

# **SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL (SA) AND HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT (HRA) OF THE RSS 2009 UPDATE**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF SA SCOPING REPORT AND HRA SCREENING METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

1. Land Use Consultants (LUC) was commissioned by the Assembly to undertake the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the RSS 2009 Update. This report summarises the work being undertaken by LUC during the initial stages of the SA (Scoping) and HRA (Screening). This includes a critical review of the approach adopted by the Assembly to developing spatial options for accommodating future housing growth in the region.

### **What are SA and HRA?**

2. SA is a statutory requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The main aim is to ensure that the RSS 2009 Update improves the contribution that the RSS makes to the achievement of sustainable development. The SA will incorporate the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive which requires formal assessment of plans and programmes likely to have significant effects on the environment.
3. HRA refers to the requirement under the Habitats Regulations to demonstrate that the implementation of the RSS 2009 Update would not adversely affect the integrity of European nature conservation sites.

### **Key regional sustainability issues and baseline information**

4. The SA Scoping Report will highlight a number of sustainability issues to be addressed in the region, including:
  - Relatively high levels of multiple deprivation (income, employment, health, education, barriers to housing and services, crime) and growing disparities within the region.
  - Below national average ratio of incomes to house prices, but housing affordability remains a key issue in particular parts of the region.

- Increasing mobility and high reliance on the use of the car, resulting in increasing dispersal between where people live, work and shop.
  - The need to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and to adapt to the effects of climate change, in particular flood risk.
  - Sub regional variations in water scarcity, with restricted surface and groundwater supply in large parts of the region.
  - Recovering levels of biodiversity but new challenges to be faced as a result of climate change.
  - Increasing levels of recycling, but a continued need to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.
5. The key sustainability issues and the evidence that supports them are set out in **Appendix 1** of this report.
  6. The Scoping Report will also provide an updated list of baseline information that will be drawn upon when appraising policies and proposals in the RSS 2009 Update.

### **Proposed SA framework**

7. The purpose of the SA Framework is to provide a way of checking whether the proposed Update to the RSS is the best possible one for sustainability. It comprises of a series of objectives and sub-questions against which policies and proposals of the RSS Update will be tested.
8. The framework will be based on that used to appraise the adopted RSS, updated where appropriate to reflect the recently published plans, policies and programmes such as the Integrated Regional Framework.

### **Proposed HRA component**

9. The HRA element of the work falls into two parts. In the first of these, information on Natura 2000 sites and their sensitivities will be fed into identification of spatial options. This will focus on ruling areas out where early screening work identifies potential for adverse effects on integrity, though this does not mean that any development outside these areas will automatically have no such impacts. In the second part of the work, HRA will be undertaken for the spatial options. This will take account of potential adverse effects associated with development identified in the first stage of the work. The aim will be to identify one or more options where there is no adverse effect on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites. This will ensure that the RSS Update

meets the requirements of the Habitats Directive, as well as the plan's core policies, environment policies and sub-area policies.

### **Critical review of the Assembly's approach to developing spatial options**

10. A critical review of the Assembly's approach to developing spatial options was carried out by testing the three elements of the approach – the scale of housing, the distribution of housing and sub-area options – against sub-questions and objectives of the SA framework. The review focussed on the most relevant sub-questions and objectives i.e. those that have spatial implications, given the scope of the RSS Update. It also had regard to sub-questions that are dependent on policy wording (e.g. reducing crime through design-measures). Although the RSS Update applies to housing numbers only, part of the role of the SA is to assess whether policies of the adopted RSS will need to be updated or refined as a result (e.g. public transport infrastructure provision).
11. The main conclusions resulting from the critical review were:
  - YHA's approach to examining the evidence for housing demand seems thorough. There is a need for assumptions on demand and supply to be made explicit and to ensure accompanying policies require housing of the right type and tenure to meet local needs.
  - Examining the relationship of housing demand and supply with employment growth will help to align the two and go some way towards reducing the need to travel. This is a significant and complex sustainability issue that warrants further analysis.
  - There is a need to understand the land requirements of the existing RSS and the distribution of the residual land supply available for further increases in housing as a result of the RSS Update. This is a crucial component of the deliverability of the RSS Update and will add greater certainty to the SA.
  - Prioritising public transport nodes and corridors in defining strategic opportunities is a welcome and positive element of YHA's approach to developing spatial options. There is a need for information on transport capacity to be incorporated and supporting policies to reduce car use.
  - There is a need to clarify the full range of opportunities and constraints that will inform strategic opportunity areas and how their relative importance will be weighted.

## **Next steps**

12. The Scoping Report will be published for an [x week] consultation on [date] and responses received will inform the final version.
13. The appraisal of spatial options will take place from [November 2008 to April 2009] using the Spatial Options Appraisal Framework (SOAF) which is to be developed with stakeholders as part of the SA process. This will help to clarify the weight to be attached to opportunities and constraints.
14. Preferred Options and accompanying policies will be appraised and the results published in an SA Report in [September 2009].

Land Use Consultants

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