



CHAPTER 12: ENVIRONMENTAL APPRAISAL

Introduction

- 12.1 The Borough Council strongly believes in the principle of working towards sustainable development. Sustainable development may be described as the type of development that supports economic growth, social welfare and environmental protection. Reconciling these interests is often very difficult and can challenge the integrity of Local Plan policies. This section of the Local Plan addresses environmental issues that form part of the Council's work towards delivering sustainable development across High Peak.
- 12.2 The 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development confirmed at the international level the responsibility of local governments as a custodian of the environment. Sustainable development: meeting the needs of the future without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (WCED 1987 Our Common Future) was established as an important issue for central and local government.
- 12.3 From the 1992 Conference Local Agenda 21 strategy was developed and requires that a holistic approach be taken to considering the way societies move forward so that economic, social and environmental concerns are addressed together. There are a variety of policies within the UK that help to contribute to environmental sustainable development. The Borough Council supports good environmental management practices and during 2001 achieved the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS).
- 12.4 Through Planning Policy Guidance Note 12 – Development Plans, the Government requires that environmental concerns be integrated into the appraisal of policies in the preparation of Local Plans. Undertaking an environmental appraisal of the Local Plan is considered very beneficial in accommodating sustainability issues and environmental concerns.



Purpose and Aim

- 12.5 The purpose of an environmental appraisal is to show the likely effect of policies and proposals against a range of environmental criteria. When the plan refers to the 'environment', it means the external conditions and surroundings that may be affected by the policies.
- 12.6 The Environmental Appraisal is an explicit, systematic and iterative review of Local Plan policies to evaluate their individual and combined impacts on the environment. It is essential that the Environmental Appraisal is fully integrated into the plan making process and that it is involved early on in the planning process.
- 12.7 A successful outcome of the appraisal is that policies in the final plan give due regard to environmental factors, minimise adverse environmental impact and where possible enhance the quality of the environment. It must be acknowledged that there are specific social and economic imperatives, which may at times take priority over environmental issues. These are not considered in the Environmental Appraisal due to the many diverse issues that would have social or economic considerations.
- 12.8 The Borough Council has committed itself to a plan strategy which embraces the concept of environmentally sustainable development. The Appraisal has shown it is not possible to produce a plan that has no environmental impact although wherever possible these impacts are kept to a minimum or permitted in situations where the environment would be expected to recover in due course. The Environmental Appraisal is designed to be open about tensions and conflicts that inevitably exist. This will help the Borough Council determine how policies and proposals can be improved with regard to the objectives of environmental sustainability as mentioned in Chapter 2: Strategy and Aims.
- 12.9 The 1998 Adopted Local Plan was subject to an environmental appraisal and the council believe that the main thrust of the plan and the majority of the aims and policies were sustainable. Overall the previous Adopted Plan made a positive contribution towards achieving sustainable development and growth. The policies and proposals of the 2002 Deposit Local Plan have been similarly appraised.

Process

12.10 The approach taken for the environmental appraisal has been broadly based on the Department of the Environment Good Practice Guide "Environmental Appraisal of Development Plans" (published 1993) and "Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice" (DETR, 1998).



12.11 There are three main stages to the Environmental Appraisal:

- Characterising the environment and defining environmental stock
- Appraising the policy content.
- Interpretation of policy impact appraisal

Establishing Criteria

12.12 The environmental appraisal is based on 15 environmental criteria against which the policies are appraised. The criteria were taken from suggestions of Environmental Considerations in PPG 12.

12.13 The Good Practice Guide (referred to previously) suggests it is preferable to limit the number of environmental characteristics to as few as possible, only to address areas which the local plan could be expected to influence and to clearly distinguish between the criteria for clarity. In this kind of broad summary appraisal, the chosen criteria can only give an outline indication of the character of the environmental stock. The environmental stock criteria are categorised into three broad bands that were considered relevant to the High Peak area:

- Energy Efficiency
- Natural Resources
- Environment

Environmental Stock Criteria

Energy Efficiency

12.14 These criteria are concerned with the impacts that policies may have on the wider global environment and energy consumption

12.15 Building Quality

Planning policies that pursue urban containment can positively influence urban renewal and reuse existing buildings with an aim to maintain or improve the condition and continuous renewal of buildings.

12.16 Renewable Energy

There is some limited potential for alternative energy production in the High Peak due to particular planning constraints. By substituting energy generated from the burning of finite fossil fuels for energy generated from renewable sources CO₂ emissions can be reduced.



12.17 **Waste**

Policies which encourage sustainable waste management and aim to decrease the amount of land filled waste by encouraging reuse and recycling are deemed as positive contributions.

12.18 **Transport energy efficiency – modes – safer more energy efficient transport**

Encouraging modes of transport which produce fewer harmful emissions per person will help in reducing global atmospheric problems, reduce congestion and improve local air quality.

12.19 **Transport energy efficiency – trips – reduction in need to travel**

Land use patterns that segregate uses and increase the length of trips are a problem. Positive impacts for reducing the number and length of trips needs to be encouraged.

Natural Resources

12.20 The protection and enhancement of natural resources is a central aspect of sustainable development. These criteria are concerned with the impact of policies on the natural resources.

12.21 **Air Quality**

Policies, which protect air quality by reducing the influence of traffic, quarrying processes and other industrial activities, have a positive influence.

12.22 **Water Conservation**

High rainfall, the occurrence of water bearing rocks, the watershed of the Pennine Hills and aquifers around Buxton make the High Peak strategically important for water. Policies, which maintain a supply of water while maintaining ground water and river levels while minimising water polluting industries and without inflicting adverse impacts on wildlife habitats and the quality of the landscape, are positive.

12.23 **Conservation of Undeveloped (Greenfield) Land**

Once land has been built on it is extremely unlikely that it will be returned to green uses. Conservation of the land is an important concern since it is a vital resource for agriculture and wildlife and is essential in determining environmental quality. Policies that encourage brownfield and infill development generally have a positive score.

12.24 **Mineral Conservation**

The High Peak is rich in minerals, principally limestone, grit-stone and clay. The extraction of minerals and restoration of sites is dealt with by the Minerals Local Plan written by Derbyshire County Council. Some of the impacts of mineral extraction may fall within the remit of this plan. Policies should aim to reduce consumption and increase reuse and recycling of materials.



12.25 **Conservation of Tree Cover (rate of CO₂ fixing)**

Carbon dioxide is released to the atmosphere when fossil and biomass fuels are burned but can be fixed in the form of plant tissue as vegetation transpires. Vegetation; especially broad-leafed tree species are amongst the most effective fixers of carbon dioxide. Within policies it is important to protect current stock and increase tree cover.

Local Environment

12.26 The impact that policies will have on the quality of peoples lives and their surroundings.

12.27 **Cultural Heritage**

The Boroughs history is essential to its cultural identity and lends many parts of the area a distinct sense of place. Its maintenance is important to the well being of the local community and its educational value. Policies which serve to protect historically important and locally valued sites will score positively.

12.28 **Public access/ open space**

Access to open space including areas in towns and to the countryside for informal recreation is important in determining people's quality of life. Areas of open space often have other sustainable values such as CO₂ fixers or wildlife habitats. The planning and development process needs to enable open space to be protected, quality maintained availability to be increased and access to be enhanced.

12.29 **Landscape Character**

Landscape character is determined by a combination of physical, natural and cultural characteristics such as geology, landform, soils, tree cover, enclosure and settlement patterns including visual aspects. Perceptual qualities such as noise, smell, historical associations and cultural nuance are also important parts of landscape character. Policies need to conserve, enhance or restore landscape character and local distinctiveness in the High Peak.

12.30 **Built Environment – Liveability**

The quality of the built environment is of great importance in determining the quality of life of those who live in towns and villages. The juxtaposition of different types of development and convenient access to homes, jobs and services are vital to providing a convenient and pleasant living environment. The aim is to enhance townscapes, increase safety and sense of security and improve the aural and olfactory environment.

12.31 **Wildlife Habitats**

Improving bio-diversity and the diffusion of wildlife has aesthetic, recreational and sustainability benefits. This can be achieved by protecting sites and species and through sustainable development in which the location, form and layout of the development is influenced by wildlife needs. Many sites in the High Peak are designated as having special wildlife value. Sites of importance include



woodlands, moorlands, acid and alkali grasslands, wetlands, hedgerows and former mineral workings. The development of a biodiversity plan for the High Peak area has contributed significantly to understanding about the vulnerability and diversity of protected species.

Appraising the Plan

12.32 The primary impact of each policy was examined and the level of impact judged under each of the criteria whether the impact was considered to be positive, neutral, mixed choice, negative or uncertain. The views are represented as symbols on a matrix of results.

- ✓ Positive (beneficial impact)
- Neutral (No relationship or insignificant impact)
- </> Mixed choice (Impact was uncertain at time of appraisal)
- X Negative (significant adverse impact)
- ? Uncertain (Uncertainty of knowledge or prediction)

12.33 The Local Plan seeks to achieve policies and developments that are fully sustainable. The appraisal's true test is whether policies in the Local Plan move land use and patterns of development towards or away from sustainable objectives. Policies may in some cases allow certain forms of development which in themselves are not fully compatible with sustainable objectives. Nevertheless, if policies seek to control development in such a way that the outcome will improve on current trends or predictions then the move in a positive sustainable direction is achieved.

Conclusions

12.34 The final appraisal of the policies can be seen in the matrix table at the end of the chapter. The overall percentages for this appraisal of the 117 Policies giving 1755 possible responses are:

✓	Positive	22%
●	Neutral	44%
</>	Mixed choice	5%
X	Negative	1%
?	Uncertain	28%

12.35 In general terms the more positive responses a policy receives with no negative responses, the more sustainable a policy is. This is the case for GD1, OC4 and OC8. These policies relate to sustainability and the development context, landscape character and design and the protection of sites of importance for nature conservation.



- 12.36 If a policy has only a few positive responses but has mainly neutral responses such as OC9 and OC10, BC2, TR11 and TR12 these policies should also be sustainable in that they will not adversely affect the various criteria but will have less of a beneficial impact. These policies mainly relate to specific issues such as protected species, trees and woodlands, shop fronts and cycle facilities which are important to address but which do not have as wide-reaching impact other than within the criteria on which it scores positively.
- 12.37 66% of all of the 1,755 possible responses were positive and neutral which means that in the majority of cases, the policies within the plan will not result in adverse environmental impacts but create a mainly sustainable framework for future development in the borough. Of the remaining responses 5% were mixed, 10% were negative and 28% uncertain. Whilst those responses only represent a fairly small percentage of cases their impact is likely be significant.
- 12.38 Policy numbers TC4, EMP8, H2 and H4 have a large proportion of negative responses. These policies consider large retail, housing and industrial allocations where would be impossible to avoid adverse impacts on many aspects of the environment. Where developments occur on greenfield land there are sustainability implications involving the consumption of a finite resource and also the loss of bio-diversity and wildlife habitats. By planning for travel by motor vehicle the plan is also indirectly encouraging air and noise pollution associated with road traffic. Many policies do however take account of more sustainable forms of transport that can lead to a mixed response. It is inevitable that any reasonable environmental appraisal of the local plan will record a significant number of adverse impacts.
- 12.39 Where policies could potentially result in detrimental, mixed or uncertain impact, the careful consideration of the criteria within the policy is required. This will have been taken into account prior to allocation of land or the development of a proposal, by avoiding the most sensitive land uses and putting forward sites with close proximity to existing facilities.
- 12.40 Mixed responses can be found within policy numbers OC1, BC4, TC4, EMP7, CF7 and CF10. These polices relate to developments including countryside developments, telecommunications, renewable energy and industrial and business developments. Within these policies it is often the case that many of the natural resources criteria are often in conflict with the need for development. Whilst some parts of a policy do have negative, mixed or uncertain responses, the overall need for that policy is considered to outweigh the impact.
- 12.41 The appraisal of the plan will be subject to the same level of consultation as the Plan itself and responses to the consultation will be used to inform the next stage of the plan preparation.
- 12.42 It is not possible to compare and evaluate the environmental impact of the Deposit Plan to that of the 1998 Adopted Local Plan due to differences in the way that the environmental appraisal was carried out. This appraisal shows the



Deposit Plan to be generally sustainable with 66% of all possible responses being positive or neutral. Many of the policies that gained negative results are essential policies that are dealing with larger impacts such as housing allocations but in doing so contradict many of the ideals of sustainability. It is reasonable to conclude that the environmental appraisal of the Local Plan is satisfactory.

