

Guide to Sustainability Appraisal in the South East

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Supplement to the Integrated Regional Framework 2004:
A Better Quality of Life in the South East

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Background

In 2004 a group of seven South East organisations jointly published the Integrated Regional Framework 2004: A Better Quality of Life in the South East (IRF).

The IRF creates a shared vision for the South East region, setting out 25 key objectives that will contribute to a better quality of life and sustainable development.

Sustainable development means planning for a more inclusive society which shares the benefits and wealth of economic success widely (for example delivering affordable housing, improving health and reducing poverty). It also means protecting and improving the environment (for example developing brownfield land before greenfield, reducing pollution and congestion) and conserving natural resources such as biodiversity, energy and water.

This new Guide to Sustainability Appraisal in the South East aims to encourage organisations, businesses and community groups to review their own plans and strategies against the region's 25 key objectives to see how each organisation can contribute to improving quality of life and sustainability in the region.

The 25 objectives, set out in checklist form on pages 6-7, all have a role to play in maintaining the South East's leading position both as an attractive place to live and visit and as a successful economy.

We hope that all organisations in the South East will use this guide to work out how they can contribute to the region's 25 key objectives, because by working together we can achieve change that will benefit everyone – from businesses who can save money by greater energy efficiency to voluntary sector groups who can help socially excluded people play a full role in the life of the South East.

This guide is a supplement to the full IRF document. It has been produced by seven partners: the South East England Regional Assembly; Government Office for the South East; South East England Development Agency; Environment Agency; Department of Health; South East Forum for Sustainability; and Regional Action and Involvement South East.

For more information on the full IRF visit the Regional Assembly website http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/our_work/planning/sus_dev/irf.html

A sustainable plan, strategy or activity is one that works within environmental limits and achieves a just society, through a sustainable economy, good governance, and sound science. This guide will help you to test how sustainable your plan, strategy or activity is, and make it more sustainable. This will help you in a number of ways, from saving money to reducing your environmental footprint.

What is sustainability appraisal?

Sustainability appraisal is a process that helps organisations to develop their plans, strategies or activities (they will be called 'plans' from now on) by assessing how sustainable they are. It can be done by using a straightforward checklist, shown at Figure 1 (See page 6-7). A sustainability appraisal can help to:

- Evaluate and compare different plan options
- Minimise negative impacts and maximise positive ones
- Demonstrate the plan's overall contribution to sustainability.

The UK Government has defined five principles of sustainability:

- Respecting the limits of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity
- Meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all
- Building a strong, stable and sustainable community which provides prosperity and opportunities for all, and in which environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them and efficient resource use is incentivised
- Ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty as well as public attitudes and values
- Actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society.

Defra (2005) Securing the Future,
<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk>

Who should use a sustainability appraisal checklist and why should we want to?

We all have a role in making the world more sustainable, for instance by reducing our climate change impacts and supporting our local communities. The sustainability appraisal checklist can be used by anyone, regardless of the type and size of organisation or plan.

Many organisations are already carrying out partial sustainability appraisals using other tools, for instance quality assurance standards or Investors in People. Some of the information in this guide may help to achieve these other standards. The other standards can also be expanded to become a full sustainability appraisal, by using the checklist.

Who should use it?	Why use it?
Community and voluntary sector groups, and Local Strategic Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● It provides a structure for comparing different approaches to a problem● It helps to make sure that decisions are well balanced and take all important factors into account● It shows how the group's activities meet government priorities and goals● It provides a broader view of how the organisation can contribute to sustainable development.
Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● It can help to identify opportunities for greater efficiency and lower costs, for instance opportunities to reduce waste, energy and water use, and the need to travel● It can improve relations with employees, clients, and the wider public.
Public sector organisations, eg health care trusts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● It can identify mutually beneficial links with other agencies or organisations● It can provide data to help inform and justify decisions● It can support other programmes, eg Investors in People.
Local/regional authorities with statutory sustainability appraisal functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● It is legally required for Development Plan Documents, Regional Spatial Strategies, Supplementary Planning Documents, some Community Strategies● It helps plans to become more sustainable, transparent and easier to understand● It is a productive use of time and resources¹.

¹ Therivel, R. and F. Walsh (2005) 'The Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive in the UK: One Year On', submitted to Environmental Impact Assessment Review, available at www.levett-therivel.co.uk; Therivel, R. and Minas, P., 2002. 'Ensuring effective SEA in a Changing Context', Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal 29(2), pp. 81–91.

How do we use the checklist?

Step 1.

Decide what you are appraising: Are you doing a quick check of a business or an idea or a plan? Are you comparing different ways of running your organisation? Are you fine-tuning the final version of a plan? You will need to put appropriate headings in the first row of the checklist on page 6.

Step 2.

Decide on the team: Who wants to be involved? Who makes the decisions? Who knows about your organisation's goals, ideas and plans? Who can give an independent view? Teams of two to five people are best.

Step 3.

Check the objectives in the first column of the checklist, which is based on the Integrated Regional Framework for the South East. Do all the objectives apply to the plan in question? Should some be added, deleted or reworded? Fine-tune them as appropriate.

Step 4.

For each objective in the first column of the checklist, ask yourself "will my plan, option or plan sub-component have a positive or negative impact on the objective (in the first column in the table)?" Put the answer in the appropriate cell. The answer can be + or -; or more detailed if appropriate.

Step 5.

If the plan has negative impacts, consider ways of reducing or eliminating them, and list them in the "suggested changes" column. If you are comparing options, identify the option that would have the most positive and least negative impacts.

If that option is strongly positive, and if it promotes a good mix of social, economic and environmental issues, then it is your preferred option in terms of sustainability; put it in the "preferred option" column and explain why.

If the most positive option still has many negative aspects, or if it is unbalanced (for instance if it strongly supports economic growth but would clearly harm the environment), then you may want to ask whether one of the other options is more sustainable overall, or you could try to identify new options that are more sustainable.

Figure 1. Sustainability appraisal checklist

Step 2.
Decide on the team. The checklist can be filled in by one person or by a group.

Step 3.
Fine-tune the sustainability objectives to fit the plan. More detailed questions are in the Integrated Regional Framework. More information on some topics is shown in this guide's section on 'taking sustainability appraisal further'.

Sustainability objectives from the Integrated Regional Framework: 'Will my plan/option have a positive or negative impact on...'	
Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone	
1.	Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, sustainably constructed and affordable home?
2.	Reduce the risk of flooding and the resulting detriment to public well-being, the economy and the environment?
3.	Improve the health and well-being of the population and reduce inequalities in health?
4.	Reduce poverty and social exclusion and close the gap between the most deprived areas in the South East and the rest of the region?
5.	Raise educational achievement levels across the region and develop the opportunities for everyone to acquire the skills needed to find and remain in work?
6.	Reduce crime and the fear of crime?
7.	Create and sustain vibrant communities?
8.	Improve accessibility to all services and facilities?
9.	Encourage increased engagement in cultural activity across all sections of the community in the South East?
Effective protection of the environment	
10.	Improve efficiency in land use through the re-use of previously developed land and existing buildings, including re-use of materials from buildings, and encourage urban renaissance?
11.	Reduce air pollution and ensure air quality continues to improve?
12.	Address the causes of climate change through reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and ensure that the South East is prepared for its impacts?
13.	Conserve and enhance the region's biodiversity?
14.	Protect, enhance and make accessible for enjoyment, the region's countryside and historic environment?
15.	Reduce road congestion and pollution levels by improving travel choice, and reducing the need for travel by car/lorry?
Prudent use of natural resources	
16.	Reduce the global, social and environmental impact of consumption of resources by using sustainably produced and local products?
17.	Reduce waste generation and disposal, and achieve the sustainable management of waste?
18.	Maintain and improve the water quality of the region's rivers and coasts, and achieve sustainable water resources management?
19.	Increase energy efficiency, and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources in the region?
Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth	
20.	Ensure high and stable levels of employment so everyone can benefit from the economic growth of the region?
21.	Sustain economic growth and competitiveness across the region?
22.	Stimulate economic revival in priority regeneration areas?
23.	Develop a dynamic, diverse and knowledge-based economy that excels in innovation with higher value, lower impact activities?
24.	Encourage the development of a buoyant, sustainable tourism sector?
25.	Develop and maintain a skilled workforce to support long-term competitiveness of the region?

What can we learn from the checklist?

The checklist can answer the following questions:

What aspects of sustainability does my plan cover particularly well or badly?

	Plan section			Suggested changes
	A	B	C	
	-	+	0	
Good, we'll keep this.	+	++	+	
	--	0	--	Bad, this needs to change.
	-	+	-	
	--	++	0	

What impacts does my plan have and what should I be doing about them?

	Plan section			Suggested changes
	A	B	C	
	-	+	0	Section A should be changed to...
	+	++	+	
	--	0	--	Ideas listed here.
	-	+	-	
	--	++	0	

Which of several options is the most sustainable?

	Plan section			Suggested changes
	A	B	C	
	-	+	0	B is preferred because...
	+	++	+	This one.
	--	0	--	
	-	+	-	
	--	++	0	

Taking sustainability appraisal further

There is much additional information on sustainability appraisal and related approaches. Below are some key documents to act as starting points. Most of these, in turn, include links to further information.

Further information on...	Most useful for				Name and web-link
	community and voluntary sector groups	businesses	public sector organisations	authorities with statutory appraisal functions	
Sustainable buildings	✓	✓	✓	✓	SustainNE Building-in Sustainability http://www.buildingsustainability.co.uk
		✓		✓	DTI Sustainable Construction http://www.dti.gov.uk/construction/sustain
		✓	✓	✓	Building Research Establishment BREEAM http://www.breeam.org
Sustainable resource use	✓	✓	✓	✓	Best Foot Forward Sustainability Accounting http://www.bestfootforward.com/sustacc.html
Sustainability for businesses		✓			UK government gateway to social responsibility http://www.societyandbusiness.gov.uk The Sigma Project Putting Sustainability into Practice http://www.projectsigma.com Forum for the Future Sustainability Pays http://www.forumforthefuture.org.uk/publications/Sustainabilitypays_page712.aspx Midlothian Enterprise Trust Success and Sustainability http://www.che.ac.uk/publications/successandsustainability.pdf
Sustainability for higher education institutions			✓		Forum for the Future Reporting for Sustainability http://www.forumforthefuture.org.uk/uploadstore/reporting.pdf
Sustainability for local planning authorities and other government agencies				✓	ODPM Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1161341 ODPM A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive http://www.odpm.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1143290
Assessing impacts on health			✓	✓	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence Health Impact Assessment Gateway http://www.publichealth.nice.org.uk/page.aspx?o=503066
Assessing impacts on rural communities			✓	✓	Countryside Agency What is Rural Proofing? http://www.countryside.gov.uk/EssentialServices/ruralProofing/index.asp
Eco-audit, environmental audit	✓	✓	✓	✓	Environmental Management and Audit Scheme http://www.emas.org.uk

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Related approaches

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) assesses the impacts of plans on the environment. It is legally required for certain plans and programmes under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Information on SEA is given in the ODPM's A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive.

Sustainability appraisal is legally required for local authority development plan documents, supplementary planning documents and regional spatial strategies under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Information on joint SEA and sustainability appraisal is given in the ODPM's guide Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents.

Health impact assessment and rural proofing deal with impacts on particular groups of people (those with health problems, those in rural communities). The 'further information' list includes links to these types of appraisal, which are often integrated with sustainability appraisal.

Eco-audit or environmental audit tests an organisation's environmental impacts. It may lead to a certification, for instance Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) or ISO14001.

Examples of sustainability appraisal

Voluntary sector: Oxfam GB

Oxfam GB has a policy on operational sustainability. It covers employment conditions within Oxfam and its suppliers, use of energy on Oxfam premises, air and car travel, materials used to manufacture products, waste disposal and recycling, and relationship with local communities.

Oxfam has set five performance indicators for these issues, each linked to a target. It will monitor whether these targets are being achieved.

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/about_us/suppliers/sustainability05.doc

Public sector: University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh has had an environmental policy since 1993 and a sustainability policy since 2000. It has a dedicated office that checks whether environmental and sustainability legislation is complied with, and that appraises and monitors the university's activities. It has policies on energy efficiency, utilities, transport, and waste management.

As a result, since 1990, the university's energy costs have been cut by 5% despite a doubling in student numbers; waste management costs have gone down every year; the university recycles 21% of its waste; a burst underground water main was discovered because of the monitoring of water consumption; and a university travel plan has been put in place.

<http://www.eso.ed.ac.uk/PoliciesAndReports/>

Business: Abbott Laboratories Ltd

Abbott Laboratories Ltd is a health care company based in Queenborough (Kent). It appraised its waste and energy consumption, and set up a waste reduction and resource/energy efficiency initiative. It also provided training for its workers, and influenced its suppliers through its purchasing policy.

Due to these actions, it now recycles 50% of its waste, and in 2004 reduced its energy consumption by about 10%, saving £69,000. It also improved its overall operational efficiency, in some areas by 50%.

http://www.seeda.co.uk/Publications/Sustainable_Development/docs/Sustainable_Business_Awards/2004/Abbott-LaboratoriesLtd.pdf

Local authority: Basingstoke and Dean Borough Council

Basingstoke has had a sustainability appraisal system in place since 1998. This was updated in June 2003 at a workshop to test a draft sustainability appraisal tool, which reflected the themes of the community strategy and council priorities. An updated version was then tested with members against a draft procurement strategy. They also used it as a basis for a newly formed street care team and discussions with the voluntary sector.

The appraisal has acted as a powerful mechanism to re-focus thinking about a range of outcomes, balancing national and local priorities, and has generated much discussion. It is also being used to inform strategies and officers have been using it to scope projects.

The tool is part of a larger toolkit to engage and embed corporate priorities. Work has begun on developing an electronic version which produces two graphs – one showing results against corporate priorities, and another results against the community strategy.

http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/our_work/planning/sus_dev/research_report-nov2004.doc

Sustainability appraisal under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

For those authorities that must carry out sustainability under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, South East specific issues to consider when carrying out such appraisals are:

Identifying other relevant policies, plans and programmes, and sustainability objectives (Task A1 in the ODPM guidance): See the 'Compendium of Regional Strategies Part of the Integrated Regional Framework 2004' (the red booklet in this series).

Collecting baseline information (Task A2): Useful baseline data for the region can be found at:

- South East England Intelligence Network
<http://www.see-in.co.uk>
- South East Public Health Observatory
<http://www.sepho.org.uk/>
- Regional Quality of Life Counts
<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk>
(regularly updated)
- South East England Regional Assembly monitoring reports
<http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/publications/monitoring.html>
- Audit Commission area profiles
<http://www.areaprofiles.audit-commission.gov.uk>

Identifying sustainability issues and problems

(Task A3): The following regional-level problems relating to the spatial development of the South East region were identified in the sustainability appraisal of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East, the 'South East Plan'. They may set a context for, and may also affect more local plans:

At regional level	In some sub-regional or local areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Housing supply, particularly a shortage of affordable housing which prevents 'key workers' and the low paid from living/working in many parts of the region ● Access and transport, addressing problems of access without placing further pressure on the region's stressed transport infrastructure ● Resource consumption and associated problems, particularly in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Climate change and energy use, achieving targets for greenhouse gas reductions - Waste management - Water usage and resources, ensuring that increasing demand for water can be controlled and provided for. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Flooding and flood zones ● Poverty and social exclusion, and regeneration ● Land use, providing new houses and employment land etc on derelict and vacant land in urban areas, rather than using greenfield sites ● Biodiversity ● Countryside and the historic environment.

Developing the sustainability appraisal (SA) framework

(Task A4): The Integrated Regional Framework provides a useful basis for developing the SA framework.

Contact for further information on the South East's approach to sustainability appraisal

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