

Sustainability Appraisal Report
RUNCORN TOWN CENTRE SPD

Sustainability Appraisal Report

RUNCORN TOWN CENTRE SPD

HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Non-TECHNICAL Summary

INTRODUCTION

Runcorn Town Centre is one of three main shopping locations within Halton Borough. Halton Borough Council has prepared a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to update and build upon the Council's previous 1997 Town Centre Strategy and develop the opportunities set out within the draft Runcorn Town Centre Strategy issued for public consultation in February 2007. Runcorn Town Centre was also identified as a key Action Area for Regeneration as a result of the new bridge proposed across the River Mersey. The new bridge is intended to become the main crossing over the Mersey with the Silver Jubilee Bridge acting as a crossing for local traffic, buses, pedestrians and cyclists. Some of the existing road infrastructure associated with the Silver Jubilee Bridge will therefore be removed and reconfigured. This would result in some areas of land becoming available for development and enables the existing road infrastructure into Runcorn Town Centre to be improved.

The Vision for the SPD is therefore to: *'re-establish Runcorn Town Centre as a vibrant waterside location that provides for the day to day shopping needs of its immediate catchment whilst offering a wider complementary function to the neighbouring town centre, as a focus for local independent shops, niche retailers and service providers, and as a centre for cultural and leisure activity'*.

The key objectives of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD are:

Objective 1 – Enhance Employment Role: Initiate physical redevelopment of Runcorn Station Gateway for high value employment uses, following environmental and secured by design principles utilising the improved access and visibility, achieved through de-linking of A553 (and 'loops') infrastructure.

Objective 2 – Expand Specialist Retail & Leisure Role: Providing accommodation and development opportunities for the refocusing of the role of the Town Centre for specialist niche traders to complement the roles of the Borough's other town centres and capitalise on the 'market town' appeal. Initiate physical opportunities for the development of leisure uses in the Town Centre – particularly in the new Canal Quarter- to develop a vibrant, cultural and safe day and night-time economy building on the achievements at The Brindley.

Objective 3 – Improve Community Facilities: Provide opportunities for the development of improved services and public realm upgrades across the Town Centre. This should focus on protecting, managing and enhancing the cultural, built and natural environment and promoting cycle and walking facilities between the Station, Town Centre, surrounding residential neighbourhoods and the waterside. Re-open the closed section of the Bridgewater Canal to meet the Manchester Ship Canal for business and leisure travel uses. Utilise the Halton draft Parking & Access (2008) study to achieve improved parking and accessibility.

Objective 4 – Enhance Public Transport: Rationalise the existing A553 road infrastructure through de-linking providing improved and simplified bus access to Runcorn Town Centre and Runcorn Rail Station via the Town Viaduct and High Street and new Station Gateway Quarter. Consider options to re-model the existing bus station to enhance circulation.

Objective 5 – Increase & Diversify Housing Offer: Increase and diversify the housing offer within Runcorn, providing resource efficient and affordable housing – with a particular focus on developing sites made available through communications infrastructure removal in Runcorn Town Centre to meet forecast population expansion. Build on waterfront achievements at The Deck to encourage development of housing within the Canal Quarter. This would establish a north-south activity corridor that supports food, drink and complementary uses for the sustainability and wider regeneration of the Town Centre and expand the user-base of the Town Centre's retail and leisure offer.

Objective 6 – Sustainable Development: To use land, energy and water resources prudently, minimising the production of waste and increasing re-use, recycling and recovery of waste.

Waterman Energy, Environment & Design (WEED) was appointed to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD in

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order to meet the requirements of planning legislation¹ and regulations². The combined SEA and SA process is subsequently referred to as SA only. The main purpose of SA is to test whether implementation of the SPD is likely to have any significant environmental, social or economic effects. Where significant negative effects are identified, recommendations are made as to how these could be avoided, offset or reduced. Recommendations are made on how to enhance beneficial effects. A draft programme to monitor significant effects is also required.

This document forms the Non Technical Summary of the SA Report. The SA has been undertaken on behalf of Halton Borough Council (HBC) by WEED.

THE SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL PROCESS

The assessment to date has comprised four stages as follows:

- Determining the key issues upon which the SA should focus and setting and agreeing sustainability objectives, a process known as 'Scoping';
- Appraisal of the objectives and options for Runcorn Town Centre. The options were considered as part of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy;
- Appraisal of the Initial Draft SPD; and
- Appraisal of the Consultation Draft SPD, referred to as the 'SA Report' (this report).

SCOPING

The aim of the scoping stage is to determine the key environmental, social and economic issues arising in the SPD area and the borough as a whole and to devise the framework for assessing the plan.

After documenting the sustainability characteristics of the area, and identifying any trends (i.e. is the situation getting better or worse?), other planning documents and policies were reviewed to see how these would influence the SA and the SPD. From the outputs of these two initial stages, the key environmental, social and economic issues and opportunities that relate to the area, and on which the assessment should focus, were established. These issues are described below.

Key Sustainability Issues and Baseline

Key sustainability issues have been identified from the review of planning documentation, information on the existing sustainability characteristics of Runcorn Town Centre and the Borough as a whole and following discussions with HBC. These are described below.

Economic

The Mersey ward, within which the Runcorn Town Centre SPD is located, has a similar economic activity rate compared to the average for Halton Borough Council although this is lower than the North West and England as a whole. The proportion of working age people in the with 'higher end' skills such as a university degree is similar to the Borough but lower than the region, the Greater Merseyside sub region and Great Britain.

There is a reliance on a narrow range of employment sectors such as the manufacturing industry and wholesale and retail trade.

The rate of new business development is slightly above the national average but the survival rate of new business is below the national average.

¹ Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004)

² Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004).

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Social

Health standards in Halton Borough are amongst the worst in the country, with life expectancy in the Borough well below the national average.

Levels of crime in Halton are fairly high compared to the rest of the country. However, the actual overall crime rate has seen a decrease in 2007 and all areas of crime apart from burglary, criminal damage and other offences have seen a decrease.

There is increased demand for affordable housing as there have been significant house price increases across Halton over the last five years, although house prices are still well below the national average. The number of single person households is increasing and there is an increased demand for supported housing for the elderly.

Environmental

The chemical and tanning industries have left the Borough of Halton with a serious problem of contaminated and derelict land which can be an obstacle to regeneration. Despite intense efforts to deal with the huge legacy of dereliction and contamination, a great deal of such land remains. River quality in Halton is below the regional average and no rivers are classed as being of very good quality. However the quality of rivers such as the Mersey is improving.

Runcorn Town Centre is at a low risk of flooding from rivers or the sea although the flood risks associated with the Manchester Ship Canal are unknown.

There has been an increase in the total amount of municipal waste produced in the Borough although there has been a very slight increase in the amount of waste recovered and composted.

There are a number of listed buildings within the SPD Boundary and there is also a reasonable probability of intact archaeological deposits in some areas. The Mersey Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) is adjacent to the SPD boundary.

SA Objectives

Based on the key issues and the objectives developed during the production of the Core Strategy Scoping Report, eighteen SA Objectives were developed as shown below.

- 1) To continue reducing the unemployment rate in Halton and increase the economic activity rate;
- 2) To improve educational attainment and opportunities for lifelong learning and employment;
- 3) To encourage sustainable economic growth and business development;
- 4) To improve the competitiveness and productivity of business;
- 5) To enhance the vitality and viability of the three town centres (Runcorn Town Centre, Halton Lea and Widnes);
- 6) To improve and promote the overall image of the Borough in order to attract investment;
- 7) To improve health and reduce health inequalities;
- 8) To improve safety and reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime;
- 9) To provide well designed, good quality, affordable and resource efficient housing;
- 10) To improve access to basic goods, services and amenities;
- 11) To ensure access to high quality public open space and natural greenspace;
- 12) To reduce social exclusion, deprivation and social inequalities;
- 13) To minimise the risk of flooding in relation to both new & existing development whilst protecting, improving and where necessary, restoring the quality of inland, estuarine and coastal waters;
- 14) To protect, enhance and manage biodiversity;
- 15) To minimise the production of waste and increase reuse, recycling and recovery rates;
- 16) To improve air quality by reducing the need to travel and improving choice and use of sustainable transport modes and reducing air pollution from other sources;

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- 17) To protect, enhance and manage the rich diversity of the cultural and built environment and archaeological assets; and
- 18) To use land, energy, and water resources prudently and efficiently, and increase energy generated from renewable sources.

Consultations on the Scope

Consultations on the key issues and SA objectives were undertaken in December 2008/January 2009 with English Heritage, Natural England (formerly English Nature and the Countryside Agency), and the Environment Agency to confirm that they were in agreement with the findings of the initial stages, and to provide an opportunity to suggest changes to the assessment. Consultation with these bodies is a legal requirement however in addition, the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service was also included in the consultation exercise. No changes were made to the objectives listed above but revisions were made to the indicators and targets in some cases.

INITIAL SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL (JANUARY 2008 – MARCH 2008)

One of the requirements of SA is to consider alternative approaches to achieving the objectives of the plan, so that the effects of these alternatives can be assessed.

Two options for the Runcorn Town Centre SPD Area were assessed against the agreed SA objectives. The purpose of this appraisal, known as an 'Initial Sustainability Appraisal', was to help to guide the Council on choosing their Preferred Option. Whilst each option had some positive and negative elements, Halton Borough Council was able to use the analysis together with public consultation and economic analysis to choose and refine the Preferred Option.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF PREFERRED OPTION (JANUARY 2009)

This stage of the SA involved predicting the environmental, social and economic effects that were likely to result from the implementation of the Preferred Option, and then evaluating the significance of the predicted effects. A sustainability appraisal was undertaken on the initial draft of the SPD to identify whether the sustainability performance of the SPD could be improved and provide recommendations for improvement, where appropriate. These recommendations were incorporated into the Consultation Draft SPD which was re-assessed against the SA Framework. The results are summarised below.

Significant Positive Effects

Significant positive effects include:

Objective SA4 - there will be significant positive effects on the competitiveness and productivity of business through the provision of new business sites and improved accessibility;

Objective SA5 – the SPD should have a significant positive effect on the vitality and viability of Runcorn Town Centre through improved access into the town, redevelopment of new sites and existing vacant and underdeveloped sites and improvements to the public realm.

Objective SA6 – the overall image of the Borough will be improved and promoted through the redevelopment of the road system to improve accessibility, the provision of new business and leisure sites, the provision of new quality housing and the improvement and development of greenspaces and public realm;

Objective SA8 – The provision of greater employment opportunities should have knock-on effects in improving issues associated with deprivation, such as crime. New developments are required to incorporate the principles of Secured by Design;

Objective SA10 – Promotion of walking and cycling and delinking of the existing infrastructure associated with the Silver Jubilee Bridge should result in improved access; and

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Objective SA11 – public realm improvements, the development and improvement of pedestrian and cycle routes and potential improvements to the waterside and Canalside environments will enhance access to high quality public open space and natural greenspace.

Significant Negative Effects

No negative effects have been identified.

Significant Uncertainties

There are a number of cases where the effect of the plan is uncertain. Significant uncertainties include:

Objective SA2 – Links to existing educational establishments should be improved but new residential development could put pressure on existing schools and colleges;

Objective SA7 – New residential development could put pressure on existing health facilities. However, the development of new amenity spaces and pedestrian and cycle routes will help to encourage active lifestyles;

Objective SA18 - new developments will make efficient use of land by reusing brownfield sites but the construction of new buildings will involve energy and resource use.

Mitigation Measures

SA Guidance requires that measures should be considered to prevent, reduce or offset any significant negative effects that have been identified during the assessment process.

Where uncertainties have been identified during the assessment process, mitigation measures have been proposed to prevent or reduce the severity of the effect. For example, requiring new developments to meet specific environmental standards such as BREEAM and/or Code for Sustainable Homes.

HOW THE ASSESSMENT HAS INFLUENCED THE PLAN

The process of undertaking sustainability appraisal on the emerging options for the Runcorn Town Centre SPD is an interactive process which informs the option development process. This has resulted in:

- Revisions to the SPD objectives as a result of the initial SA stages;
- Guiding the selection and wording of the Preferred Option; and
- Recommending mitigation measures to include within the Preferred Option.

MONITORING PROPOSALS

The monitoring proposals will allow action to be taken to reduce and/or offset any significant effects on society, economy and the environment. Where possible the monitoring will make use of existing arrangements, such as those reported in the Halton Borough Council Annual Monitoring Report. The recommended monitoring includes:

- The amount of new employment development;
- Level of crime within the area;
- The number and proportion of total new build completions on housing sites reaching very good, good, average and poor ratings against the Building for Life criteria;
- Proportion of journeys on foot or by cycle; and
- The accessibility of Halton's Natural Green spaces.

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NEXT STEPS

The SPD and Sustainability Appraisal will be made available to a wide audience of consultees including the general public to enable them to comment. The responses will be reviewed and changes made to the SPD, where considered appropriate. Should significant changes be made to the SPD, these will be subject to further Sustainability Appraisal. The SPD will then be formally adopted by Halton Borough Council.

**Runcorn Town Centre Spd Sustainability Appraisal
Report**

The Final Sustainability Appraisal Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

Runcorn Town Centre is one of three main shopping locations within Halton Borough. Halton Borough Council has prepared a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to update and build upon the Council's previous 1997 Town Centre Strategy and develop the opportunities set out within the draft Runcorn Town Centre Strategy issued for public consultation in February 2007. Runcorn Town Centre was also identified within the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy as one of five key Action Areas for Regeneration as a result of the new bridge proposed across the River Mersey. The Regeneration Strategy focuses on the regeneration opportunities that the proposed second crossing of the Mersey Gateway will create and how those opportunities may be realised.

The new bridge is intended to become the main crossing over the Mersey with the Silver Jubilee Bridge acting as a crossing for local traffic, buses, pedestrians and cyclists. Some of the existing road infrastructure associated with the Silver Jubilee Bridge will therefore be removed and reconfigured. This would result in some areas of land, including land within Runcorn Town Centre, becoming available for development and enables the existing road infrastructure into Runcorn Town Centre to be improved.

The Regeneration Strategy reviewed the issues and options for future development within each of the five key Action Areas and a Preferred Option for each area was selected based on community consultation, the Sustainability Appraisal and Economic Viability Analysis. The Regeneration Strategy does not contain policies but was adopted by Halton Borough Council (HBC) to guide future policy development. The Preferred Option for Runcorn Town Centre and policies to guide the regeneration of this area have now been formalised in a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The Runcorn Town Centre SPD has been prepared by GVA Grimley on behalf of Halton Borough Council (HBC).

Waterman Energy, Environment & Design (WEED) was appointed to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD in order to meet the requirements of planning legislation³ and regulations⁴. The combined SEA and SA process is subsequently referred to as SA only. The main purpose of SA is to test whether implementation of the SPD is likely to have any significant environmental, social or economic effects. If significant negative effects are identified, recommendations are made as to how these can be avoided, offset or reduced. Recommendations are also made on how to enhance beneficial effects. A programme to monitor significant effects is also required. The SA of the SPD draws upon the SA undertaken of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy which included an assessment of the objectives and options for Runcorn Town Centre. The draft SPD was then reviewed against the Sustainability Appraisal Framework and advice and guidance was provided aid GVA Grimley and HBC to finalise the SPD for consultation.

This report provides a summary of the SA undertaken including the Scoping Stage, the Initial SA of the Runcorn Town Centre Objectives and Options, the SA of the initial draft SPD and the SA of the Consultation Draft SPD.

2. THE RUNCORN TOWN CENTRE SPD

The Vision for the SPD is therefore to: *'re-establish Runcorn Town Centre as a vibrant waterside location that provides for the day to day shopping needs of it's immediate catchment whilst offering a wider complementary function to the neighbouring town centre, as a focus for local independent shops, niche retailers and service providers, and as a centre for cultural and leisure activity'*.

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⁴ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004).

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Objective 6 – Sustainable Development: To use land, energy and water resources prudently, minimising the production of waste and increasing re-use, recycling and recovery of waste.

3. THE SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL PROCESS

3.1 BACKGROUND

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires Sustainability Appraisals (SAs) to be carried out on Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS), Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). SAs help planning authorities to fulfil the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in preparing their plans through a structured assessment of the objectives and policies against key sustainability issues for the area.

Planning Policy Statement PPS 1: Creating Sustainable Communities⁵ sets out the Government's vision and policies and proposals for achieving sustainable development. It states that:

'A Sustainability Appraisal is intended to assess the impact of plan policies from an environmental, economic and social perspective. It is first and foremost a process. It is intended to test the performance of a plan against the objectives of sustainable development and thereby provide the basis for its improvement.'

In line with Government guidance, the SA is also designed to meet the requirements of EU Directive 2001/04 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive or SEA Directive. The Directive applies to a wide range of plans and programmes, including SPDs. SEA is a process to ensure that significant environmental effects arising from policies, plans and programmes are identified, assessed, mitigated, communicated to decision-makers, monitored and that opportunities for public involvement are provided.

⁵ Planning Policy Statement 1: Creating Sustainable Communities, ODPM, 2004.

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The objective of the SEA Directive is:

'to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans, with a view to promoting sustainable development'⁶.

3.2 THE APPROACH

SEA and SA are very closely related. SA aims to integrate sustainability issues into decision making by appraising the plan or strategy using environmental, social and economic objectives. SEA also aims to facilitate sustainable development but its emphasis is on integrating environmental considerations into decision making through a thorough analysis of environmental issues.

The approach adopted in this SA incorporates the requirements of the SEA Regulations and follows the stages of the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (formerly the ODPM) guidance⁷, as set out below.

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

A1: Identify other relevant policies, plans and programmes and sustainability objectives

A2: Collect baseline information

A3: Identify sustainability issues and problems

A4: Develop the SA Framework

A5: Consult on the scope of the SA

Stage B: Developing and Refining Options and Assessing Effects

B1: Test the SPD objectives against the SA Framework

B2: Develop the SPD options

B3: Predict the effects of the SPD

B4: Evaluate the effects of the SPD

B5: Consider ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising beneficial effects

B6: Propose measures to monitor the significant effects of implementing the SPD

Stage C: Preparing the SA Report

C1: Prepare the SA Report

Stage D: Consult on the Preferred Options of the SPD and the SA Report

D1: Enable public participation on the Preferred Options of the SPD and the SA Report

D2: Appraise significant changes

D3: Make decisions and provide information

Stage E: Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the SPD

E1: Finalise aims and methods for monitoring

E2: Respond to adverse effects

⁶ EC Directive 2001/42/EC

⁷ 'Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents, department of Communities and Local Government (formerly ODPM), 2005

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This report represents Stage C of the above process and follows on from a Scoping Stage and an Initial SA which assessed two options for development and the draft SPD.

3.3 SEA SIGNPOSTING

The SEA Directive, as implemented by the Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, places certain requirements which must be addressed through the assessment and reporting process. These are the same for all SEA assessments, irrespective of whether or not they are incorporated into Sustainability Appraisal, as they are in this case.

The following table lists the requirements of the Directive, and provides sign-posting as to where in the Sustainability Appraisal Report they have been covered.

Table 3.1: Requirements of the SEA Directive

Requirements of the SEA Directive	Where covered in appraisal process
Preparation of an environmental report in which the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme, and reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated. The information to be given is (Art. 5 and Annex 1):	
a) An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes;	Section 2
b) The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme;	Section 5 and Appendix B
c) The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected;	Section 5 and Appendix B
d) Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme, including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43 EEC;	Section 5 and Appendix B
e) The environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental, considerations have been taken into account during its preparation;	Section 5 and Appendix A
f) The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological, heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors. (Footnote: These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects);	Section 7 and Appendix F
g) The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;	Section 7
h) An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information;	Sections 6 and 7
i) A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with Art. 10;	Section 8
j) A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.	Non Technical Summary
The report must include the information that may reasonably be required taking into account current knowledge and methods of assessment, the contents and level of detail in the plan or	Ongoing throughout the

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Requirements of the SEA Directive	Where covered in appraisal process
programme, its stage in the decision-making process and the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process to avoid duplication of the assessment (Art. 5.2).	appraisal process and report writing
<p>Consultation: Authorities with environmental responsibility, when deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information which must be included in the environmental report (Art. 5.4).</p> <p>Authorities with environmental responsibility and the public, shall be given an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinion on the draft plan or programme and the accompanying environmental report before the adoption of the plan or programme (Art. 6.1, 6.2).</p>	Section 5 and Appendix C
Other EU Member States, where the implementation of the plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment of that country (Art. 7)	N/A. Effects on other EU member states are not envisaged.
<p>Provision of information on the decision: When the plan or programme is adopted, the public and any countries consulted under Art. 7 must be informed and the following made available to those informed: the plan or programme as adopted a statement summarising how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental report of Article 5, the opinions expressed pursuant to Article 6 and the results of consultations entered into pursuant to Art. 7 have been taken into account in accordance with Art. 8 and the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and the measures decided concerning monitoring (Art. 9).</p>	This will be prepared at adoption.
Monitoring of the significant environmental of the plan's or programme's implementation (Art.10)	Recommended monitoring is set out in Section 8.
Quality Assurance: environmental reports should be of a sufficient standard to meet the requirements of the SEA Directive	All the SA Reports are checked to ensure they are of a sufficient standard.

4. SA REPORT STRUCTURE

This SA Report has been structured as follows:

Section 5 provides details of the scoping stage of the SA. This includes the other relevant plans, programmes and strategies that have been taken into consideration as part of the assessment process; a summary baseline characterisation of the social, economic, and environmental information for Runcorn Town Centre; a summary of the key sustainability issues based on the baseline research; and the Sustainability Appraisal Framework which provides the structure through which the assessment has taken place.

Section 6 provides details of the Initial SA including the review of the objectives and options for Runcorn Town Centre against the SA objectives.

Section 7 presents a summary of the findings of the SA of the Preferred Option.

Section 8 suggests methods of monitoring the predicted significant effects and uncertainties.

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Section 9 describes the next steps towards implementation of the SPD.

Appendices are contained within a separate document and include further detail on the baseline information, full Sustainability Appraisal Framework and appraisal undertaken.

A **Non Technical Summary (NTS)** has also been prepared to provide a summary, in non-technical language, of the principal findings of the SA.

5. SA SCOPING

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The first phase of the SA was a Scoping Report, which identified the key issues facing Runcorn Town Centre and set out 18 Sustainability Objectives against which the SPD would be assessed.

The objectives that were used to test whether the SPD contributes towards achieving sustainable development were taken from those developed during the production of the Core Strategy SA Scoping Report. These were amended, where applicable to ensure that they remained appropriate to the SPD. A summary of the findings of the Scoping Report are set out below and in Appendices A and B. Consultation responses are set out in Appendix C.

5.2 REVIEW OF RELEVANT STRATEGIES, PLANS AND PROGRAMMES

A formal review of relevant policies, plans and programmes (PPPs) was carried out by the Council as part of the SA process for the Core Strategy. A further exercise was undertaken as part of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy SA scoping exercise, to identify issues, visions and problems within the PPPs of relevance to the SPD. This process reconsidered the following documents:

- International PPPs;
- National PPPs;
- Regional PPPs; and
- Local PPPs.

The main PPP of relevance to the Runcorn Town Centre SPD is the Halton Borough Council Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy. However, a number of other documents contain sustainability objectives and targets and these have been incorporated into the SA Framework, where applicable. The list of PPPs reviewed is contained within Appendix A.

When considering this list, it is important to recognise that no list or review of relevant PPPs can ever be exhaustive and may be added to, as and when required.

5.3 BASELINE CHARACTERISATION

WEED and Halton Borough Council collected information about the current and likely future state of the environment, economy and society at the Scoping Stage to allow the effects of the SPD to be adequately predicted. The baseline data collected has been summarised in the SA Framework in Appendix B. A review of this data has been undertaken in preparing this report to ensure that it remains appropriate.

Trends in performance (i.e. whether something is getting better or worse) were identified where possible and indicator performance was also gauged in relation to wider geographical areas (e.g. regions) where comparable data was available. Key issues identified by the baseline data review are summarised in Table 5.1 below.

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Table 5.1: Economic, Social and Environmental Issues facing Runcorn Town Centre

Key Issues	Source
Economic	
<p>Unemployment - The official claimant count unemployment rate in Halton halved between 1992 and 1998 and has halved again since. Unemployment rates have generally been some 40% to 50% higher than regional averages though the gap is now narrowing and is presently 15% to 20% higher. In December 2004 the average claimant count was 2.6% compared with the North West average of 2.2%.</p>	<p>'Halton: Gateway to Prosperity' 2005-2008</p>
<p>Disparity in employment – There remain significant concentrations of unemployment in the 20-29 age band for both males and females. There are also concentrations of unemployment for males in the 30-39 age band and for females in the 17-19 band.</p>	<p>'Halton: Gateway to Prosperity' 2005-2008</p>
<p>Access to Employment –76.2% of people aged 16-59/64 in Halton are economically active and in full time employment, whilst 23.8% are economically inactive and unemployed. This compares to 76.8% of people aged 16-59/64 in the North West who are economically active and in full time employment with 23.2% economically inactive and unemployed. In Great Britain as a whole 78.6% are economically active and 21.4% are economically inactive.</p>	<p>Office of National Statistics, January 2007 – December 2007</p>
<p>The need to raise the levels of education & skills – The proportion of working age people with 'higher end' skills in Halton is lower than Great Britain, the region and the Greater Merseyside sub region. In 2006, 16.8% of people were qualified to at least NVQ level 4 (a university degree), compared to 26.6% in Great Britain, 24.8% in the North West and 21.3% in Greater Merseyside. Halton's figures have improved by 0.6% since 2005, however other comparator towns saw an average improvement of 3-4%.</p> <p>22.5% of people in Halton also possessed either no qualifications, or were qualified to NVQ level 1 equivalent in 2006. This is compared to 22.25% in Great Britain, 20.64% regionally, and 20.49% in Greater Merseyside. Whilst this is a big improvement from the 2002-03 figure when 41.7% of the working age population in Halton possessed either no qualifications or were only qualified to NVQ level 1, other areas have improved even more leaving Halton in a worse rank in 2006 than it was in 2002.</p>	<p>The State of the Borough Jan 2008</p>
<p>The need to develop the Knowledge Economy – Halton is one of the lowest ranking districts in the country (374th out of 408) in terms of the proportion of knowledge workers in the resident population. In 2003 it was 343rd so there has been a relative decrease in the number of knowledge workers.</p>	<p>The State of the Borough Jan 2008</p>
<p>The need to foster enterprise and entrepreneurship – The level of entrepreneurship is slightly above average with a new business formation rate of 9.9% compared to the national average of 9.4%. The two year survival rate of new business has declined to a level of 79% down from 81.2% in 2000-2002 and compares unfavourably with other comparators including the Great Britain average of 82.1%.</p>	<p>The State of the Borough Jan 2008</p>
<p>Reliance on a narrow economic base and low wage economy – With the exception of chemicals, most local high value added wealth-creating sectors are under-represented within the local economy. Local specialisation is predominantly based within sectors that generate below (local) average GDP per employee, and lower value-added sectors account for close to 60% of estimated GDP.</p> <p>The median gross weekly earnings (full time for resident workers) in 2007 was £427 per week for residents of Halton, compared with £430 for the North West, and £460 for the UK.</p>	<p>'Halton: Gateway to Prosperity' 2005-2008</p> <p>Nomis 2007</p>
<p>The need to improve the Economy – Halton's economy is relatively small by national standards (the economic scale score of 83.5 is below the national average which is benchmarked to an index score of 100), with low shares of Gross Value Added (GVA) and employment.</p>	<p>The State of the Borough Jan 2008</p>

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Key Issues	Source
<p>The need to revitalise the Town Centres – Runcorn Town centre lacks the usual high street nationals but has over 180 shop units and almost 145,000 Sq ft (13,500m²) of retail floor space, with streets with a unique character and a reasonable quality of external environment. The % of vacant units in Halton Lea and Widnes have increased whilst the % in Runcorn Town Centre has decreased since 1995.</p>	Runcorn Town Centre SPD
<p>The image of the Borough – In 2003 the Council undertook a review of how people and organisations perceived both the Council and the Borough. It discovered that there is limited recognition of Halton in the wider regional and national arenas, in some instances, almost complete lack of awareness of Halton and what it has to offer. There is a tendency not to promote Halton's successes, and too much emphasis on the negative rather than the positive.</p>	'Halton: Gateway to Prosperity' 2005-2008
Social	
<p>The need to improve health & life expectancy – statistics show that health standards in Halton are amongst the worst in the country, with life expectancy in the Borough well below the national average. Women in Halton can expect to live an average of 78.4 years and men to live an average of 74.3 years. This compares to a life expectancy of 80.3 years for woman and 75.75 years for men for the North West.</p> <p>Halton remains relatively unhealthy, ranked 383rd out of 408 districts in the country, compared to 384th three years ago.</p>	North West Public Health Observatory, 2008. The State of the Borough Jan 2008
<p>Long-term ill – 41% of Halton's households have one or more persons with a limiting long-term illness, in comparison to 38.4% of households in the North West and 34.1% in England.</p>	2001 Census
<p>Ageing residents & the need to grow the health-care sector - The 2001 Census shows that 18% of Halton's population were aged 60 or over. The Department of Health suggests that number of very elderly people will rise over the next thirty years and this will increase demands on the NHS and social care providers. Therefore, the effectiveness and efficiency of services must be maximised, and the need for services must be minimised by reducing morbidity and disability in later life.</p>	2001 Census Department of Health
<p>Perception of crime levels and fear of crime – crime / community safety was the top concern for the public, mentioned by four out of five survey respondents as one of the three biggest problems for Halton.</p> <p>Levels of crime in Halton are fairly high; By 2006-07, the total crime score had risen from 103.6 to 114.0 a figure just below the regional average, but 14% above that for England and Wales. In 2002-07 Halton's rank was 79th out of 376 in terms of total offences per 1000 population. This is compared to 140th for 2003-04.</p> <p>The actual overall crime rate has seen a 1% decrease in 2007 and all areas of crime apart from burglary, criminal damage and other offences have seen a decrease.</p>	'Quality of Life Survey' of 1999 The State of the Borough Jan 2008 Cheshire Police, 2007
<p>Increased demand for affordable housing – There has been significant house price increases across Halton over the last 5 years but they are still below the average house prices. The average house price in Halton is £116,000 compared to an average house price of £174,000 in England and Wales.</p>	Land Registry, House Price Index Report, August 2008
<p>Providing an appropriate and balanced housing supply – The average household size has fallen from 2.8 in 1991 to 2.44 in 2001, and the proportion of single person households has increased from 22.7% to 27% over the same period.</p> <p>The over 75-year-old group has increased by 17%, which will affect the demand for supported housing provision.</p>	Housing Strategy 2005/06 to 2007/08
<p>Improve access to Services– Halton is ranked 138th out of 408 districts in Great Britain, for accessibility and connectivity, down slightly from its 2002 rank of 120th.</p> <p>Halton has an overall connectivity score of 60.4 (indexed against Great Britain), slightly</p>	State of the Borough, 2008. A Community Strategy

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Key Issues	Source
<p>below the regional figure of 66.7, and below the national benchmark of 100.</p> <p>The quality and distribution of libraries, One Stop Shops, Post Offices, employment centres and other community resources are an important factor in the quality of life of residents.</p>	for a Sustainable Halton, 2006-2011, Halton Borough Council 2006.
<p>Improve access to Services to those who do not own cars – 29% of all households in Halton do not have access to a car or van. However, there are striking differences between wards with 45% of households in Castlefields; 38% in Riverside; 37% in Halton Lea; 36% in Mersey; and only 6% of households in Beechwood, not having access to a vehicle.</p>	2001 Census
<p>Amount, location and access to Recreational Space – no ward within Halton currently meets the minimum standard of 0.3 hectares of equipped play facilities per 1,000 population, and very few have sufficient areas of formal open space.</p>	PMP Open Space study.
<p>Deprivation – In the 2007 IMD, Halton was rated as one of the most deprived districts in England, but its ranking has improved from 21st in 2004 to 30th in 2007 (out of 354 districts in England). There is a high amount of inequality within the district.</p>	2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) State of the Borough Jan 2008
Environmental	
<p>Quality of the Natural Environment – the different elements of the natural environment have been benchmarked, including indicators of weather, tranquillity and natural beauty. Halton scores 72 as an index where the English average is 100, ranking it 249th out of 354 districts in England for the quality of its natural environment.</p>	State of the Borough Jan 2008
<p>Conserving biodiversity, habitats and species – There are 2 habitats and 7 species that are of particular interest within Halton these are: Saltmarsh, Reedbed, Bluebell, Purple Hairstreak Butterfly, Great Crested Newt, Redshank, Skylark, Song thrush and Reed bunting. However, Runcorn Town Centre is not designated for its nature conservation interest and there is no Saltmarsh, Reedbed, Purple Hairstreak Butterfly, Great Crested Newt, Redshank, Skylark, Song thrush or Reed bunting recorded on the Local BAP within or near to the Runcorn Town Centre SPD area.</p>	Halton Biodiversity Action Plan, 2003
<p>Ecological Designations - The Mersey Estuary SPA, Ramsar Site and SSSI is adjacent to the SPD boundary. An Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken as part of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy proposals.</p>	English Nature (now Natural England), April 2005
<p>Waste Management – Halton Borough Council deals with about 65,000 tonnes of 'household' waste per year (including the waste which is recycled) (2008). All of this waste goes to make up the total 'municipal' waste in Halton. A kerbside recycling collection scheme is run by the Borough for paper and green waste. A recent kerbside pilot programme for a fortnightly collection of mixed recyclables has been introduced to approximately 6,000 properties in the Borough.</p> <p>Recycling and composting rates have risen from 16% in 2002/03 to 25% in 2006/07. The rate of waste growth has also slowed down and municipal solid waste is projected to increase at +1.25% pa, declining to +1%pa from 2010.</p>	Halton's Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2008 - 2020
<p>Transport congestion & pollution – The major and overriding congestion problem within the Borough is largely restricted to the approaches to the Silver Jubilee Bridge, which performs both a local function, linking Widnes and Runcorn, and a strategic role for the region. Flows on the bridge regularly reach 90,000 vehicles per day, exceeding its theoretical capacity by 50%.</p>	Local Transport Plan 2 (LTP2), March 2006
<p>Air Quality – A 12-month nitrogen dioxide roadside survey was completed in September 2004. No exceedences were found within the boundaries of the SPD. There are no AQMAs within the Borough.</p>	Provisional LTP2

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Key Issues	Source
<p>Protecting cultural & built heritage – There are a number of listed structures within the Runcorn Town Centre SPD area including the Aethelfleda Railway Bridge (Grade II Listed). There are no conservation areas within the SPD boundary. Runcorn Town Centre has the potential to develop as a Market Town.</p> <p>There is a reasonable probability of intact archaeological deposits in some areas within the SPD boundary, particularly along the boundary with the Manchester Ship canal/River Mersey.</p>	English Heritage (2005)
<p>Carbon Emissions – It is currently estimated that Merseyside generates 11,018kt carbon emissions – one of the lowest levels for any metropolitan area within the UK. Of the six councils forming Merseyside, Halton had the fourth highest emissions but the highest per capita emissions, which reflects the presence of chemical industries relative to a low population in the area</p>	Merseyside Economic Review, 2008
<p>Ensuring the most effective use of land – Of the total land area within the North West region, 3.5% is classified as derelict land or buildings, compared to an English average of 1.7%. In 2003/4, just over a quarter (29.5%) of new dwellings constructed in the North West in schemes of 10 dwellings or more occurred in low-density schemes (i.e. less than 30 dwellings per hectare).</p>	NLUD 2005
<p>Water resources – Key issues relate to protection of water quality. The principal river in Halton Borough is the River Mersey and this is located beyond the Manchester Ship Canal on the northern boundary to the Runcorn Town Centre SPD Area.</p> <p>The northwest contains a third of the poorest quality rivers in England and Wales. In 2006, no rivers in Halton were rated as having a very good biological or chemical quality. However, over the past 20 years, the water quality of the River Mersey has improved significantly following changes in legislation and investment by industry.</p>	Environment Agency, 2006 Environment Agency 2008
<p>Flood Risk – None of Runcorn Town Centre SPD Area falls within Flood Zones 2 or 3. However, it should be noted that the flood risks associated with the Manchester Ship Canal are unknown. Additionally, new developments could be at risk from flooding from surface water sewers.</p>	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Version 1, Halton Borough Council, 2007 and Environment Agency 2008
<p>Industrial legacy - Dereliction and contamination - Despite reclaiming over 182 hectares of derelict land within the administration boundary of Halton Borough Council between 1994 and 1998, over 200ha – more than 3% of the Borough land surface – remains. The remaining derelict sites are often the more difficult and more expensive to bring back into beneficial use. There has been an increase in the amount of development on PDL with 88% of new and converted dwellings on PDL in 2006/07.</p> <p>The greatest amount of Previously Developed Land (PDL) is within the wards of Ditton, Halton View, Mersey and Riverside.</p>	NLUD 2005 Annual Monitoring Report, Halton Borough Council, 2007

5.3.1 Difficulties in collecting data and limitations of the data

Ideally the baseline information should relate to 2009. Unfortunately, due to the time it takes to collate data, this has not been possible in many cases. As far as possible the most up-to-date information has been used for each set of data provided.

The information tables also contain some omissions because, in some cases, it has not been possible to establish the most appropriate targets, figures or sources. Some difficulties in collecting data have also been associated with the reliance on external bodies. For example, where external bodies have collected data for their own purposes, in the future the data may not be available, or not available in the same format, in order to make reliable comparisons.

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It should be noted that the baseline information represents a 'work in progress' in the sense that it will be added to / amended as new indicators / sources of baseline information come to the attention of WEED or Halton Borough Council.

5.4 THE SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK

The following section presents the Sustainability Appraisal Framework (SAF) against which the policy options taken from the SPD have been assessed. In accordance with Halton Borough Council's intentions, the objectives, targets and indicators that form the SAF within this document are broadly consistent with the SAF developed for the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework. However, the SAF has been slightly refined to ensure that it is applicable to the SPD.

The objectives of the SAF have been derived from the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive topics and SA themes, including: Biodiversity, Fauna and flora; Population and human health; Water and soil; Air; Climatic factors; Cultural heritage and landscape; Social inclusiveness; and Economic development. Documents such as the Community Strategy, the sub-regionally agreed Merseyside objectives and the regional sustainability framework – 'Action for Sustainability' have also influenced the content of the SAF objectives, indicators and targets.

It should be noted that the SAF objectives are distinct from objectives of the SPD, though they may in some cases overlap. The SAF objectives focus on outcomes (or ends), not on how the outcomes will be achieved (inputs or means).

As the SAF evolves there may be situations that require the framework to be reviewed. These situations could include:

- a) new baseline information emerging that better reflects the current objectives in the sustainability framework;
- b) changes to the objectives in the sustainability framework; and
- c) direction from a consultation body that information within the framework needs amending, such as through consultation on Scoping Reports.

The SAF incorporates changes made as a result of consultation on the Scoping Report (see Section 5.5 below). The full SAF is presented in Appendix B.

Table 5.2: The Sustainability Appraisal Framework for the Runcorn Town Centre SPD

SA Objectives	SA Sub-Objectives	Indicators and Source
Economic		
To continue reducing the unemployment rate in Halton and increase the economic activity rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it encourage new employment that is consistent with local needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population in employment and unemployment • Job Density
To improve educational attainment and opportunities for lifelong learning and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it provide improved access to vocational training, education and skills for young people? • Will it provide local employment opportunities for local people by linking in to local businesses? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of 15 yr olds achieving five or more GCSE's at grades A-C or equivalent • % of adults educated to NVQ level 2, 3 or 4
To encourage sustainable economic growth and business development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it encourage the growth of indigenous businesses? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total number of VAT registered businesses • Percentage of business registrations and de-registrations
To improve the competitiveness and productivity of business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it improve business development and enhance competitiveness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gross Value Added (GVA) per head

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SA Objectives	SA Sub-Objectives	Indicators and Source
To enhance the vitality and viability of the three town centres (Runcorn Town Centre, Halton Lea and Widnes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it provide an improvement to one or more of the town centres? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Footfall within the town centre Vacancy rates within the town centre
To improve and promote the overall image of the Borough in order to attract investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it encourage inward investment? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of investment enquiries and the number of conversions (enquiries that are translated into actual, completed investment or expansion projects).
Social		
To improve health and reduce health inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve the standard of healthcare, particularly for the elderly? Will it support healthy lifestyles? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Years of healthy life expectancy Number of people who have a long-term illness
To improve safety and reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it encourage crime-sensitive design? Will it target, reduce and sustain a reduction in crime? Will it reduce the likelihood of violence and antisocial behaviour? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recorded crimes per 1,000 population Number of people reporting fear of crime
To provide well designed, good quality, affordable and resource efficient housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it provide for affordable housing for local people? Will it ensure that new housing is of a high standard of design and layout? Will it provide safe, secure and decent housing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of different housing types and tenures The number and proportion of total new build completions on housing sites reaching very good, good, average and poor ratings against the Building for Life criteria.
To improve access to basic goods, services and amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve transport provision and accessibility? Will it provide for local retail needs? Will it improve public access to services and amenities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of new residential development within 30 minutes public transport time of a GP, hospital, primary and secondary school, employment and a major retail centre.
To ensure access to high quality public open space and natural greenspace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it ensure that all people have access to public open space within a reasonable distance from where they live? Will it improve access to natural greenspace? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The accessibility of Halton's Natural Green spaces.
To reduce social exclusion, deprivation and social inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it reduce poverty and social exclusion in those areas most affected? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Index of Deprivation Average household income
Environmental		
To minimise the risk of flooding in relation to both new & existing development whilst protecting, improving and where necessary, restoring the quality of inland, estuarine and coastal waters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve the quality of controlled waters? Will it ensure that the amount of impermeable surfaces/new development within Flood Risk Zones 2 & 3 does not increase? Will it ensure that the amount of surface water runoff does not increase? Will it ensure that new developments are not at risk from flooding? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water quality (chemical & biological) classification of rivers, canals, estuaries and coastal waters and percentage lengths in different classes Amount of new development replacing greenfield land within Flood zones 2 and 3 Proportion of new developments over 1ha incorporating surface water

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SA Objectives	SA Sub-Objectives	Indicators and Source
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attenuation and/or sustainable urban drainage systems • Number if planning permissions granted contrary to the advice of the Environment Agency on with flood defence grounds or water quality
To protect, enhance and manage biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it protect or enhance statutory protected sites, habitats or species of nature conservation value? • Will it protect or enhance BAP habitats and/or species? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and total area of internationally and nationally designated nature conservation sites • Condition of SSSIs - 95% of SSSI land should be in favourable or recovering condition by 2010. (Public Service Agreement (PSA) target) • Number and area of Local Wildlife Sites, Wildlife Corridors and Action Areas for People and Nature • Distribution of bluebells
To minimise the production of waste and increase reuse, recycling and recovery rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it result in a reduction in the amount of waste requiring treatment and disposal? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level and % of household waste recycled • Total annual amount of municipal waste generated and % recycled or composted.
To improve air quality by reducing the need to travel and improving choice and use of sustainable transport modes and reducing air pollution from other sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it minimise the need to travel? • Will it reduce car use and encourage the use of integrated and public transport? • Will it improve air quality? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and total area of Air Quality Management Areas and population living in AQMAs • Travel to work by mode
To protect, enhance and manage the rich diversity of the cultural and built environment and archaeological assets, whilst maintaining and strengthening a local distinctiveness through the enhancement of the character and appearance of the local landscape, townscape and coast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it safeguard sites of archaeological importance? • Will it preserve and enhance buildings which contribute to Halton's heritage? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Listed Buildings and Number and Area of Conservation Areas • Number of buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments 'at risk'.
To use land, energy, and water resources prudently and efficiently, and increase energy generated from renewable sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will it enable development to re-use brownfield land and convert existing buildings? • Will it encourage prudent and efficient use of energy? • Will it use water efficiently and with care? • Will it encourage the development of appropriate types of renewable energy resources? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of housing built on previously developed land per (PDL) year • Proportion of energy generated from sustainable and renewable sources

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5.5 CONSULTATION ON THE SA SCOPING REPORT

The SA Scoping Report was issued for a five week consultation period in December 2008/January 2009. In accordance with the SEA Regulations the following statutory consultee bodies were consulted:

- Natural England (formerly the Countryside Agency and English Nature)
- English Heritage
- Environment Agency

In addition, the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service was consulted. The following bodies responded to HBC as part of the scoping exercise:

- Environment Agency
- Natural England (re-issue of response to Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy Scoping Report)
- Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service

A summary of the consultation responses is set out in Appendix C and comments directly relating to the objectives or indicators are summarised below (Note: changes that were made as a result of Natural England's consultation response on the Regeneration Strategy have not been repeated below).

- **Objective 9** – An indicator was recommended that measures the environmental performance of new housing development within the SPD area against the Code for Sustainable Homes. For example: *'Proportion of homes assessed against the Code for Sustainable Homes'*.
- **Objective 11** – With no LNR within the SPD area it was suggested that the indicator/target reporting loss of LNR is not applicable. A more general indicator such as *'the amount and quality of open space'* supported by a target which ensures no loss of open space was recommended.
- Merseyside EAS does not believe that the indicators 'Population of Skylark breeding pairs' and 'Population of Song Thrush pairs' are relevant to this SPD, as Runcorn Town Centre does not provide suitable habitats for these species and the regeneration proposed over the plan period is unlikely to change this situation appreciably. As such it is considered that the SPD would not be able to deliver these targets.
- In relation to Bluebell the SAF has not provided any data for native Bluebells species within Halton or the SPD area. Merseyside EAS suggested that consideration is given to a scheme of planting native Bluebells along road verges within the SPD area. The indicator and target can be amended accordingly.
- **Objective 13** – It was recommended that the indicator *'New development with sustainable drainage system installed'* should be replaced with *'Proportion of new development with sustainable drainage system installed'*. This would show developments both with and without SuDS installed.

6. THE INITIAL SA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

An Initial SA of the objectives and options for Runcorn Town Centre as set out within the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy was undertaken to inform the development of the Preferred Option. This comprised a review of the Objectives and Options against the SA Framework; recommendations were made for improvement, where appropriate. The SPD Objectives expand upon the Regeneration Strategy Objectives and therefore these revised Objectives were also tested against the SA Framework.

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6.2 THE INITIAL SA OF OBJECTIVES

The Runcorn Town Centre SPD Objectives were mapped against the SAF Objectives to determine their compatibility. The majority of the SPD Objectives were seen to be compatible or have no link with the Sustainability Objectives. None of the Objectives were incompatible, however there were a number of cases where the outcome of the SA Objective will be dependent on how the particular Objective is implemented. In addition, a number of the SA Objectives were not covered at all within the Runcorn Town Centre Objectives. Whilst it is not necessary to ensure that every SA Objective is covered as a wider regeneration benefit is sought, it was recommended that an additional Objective be included. Recommendations that were made to improve the Runcorn Town Centre Objectives (either during the SA of the Regeneration Strategy or as a result of testing the revised Objectives set out within the Runcorn Town Centre SPD) to ensure compatibility with the SA Objectives are set out below.

Table 6.1: Initial SA of the Objectives

Changes to objectives recommended in the Initial SA Report	Change made in SPD Consultation Draft?
Recommended New Objective: <i>'Development should use land, energy, and water resources prudently and efficiently, minimising the production of waste and increasing reuse, recycling and recovery of waste'</i> . [NB: this formed a priority objective of the Regeneration Strategy but had not been carried over into the Runcorn Town Centre SPD.]	✓ (New Objective 6)
Runcorn Objective 1 (largely the same as Regeneration Strategy Runcorn Objective 4): could refer to access routes being designed according to Secured by Design principles. This would help to meet SA Objective 8.	✓
Runcorn Objective 3 (largely the same as Regeneration Strategy Runcorn Objective 2): could include an addition that all development protects, enhances and manages the cultural and built and natural environment. This will help to meet SA Objectives 13 and 17.	✓
Runcorn Objective 5 (an expanded version of Regeneration Strategy Runcorn Objective 1): could be re-worded as 'Increase, and diversify, the housing offer within Runcorn, <i>providing resource efficient and affordable housing</i> – with a particular focus on developing sites with high potential in Runcorn Town Centre to meet forecast population expansion.' This will help to meet SA Objectives 9, 12 and 18.	✓

6.3 INITIAL SA OF THE OPTIONS

The Options for Runcorn Town Centre, as set out within the Regeneration Strategy Issues and Options report were appraised against the SA Framework (Appendix D). In terms of the overall appraisal of the Options, the effects on the economic and social SA Objectives were generally assessed as likely to be beneficial. However, the effect on a number of the environmental objectives was found to be either negative or uncertain due to the environmental effects inherent in redevelopment or a lack of information. It was recommended that the Preferred Option include reference to healthcare, a requirement for crime sensitive design, targets for affordable homes provision, a requirement to achieve environmental design standards eg BREEAM/Code for Sustainable Homes, reference to waste minimisation, and a requirement to assess the effects on the built environment, including archaeology. Specific findings are presented below and the appraisal against the full SA Framework is presented in Appendix D.

- Options 1 and 2 perform very similarly with both enhancing the economy through the development of new office and retail space; improving the vitality and viability of Runcorn Town Centre by making modifications to the 'Runcorn Loops' to increase accessibility; and creating new pedestrian routes and cycleways to improve access to the town centre and railway station;

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- Option 2 may perform slightly better by providing more jobs. Option 2 also slightly improves accessibility into the centre of Runcorn Town Centre by changing the east bound slip road from the A533 into a two way road terminating at a new crossroad junction directly into the town centre; and
- Both Options involve demolition and construction leading to waste generation and resource use which will have a negative impact and the Preferred Option should consider methods to reduce waste generation such as requiring contractors to re-use and recycle waste and requiring environmental design standards to be achieved, eg Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM.

6.4 CONSULTATION AND SELECTION OF PREFERRED OPTION

As identified above, both options perform very similarly against the SA Framework with the only potential difference being that Option 2 may result in improved accessibility to the centre of Runcorn Town Centre. GVA Grimley and Halton Borough Council therefore used the Initial Sustainability Appraisal, together with the findings of public consultation, stakeholder dialogue and economic viability analysis to choose and refine the Preferred Option. The Preferred Option chosen was Option 2.

7. SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF PREFERRED OPTION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This stage of the SA involves predicting the environmental, social and economic effects that are likely to result from the implementation of the Preferred Option, and then evaluating the significance of the predicted effects.

7.2 METHODOLOGY

7.2.1 Testing the Plan Objectives

The Runcorn Town Centre Objectives that had been revised following the Initial SA Stage, and which now form the SPD Objectives, were retested against the Sustainability Objectives to determine their compatibility. The results are shown in Appendix E. This shows that the majority of the SPD Objectives are either compatible or have no obvious relation with the Sustainability Objectives. There are no conflicts between the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives and the Objectives of the SPD. A number of the SPD Objectives through being revised have improved in compatibility with the Sustainability Objectives. However, there are still a number of question marks where it is unclear how the Objectives of the SPD will impact on the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives, as there is not enough information to assess the impact. For example, whilst SPD Objective 3 aims to improve community facilities, there is no specific information on the types of facilities that may be provided. The effect on SA Objectives 2 and 4 (health and education) is therefore uncertain.

7.2.2 Testing the Initial draft SPD Preferred Option

The assessment was carried out by assessing the initial draft SPD policies against the SA Objectives. A number of recommendations were made to improve the draft SPD including:

- Require SuDS to be incorporated into new developments where appropriate;
- Require measures to be adopted to enhance biodiversity;
- Require developers to undertake an archaeological assessment where necessary and refer to the North West Best Practice Design Guide; and
- Require commercial developments to achieve a BREEAM rating of Very Good and encourage renewable energy generation (a requirement to achieve a minimum of a Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 was already included in the draft SPD).

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All of the above recommendations have been incorporated into the consultation draft SPD.

7.2.3 Testing the Consultation Draft SPD Preferred Option

Following amendments to the Initial Draft SPD as a result of internal consultation within Halton Borough Council and the SA, the Consultation Draft was retested against the SA Framework. The assessment table is included in full in Appendix F with Section 7.3 below summarising the significant positive and negative effects, as well as where the effects are uncertain. The assessment table in Appendix F provides commentary on the scale and timing of the effect with a brief justification for the assessment. The assessment considers potential cumulative, synergistic and secondary effects of the policies within the plan as a whole as this was considered more beneficial than assessing each individual policy in isolation. The assessment was undertaken using professional judgement and by comparing the potential effects to the baseline situation.

Based on the assessment tables, the performance of the policies against the SA sub-objectives has been summarised in Section 7.3 below.

7.3 SUMMARY OF THE APPRAISAL

Significant Positive Effects

A number of sites will be redeveloped for commercial uses and access into Runcorn Town Centre will be improved through the removal of Runcorn Loops. This will have a significant positive effect on the competitiveness and productivity of businesses (Objective SA4) as they will be able to reach wider markets and customers and there will be greater access to basic goods, services and amenities for local residents (Objective SA10). Access to goods and services will also be improved through provision of new convenience shops and improvements to the public realm, pedestrian and cycle routes and signage within the Town Centre.

The vitality and viability of Runcorn Town Centre (Objective SA5) and the overall image of the Borough (Objective SA6) will be improved and promoted through provision of new and enhanced retail, leisure and cultural facilities, public realm improvements and enhanced accessibility. This will also have a significant positive effect on objective SA11 to ensure access to high quality public open space and natural greenspace.

The regeneration of the area together with the requirement to incorporate Secured by Design principles and provision for a neighbourhood centre should help to reduce crime and the fear of crime (SA8).

Significant Negative Effects

No negative effects have been identified.

Uncertainties

The provision of new health and education facilities falls outside of the scope of the SPD although improved access will be created, particularly to Riverside College, and new pedestrian and cycle facilities should result in more active lifestyles. However, there is uncertainty with regard to the capacity of the existing facilities given the increase in population resulting from new residential development (Objectives SA 2 and SA7).

The use of renewable energy is encouraged to minimise resource use but no specific targets have been set (Objective SA18). The implementation of these elements of the SPD will therefore determine the nature of the effect.

7.4 DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

There remain a number of uncertainties in the assessment due to the strategic nature of the SPD, which means that specific effects cannot be determined at this stage. The timeframe for development also leads to uncertainties as it is difficult to determine the future baseline scenario. Nevertheless, the

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recommendations made together with other Council policies to control future development should ensure that the effects of the SPD are positive.

The assessment assumes that the General Development Principles will be implemented and effective.

8. MONITORING PROPOSALS

The SEA Directive explicitly requires monitoring of the significant environmental effects resulting from implementation of the SPD. A monitoring system is being designed which will help to fulfil the following requirements:

- To provide baseline data for the next SA and to provide a picture of how the environment / sustainability criteria of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD Area is evolving;
- To monitor the significant effects or uncertainties of the SPD; and
- To ensure that action can be taken to reduce / offset the significant effects of the SPD.

Monitoring already plays a large role in the performance management of Halton Borough Council, and monitoring is being undertaken for the Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs), which have been introduced to track the performance of the Local Development Scheme and associated documents. There is also considerable monitoring activity being carried out for other plans and programmes (e.g. the Local Transport Plan) and by bodies such as the Environment Agency.

Where relevant, use will be made of these existing monitoring processes for the monitoring proposed as part of this SA to avoid duplication of effort.

The monitoring measures proposed in this section relate to the significant positive and negative effects that have been predicted to result from implementation of the SPD, as well as any areas where there was significant uncertainty in the prediction.

The significant effects of the SPD will be monitored on an annual basis through the AMR unless otherwise stated. However, it is noted that the monitoring requirements may change as a result of changes to the SPD following consultation or due to other external influences on the baseline situation (the AMR will be revised on a yearly basis).

In light of the changes that may arise prior to plan adoption, the monitoring proposals presented below should therefore be viewed as provisional.

Table 8.1 sets out the indicators that are proposed to monitor the significant effects and uncertainties that have been predicted to arise on the implementation of the SPD.

The following key is used to identify the type of effect to be monitored.

- ✓✓ Significant Positive Effect
- ✗ Negative Effect
- ? Uncertain Effect

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Table 8.1: Monitoring Proposals to Assess Significant Effects and Major Uncertainties

Significant Effect/ Uncertain Effect	Effect	Monitoring Proposal	Included in AMR 2007 or national datasets?	Type of indicator ⁸
<i>SA2 – To improve educational attainment and opportunities for lifelong learning and employment</i>				
The new residential development could put some pressure on existing education services.	?	School class sizes/capacity	No	
<i>SA4 – To improve the competitiveness and productivity of business</i>				
The preferred option will redevelop and provide a number of new sites for business development. This will include the provision of high quality office and light industrial units.	✓✓	Amount of completed office, retail and leisure development	Yes	Core
		Amount of floor space developed for employment by type in employment or regeneration areas	Yes	Core
		GVA per head	Yes	Contextual
<i>SA5 - To enhance the vitality and viability of the three town centres (Runcorn Town Centre, Halton Lea and Widnes)</i>				
The preferred option for Runcorn will regenerate the town centre through the provision of new development providing employment and leisure uses. Access will be enhanced through improvements to the road network and pedestrian and cyclepath provision.	✓✓	Footfall within town centres	Yes	SA
		Vacancy rates within the Town Centres	Yes	SA
<i>SA6 – To improve and promote the overall image of the Borough in order to attract investment</i>				
The preferred option will encourage inward investment through the provision of a greater range of land uses and employment opportunities.	✓✓	Amount of completed retail, office and leisure development	Yes	Core

⁸ The type of indicator has been identified based on the criteria given in the Annual Monitoring Report.

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Significant Effect/ Uncertain Effect	Effect	Monitoring Proposal	Included in AMR 2007 or national datasets?	Type of indicator ⁸
The landscaping and improvement of the public realm will help to enhance the image of the area.		Number of investment enquiries and the number of conversions (enquiries that are translated into actual, completed investment or expansion projects)	No	
		Visitor numbers to Halton	No	
SA7 – To improve health and reduce health inequalities				
The proposals do not include any specific enhancements to health facilities and an increased population as a result of new residential development could put pressure on existing local health facilities.	?	GP list sizes	No	
SA8 - To improve safety and reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime				
Regeneration of the area should have knock-on effects in improving issues associated with deprivation such as crime. The SPD requires reference to be made to Secured by Design in the development of new housing.	✔✔	Recorded crimes per 1,000 population	Yes	National
		Number of people reporting fear of crime	No	
SA10 To improve access to basic goods, services and amenities				
The preferred option will alter the layout of the existing road system so access to Runcorn Town Centre is simplified. Pedestrian and cycle routes will also be created and new convenience stores developed.	✔✔	Amount of new residential development within 30 minutes public transport time of: a GP, a hospital, a primary school, secondary school, areas of employment and a major retail centre(s)	Yes	Core
		Proportion of journeys on foot or by cycle	Yes	National

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Significant Effect/ Uncertain Effect	Effect	Monitoring Proposal	Included in AMR 2007 or national datasets?	Type of indicator ⁸
<i>SA11 To ensure access to high quality public open space and natural greenspace</i>				
A number of sites will be promoted for leisure uses and there will be pedestrian and cycle routes linking these spaces with the town centre and residential areas. There is also potential for the Bridgewater Canal to be extended to the Manchester Ship Canal (Policy HS2) which would provide new and improved leisure opportunities.	✓✓	The accessibility of Halton's Natural Green spaces.	No	Will be included in future.
<i>SA18 To use land, energy and water resources prudently and efficiently, and increase energy generated from renewable sources</i>				
The preferred option will make efficient use of land by using brownfield sites. However new construction will increase energy and resource use.	?	The number and proportion of total new build completions on housing sites reaching very good, good, average and poor ratings against the Building for Life criteria.	No	Will be included in future AMRs
		Renewable energy capacity installed by type	Yes	Core

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9. CONSULTATION ON THE SA REPORT AND NEXT STEPS

The consultation draft SPD and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal report will be issued for public consultation in February/March 2009. Comments made on the SPD will be reviewed and where necessary, amendments will be made to the SPD. Any significant changes will be subject to further Sustainability Appraisal. The SPD will then be finalised and adopted by the Council. An Adoption Statement will be prepared to summarise the SA process and provide final monitoring proposals for the SPD.