

Non Technical Summary of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Planning Obligations SPD

The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is to promote sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of planning policy documents.

The first stage of the SA was to produce an LDF Scoping Report, which was issued for consultation in February 2006. This identified key sustainability issues in Oxford. 25 sustainability objectives were selected covering a wide variety of environmental, social and economic issues such as flooding, biodiversity, climate change, energy efficiency, waste generation, affordable housing and economic growth.

The second stage is the production of the Sustainability Appraisal Report. A key element of the Sustainability Appraisal Report involves testing the Planning Obligations SPD against the SA objectives in order to identify likely positive or negative impacts. This assessment concluded that the Planning Obligations SPD is likely to have a positive impact on the environment by ensuring that it is clear what contributions will be necessary to make required environmental improvements or to mitigate against possible negative effects of new development on the environment. The SPD will also have beneficial social effects, as it will help to ensure that it is clear what need for new social infrastructure will be generated by new development, for example new adult care provision. With regard to economic objectives, the SPD clarifies how much need for new educational capacity is likely to be generated by new development. This could help meet the economic SA objective to develop a skilled workforce.

Two possible negative impacts were identified. One is that because formulae are stated for some planning obligations and not others, more attention may be placed on these. However, it has always been the case that formulae have been used to calculate some planning obligations and not others. That all main infrastructure needs are listed in one document will help to ensure that the whole range of planning obligations likely to be needed is secured.

The other potential negative effect is that development costs could be increased. There is a possible risk either that this could be passed on to house-buyers, decreasing the affordability of housing (although one planning obligation required is for affordable housing). However, the SPD makes it clear that it is expected that legitimate planning obligations should be taken off the land value. This could lead to non-viability of development required to meet Oxford's social and economic needs. Applicants who cite non-viability as the reason for not meeting all infrastructure requirements can support their case with financial evidence, which they should submit with the planning application.

The aim of planning obligations is only to ensure any negative effects of developments are mitigated against; therefore, a tool to make it clear what planning obligations are likely to be needed should help to ensure the right planning obligations will be negotiated. This will help achieve many sustainability objectives.

Monitoring will be important to ensure that any potential unexpected negative effects are identified.

The SA concluded that the overall impact of the Planning Obligations SPD on the 25 sustainability appraisal objectives is likely to be positive.