

A NEW VISION FOR DEVELOPING CENTRAL WAKEFIELD

**Sustainability
Appraisal Summary**



Central Wakefield Area Action Plan

**Sustainability
Appraisal Summary**

**Central Wakefield Area Action Plan
Development Plan Document**

Submitted to Secretary of State May 2008

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Sustainability Appraisal Report - Non Technical Summary

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CENTRAL WAKEFIELD AREA ACTION PLAN DPD, SUBMISSION DOCUMENT, WAKEFIELD METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

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BACKGROUND

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is the emerging development plan for Wakefield. LDFs are a new form of plan controlling the way in which land and buildings are used and developed. The LDF will guide new development in the district for the period up to 2026 and, once adopted, will replace the adopted Wakefield Unitary Development Plan 1st Alteration (published 2003). This report relates to the Central Wakefield Area Action Plan Development Plan Document (DPD) which forms part of the LDF. This DPD is subsequently referred to as the CWAAP.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) have been carried out on this DPD in order to meet the requirements of new 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 the LDF 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.

This document forms the Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the SA Report and provides a summary, in non-technical language, of the principal findings of the SA of the CWAAP. The SA has been undertaken on behalf of Wakefield Metropolitan District Council by Waterman Environmental and the Centre for Sustainability at TRL Ltd.

THE CWAAP OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the CWAAP set out what it is aiming to achieve in planning terms. The CWAAP objectives have been largely derived from the Community Strategy³, other national, regional and local strategies and programmes; and from consideration of the current economic, social and environmental status of Central Wakefield. The objectives that have emerged from these sources are:

1. To reduce traffic levels within Wakefield city centre and enable all users to gain equal access to shops and services by making it more pedestrian friendly, safer and more accessible by foot, bicycle and public transport.
2. To encourage city living for different types of household and tenure to meet the housing needs/requirements for Wakefield.
3. To regenerate the local economy by focussing major new office, retail and leisure development within central Wakefield.
4. To protect and enhance the historic and distinctive character of central Wakefield, including the skyline and strategic views of the spires and towers.
5. To promote the highest standards of design and construction in new developments within central Wakefield by making best use of existing resources and renewable energy technologies and minimising carbon emissions.
6. To enhance the public realm and improve links between the city centre and surrounding areas, including the waterfront.
7. To protect and enhance the natural environment by promoting biodiversity and recreational opportunities within the waterfront and providing greenspaces within new developments.

¹ Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004)

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

³ Developing Knowledge Communities (Wakefield District Partnership, 2006)

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8. To influence the location, layout and design of new development so that it reduces or minimise the risk of flooding and does not have an adverse impact on air quality, noise and light pollution.
9. To increase the attractiveness of central Wakefield for residents, workers, shoppers, tourists and visitors, including those previously lost to other centres.
10. To promote a vibrant evening economy for a wide range of ages and social groups whilst improving pedestrian safety and reducing opportunities for crime.

THE SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL PROCESS

The SA process used in Wakefield is summarised in Figure NTS 1 below. The assessment, to date, has comprised three 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 Central Wakefield AAP issues and options, referred to as the ‘Initial SA’; and
- Appraisal of the preferred options chosen, referred to as the ‘SA’.

This report represents the final stage in the process, that is an assessment of the submission document.

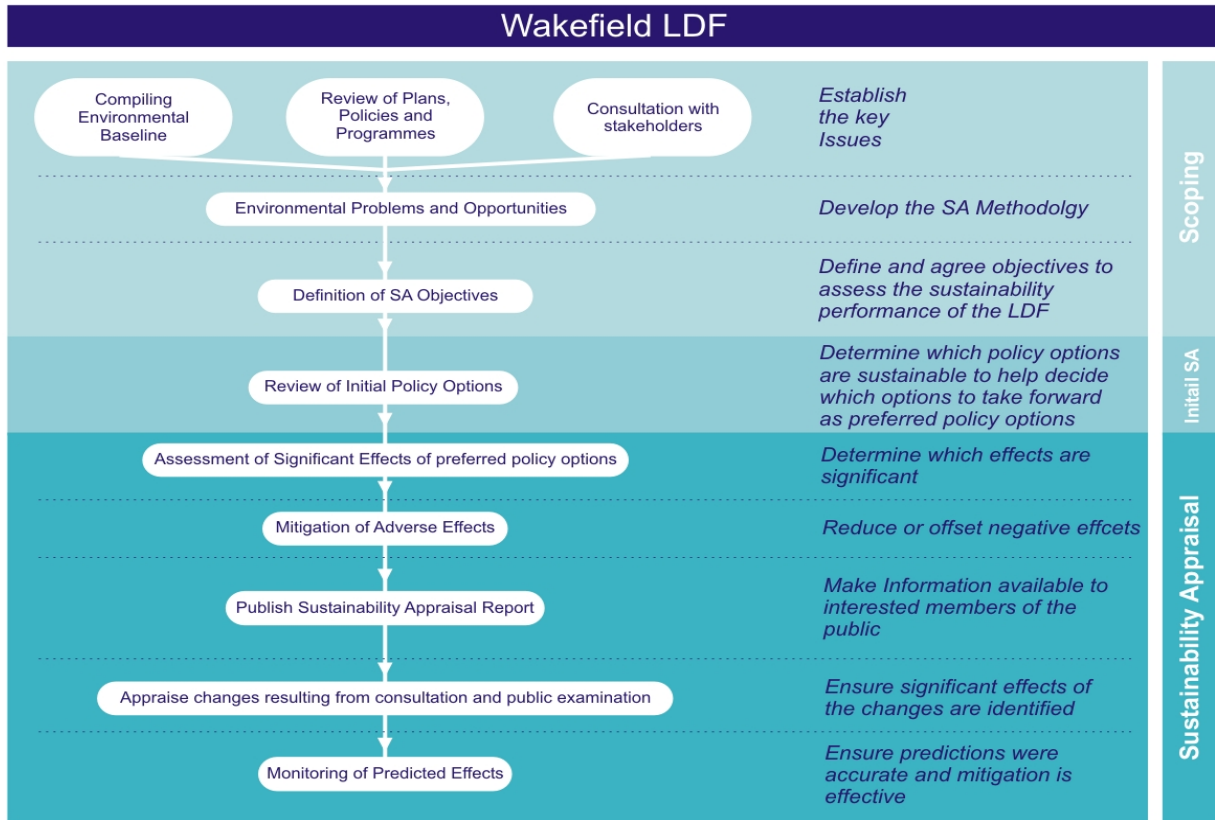


Figure NTS 1: Summary of the SA Process

SCOPING

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The aim of the scoping stage is to determine the key environmental, social and economic issues arising in the district and the framework for assessing the plans. The key issues are determined based on the characteristics of the Central Wakefield, trends (i.e. is the situation getting better or worse?) and planning documents and policies that may influence the CWAAP or SA. The SEA Regulations require that the following topics are investigated in order to determine whether the introduction of the policies will have significant effects on these topic areas:

- Population
- Human health
- Biodiversity, flora and fauna
- Soil
- Water
- Air
- Climatic factors
- Material Assets
- Cultural heritage
- Landscape
- And the interrelationship between these factors

In addition to these “SEA topics”, other social and economic factors are also taken into account. The issues are described below.

Key Sustainability Issues

Key economic issues are as follows:

- Central Wakefield’s economy has diversified with growth in the service sector aided by the excellent road and rail links available to and from Wakefield;
- The shopping centre is relatively stable and enjoys good accessibility via bus and rail but faces competition from Leeds, other town centres and out of town shopping centres;
- There is a need for Wakefield to market itself as a more distinctive and vibrant shopping centre where a variety of independent specialist retailers sit alongside the more well-known high street businesses;
- There is a shortage of office accommodation, which has caused the out of centre office market to grow;
- Unemployment levels in Central Wakefield are higher than in the District, with a large fluctuation in level between different localised areas; and
- There is a lack of hotel accommodation.

Key social issues are as follows:

- The bulk of Central Wakefield is within the top 8% of the most deprived areas in England;
- The high proportion of students living in the city means that the average level of qualifications is higher than the District average. This however masks the fact that some areas have low levels of educational attainment;
- High levels of crime contribute to fear amongst residents;
- Pubs and clubs around Westgate make this area rowdy affecting surrounding facilities and discouraging others, such as families, from using the area at night time;
- Levels of long term limiting illness are high and health needs improving; and
- A sharp increase in house prices has affected the number of affordable houses for sale. There is a shortage of family sized accommodation and apartments within the city centre.

Key environmental issues are as follows:

- Central Wakefield has high-levels of traffic and consequently experiences traffic congestion especially at peak times;
- Less than 1% of journeys made during peak hours are by cycle;
- Bus services suffer poor reliability and cross city centre links could be improved. There are limited facilities for buses in the city centre, with a number of bus only streets, but relatively few bus lanes;

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- High volumes of traffic make parts of central Wakefield difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to negotiate and this problem is particularly severe around the roads that form the incomplete inner ring road, and around the Westgate/Marygate/Bull Ring area;
- It is important that future development in the city centre reduces the need for car travel, by improving access by sustainable transport modes (bicycle, on foot and public transport);
- Flood risk is a significant issue for central Wakefield as part of the CWAAP area lies in a high risk zone;
- There is a lack of statutory/ non-statutory ecological designated sites within Central Wakefield, both within and immediately adjacent to the CWAAP area;
- There is also a relatively limited amount of open green space within central Wakefield;
- The entire central Wakefield area has been designated an Air Quality Management Area due to elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide, primarily due to high traffic levels; and
- There is one Scheduled Ancient Monument (Wakefield Bridge) and 8 Conservation Areas within the CWAAP boundary. There are 80 groupings of Listed Buildings. New development will need to deliver and promote higher quality design at these locations to improve the attractiveness of central Wakefield.

SA Objectives

Based on these key issues and other plans and programmes, fifteen SA Objectives were developed as shown below. These have been supplemented by sub-objectives which are more focused on the specific issues. The objectives and sub-objectives which comprise the SA Framework were agreed with environmental bodies and others and used as the basis for the appraisal.

- SA1** Good quality employment opportunities available to all;
- SA2** Conditions which enable business success, economic growth and investment;
- SA3** Education and training opportunities to build skills and capacities;
- SA4** Conditions and services to engender good health;
- SA5** Safety and security for people and property;
- SA6** Vibrant communities to participate in decision making;
- SA7** Create, enhance and provide accessibility to culture, leisure and recreation activities;
- SA8** Local needs met locally;
- SA9** Quality housing available to everyone;
- SA10** To provide a transport network which maximises access whilst minimising detrimental impacts;
- SA11** A quality built environment that protects and enhances its historic assets, and efficient land use patterns that make good use of derelict sites, minimise travel and promote balanced development;
- SA12** A bio-diverse and attractive natural environment;
- SA13** Minimal pollution levels;
- SA14** Minimal greenhouse gas emissions and a managed response to the effects of climate change; and
- SA15** Prudent and efficient use of energy and natural resources with minimal production of waste.

Testing the CWAAP Objectives

In order to ensure that the CWAAP objectives do not conflict with the SA objectives, they were tested against each other. Generally the SA and CWAAP objectives are compatible with one with the exception of CWAAP objectives 2 and 3 which are incompatible with SA Objective 14. This is because development in Central Wakefield conflicts with the sub-objective within SA14 to prevent inappropriate development in the flood plain. However, in some cases there was uncertainty, primarily as to how the CWAAP objectives would be translated into actions on the ground.

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Consultations on the Scope

Consultation on the key issues and SA objectives was undertaken with the Countryside Agency, English Heritage, English Nature, 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. In addition, a wider group of local stakeholders was also included in the consultation exercises so that input could be provided on the approach to assessing the social and economic factors covered by the assessment, as well as the more local environmental issues.

INITIAL SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL (JUNE 2005)

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. The Issues and Options Report for the CWAAP (published June 2005) proposed a number of options for achieving the plan's objectives. These options were assessed against the agreed SA objectives. The purpose of this appraisal, known as an 'Initial Sustainability Appraisal', was to help inform and guide the selection of preferred options.

The policy options available to plan makers are heavily constrained by national and regional planning guidance, and the Initial Sustainability Appraisal found that, in most cases the proposed options that were the least sustainable were those that looked at the 'do nothing' option, these being the options that did not follow the new guidance.

The 'Initial Sustainability Appraisal' report was sent out with the 'Issues & Options Report' for widespread consultation with interested parties including the public, in June and July 2005. This consultation generated a total of 632 separate comments from 48 different respondents and the results have been used, together with the Initial SA, to develop the options into preferred policies. These were presented in the 'Preferred Options Report' and were accompanied by a 'Sustainability Appraisal Report'. Of the comments received only 8 related to the Initial Sustainability Appraisal report itself.

PREFERRED OPTIONS SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL (JANUARY 2007)

This stage of the SA involved predicting the environmental, social and economic effects that were likely to result from the implementation of the preferred policies, and then evaluating the significance of the predicted effects. Where adverse effects were identified, recommendations were made as to how these could be mitigated. Most of these recommendations were taken on board when the Preferred Options were being developed into the Submission Policies.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF SUBMISSION POLICIES (MARCH 2008)

The CWAAP (including the objectives and policies for central Wakefield) has been appraised against the agreed SA Objectives. The appraisal has focused on identifying the significant environmental, social, and economic effects which may result from the implementation of the CWAAP. The policies were assessed for their likely impact against the 15 SA objectives, and the findings of the assessment are summarised below in Figure NTS 2. For the purpose of this assessment, significant effects are defined as those which have been identified as very sustainable (✓✓) or very unsustainable (××) in the assessment. The key to the table below is as follows:

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✓✓	Very sustainable
✓	Sustainable
?	Uncertain
-	Neutral
×	Unsustainable
××	Very unsustainable

Policy (Abridged)		SA Objective (Abridged)														
		SA1. Employment	SA2. Economy	SA3. Education	SA4. Health	SA5. Security	SA6. Participation	SA7. Leisure	SA8. Local Needs	SA9. Housing	SA10. Transport	SA11. Land Use	SA12. Natural Environment	SA13. Pollution Levels	SA14. Climate Change	SA15. Natural Resources
CW1	Create Emerald Ring	?	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CW2	Traffic in Emerald Ring	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CW3	Design in Vicinity of Emerald Ring	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	?	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
CW4	Design near Emerald Ring	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
CW5	Number and location of Car Parks	✓	✓	-	?	?	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓
CW6	Pedestrian and Cycle Routes	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓
CW7	Skylines and Strategic views	?	?	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-	-	-	-
CW8	Vistas	?	?	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-	-	-	-
CW9	Landmark Sites	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	?	✓	?	✓	?	?
CW10	Landmarks /Tall Buildings	-	-	-	?	?	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	?	?	?	?
CW11	Public Realm	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
CW12	Public Realm Principles	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
CW13	Public Realm Hierarchy of Quality	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	-	-
CW14	Private Amenity Space	-	-	-	✓	✓	?	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-	-
CW15	New Office Floorspace	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-	✓	?	?	?	-	?	?	?
CW16	Retail Policy Area	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-
CW17	Primary Shopping Frontages	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	-
CW18	Specialist Retail Areas	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	-	?	?	-
CW19	Westgate Yards	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	?	✓	-	?	?	-
CW20	The Evening Economy	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-
CW21a	Jacobs Well/Stanley Lane	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?	?	?	×
CW21b	Clayton Hospital (Northgate /Wentworth)	-	-	?	?	?	✓	✓	✓	-	?	?	?	-	-	×
CW21c	Borough Road Car Park	✓	✓	?	?	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	-	-	×
CW21d	Wakefield College (Sandy Walk)	-	-	-	?	?	-	✓	-	-	?	?	-	-	-	×
CW21e	Registry of Deeds, Newstead Road	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓	-	-	-	?	?	-	-	-	×
CW22	Special Policy Areas	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?	×	×
CW23	Trinity Walk	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?	?	×
CW24	Merchant Gate	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?	?	×
CW25	The Waterfront	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?	×	×
CW26	Kirkgate	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?	×	×
CW27	Ings Road /Westgate	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	×	×	×
CW28	Thornes Wharf	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	×	×	×

Figure NTS 1 Summary of the SA of the Submission Policies

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Significant Positive Effects

As shown above, significant positive effects were identified for nine of the SA Objectives. These include:

- Improved employment opportunities and conditions to encourage economic growth;
- Improvements to the public realm brought about through initiatives such as pedestrianisation and the introduction of design principles;
- Meeting local needs locally by improving the range of leisure and retail facilities within Central Wakefield, thereby reducing the need to travel elsewhere for these services;
- Encouraging sustainable modes of transport through the extension of cycle and pedestrian routes and improvements to public transport; and
- Protecting and enhancing the cultural heritage assets and townscape of Central Wakefield by promoting high quality design, improving the public realm, preserving the character and appearance of conservation areas and protecting key view points.

Significant Negative Effects

The only significant negative effects identified during the assessment resulted from the level of proposed new development and redevelopment in areas of high flood risk as identified by the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment that was published in May 2005.

The findings of the latest flood risk assessment have resulted in changes to the CWAAP policies to guide sensitive developments away from areas of high flood risk and to use design to ensure that other risks are minimised.

Significant Uncertainties

There are a number of cases where the effects of the policies are uncertain. The major uncertainties relate to:

- How area wide travel and traffic patterns will be affected by the proposed CWAAP measures and whether restriction of car traffic will impact upon visitor numbers and the local economy;
- How the level of new housing development will impact upon existing health and education facilities;
- The broad nature of some of the CWAAP policies which has made prediction of the significant effects difficult especially where the nature and level of effects will be very much dependant on the type and scale of developments which are built.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects are those effects that when added together become more significant even if on their own they do not appear to be significant. Cumulative effects can occur with other plans and policies as well as within the plan itself. The cumulative effects of the SA are generally positive and include:

- Improvements to the public realm;
- Protecting existing assets and improving the townscape;
- Promoting conditions which enable economic regeneration; and
- Promoting conditions which provide the opportunity for a wider group of the population to utilise the City centre services and facilities.

However there is uncertainty as to how traffic and travel patterns will be influenced by the CWAAP, and development in high risk flood areas will have an adverse cumulative effect on flood risk in the area.

Mitigation Measures

SA Guidance requires measures to be considered to prevent, reduce or offset any significant negative effects that have been identified during the assessment process. In nearly every case where significant negative effects and other less significant negative effects have been identified during the assessment

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process, the CWAAP or Core Strategy and Development Policies DPDs have put forward the mitigation measures required to prevent or reduce the severity of this effect. For example, requiring planning applications for sensitive developments within area of high air pollution to submit air quality assessments and proposals for management of this problem.

As described above, in relation to flood risk the findings of the latest flood risk assessment have resulted in changes to the CWAAP policies to guide sensitive developments away from areas of high flood risk and to use design to ensure that other risks are minimised.

HOW THE ASSESSMENT HAS INFLUENCED THE PLAN

The process of undertaking sustainability appraisal on the emerging policy options for the CWAAP is not a 'rubber stamping operation' that is carried out once the policies have been determined, but instead is an interactive process which informs the option development process. This has resulted in:

- Revisions to the CWAAP objectives as a result of the initial SA stages;
- Guiding the selection of preferred options and the development of new options; and
- Recommending mitigation measures to include within the submission document for example, requiring the effects of poor air quality on sensitive developments, such as family housing, to be assessed and commissioning detailed flood risk assessment for central Wakefield.

MONITORING PROPOSALS

Once the plans are implemented, their effects on the environment, society and economy are to be monitored to allow action to be taken to reduce and/or offset any significant effects. The monitoring programme will be finalised for inclusion in the SA Statement which will accompany the adopted CWAAP. Where possible the monitoring will make use of existing arrangements, such as those reported in WMDC's Annual Monitoring Report. The recommended monitoring includes:

- Air quality monitoring data;
- The proportion of journeys made by car, bike and foot;
- Employment and unemployment figures; and
- Visitor numbers to Wakefield City Centre.

NEXT STEPS

When the CWAAP is submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public it will be accompanied by this SA Report along with a number of other supporting documents.

If significant changes to the DPD are found to be required following the examination it may be necessary to undertake some additional sustainability appraisal on these changes.

When the DPD is adopted by Wakefield MDC an 'Adoption Statement' will be produced which summarises how the findings of the SA process have been taken into account during the preparation of the DPD, and how sustainability considerations have been integrated.

At this stage information will also be provided to explain why the options carried forward into the plan have been accepted, and why other reasonable alternatives were rejected prior to the DPD being submitted for adoption.

The Adoption Statement will also provide details of how monitoring will be carried out during implementation of the DPD.