

Appendix b: Executive Summary of the draft Sustainability Appraisal of the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Introduction

1. Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the City Council is required to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of all plans, which it prepares as part of its Local Development framework, including Supplementary Planning Documents. An SA has therefore been prepared for the Affordable Housing SPD.
2. Government guidance¹ states that preparing the SA report is to be carried out in three stages, which are:

Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope

Stage B: Developing and refining options and appraising effects

Stage C: Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report
3. A scoping report outlining the findings of Stage A was published for consultation in July 2005. Respondents were generally satisfied with the report; and where appropriate their comments have been taken into account.
4. This Executive Summary provides a summary of how Stage B was carried out and the key findings.

Developing the SPD Options

7. The purpose of appraising alternative options is to compare the sustainability impacts of alternative ways of addressing the same issue. The options need to be sufficiently distinct to highlight the different sustainability implications of each, so that meaningful comparisons can be made. The options were tested against 25 Sustainability Objectives in order to determine which is likely to be the more sustainable.
8. Two strategic options were selected, namely:
 - Relying on Government guidance and the adopted Local Plan policies
 - Having an SPD on affordable housing
9. The assessment concluded that producing the SPD will assist the planning process of 'negotiating' affordable housing and therefore will have a direct beneficial effect upon SA objective 3 'to meet local housing needs by ensuring

¹ 'Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents' ODPM 2005

that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, affordable home.’ Its production is not likely to result in any adverse effects on any of the other SA objectives. Production of the SPD is therefore likely to be beneficial.

10. In addition a number of options were considered with regard to the wording of the SPD. These are set out in the main SA report. The assessment concluded that in the majority of cases the wording proposed in the SPD was the most sustainable. There was, however, the following exception:

- Paragraph 42: contributions from commercial developments. The original draft SPD proposed that affordable housing would be required from commercial developments where they generated a significant demand for affordable housing. The SA concluded that all new commercial developments resulting in a net increase in jobs are likely to lead to an increase in the need for new affordable housing in Oxford. The requirement therefore should relate to all commercial development of the types included in the Local Plan.

11. In addition, in the following cases it is considered that more information is required in order to determine what is the most sustainable option:

- Paragraph 36: on sites where evidence has been produced which demonstrates that requiring 50% affordable housing would make the development unviable, the City Council will apply a cascade approach, firstly altering the tenure split requirement and secondly, reducing the affordable housing requirement.
- Paragraph 74: requiring affordable housing to meet Ecohomes ‘Very Good’ standard and whether achieving this standard, or some alternative such as ‘excellent’, would have any adverse impacts on the provision of affordable housing.

12. These two options will be further appraised when further information has been obtained on these two matters.

Conclusion

13. In social terms the draft SPD will have beneficial social effects as it will help to ensure that the affordable housing provided in new developments in Oxford, will meet identified housing needs. It will also provide certainty and clarity to developers and therefore help to speed up negotiations.

15. The environmental impact of new affordable homes will also be minimised by requiring that EcoHomes ‘very good’ standard be met. This will also have a positive impact upon the social and economic criteria through the lower running costs of the affordable housing units, which will reduce the potential for fuel poverty.