# Sedgefield Borough Council

## Spennymoor Area Action Plan
## Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

Prepared by DTZ on behalf of Sedgefield Borough Council

August 2008

# Contents

**HOW TO COMMENT ON THIS REPORT**

The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report has been prepared for the Sedgefield Borough Council Local Development Framework to accompany the Spennymoor Area Action Plan Issues and Options Paper. Both are subject to a formal consultation exercise between August 2008 and October 2008. Following the consultation period, Sedgefield Borough Council will consider the responses and make any necessary amendments. The next stage of preparation for both the Area Action Plan (AAP) and the Sustainability Appraisal will then begin, and will be the subject of further consultation in the future. Comments are welcomed on this report. In particular, we are seeking views on the following areas:

- Has all the relevant background information been identified and correctly interpreted? (This includes other plans and programmes, and baseline data.)

- Have all the key issues for Spennymoor been properly identified?

- Have we chosen appropriate sustainability objectives for the AAP?

- Are there any other or better indicators we could have chosen?

Comments must be in writing, and should specify the matters/paragraphs to which they relate. Copies of the relevant documents have been placed in the libraries and are available for inspection at the Borough Council. The documents are also available on the Council's web site (www.sedgefield.gov.uk). Comments should be sent to:

Forward Planning Team
Sedgefield Borough Council
Council Offices
Spennymoor
DL16 6JQ

or by e-mail to: cmyers@sedgefield.gov.uk

**ALL COMMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY XXXX**

The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping exercise was carried out by DTZ on behalf of and in consultation with Sedgefield Borough Council.

# 1. Introduction

This Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report has been prepared for the Sedgefield Borough Local Development Framework (LDF) to accompany the Spennymoor Area Action Plan Issues and Options Report.

In accordance with European legislation and under Section 39(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, all LDFs must now be subjected to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) throughout their preparation, in order to assess the extent to which they are contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.  In preparing new or revised DPDs (Development Plan Documents) Local Planning Authorities must also conduct an environmental assessment in accordance with the requirements of European Directive 2201/42/EC (the Strategic Environmental Assessment directive), to test the full range of economic, social and environmental effects.

This is the second Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report to be prepared for the Sedgefield Borough LDF, following on from the LDF Scoping Report published in June 2005.  A full Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy Preferred Options report was published in June 2007.

## 1.1 Purpose of the Scoping Report

In line with Government guidance, the purpose of this SA Scoping report is to:

- Identify environmental, social and economic objectives identified in other Plans, Policies and Programmes that are relevant to the Spennymoor AAP;
- To assess the environmental, social and economic characteristics of the Spennymoor Area;
- To ensure that, as far as possible, the Spennymoor AAP achieves the objectives of sustainable development;
- To set out a framework for carrying out the remainder of the sustainability appraisal.

The Scoping Report has been written to conform to the SA Scoping Report for the LDF Core Strategy.  Therefore, it follows the same structure and uses much of the data and indicators used in the LDF Scoping Report.

## 1.2 The Meaning of Sustainable Development

The goal of sustainable development is 'to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations.' (UK Sustainable Development Strategy, 'Securing the Future', 2005). Essentially, this means recognising the links between the social, economic and environmental factors, which affect people's lives, and working to develop integrated solutions, which balance the needs of these three factors.

The UK Sustainable Development Strategy sets out five shared UK principles that will be used to achieve the sustainable development purpose:

- **Living within Environmental Limits:** respecting the limit of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity, to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations.
- **Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society:** meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all.
- **Achieving a Sustainable Economy:** building a strong, stable and sustainable economy which provides prosperity and opportunities for all, and in which environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them (polluter pays), and efficient resource use is incentivised.
- **Promoting Good Governance:** actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society – engaging people's creativity, energy and diversity.
- **Using Sound Science Responsibly:** ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty (through the precautionary principle) as well as public attitudes and values.

The government states that, for a policy to be sustainable, it must respect all of these principles. The AAP will therefore need to reflect these principles throughout its development.

These 5 principles have been reflected in the preparation of this Scoping Report, and are used to categorise the key issues to be addressed by the AAP and Sustainability Appraisal framework in Chapter 5.

## 1.3  The Sustainability Appraisal Process

In 2005, the government issued guidance that indicated it is possible to satisfy the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal by a single combined process.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a requirement under the European Directive 2001/42/EC. Certain plans and programmes that are likely to have significant effects on the environment now have to undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment. This includes spatial plans at both the regional and local levels.

This process is intended to provide a high level of protection for the environment. The likely significant effects of implementing the plan need to be identified, described and evaluated, and reasonable alternatives considered.  The SEA process focuses primarily on environmental effects. However, in order to ensure that the AAP complies with sustainability principles, the assessment of likely significant effects needs to be broadened to encompass social and economic effects as well.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is now mandatory, under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, for Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS), Development Plan Documents (DPD) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). It is an integral part of good plan making, and provides a mechanism for ensuring that sustainability objectives are translated into sustainable planning policies. An SA should identify and report on the likely significant

effects of a plan on social, environmental and economic issues, and highlight where these might need to be amended or changed. Government guidance on how to carry out a SA was issued by the ODPM in 2005, *'Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks'*.

There are many similarities between the assessments required of the SEA and SA. As a result, the ODPM guidance encompasses the requirements of the SEA Directive, and by carrying out a sustainability appraisal in accordance with the draft guidance, both sets of criteria should be met.

The SA consists of 5 stages as follows:

- Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope;
- Stage B: Developing and Refining Options and assessing effects;
- Stage C: Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report;
- Stage D: Consulting on the preferred options of the DPD and SA report;
- Stage E: Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the DPD.

This Scoping Report summarises the work which has been undertaken under Stage A of the SA process to date, as set out in more detail within the table below and for the purposes of consultation as set out at task A5.

| Stage | Sustainability Appraisal Task |
|---------|--------------------------------|
| Task A1 | Identify other policies, plans and programmes and sustainability objectives |
| Task A2 | Collect and analyse baseline information |
| Task A3 | Identify key sustainability issues and problems |
| Task A4 | Develop the SA framework |
| Task A5 | Consulting on the Scope of the SA |

# 2. Spennymoor Area Action Plan

## 2.1.1 Purpose/scope of the document

An Area Action Plan is a type of Development Plan Document that forms part of the statutory planning framework (LDF – Local Development Framework) for the local area. It provides a means of guiding the pattern of development within a specific area of change. Planning Policy Statement 12 (PPS 12, June 2008): Creating Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities though Local Spatial Planning states that AAPs can be used to:

- Deliver planned growth areas;
- Stimulate regeneration;
- Protect areas particularly sensitive to change;
- Resolve conflicting objectives in areas subject to development pressures; or
- Focus the delivery of area based regeneration initiatives.

The purpose of the Spennymoor Area Action Plan (AAP) is "to provide a comprehensive regeneration framework that challenges current use, targets change and inspires action to guide future investment and activity in the town centre".

Sedgefield Borough Council requires an AAP to:

- Provide a comprehensive development strategy for the area;
- Contain a comprehensive planning policy framework and where applicable propose amendments to the town centre boundary;
- Identify key sites with opportunities for development;
- Identify areas where the physical offer that can be reconfigured to maximise investor appeal;
- Identify practical opportunities to develop/redevelop the centre to best serve its current and future needs;
- Create opportunities for increased employment within the town centre;
- Include opportunities for promoting environmentally sustainable development and embedded renewable energy use;
- Provide practical initiatives and proposals for implementation;
- Identify improvements to vehicle and pedestrian movement in and around the town centre;
- Identify improvements to linkages between the town centre and existing/emerging residential developments;
- Provide a specific purpose to attracting/diversifying retail in the town centre; and
- Provide a comprehensive marketing proposal to promote the opportunities identified to prospective delivery partners.

## 2.1.2 Objectives

A series of objectives have been derived from a baseline assessment of the key strengths and weaknesses of the physical, social and economic environment of the town centre. Key opportunities have also been identified. These objectives will be further refined through consultation on the AAP issues and Options paper. The following objectives aim to drive-forward the vision for Spennymoor Town Centre:

1. Enhance the retail offer through plugging key fascia gaps

   The Sedgefield Retail Gap Analysis demonstrated that there is currently an under-provision of floorspace in several retail categories including Hardware & Household Goods, Children & Infants Wear and Florists. There is also no presence of Toys/Games/Hobbies in the town centre. Key to enhancing the offer must be a strategy to broaden the range of shops and services.

2. Developing a leisure cluster for the town centre

   Leisure is considered to be a key opportunity given the existence of the Spennymoor Leisure Centre in the town centre. The development of a cluster of leisure activities would include the following key priorities:

   - Expand the leisure centre's role and offer and integration with other services;

   - Promote the links between health services and leisure under the concept of "healthy living";

   - Encourage specialist leisure retail opportunities;

   - Promote an evening economy through cafes, bars and restaurants;

   - Consider opportunities for new sports facilities linked to the leisure centre.

3. Develop the role of the centre as an employment and enterprise hub

   In order to support the growth, diversification and regeneration of the town centre, there will need to be employment opportunities. This was highlighted in the Quality of Life Survey where one of the key priorities is to have a good employment base for local job opportunities. This is further supported by the RSS, Sedgefield Borough Community Strategy and Economic Development Strategy.

   Concentration of office space within the town centre would create a more vibrant town centre which is easily accessible for all. Furthermore, the close proximity to Durham makes Spennymoor an attractive option for new investment.

4. Expand the civic/public service role of the centre

   Local services can play an important role in bolstering the offer of the town centre, in concentrating footfall, and in facilitating investment. The rationalising and moderating of local services, including through the local government review may present some opportunities to facilitate this option.

5. Improve access and movement patterns in and around the centre

   This objective will promote and support a range of access and movement types including improved bicycle access, pedestrian access from key housing areas and car parks, and will increase the passing trade on the High Street which is currently restricted to buses only.

   An improved bus service which is legible and reliable for all will support the RSS's sustainable development agenda of ensuring good accessibility of homes to jobs and services by public transport.

6. Promote town centre living

   The promotion of town centre living will bring a customer base into the town centre, create a natural surveillance to improve community safety and bring forward infill sites for development.

7. Create a high quality, distinctive and attractive town centre environment

   The Retail Gap Analysis stated that improving the general ambience and environment would encourage more shoppers to visit the town centre. Furthermore, the Quality of Life survey highlighted the importance of a well maintained and safe environment, which can be achieved though high quality urban design is a key priority of theirs.

8. Promote sustainability and energy efficiency.

   The promotion of a sustainable and energy efficient town centre should be achieved through functionality a form of development that encourages low car based transport and employs standards relating to the quality and type of construction.

## 3. Review of Other Relevant Plans and Programmes

### 3.1 Developing the database

The SEA directive recommends that a sustainability appraisal should take account of the relationship between other relevant policies plans and programmes and sustainability objectives. The directive specifically requires that environmental objectives established at international, European Community or national levels be taken into account along with other relevant documents such as the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, PPS's and a range of other local plans and strategies. In reviewing the appropriate documents, positive and negative relationships between the possible competing demands of social, environmental and economic objectives can be identified.

The Local Development Framework Sustainability Scoping Report addresses existing plans, policies and Strategies at National and international level down to District level. This review of documents was updated in 2007 as part of the Sustainability Appraisal process for the Core Strategy. As such, in order to avoid repetition, this report will concentrate just on the tier of documents specific to local circumstances, only referring to relevant higher tier documents where appropriate.

### 3.2 Limitations of the database

It is important to recognise the limitations of this database:

- The list of relevant plans and programmes cannot claim to be exhaustive. The limits of time and resources have constrained the search, and new documentation emerging since the search will not have been included.

- There is also an inherent problem in researching a broad range of plans and programmes in this way. It requires the researcher to be able to identify the full spatial planning implications of plans and programmes from a wide range of different professional disciplines (e.g.: health, waste, housing or wildlife). Many of these may be unfamiliar to the researcher, and therefore the potential influences on land use may not have been recognised. To help overcome this problem, a postal consultation was carried out early in the SA process with all the key agencies and stakeholders responsible for the main plans and programmes under review. However, the feedback from this was limited. It therefore cannot be assumed that, because a plan or programme is identified in Appendix IV, the full implications for the LDF have been identified.

- The LDF has a key role to play in achieving sustainable development. Yet it is also a key delivery mechanism for major strategic plans such as the Borough's Community Strategy. PPS 12 states that the LDF should *'express those elements of the community strategy that relate to the development and use of land.'* The Community Strategy, however, has not undergone a sustainability appraisal, and to date there is no mechanism in place for appraising the action plans and programmes arising from the Community Strategy via the LSP. This may give rise to inconsistencies or conflict as the LDF is developed.

## 3.3 Regional and Local Context

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East provides the long term land use framework for the region. There are three main principles in the RSS which underpin the policy framework: Renaissance of the North East, Sustainable Development and Sequential Approach to development and phasing.

The RSS states that there is a need to create and sustain a high quality of life for all. As such, the plan states that strategies, plans and programmes should promote sustainability by encouraging development within existing built up areas and locating development to minimise the need to travel and journey lengths. In particular, the need to support town centres and ensure that services can be accessed on foot or by public transport is highlighted.

As well as being consistent with national and regional policy, this report is in alignment with the Council's Core Strategy and its Sustainability Appraisal process.

## 3.4 Key findings from the Review

Appendix III contains a detailed table showing the plans and programmes which have been reviewed. The table highlights the implications of the plans, policies and programmes (PPPs) for the AAP and the SA. However, it is possible that conflicts or inconsistencies between the plans and programmes will arise when trying to translate their implications into AAP policies. A summary of the key messages from the document review is contained in the table below:

| Key messages from the review of Plans, Policies and Programmes (PPPs) |
|---|
| Deliver sustainable development by tackling poverty, changing consumption and production patterns, conserving natural resources, tackling climate change and bringing health care up to basic minimum standards |
| Protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity and geo-diversity |
| Encourage energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy and low carbon generation/technology |
| Cut carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions |
| Ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, that they can afford, in a community where they want to live |
| Protect human health and the environment by reducing waste and promoting re-use and recycling |
| Living within environmental limits - protect air, land and water resources |
| Enhance community involvement and increase public involvement in decision-making and civic activity |
| Promote sustainable design |
| Provide good quality services for all |
| Raise the quality of life and the environment in rural areas |
| Provide a transport network that meets the needs of a growing economy and the increasing demand for travel while taking into consideration the environment |
| Reduce deprivation |
| Consider crime prevention and enhance community safety |
| Address the needs of the ageing population |

| |
|---|
| Develop a tourism experience that matches the quality of the built heritage and natural environment offered in the County |
| Ensure that the historic environment is fully considered in the LDF |
| Promote the vitality and viability of town centres through planning for growth and the development of existing town centres |
| Promote sustainable, diverse and adaptable agricultural sectors |
| Encourage growth of new and existing telecommunications systems while reducing environmental impact |
| Ensure a good quality of life in both urban and rural areas by promoting access to high quality, well managed and maintained open spaces, sports and recreational facilities |
| Identify land at risk and the degree of risk from flooding |
| Stem population decline and urban-rural migration |
| Improve health and well-being while reducing health inequalities |
| Create, maintain and promote a range of industrial sites and premises, that enhance the image of the Borough as a location for new investment |
| Make cultural activity central to the lives of residents as they pursue lifelong learning and acquire new knowledge skills |
| Ensure children have access to education and provide life-long learning opportunities for all |
| Eradicate fuel poverty |
| Tackle and adapt to the effects of climate change |

# 4.    Baseline Information

Each of the policies contained within the AAP will have an impact upon the state of the Borough. In order to understand, predict or monitor these impacts, there first has to be an understanding of what currently exists within the Borough and where possible, within the area covered by the AAP. This is why the collation of baseline information is essential.

The information collated to date is summarised below, and presented in the table in Appendix IV. The baseline information assists the development of the AAP in three key areas.

1.  It provides a 'snapshot' of the state of the Borough and Spennymoor at the current time.
2.  It assists in identifying key issues and problems that will need to be addressed by the AAP.
3.  It provides the basis for predicting and monitoring effects arising from the implementation of the AAP.

Compiling a comprehensive set of baseline information could potentially go on indefinitely. The limits of time and resources will inevitably constrain how much information can be collated, and a pragmatic approach is essential to determine the level of detail necessary for the effective delivery of the AAP.  A detailed analysis of baseline data was undertaken at the beginning of the LDF process and this database has since been updated as part of the Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal.  The AAP boundary, which encompasses Spennymoor town centre, does not fit with ward boundaries or census output areas and as such data collection at this level is not possible.  Therefore, this current SA takes the existing borough wide LDF baseline data base as a starting point, updating it where appropriate and supplementing it with further indicators derived at the local Spennymoor level where appropriate but recognising that there are limitations to the availability of data at the Spennymoor level.  The following wards have been used to provide a socio-economic analysis of the town:

- Spennymoor Ward
- Low Spennymoor and Tudhoe Grange Ward
- Tudhoe Ward
- Middlestone ward

## 4.1    Background to Baseline Data Collection

During the collation of baseline data for the LDF it was recognised that, whilst there is a need to take a pragmatic approach to baseline data collection, it is also important to ensure that certain key areas of information are covered.  The SEA Directive states that the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment need to be identified (Annex 1(b)), along with the environmental characteristics of the areas likely to be affected (Annex 1(c)). The draft ODPM guidance on Sustainability Appraisal widens the Directive's approach to encompass social and economic as well as environmental information. Given the all-encompassing nature of this approach, the ODPM guidance provides some initial areas for consideration when collating the information. These were used as the starting point for collating the data.

The data was compiled by consultation with organisations, individuals and Council departments; by examining plans and programmes collated as part of the preparation of the LDF and Sustainability Appraisal (including the Sedgefield Community Strategy); and via accessing relevant web-sites. The Sustainability Appraisal of the NE RSS (ERM, June 2008) also contains a comprehensive data set of regional information, which provides a useful comparator.

## 4.2 Limitations of baseline data

It is important to recognise the limitations attached to the baseline data.

- The level of detail contained within the database is inevitably limited by the time available.
- With a wide variety of data sources, inevitably there will be significant variations between the quality and level of detail. This could lead to misinterpretation of the data when trying to make comparisons or assess the findings.
- Geographical boundaries used by different agencies may not correspond, making it difficult to extract figures relating just to the local authority area or indeed more detailed data at a Spennymoor level.
- Finding information at the local level can be extremely difficult, especially for some topic areas where it may only be available at the regional level. While it may be possible to extrapolate to Borough level, it is extremely difficult to translate this to ward level.
- There will be variation between the age of the data. Some will have being constantly updated and some may be several years old.
- The data may not be presented or interpreted in the format, which would be most useful to the LDF or SA, which may mean that the information extracted will be inadequate or incomplete.
- There are information gaps where the data has not been collated at all, or where continued monitoring is not in place. This is particularly the case for biodiversity and economic data.
- Some information may only be qualitative in nature (e.g.: fear of crime, quality of life).
- The information collated is providing only a 'snapshot' of the current situation.

**A key consideration for the database is that it should be kept constantly under review.** In order to effectively develop, monitor and appraise the LDF, it is essential that the local planning authority (or the authority as a whole), maintains and develops the database in order to ensure it is up-to-date and as comprehensive as possible. The means of doing this, including the potential resource issues, will have to be considered as part of the development of the LDF. (See Action Points raised in Chapter 8.) The baseline information collated to date is summarised below, under the categories of environmental, social and economic issues.

The full set of data is set out in Appendix IV.

## 4.3 Summary of baseline indicators

A brief summary of the key indicators in relation to Spennymoor is set out below under the core sustainability indicators.

### 4.3.1 Environment

The A688 which bypasses the main developed areas of the town acts as a barrier between the town and open space surrounding the grey hound track. The town centre and immediate surrounding areas appear to have a haphazard pattern of development with housing from various eras having replaced the historic terraces leading to a lack of coherency. To the north of the town centre there are two popular green open spaces: The Victoria Jubilee Park and Tudhoe Grange which is connected to the town centre through a swathe of landscape terminating on Oxford road. This is a successful open space and presents an opportunity to bring it more into the town. Victoria Jubilee Gardens is connected to the town via Villiers Street.

The main retail activity in Spennymoor town centre is concentrated along the High Street, Cheapside and Festival Walk. A number of budget supermarkets lie to the east and west of those streets which are surrounded by their respective car parks. Festival Walk currently contains a number of void units which detracts from the High Street which presents an unsightly frontage. The public square enclosed by Festival Walk lies in an inconspicuous place along the High Street and lacks activity. The centre lacks structure and clarity in terms of fronts and backs, streets and footpaths and general legibility. There are a number of underutilised sites within the centre including the former gas works site which contributes to this image of fragmentation.

The High Street contains some decent and higher quality historic buildings but it is diluted by Festival Walk and other 70s developments such as the bingo hall. The shop front signage throughout the town centre is incoherent and obtrusive. Around the backland fringes there are a number of shed-type developments from the 1980s and 1990s such as the Co-op and other supermarkets. The general image is one of incoherent architectural style, poor maintenance and average to poor building quality with very few exceptions. This detracts from the character and identity of Spennymoor.

The public realm has had some recent investment and some parts of the public realm dates back to the 1970s and 80s. The general impression is that the public realm lacks a coherent scheme that will reinforce the identity of the town. There are also oversized planters, and too much signage and street furniture.

### 4.3.2  People

Spennymoor has approximately 19,000 residents (as at the Census 2001). The resident age profile of Spennymoor and Sedgefield generally follows the regional and national profile overall.  There is a lower proportion of children aged under 15 and a higher proportion of 46-60 year olds within Spennymoor. ONS forecasts that the Borough's population is expected to rise gradually from 88,000 to 91,600 by the year 2029. Spennymoor's population offers the potential to grow by a greater percentage increase as a result of a number of major housing developments coming forward in the town.  In terms of ethnic mix, a higher than average number of people living within Sedgefield are classed as being white, with over 99% of people falling within this category.

In terms of the level of vacant dwellings, Spennymoor is in line with national averages with just 3% of dwellings recorded vacant as of the 2001 census. 68% of residents within the town

own their own homes, again in line with national averages, although levels of social renting are significantly higher than national averages at 33% compared to 19%. The town as a whole has a small proportion of detached homes and a higher proportion of semi-detached and terraced properties. There is a limited market for flatted accommodation, with potential for any further demand to be met within the town centre.

Slightly higher than average numbers of people travel to work in privately owned transport with correspondingly lower numbers of people using public transport to get to work. Slightly higher than average numbers of people walk to work in Spennymoor, however slightly lower than average numbers of people cycle to work. Furthermore a higher than average number of people don't own a car or van, approximately 30% compared to 27% nationally.

### 4.3.3 Economy

Spennymoor has traditionally had a strong employment base with the Merrington Lane and Green Lane industrial areas on the edges of the town accommodating a wide range of employers. However, with many businesses closing their premises and relocating elsewhere, such as Electrolux and Thorne Lighting, the town employment base is being eroded.

The local workforce displays average levels of economic activity (43% in fulltime employment, which is above the national average). Particularly significant disparities from national averages are the low numbers of self employed residents (over 3% less than national levels) and the high numbers of permanently sick or disabled residents in Spennymoor (almost twice the national level). The number of students is also half the national average. The employment base is dominated by manufacturing. The occupation and skill profiles mirror the employment structure with lower income households (falling within the lower Mosaic Profile categories of blue collar enterprise, ties of the community and municipal dependency, as highlighted within the County Durham Economic Partnership Baseline study Prepared by Experian in 2006).

Travel to work patterns show that a large proportion of residents work locally within Spennymoor. According to the 2001 Census, approximately 40% of residents in Spennymoor work within 5km of their home.

In terms of retail activity, the Town Centre Survey 2007 illustrates that comparison goods take up the greatest level of floorspace. Although the number of vacant units have decreased in numbers, proportionally the level of voids has risen due to an overall decrease in retail unit numbers across the town between 2004 and 2007. Overall the amount of floorspace has decreased in the town and there is a concern in the number of hot food takeaways. Another strength of the town centre is that Zone A rental levels increased between 2003 and 2006 by 10%

# 5. Summary of Key Sustainability Issues

## 5.1 Background

In order to effectively address the development needs of the Borough, the Local Development Framework (LDF) Sustainability Scoping Report prepared in 2005 identified the key issues affecting the area. These issues which, were identified in order to influence the development of the LDF, also directed the objectives and indicators which were chosen for the Sustainability Appraisal framework.

The Sustainability issues identified as part of this initial exercise have been reviewed since the end of the consultation period on the LDF SA Scoping Report, in order to inform the development and sustainability testing of the Core Strategy, which was published in July 2007. In preparing this scoping report for the Spennymoor AAP, the Core Strategy Sustainability Issues have been taken as a starting point for the identification of Sustainability Issues affecting Spennymoor town centre.

The issues, summarised below, have been drawn from various sources. These include the baseline data already collated as part of the SA process, the other plans and policies affecting the LDF (including the Community Strategy), and preliminary consultations with a range of key contacts and organisations. A full list of issues is contained within Appendix V.

## 5.2 Living within Environmental Limits

The town is located in a borough which has a semi-rural character in parts. quality and concerns of litter, graffiti and fly tipping (as stated in the Community Strategy). Furthermore, the urban fringes of the town and the industrial areas need improvement. Environmental sustainability needs to be managed in terms of land use (developing on brownfield land first) and resources such as energy, water and recycling; and the potential for polluting activities need to be minimised. Access to services need to be improved, especially because of the low levels of car ownership. Public transport, therefore, needs to be improved and alternative travel schemes introduced. Climate change is one of the most serious issues facing the Borough. Therefore, levels of greenhouse gasses, energy consumption and flood risk need to be monitored.

**Implications for the AAP**
- Improve the quality of environmental information used to monitor environmental quality in the town centre;
- Improve environmental quality generally;
- Urban Fringe needs to be Improved;
- Brownfield sites in the town centre need to be brought forward into productive use;
- Identify measures for reducing levels of water and energy consumption through, for example, smart design and promotion of renewable forms of energy;
- Facilitate the creation of a compact centre, that is well connected and accessible by public transport;
- Encourage town centre living;
- Maximise opportunities for public art;

- Encourage sustainable forms of construction, to reduce waste and encourage recycling and energy/water efficiency;
- Encourage sustainable urban drainage schemes (SUDS);
- Designation of multi-user routes, and design of new developments to move away from favouring car travel;
- Promotion of tree planting.

## 5.3 Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society

Sedgefield faces a number of social issues, which will be addressed through the LDF and where appropriate the Spennymoor AAP. These issues include an ageing population, deprivation and health issues. Health issues have been made worse by poor levels of physical activity, poor diet and smoking. Access to adequate health care is an important issue. Educational achievement is relatively low, an issue which should be rectified in order to support the development of a skilled workforce and healthy economy. Housing affordability needs to be considered in order to ensure the existence of a well balanced housing market.

The town centre needs to revive its vitality and viability, whilst retaining existing services and promoting new services. This could be achieved through the development of further facilities in the public and community sector. The community strategy states that Spennymoor should be a place where people can live healthy, active and fulfilling lives as part of vibrant and strong community, and where people can access the housing they want in attractive and safe neighbourhoods.

**Implications for the AAP**
- Bring forward residential development sites which meet the needs of the community and also encourage a more diverse socio-economic mix;
- Improve the Town Centre's role as a focus for high quality public service delivery;
- Inclusive design for disabled users;
- High quality facilities such as leisure centres;
- Attract seasonal events and create an events space;
- Provide a secure, safe environment with natural surveillance.

## 5.4 Achieving a Sustainable Economy

Although the Borough suffers from high levels of unemployment, Spennymoor has a higher than average level of those in full time employment. The area has historically had a heavy reliance on manufacturing with the Borough seeing a low level of business start ups. As well as NetPark, there are currently proposals for a new development at Durham Gate which would, if granted planning permission, provide the area with the opportunity to attract further new business to the town.

The community strategy for Spennymoor wants high quality businesses which can prosper and where local people have the confidence and skills to access the jobs that they offer.

**Implications for the AAP**
- Recognise and Promote the town centre as an employment centre;
- Improving viability as a shopping centre;
- Consider opportunities for initiative workspace to accommodate local businesses;

### 5.4.1 Promoting Good Governance

There is a perceived strong sense of community within the Borough. However, the Sedgefield Borough Council Quality of Life Survey (2008) suggested that this could be improved in Spennymoor by increasing community awareness of the existing local residents association within the town.

**Implications for the AAP**
- Engage effectively with the community in all aspects of planning, through the Statement of Community Involvement process;
- Fully involve the traders in the process of town centre management.

### 5.4.2 Using Sound Science Responsibly

The SA process has collated a significant amount of information as part of its review of plans and programmes, and through gathering baseline information. However, a number of significant gaps in information have also been identified. It is essential that this information be updated and improved, and kept constantly under review, in order to effectively develop, monitor and appraise the AAP. This will have resource implications. However, given that this information may have wider benefits throughout the local authority, consideration might be given to how baseline information may be kept up-to-date at a corporate level, to benefit all corporate plans.

**Implications for the AAP**
- Ensure that the baseline information is kept up-to-date and relevant;
- Consider certain forms of renewable technology and sustainable construction techniques in order to support the reduction of $CO_2$ emissions.

# 6. The Sustainability Framework: Objectives and Indicators

## 6.1 Background

The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal is to ensure that sustainability considerations are better integrated into the preparation and adoption of plans. In order to assess how adequately a plan is achieving this, it is necessary to test its policies against a set of sustainability objectives and criteria and also, going forwards, to monitor how effectively they are helping to deliver those sustainability objectives. For this reason, a set of sustainability indicators needs to be developed, measuring each of the sustainability objectives. This is the purpose of the Sustainability Framework, which comprises a set of objectives and indicators.

The framework will be used to test the compatibility of the Spennymoor AAP aims and objectives, and to appraise all policies and spatial options put forward as part of the AAP production process over the next few months.

## 6.2 Selecting the Objectives and Indicators

The 2005 LDF Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, set out a series of sustainability objectives and indicators which were derived from the information gathered from the context review, baseline, and sustainability issues, the requirements of the SA Guidance and SEA Directive, and the consultation responses from the SA Scoping Report. These draft sustainability objectives were revised as a result of the responses received from the consultation on the Scoping Report and an audit trail listing the required changes is available in Appendix 4 of the Core Strategy Full Sustainability Appraisal.

As has been noted earlier within this document, for each Local Development Document the general framework developed in 2005 has to be adapted to relate to the scope of the DPD to be assessed. This involves 'scoping out' those issues not relevant to that particular document to create a slimmed down framework. As such, the framework identified within the 2005 LDF Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report has been reviewed and the sustainability objectives and indicators remain the same.

The revised list of sustainability objectives are below in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1**

| Sustainability Objectives |
| --- |
| 1. To reduce poverty and social exclusion |
| 2. To improve the health and well-being of the population |
| 3. To improve education, skills and lifelong learning |
| 4. To provide everybody with the opportunity to live in a decent and affordable home |
| 5. To improve community safety and reduce the fear of crime |
| 6. To improve the quality of the local environment |
| 7. To ensure all groups have improved accessibility to essential services |

| |
|---|
| 8. To support and enhance community activity and increase public involvement in all decision making |
| 9. To improve tourism, culture and leisure opportunities |
| 10. To reduce the harmful impact of transport |
| 11. To conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity |
| 12. To protect, maintain and enhance the distinctive appearance and character of the landscape, the historic environment and built heritage |
| 13. To protect and enhance the natural resources of air, water and land |
| 14. To reduce contributions to, and alleviate the impact of, climate change |
| 15. To reduce the production of waste and encourage re-use and recycling |
| 16. To encourage, support and promote a competitive and diverse business industry |
| 17. To enhance the image of the area as a business location |
| 18. To encourage the social and environmental performance of the economy |

## 6.3 Decision-making criteria

In the development of these objectives, it was considered useful to include a number of questions for each of the objectives. These questions have been reviewed and modified for the purposes of assessing the AAP and are presented in Appendix VI as the 'decision-making criteria', and should be used as a prompt when assessing the AAP policies against the sustainability objectives.

## 6.4 Indicators

A number of indicators have also been listed for each of the sustainability objectives in Appendix VI. These are a means of measuring how far the AAP is helping achieve the sustainability objectives.  In choosing the indicators, it was important to try to identify those that would measure, as far as possible, the contribution that the AAP was making towards achieving the objective. Inevitably this is very difficult in some cases, and for nearly all the indicators, there will be a number of influencing factors determining the achievement of the objective – not just the AAP.

The key consideration used in trying to identify indicators was whether the AAP would be one of the major influencing factors.  For some of the objectives, it has not been possible to identify sufficient indicators, and it is hoped that the consultation process will supply some additional input for these.  Other factors which influenced the choice of indicator included:

- ease of measurement;
- simplicity, and ease with which it could be interpreted and used;
- whether a target could be applied or selected in due course (see below);
- whether it will show trends over time.

The table in Appendix VI categorises each of the indicators in terms of how easy it might be to collate the information required.

## *7.* Testing the AAP aims and objectives against the Sustainability Framework

### 7.1 Methodology Used for Testing Aims and Objectives

It is important to ensure at the outset that the objectives of the AAP are in accordance with sustainability principles. Doing this should help set the context for the development of AAP policies and spatial options, to ensure that they broadly comply with sustainability principles (although they will still need to be subjected to a detailed SA).

In order to test the objectives, a simple compatibility test has been used, as set out below. This test uses the categories set out within the Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal.

Seven categories were used to test the compatibility of the AAP objectives against the SA Framework:

| | |
|---|---|
| ✓✓ | **Likely to have a very positive effect** |
| ✓ | **Likely to have a positive effect** |
| **0** | **No significant effect or no clear link** |
| **?** | **Uncertain or insufficient information to determine effect** |
| ✗ | **Likely to have a negative impact** |
| ✗✗ | **Likely to have a very negative impact** |
| **I** | **Effect depends on implementation** |

In carrying out the assessments, each AAP aim/objective was considered in terms of how much it would impact upon the achievement of each of the Sustainability Objectives as set out in the Sustainability Framework.

**Determining the Outcome**

Despite attempts to make the Sustainability Objectives and supporting questions as specific as possible, it is inevitable that the appraisal will, to a certain extent, be based upon subjective assessments. The input and comments from a wide range of external organisations via the consultation process will be invaluable here, to ensure that there is a level of consensus over the outcomes. However, the sustainability impact of any of the AAP objectives will vary greatly depending upon how that objective is implemented, and also what else is happening in the town and beyond. This is the reason, as in the Core Strategy SA Report, for the inclusion of the 'I' category, above, to highlight this level of uncertainty.

**Using the Findings**

In considering the outcomes of the compatibility test, efforts should be concentrated on those AAP objectives identified as either red or amber, i.e.: 'conflicting' or 'variable', in terms of their effects upon the Sustainability Objectives. Ideally, the intention should be to reword or amend those aims/objectives to convert their effects to green ('compatible') or yellow ('neutral'). However, it has to be recognised that in some instances it will be very difficult to avoid conflict.

## 7.2   Testing AAP Objectives - Key Findings

Table 7.1 shows the compatibility testing between the AAP Objectives against the Sustainability Objectives. This helps to identify where there might be tensions between the objectives, which in turn may influence the decisions taken when appraising the LDF policies and plans.  Although generally there was a relative degree of compatibility, there were also a number of areas of uncertainty.

There are a number of areas within the matrix which are ranked a having 'uncertain' or 'Effects dependant on implementation' compatibility, indicating potential of areas of conflict or areas where conflict will be dependent upon the way in which the activity is implemented. This is where it has been assumed that objectives likely to involve development (e.g.: housing, economic development) could have a negative impact on the environment, depending upon how development is implemented. This highlights that the objectives could still be achieved by making efficient use of land and resources, considering the use of sustainable construction techniques and ensuring that the countryside and historic environment is preserved or enhanced.

It is important to be aware of these tensions between objectives when carrying out the AAP appraisal, as it is likely that these will be the areas where it will be necessary to explore mitigation or alternatives to try to reduce the level of conflict when formulating AAP policies.

**Table 7.1: Compatibility of AAP Objectives with Sustainability Appraisal Objectives**

| | SA OBJECTIVES | AAP Objectives | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Enhance the retail offer through plugging key fascia gaps | Expand the range of leisure activities and uses, including eating/drinking | Develop the role of the centre as an employment and enterprise hub | Expand the civic/public service role of the centre | Improve access and movement patterns in and around the centre | Promote town centre living | Create a high quality, distinctive and attractive town centre environment | Promote sustainability and energy efficiency |
| 1 | Reduce poverty & social exclusion | 0 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔✔ | 0 |
| 2 | Improve health & well-being | 0 | ✔ | 0 | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | I | ✔✔ | ✔✔ |
| 3 | Improve education, skills & lifelong learning | 0 | 0 | 0 | ✔✔ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | Provide decent homes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | I | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | Improve c'ty safety & reduce fear of crime | 0 | I | 0 | 0 | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | 0 |
| 6 | Improve quality of where people live | ✔ | ✔✔ | 0 | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | I | ✔✔ | ✔ |
| 7 | Improved accessibility | 0 | I | 0 | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | ✔ |
| 8 | Enhance sense of community | 0 | ✔ | 0 | ✔✔ | 0 | ✔ | ✔✔ | 0 |
| 9 | Improve tourism, culture and leisure opportunities | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | 0 | ✔ | 0 | 0 | ✔✔ | 0 |
| 10 | Reduce harmful impact of transport | 0 | I | I | ✔ | I | ✔ | 0 | ✔ |
| 11 | To conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity | 0 | ? | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | Quality of landscapes/townscapes | I | I | 0 | I | 0 | I | ✔✔ | 0 |
| 12 | Protect/enhance air, water and land | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ✔✔ |
| 13 | Climate change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | I | 0 | 0 | ✔✔ |
| 14 | Reduce waste | 0 | I | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ✔✔ |
| 15 | Competitive & diverse business industry | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | ✔✔ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 | Quality as business location | ✔ | ✔ | ✔✔ | 0 | ✔ | 0 | ✔✔ | ✔ |
| 17 | Social/Env. performance of industry | ✔ | 0 | I | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ✔✔ |

# 8. Proposals for Sustainability Appraisal Report

This document will be sent to the Strategic Environmental Bodies for a six week consultation period. The comments made on this document will then be taken into account when preparing the finalised sustainability framework which will be used to test the emerging Area Action Plan and the Preferred Options set out within it. Where necessary further assessment of the options will be undertaken, along with any updating of the baseline data, plans and policies.

The draft Sustainability Appraisal report will be published with the preferred options document and will then be reviewed in the light of comments received. The results of the final assessment will be set out in a final Sustainability Appraisal report incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The final Sustainability Appraisal report will be published at the same time as the submission documents, which will be subject to Independent Examination.

Once the examination has taken place and the Inspector has published his binding report the Spennymoor Area Action Plan Local Development Document will be adopted by Sedgefield Borough Council. At the same time the Sustainability Appraisal will also be published, along with the necessary statements required by the legislation stating how the effects of the plan have been accounted for.

Once the Spennymoor Area Action Plan Local Development Document has been adopted the effects of it will be monitored. This will include the monitoring of the sustainability indicators set out in section 6 of this document. The monitoring process will help measure how well the plan contributes to sustainable development.