This included reviewing relevant plans, policies and legislation, together with information about the current state of the environment and the key sustainability issues affecting West Oxfordshire.
- N26. **Volume 2** (the main Regulation 19 SA Report) includes information relating to the baseline and key issues for West Oxfordshire, drawing on information gathered during the Scoping stage, relating to the following sustainability topics (which incorporate the topics identified in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations¹):
- Air;
 - Biodiversity, flora and fauna;
 - Climatic factors;
 - Cultural heritage;
 - Human health;
 - Landscape;
 - Population and material assets; and
 - Soil and water resources.
- N27. The Sustainability Appraisal has also considered how these topics might change if the Local Plan were not prepared. This 'no plan' scenario provides a baseline against which the likely effects of the Local Plan can be assessed. Without a new Local Plan, development would continue to be determined through the existing development plan, national planning policy and other relevant legislation. However, there would be greater uncertainty over where development would take place and whether future growth would be coordinated to deliver homes, jobs, infrastructure and environmental improvements.

Table N.3.1: Summary of key issues by topic

Topic	Main issues considered
Air quality	Reducing pollution and encouraging sustainable travel.
Biodiversity	Protecting important habitats and species while supporting nature recovery.
Climate change	Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to flooding and extreme weather.
Historic environment	Conserving heritage assets and local character.

¹ Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations identifies the likely significant effects on the environment, including "issues such as (a) biodiversity, (b) population, (c) human health, (d) fauna, (e) flora, (f) soil, (g) water, (h) air, (i) climatic factors, (j) material assets, (k) cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, (l) landscape and (m) the interrelationship between the issues referred to in sub-paragraphs (a) to (l)."

Topic	Main issues considered
Health	Supporting healthy communities with access to services, green space and recreation.
Landscape	Protecting the character of West Oxfordshire, including the Cotswolds National Landscape.
Population and housing	Meeting housing needs alongside infrastructure and employment.
Soil	Protecting the best agricultural land and reducing unnecessary land take.
Water	Managing water resources, wastewater and flood risk.

4 SA methodology

The SA Framework

- N28. Following consideration of key sustainability issues, as discussed in **NTS Chapter 3**, an SA Framework was established which includes SA Objectives, decision-making criteria and indicators. The SA Framework provides a way in which sustainability effects can be described, analysed and compared, and can be used in monitoring the Plan.
- N29. Full details of the SA Framework used throughout the SA process including indicators is presented in **Appendix A**, with a summary of the 14 SA Objectives shown in **Table N.4.1**. It should be noted that the order of SA Objectives does not infer any prioritisation.

Table N.4.1: SA Objectives

	SA Objectives	Relevance to Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations
1	Climate change mitigation: Minimise West Oxfordshire District's contributions towards the causes of climate change	Climatic factors
2	Climate change adaptation: Adapt to the anticipated levels of climate change	Climatic factors and water
3	Biodiversity and geodiversity: Conserve, enhance and restore the district's biodiversity and geodiversity	Biodiversity, flora and fauna
4	Landscape: Conserve, enhance and manage the quality and character of landscapes and townscapes	Landscape
5	Cultural heritage: Conserve and enhance the significance of heritage assets and support the effective management of the historic environment	Cultural heritage
6	Air quality: Protect and improve air quality, creating cleaner and healthier air	Air
7	Water: Maintain and improve water quality and ensure efficient use of water resources	Water
8	Natural resources and waste: Ensure efficient use of the district's soil and mineral resources and reduce waste	Soil and material assets
9	Housing and equality: Provide affordable, high quality and environmentally sound housing for all, whilst reducing crime and social deprivation	Population, human health and material assets
10	Health and wellbeing: Safeguard and improve health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities in health	Population and human health

	SA Objectives	Relevance to Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations
11	Transport and accessibility: Improve accessibility, increase the proportion of travel by sustainable modes, and reduce the need to travel	Population and material assets
12	Education: Increase access to education and improve attainment to develop and maintain a skilled workforce	Population and material assets
13	Economy and employment: Ensure sufficient employment land and premises are available to develop and support innovative and sustainable economic growth	Population and material assets

Significant effects

N30. Each policy, site allocation and reasonable alternative has been assessed against the Sustainability Appraisal objectives. The likely effect of each is then evaluated using the assessment framework set out in **Table N.4.2**. The reasons for each assessment are explained in the accompanying assessment text, with the full results presented in Volume 3 of the Sustainability Appraisal Report.

N31. The Sustainability Appraisal identifies, describes and evaluates the likely significant effects of implementing the Local Plan. This includes positive and negative effects, short-, medium- and long-term effects, permanent and temporary effects, and any secondary, cumulative or synergistic effects where these are likely to occur.

Table N.4.2: Guide for likely significant effects

Significance	Definition (not necessarily exhaustive)
Major Negative --	The size, nature and location of a development proposal will be likely to: - Permanently degrade, diminish or destroy the integrity of a quality receptor, such as a feature of international, national or regional importance; - Cause a very high-quality receptor to be permanently diminished; - Be unable to be entirely mitigated; - Be discordant with the existing setting; and/or - Contribute to a cumulative significant effect.
Minor Negative -	The size, nature and location of development proposals will be likely to: - Not quite fit into the existing location or with existing receptor qualities; and/or - Affect undesignated yet recognised local receptors.
Negligible 0	Either no impacts are anticipated, or any impacts are anticipated to be negligible.
Uncertain +/-	It is uncertain whether impacts will be positive or adverse.
Minor Positive +	The size, nature and location of a development proposal will be likely to: - Improve undesignated yet recognised receptor qualities at the local scale; - Fit into, or with, the existing location and existing receptor qualities; and/or - Enable the restoration of valued characteristic features.

Significance	Definition (not necessarily exhaustive)
Major Positive ++	The size, nature and location of a development proposal will be likely to: • Enhance and redefine the location in a positive manner, making a contribution at a national or international scale; • Restore valued receptors which were degraded through previous uses; and/or • Improve one or more key elements/features/characteristics of a receptor with recognised quality such as a specific international, national or regional designation.

- N32. The methods, assumptions and limitations used in the Sustainability Appraisal are described in Chapter 4 of the Main Sustainability Appraisal Report (Volume 2), with further topic-specific information provided in Appendix E (Volume 3).

5 Reasonable alternatives

What are reasonable alternatives?

- N33. The SEA Regulations require the Sustainability Appraisal to identify, describe and evaluate the reasonable alternatives considered during the preparation of the Local Plan.
- N34. There is no statutory definition of a 'reasonable alternative'. In practice, reasonable alternatives are realistic options that are capable of meeting the objectives of the Local Plan. During plan preparation, the Council has considered a range of alternatives, including different spatial strategies, policies and site allocations.
- N35. Each reasonable alternative has been assessed against the Sustainability Appraisal Framework to identify its likely sustainability effects. The findings have informed the Council's preparation of the Local Plan alongside the wider evidence base, helping to explain why the preferred approach has been selected.
- N36. The Regulation 18 Sustainability Appraisal Report presents the reasonable alternatives considered during the preparation of the Local Plan. These include alternative spatial strategies for accommodating growth, strategic site options, non-strategic site allocations and, where appropriate, alternative policy approaches. The Sustainability Appraisal identifies, describes and evaluates the likely significant effects of each reasonable alternative.
- N37. Following the latest round of Regulation 18 consultation on reasonable alternatives, sites have been selected and rejected for inclusion in the local plan; there are 8 strategic locations for growth and 9 non-strategic allocations. The SA evaluation of these sites can be found at Appendix F and G respectively in the main report.

6 Likely significant effects on the environment

Identified residual effects

- N38. The main report has identified overall effects for the plan. **Table N.6.1** identifies the likely residual positive sustainability effects of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan.

Table N.6.1: Likely residual positive sustainability effects of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan

	Summary of residual positive effects
	Housing provision
1	The Local Plan is expected to result in a long-term positive effect through the delivery of 18,318 new homes, providing sufficient housing land to meet identified needs and supporting the delivery of a range of housing types and tenures.
	Employment provision
2	The Local Plan is expected to result in a long-term positive effect through the provision of sufficient employment land to support economic growth, job creation and investment within West Oxfordshire.
	Access to services and facilities
3	The Local Plan is expected to support improved access to local services and facilities through the delivery of new development, associated infrastructure investment and developer contributions.
	Health and wellbeing
4	The Local Plan is expected to have a positive effect on health and wellbeing through the provision of new green infrastructure, recreational opportunities and improvements to walking, cycling and sustainable transport networks.
	Green infrastructure provision
5	The Local Plan is expected to have a positive effect through the delivery of new and enhanced green infrastructure, supporting recreational access, biodiversity enhancement and climate resilience.
	Climate change adaptation
6	The Local Plan is expected to support improved resilience to climate change through policies relating to sustainable design, flood risk management, sustainable drainage and the protection and enhancement of green and blue infrastructure.
	Sustainable transport
7	The Local Plan is expected to support improvements in sustainable transport through the promotion of walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure, helping to reduce reliance on private vehicles over the longer term.

- N39. **Table N.6.2** identifies the likely residual adverse sustainability effects of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan.

Table N.6.2: Likely residual positive sustainability effects of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan

	Summary of residual adverse effects
1	Habitat fragmentation The Local Plan is expected to result in a significant long-term cumulative adverse effect on biodiversity due to the loss and fragmentation of habitats, increased recreational pressure and potential impacts on ecological networks. Mitigation and biodiversity net gain are unlikely to fully offset all cumulative impacts.
2	Landscape character and visual amenity The Local Plan is expected to result in a long-term cumulative adverse effect on landscape through the introduction of development into rural areas, affecting landscape character, tranquillity and views, particularly within sensitive landscapes and areas close to the Cotswolds National Landscape.
3	Cultural heritage The Local Plan is expected to result in a moderate and potentially long-term cumulative adverse effect on cultural heritage. New development has the potential to alter the setting of designated and non-designated heritage assets and contribute to incremental changes in historic landscape character.
4	Climate change mitigation The Local Plan is expected to result in a long-term cumulative adverse effect on climatic factors through increased greenhouse gas emissions associated with construction, energy use and transport, alongside the loss of greenfield land and carbon storage functions.
5	Soil resources The Local Plan is expected to result in a long-term permanent adverse effect through the loss of previously undeveloped land and potential best and most versatile agricultural land. Opportunities to mitigate soil loss are limited due to the irreversible nature of development.
6	Air quality The Local Plan is expected to result in a short to medium-term cumulative adverse effect on air quality due to increased traffic flows and associated emissions, particularly around areas of existing air quality constraints and the strategic road network.
7	Water resources and water quality The Local Plan is expected to result in a long-term cumulative adverse effect on water resources and water quality due to increased demand for water supply and wastewater treatment capacity. Delivery of infrastructure improvements and mitigation measures will be important in managing these effects.
8	Waste management The Local Plan is expected to result in increased pressure on waste management infrastructure due to additional waste generation associated with population growth, with potential capacity constraints resulting in a medium-term adverse effect.
9	Accessibility to services and facilities The Local Plan may result in localised adverse effects where development is located in areas with limited access to existing services and facilities, particularly in rural locations where sustainable transport options are constrained.

Cumulative effects

- N40. The Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) is the process of identifying and evaluating the effects that arise when the total significant effects of the Local Plan and assessed alongside known existing underlying trends and other PPPs.
- N41. Cumulative effects are different from effects that occur alone. Alone, the Plan may not result in residual adverse effects for a particular topic, for example the effects of urban

sprawl on landscape character, but when considered cumulatively, may result in significant effects that require mitigation or monitoring.

N42. Cumulative effects of the plan are presented in chapter 16 of the main report.

7 Conclusions

Summary of findings

- N43. Overall, the West Oxfordshire Local Plan is expected to deliver a broad range of positive sustainability outcomes. The Plan provides a framework for meeting the district's identified housing, employment and infrastructure needs whilst supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation, promoting nature recovery, enhancing green infrastructure, protecting the historic and natural environment, encouraging sustainable transport, and improving health and wellbeing. Collectively, the Plan is expected to contribute towards the creation of sustainable, resilient and inclusive communities across West Oxfordshire.
- N44. The assessment has also identified a number of likely adverse effects associated with accommodating growth over the Plan period. These include the permanent loss of greenfield and agricultural land, potential effects on biodiversity, landscape character and the historic environment, increased pressure on water resources and wastewater infrastructure, and additional traffic and associated emissions in some locations. The Local Plan incorporates a range of mitigation measures to avoid, reduce or offset these effects where possible; however, some residual adverse effects are likely to remain.

Consultation and next steps

- N45. The Regulation 19 SA Report will be published alongside the Publication Version of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan.
- N46. A minimum of a six-week period of consultation will be undertaken by WODC to offer statutory consultees, stakeholders, organisations and individuals an opportunity to submit representations regarding the Plan, as well as supporting evidence including this SA Report.
- N47. Following this round of consultation, all comments will be analysed by the Plan makers as part of the ongoing plan making process. Further stages of SA will be prepared if and when necessary.



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