

Sustainability Appraisal of the Sandwell Local Plan

Regulation 18 (II): Draft Plan

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This report has been produced to evaluate the potential sustainability impacts of the Sandwell

Local Plan and meets the requirements of the SEA Regulations. It is not intended to be a substitute for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Appropriate Assessment (AA).

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

A&E	Accident and Emergency
AAP	Area Action Plan
AHHLV	Area of High Historic Landscape Value
AHHTV	Area of High Historic Townscape Value
ALC	Agricultural Land Classification
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
APA	Archaeological Priority Area
AQMA	Air Quality Management Area
BCCS	Black Country Core Strategy
BCP	Black Country Plan
BEAR	Black Country Employment Area Review
BI	Blue Infrastructure
BMV	Best and most versatile
CA	Conservation Area
CfS	Call for Sites
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfT	Department for Transport
DLHHV	Designed Landscape of High Historic Value
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
DtC	Duty to Cooperate
EDNA	Economic Development Needs Assessment
EMP	Employment
EqIA	Equality Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
FEMA	Functional Economic Market Area
G&T	Gypsy and Traveller
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GI	Green Infrastructure
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
GP	General Practitioner
GTAA	Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment
GTTS	Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople
HEAD	Historic Environment Area Designation
HIA	Health Impact Assessment
HLC	Historic Landscape Characterisation
HMA	Housing Market Area
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
HSG	Housing
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
IRZ	Impact Risk Zone
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LSOA	Lower Super Output Area
LVA	Landscape and Visual Appraisal

LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
NHS	National Health Service
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PDL	Previously Developed Land
PPP	Policies Plans and Programmes
PRoW	Public Rights of Way
RPG	Registered Park and Garden
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SAD	Sandwell Site Allocation and Delivery Development Plan Document
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SFRA	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
SHLAA	Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
SINC	Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
SLINC	Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation
SLP	Sandwell Local Plan
SM	Scheduled Monument
SMBC	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
SPA	Special Protection Area
SPZ	Source Protection Zone
SSSI	Sites of Special Scientific Interest
SuDS	Sustainable Drainage System
SWFR	Surface Water Flood Risk
TS	Travelling Showpeople
UK	United Kingdom
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Executive Summary

About this report

- E1 Lepus Consulting is conducting an appraisal process for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) to help them prepare the Sandwell Local Plan (SLP). The appraisal process is known as Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and is prepared during a number of different stages to facilitate iteration between the Plan makers (SMBC) and the appraisal team (Lepus Consulting). The process seeks to provide high level environmental protection and the different stages of plan making are mostly accompanied by consultation with statutory bodies, other stakeholders and the public.
- E2 SA is the process of informing and influencing the preparation of a development plan to optimise its sustainability performance. SA considers the social, economic and environmental performance of the plan.
- E3 This Regulation 18 (II) SA Report is being published following consultation with the statutory consultees between February and March 2023 on the SA Scoping Report, which identified the scope and level of detail to be included in the SA process going forward, and the Regulation 18 (I) Issues and Options SA Report, which presented an assessment of the proposed SLP Vision and Objectives and made recommendations for the emerging SLP.
- E4 This Regulation 18 (II) SA Report has been prepared to assess the draft policies and options (or 'reasonable alternatives') as presented in the Draft Sandwell Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation document. This includes options for:
- Housing growth;
 - Employment growth;
 - Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople growth;
 - Spatial strategy; and
 - Development sites.
- E5 The assessment of reasonable alternatives is an important requirement of the SEA Regulations.

Summary findings

- E6 Findings from the assessments are presented in a single-line matrix format to represent the likely significant effects in relation to each SA Objective within the SA Framework (see **Appendix A**). The high-level matrix is not a conclusive tool or model. Its main function is to identify at a strategic level whether or not the assessment requires a more detailed examination or whether satisfactory conclusions may be drawn from the high-level assessment without the need for further detailed analysis.
- E7 As required by the SEA Regulations, cumulative, indirect and synergistic effects are also identified and evaluated during the assessment, where relevant.

E8 It should be noted that, in the assessments of growth options, for the impact of each option to be fully understood details of the size, location and nature of the developments are required; as these options focus on quanta alone, the assessments are necessarily high level with restricted diagnostic conclusions. Some of the identified potential impacts may be able to be mitigated through the design of the developments.

Housing Growth Options

E9 Six options for the quanta of housing growth have been identified by SMBC. These options include potential numbers of housing to be delivered based on different sources to provide an illustration of how the SLP could address the borough's housing need in a realistic manner, resulting in the following total growth (see **Table 3.1** for the full description of each option):

- **Option A** – 12,523 homes.
- **Option B** – 29,773 homes.
- **Option C** – 23,522 homes.
- **Option D** – 9,044 homes.
- **Option E** – 11,167 homes.
- **Option F** – 30,206 homes.

E10 Overall, the assessment (see **Chapter 3**) identified that generally Option D would have the smallest impact in terms of climate change mitigation and adaptation, pollution and waste generation, since it proposes the smallest level of growth. Option E would deliver a slightly larger housing number than Option D, and also seeks to focus new development within the Regeneration Areas and Centres, which is likely to lead to a more efficient use of land and more benefits in terms of rejuvenating Sandwell's centres and ensuring a greater proportion of new residents are located within a sustainable distance of services and facilities.

E11 Options D and E, alongside Option A, perform similarly in terms of transport and accessibility, since these three options deliver the smallest quantum of growth, c.9,500 – 12,500.

E12 Option F is identified as the best performing in terms of housing provision, given this option would exceed the identified housing need for Sandwell and benefit the wider Housing Market Area (HMA). Options F and B would both meet Sandwell's housing need and as such would be most likely to deliver benefits in terms of addressing inequalities. However, both perform poorly against the more environmentally focused objectives, alongside Option C, when compared to Options A, D and E since Options B, C and F would all deliver c.23,500 - 30,000 homes.

E13 Options A, B, C and F may however not be achievable without significant increases in density, use of undeveloped land and/or significant export of growth, given that there is an existing supply of only 11,194 homes in Sandwell.

E14 On balance, Option E is identified as the best performing option, assuming that a large proportion of growth under this option would be on previously developed land and within the existing centres, with the benefits in terms of regeneration meaning this option slightly

out-performs Option D, although both would not deliver sufficient housing to satisfy the identified need.

Employment Growth Options

E15 Four options for the quanta of employment growth have been identified by SMBC, drawing on information from the latest Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA):

- **Option A** – 29ha – Rely on existing vacant employment land supply (do nothing).
- **Option B** – 238ha – Provide for highest estimate of need (EDNA).
- **Option C** – 132ha – Provide for lowest estimate of need (EDNA).
- **Option D** – 185ha – Provide for mid-range estimate of need (EDNA August 2023 update).

E16 The full assessment of the employment growth options can be found in **Chapter 4**.

E17 There is uncertainty regarding the exact impacts that each employment growth option would have owing to the unknown scale and nature of the developments, and the options can act differently against each of the SA Objectives meaning identifying a single best performing option is difficult.

E18 Option B proposes the highest amount of employment land (238ha), and as such performs best against economic objectives, but performs less well against environmental objectives as it would be likely to require the greatest extent of previously undeveloped land. Conversely, Option A performs best against environmental objectives owing to its focus on existing vacant employment land but less well against economic objectives as it would not fulfil Sandwell’s identified employment land need.

E19 Option C would provide for the lowest estimate of need according to the EDNA (132ha), and Option D would provide for the mid-range estimate of need (185ha). As such, both options C and D would lead to similar impacts in terms of balancing employment land delivery with reducing potential for adverse effects associated with higher growth targets.

E20 Overall, Option C could be considered as the best performing against all the objectives collectively as it provides enough land to meet the lower estimate of need, performs well against the economic objectives and although having negative impacts against the environmental objectives would likely have less of an impact than Option B.

Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Growth Options

E21 Three options for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople (GTTS) growth have been identified by SMBC:

- **Option A** – 8 pitches and 24 plots – Meet a proportion of housing need across part of the plan period (2025-2030) and schedule an early review of the SLP to readdress need across later stages.
- **Option B** – 10 pitches – Meet proportion of local housing need based on supply and small windfalls identified in current Strategic Housing Land

Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (2021) and seek contributions from adjacent authorities based on current offers and apportioned using travel to work data.

- **Option C** – 14 pitches and 32 plots – Meet entire need.

E22 Overall, the assessment (see **Chapter 5**) identified that of the three GTTS options the two Options A and B could be identified as the best performing.

E23 Option B performs the best across the most SA Objectives; this is due to Option B having the least number of proposed pitches/plots and so potentially having the smallest impact on some of the environmentally focused SA Objectives. However, a minor negative effect has been identified for Option B for the housing objective as it would only partially meet the Gypsy and Traveller need and provides no Travelling Showperson plots.

E24 Option C alone would fulfil all identified needs of the community providing all the required pitches and plots, and as such would have a major positive impact on SA Objective 10 (housing), however since it proposes the highest amount of growth it also would be likely to have the greatest potential for adverse effects.

E25 Consequently, Option A could be identified as best performing overall as it provides a proportion of both the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson needs but also has potential for less adverse impacts across the other SA Objectives. Although, it should be acknowledged that since Option A proposes to “*schedule an early review of the SLP to readdress need across later stages*”, there is some uncertainty regarding the longer-term effects.

Spatial Growth Options

E26 Four Spatial Growth Options have been identified by SMBC. These options consider how the overall number of homes and area of employment land (and other types of land use where applicable) could be strategically distributed, thus helping to meet some of the strategic aims of the emerging SLP (see **Table 6.1** for the full description of each option):

- **Option A** – Balanced Growth.
- **Option B** – Green Growth.
- **Option C** – Economic Growth.
- **Option D** – Housing Growth.

E27 The assessment (see **Chapter 6**) found that it is difficult to determine an overall best performing spatial option as the performance of each option varies depending on the SA Objective in question. Generally, options which perform better against economic needs put the most pressure on environmental or social resources and vice versa.

E28 Overall, it appears Option B performs best against the largest number of SA Objectives; it reduces the impacts on the environment whilst providing residential and employment growth. However, it is not clear exactly what level of growth this option would support as the quantities of housing or employment development that could be attained under this option are not known. As such, it may be a refinement of this option provides the best option overall.

Reasonable Alternative Sites

- E29 A total of 120 reasonable alternative sites have been identified by SMBC during the preparation of the SLP to date. This includes 56 sites identified solely for residential use, 18 sites identified solely for employment use, one is identified solely for GTTS use, and eight sites are identified for mixed-use. The remaining 37 sites are identified as reasonable alternatives for multiple uses (i.e. the sites could potentially be developed for residential, employment and/or GTTS use).
- E30 The SA identified a range of positive and adverse potential impacts of the reasonable alternative sites on the objectives within the SA framework. The assessment findings are discussed within **Chapter 7**, with the full assessments presented in **Appendix C**.
- E31 Negative impacts were mainly identified in relation to issues associated with air quality due to the proximity of sites to the borough's major roads and the location of all development within Sandwell Air Quality Management Area (AQMA); the likely impact on the borough's carbon footprint associated with the construction and occupation of new development; loss of undeveloped land and/or land of environmental value; proposed developments coinciding with surface water flood risk (SWFR); potential adverse effects on Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINCs) due to development sites coinciding or located adjacent to these designations; and sites located in deprived areas with potential to exacerbate inequalities without careful planning.
- E32 Positive impacts were identified in relation to the provision of new housing and employment floorspace which would contribute towards meeting the identified needs; benefits to health and accessibility as many sites are located within sustainable distance to healthcare facilities and public green spaces; accessibility to schools and access to railway and bus services; and the majority of sites being located within Flood Zone 1 where fluvial flood risk is low.

Draft Policies

- E33 A total of 87 policies have been identified and presented within the Draft SLP, alongside the SLP Vision and 18 Objectives, all of which have been assessed in the SA. The assessment findings are discussed within **Chapter 8**, with the full assessments presented in **Appendix D**.
- E34 For the majority of SLP policies, the assessment has identified negligible, minor positive or major positive effects. Negligible impacts are identified where the policy does not directly influence the achievement of that SA Objective, which is the case for many of the more 'thematic' policies.
- E35 A greater range of sustainability effects is identified for policies that have potential to introduce new development, for example, the housing and economy policies. Policy SDS1 sets out the broad direction for growth. As such, minor negative impacts have been identified for SA Objectives 7 (Pollution) and 8 (Waste), owing to the potential for the large amount of proposed development to lead to increases in pollution and waste.
- E36 Uncertain impacts have been identified for certain SA Objectives as a result of some of the policies in the housing and economy policies. The range in potential impacts for these policies owes to the fact that large developments could have significant adverse effects,

however, the policy requirements have the ability to ensure these developments create some positive impacts or reduce the potential adverse effects if designed and carried out appropriately.

E37 Additionally, the majority of economic policies and several housing policies do not set out details regarding the location, scale and nature of development. Therefore, there is some uncertainty against several SA Objectives whether the proposed development would lead to positive or adverse effects overall.

E38 Opportunities for enhancement may also be secured through policies in the SLP. Where there are opportunities to improve the sustainability performance of draft policies these have been identified in SA process and fed back to the Council.

Next steps

E39 This Regulation 18 (II) SA Report is subject to consultation with statutory consultees, stakeholders and the general public alongside the Draft SLP.

E40 This report represents the latest stage of the SA process. The SA process will take on board any comments on this report and use them to furnish the next report with greater detail and accuracy.

E41 Once SMBC have reviewed Regulation 18 (II) consultation comments and have begun preparing the next version of the SLP (Regulation 19 stage), preparation of an Environmental Report will begin, also known as a full SA report. The Environmental Report will include all of the legal requirements set out in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Sandwell Metropolitan Council (SMBC) are in the process of writing the Sandwell Local Plan (SLP). As part of this process, a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is being undertaken that incorporates the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The purpose of SA/SEA is to help guide and influence the decision making process for SMBC by identifying the likely sustainability effects of reasonable alternatives and various options.
- 1.1.2 The SLP is at the 'Draft Plan' stage of plan making, which follows on from the 'Issues and Options' stage. The purpose of this SA report is to assess the sustainable development implications of proposals presented in the Draft Sandwell Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation document.
- 1.1.3 A wide range of reasonable alternatives have been identified by SMBC during the plan making process. This includes growth options, spatial options and development sites, as well as a suite of draft policies. The SA outputs will help SMBC to identify sustainable development options and prepare a local plan which is economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable.
- 1.1.4 A sustainability appraisal is a systematic process that must be carried out during the preparation of local plans and spatial development strategies. Its role is to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which the emerging plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives.
- 1.1.5 This SA/SEA document follows on from the SA Scoping Report¹ and the Regulation 18 Issues and Options SA Report², both of which were consulted on with the statutory bodies (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) and the public between 6th February and 20th March 2023.

¹ Lepus Consulting (2023) Sustainability Appraisal of the Sandwell Local Plan: Scoping Report. Available at: <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/896/sandwell-local-plan-issues-and-options-sustainability-appraisal-scoping-report> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

² Lepus Consulting (2023) Sustainability of the Sandwell Local Plan – Regulation 18: Issues and Options, January 2023. Available at: <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/893/sandwell-local-plan-issues-and-options-sustainability-appraisal> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

1.2 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough

- 1.2.1 Sandwell is a metropolitan borough covering approximately 8,556ha, with a population of 341,900 according to the Census (2021)³. On average, Sandwell has a younger and more ethnically diverse population than the rest of the UK. Deprivation and inequalities are key issues for the local population, Sandwell is one of the most deprived local authorities in England with approximately 25.5% of children living in low-income families and life expectancy for both men and women lower than the national average.
- 1.2.2 Sandwell lies within the Black Country, which is a predominantly urban sub-region of the West Midlands. The sub-region includes the boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and the City of Wolverhampton. The location of Sandwell is shown in **Figure 1.1**.
- 1.2.3 The strategic centre of Sandwell is West Bromwich, with several main towns and centres including Bearwood, Blackheath, Cape Hill, Cradley Heath, Great Bridge, Oldbury and Wednesbury, alongside smaller towns and settlements. Sandwells towns are well connected through a network of strategic transport routes, with links to other regional and national centres via the M5/M6 and rail corridors.
- 1.2.4 Industry and manufacturing form a key part of Sandwell's history, which continues in the local economy today as Sandwell is an important centre in particular for retail and wholesale, manufacturing, and health and social care sectors. Sandwell also plays a role within the wider economy in terms of electricity, gas and air conditioning as well as water supply and waste management, and transportation and storage industries. The borough also supports a range of parks and open spaces including the Rowley Hills and Sandwell Valley. The Sandwell Valley forms Sandwells only area of Green Belt land.

³ Office for National Statistics (2022) How the population changed in Sandwell: Census 2021. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/E08000028/> [Date accessed: 02/06/2]

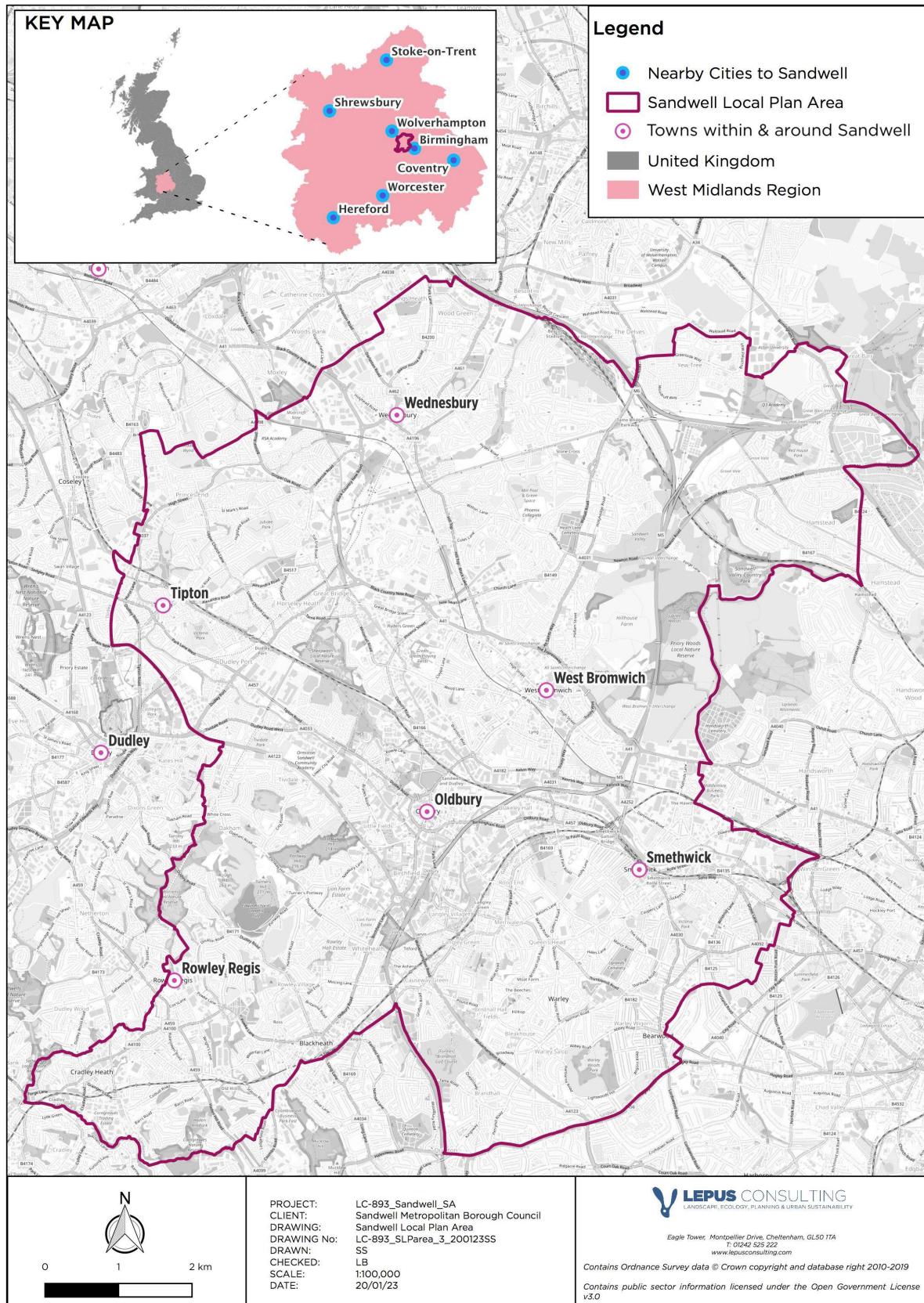


Figure 1.11: Sandwell administrative boundary

1.3 The Sandwell Local Plan

- 1.3.1 The Sandwell Local Plan (SLP) will include the overall strategy for development in Sandwell Metropolitan Borough for the plan period 2022 to 2041, including a vision for Sandwell in 2041 and underpinning strategic objectives, and an overall spatial strategy supported by site allocations and policies to guide land use and development within the borough.
- 1.3.2 The SLP is being prepared by SMBC, following the political decision to cease work on the joint Black Country Plan (BCP) in autumn 2022. The SLP will carry forward relevant information and evidence prepared as part of the Draft BCP, with specific changes in response to planning issues raised during the Draft BCP consultation and new evidence and information for the Sandwell authority area. This includes information gathered from the Issues and Options Consultation for the emerging SLP in early 2023⁴.
- 1.3.3 The BCP itself began as a review of the adopted Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS), produced by the four Black Country Authorities of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Council and City of Wolverhampton Council.
- 1.3.4 Once adopted, the SLP will form part of the statutory development plan for the borough covering a minimum of 15 years, replacing and updating the currently adopted BCCS⁵, Sandwell Site Allocation and Delivery Development Plan Document (SAD)⁶, and various other Area Action Plans which cover the period from 2006 to 2026.

1.4 Duty to Cooperate

- 1.4.1 The Duty to Cooperate (DtC) was created in the Localism Act 2011⁷ and amends the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Current national policy places a legal duty on local planning authorities, county councils in England and public bodies to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis to maximise the effectiveness of local plan preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters.
- 1.4.2 For SMBC, this means that unmet housing and economic land need should be sought to be provided for across the wider Housing Market Area (HMA), Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) and other areas with which Sandwell has a physical or functional relationship.
- 1.4.3 A DtC Statement will be prepared, which will demonstrate how SMBC has fulfilled this duty through the plan-making process. It is intended to draft and agree Statements of Common Ground with relevant authorities and bodies on key DtC issues at the Publication stage.

⁴ Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (2023) Sandwell Local Plan: Issues and Options Consultation. Available at: https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200317/planning_policy/4990/sandwell_local_plan [Date accessed: 11/08/23]

⁵ Black Country Authorities (2011) Black Country Core Strategy. Available at: <https://blackcountryplan.dudley.gov.uk/t1/p2/> [Date accessed: 06/06/23]

⁶ Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (2012) Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document. Available at: https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200275/planning_and_buildings/676/site_allocations_and_delivery_development_plan_document [Date accessed: 06/06/23]

⁷ Localism Act 2011. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents> [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

- 1.4.4 It should be noted that emerging reforms to planning policy set out the intention to repeal the DtC and replace this with a more flexible 'alignment test'⁸. However, at the time of writing and for the purposes of this stage of the SLP, the current DtC requirement applies.

1.5 Integrated approach to SA and SEA

- 1.5.1 The requirements to carry out SA and SEA are distinct, although it is possible to satisfy both obligations using a single appraisal process.
- 1.5.2 The European Union Directive 2001/42/EC⁹ (SEA Directive) applies to a wide range of public plans and programmes on land use, energy, waste, agriculture, transport and more (see Article 3(2) of the Directive for other plan or programme types). The objective of the SEA procedure can be summarised as follows: *"the objective of this Directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development"*.
- 1.5.3 The SEA Directive has been transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004¹⁰ (SEA Regulations). Under the requirements of the SEA Directive and SEA Regulations, specific types of plans that set the framework for the future development consent of projects must be subject to an environmental assessment. Therefore, it is a legal requirement for the SLP to be subject to SEA throughout its preparation.
- 1.5.4 SA is a UK-specific procedure used to appraise the impacts and effects of development plans in the UK. It is a legal requirement as specified by S19(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004¹¹ and should be an appraisal of the economic, social and environmental sustainability of development plans. The present statutory requirement for SA lies in The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012¹². SA is a systematic process for evaluating the environmental consequences of proposed plans or programmes to ensure environmental issues are fully integrated and addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision-making.
- 1.5.5 Public consultation is an important aspect of the integrated SA/SEA process.

⁸ DLUHC (2022) Policy Paper – Levelling Up and Regeneration: Further information. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-and-regeneration-further-information/levelling-up-and-regeneration-further-information> [Date accessed: 11/08/23]

⁹ Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive). Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001L0042&from=EN> [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

¹⁰ The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2004/1633/contents/made> [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

¹¹ Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/contents> [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

¹² The Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012. Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/767/contents/made> [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

1.6 Best Practice Guidance

1.6.1 Government policy recommends that both SA and SEA are undertaken under a single sustainability appraisal process, which incorporates the requirements of the SEA Regulations. This can be achieved through integrating the requirements of SEA into the SA process. The approach for carrying out an integrated SA and SEA is based on best practice guidance:

- European Commission (2004) Implementation of Directive 2001/42 on the assessment of the effects of certain plan and programmes on the environment¹³;
- Office of Deputy Prime Minister (2005) A Practical Guide to the SEA Directive¹⁴;
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹⁵;
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2021) Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)¹⁶; and
- Royal Town Planning Institute (2018) Strategic Environmental Assessment, Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of SEA/SA for land use plans¹⁷.

1.7 Sustainability Appraisal

1.7.1 This document is a component of the SA of the SLP. It provides an assessment of the likely effects of reasonable alternatives, as per Stage B of **Figure 1.2**, according to PPG on SA¹⁸.

¹³ European Commission (2004) Implementation of Directive 2001/42 on the assessment of the effects of certain plan and programmes on the environment. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/eia/pdf/030923_sea_guidance.pdf [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

¹⁴ Office of Deputy Prime Minister (2005) A Practical Guide to the SEA Directive. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practicalguides_ea.pdf [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

¹⁵ DLUHC (2023) National Planning Policy Framework. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

¹⁶ DLUHC & MHCLG (2021) Planning practice guidance. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

¹⁷ Royal Town Planning Institute (2018) Strategic Environmental Assessment, Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of SEA/SA for land use plans. Available at: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1822/sea-sapracticeadvicefull2018c.pdf> [Date accessed: 02/06/23]

¹⁸ DLUHC & MHCLG (2020) Guidance: Strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal> [Date accessed: 02/06/23]



Figure 1.22: Sustainability appraisal process

1.8 The SA process so far

1.8.1 **Table 1.1** below presents a timeline of stages of the SLP and SA process so far. To date, this represents Stages A and B of **Figure 1.2**.

Table 1.11: The SLP and SA process to date

Date	SLP Stage	Sustainability Appraisal
January 2023	Plan making commences.	SA Scoping Report This report identifies the scope and level of detail to be included in the SA.
February– March 2023	Issues and Options (Regulation 18) Consultation In the Issues and Options document, the Council considered the ways in which future development needs could be met and asked the public and other stakeholders to comment on these key issues for the borough.	Regulation 18: Issues and Options SA Report The Regulation 18 (I) SA Report presented an assessment of the SLP Vision and Objectives as set out in the consultation document, and made recommendations for the emerging SLP.
November – December 2023	Draft Plan (Regulation 18 II) Consultation The Draft Plan document sets out the Councils’ preferred options for the overall levels of growth and spatial strategy as well as site allocations and policy areas, and seeks consultation views on these to help inform the SLP process going forward.	Regulation 18 (II) SA Report This report assesses the reasonable alternative options for housing growth, employment growth, Gypsy and Traveller growth, spatial strategy, development sites and policies identified by the Council.

1.9 Scoping Report

1.9.1 In order to identify the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the SA process, an SA Scoping Report¹⁹ was produced in January 2023.

1.9.2 The SA Scoping Report represented Stage A of the SA process (see **Figure 1.2**), and contains information in relation to:

- Identifying other relevant plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives;
- Collecting baseline information;
- Identifying sustainability problems and key issues;
- Preparing the SA Framework; and
- Consultation arrangements on the scope of SA with the consultation bodies.

1.9.3 The Scoping Report was consulted on between 6th February and 20th March 2023 with the statutory bodies Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency as well as the general public. No specific comments were received regarding the SA Scoping Report.

¹⁹ Lepus Consulting (2023) Sustainability Appraisal of the Sandwell Local Plan: Scoping Report. Available at: <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/896/sandwell-local-plan-issues-and-options-sustainability-appraisal-scoping-report> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

1.10 Regulation 18 (I) Issues and Options SA

- 1.10.1 Through the Issues and Options Consultation, the Council sought to involve local people, businesses and stakeholders in identifying what the emerging SLP should address. In addition to various questions which seek to gather views from consultees, the Issues and Options consultation document identified options for the Vision and 11 draft Objectives for the SLP.
- 1.10.2 The Regulation 18 Issues and Options SA Report²⁰ set out an assessment of the draft Vision and Objectives of the emerging SLP. The SA Report also set out a range of recommendations for SMBC to consider as the SLP is developed and refined, including recommendations to improve the SLP Vision and Objectives, as well as consideration of the identification, description and evaluation of reasonable alternatives which is an important aspect of this Regulation 18 (II) SA Report.
- 1.10.3 The Issues and Options SA Report was consulted on between 6th February and 20th March 2023 with statutory consultees, stakeholders and the general public, alongside the SLP Issues and Options document, and the SA Scoping Report.
- 1.10.4 Comments received during the consultation relating to the SA have informed the preparation of this Regulation 18 (II) SA Report. **Table 1.2** summarises the responses received and how these comments have been incorporated into the SA process going forward.

Table 1.22: Consultation responses from statutory consultees on Regulation 18 (I) Issues and Options SA Report (January 2023)

Consultee	Summary of Consultation Response	Incorporation into the SA
Natural England	No specific comments received regarding the SA Scoping Report or Issues and Options Report, but general comments and recommendations have been supplied including the following: "The Local Plan should be underpinned by up to date environmental evidence. This should include an assessment of existing and potential components of local ecological networks. This assessment should inform the Sustainability Appraisal, ensure that land of least environment value is chosen for development, and that the mitigation hierarchy is followed and inform opportunities for enhancement as well as development requirements for particular sites."	The SA has incorporated the latest evidence available to inform the assessments of reasonable alternatives and policies, identified through conversation with SMBC. In particular, the topic-specific methodology including evidence to inform site assessments is set out in Appendix B . Additionally, the Draft SLP policies take into consideration the emerging approach to Nature Recovery Networks within the borough, for example, which have been assessed in Appendix D .
Historic England	The following comments received regarding the Issues and options SA Report: "3.2 we would welcome reference to the historic environment within the vision which should then help to set out a positive strategy for the historic environment. Table 3.1 we are supportive of a separate objective for cultural heritage."	The Issues and Options SA in section 4.2 included a recommendation to incorporate stronger reference to the importance of conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage and the historic environment, such as seeking opportunities for heritage-led regeneration.

²⁰ Lepus Consulting (2023) Sustainability of the Sandwell Local Plan – Regulation 18: Issues and Options, January 2023. Available at: <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/893/sandwell-local-plan-issues-and-options-sustainability-appraisal> [Date accessed: 18/10/23]

Consultee	Summary of Consultation Response	Incorporation into the SA
	<p><i>There is limited detail to comment on at this stage as we are awaiting to see the content of the Local Plan and the policies and allocations that the Council decides to pursue. We welcome an objective to assess cultural heritage when that detail is available.</i></p> <p><i>When considering relevant plans and programmes to consider within the SEA/SA process we recommend that the Council consider the documents listed in our representation above, where we have included the links for ease."</i></p>	<p>SMBC have since updated the Vision with stronger wording, as presented in the Draft SLP, which has been re-assessed in Appendix D. Recommendations for the SLP are discussed further in Chapter 9.</p>
Environment Agency	No response received.	N/A

1.11 Signposting for this report

1.11.1 This Regulation 18 (II) SA Report sets out an assessment of draft policies and reasonable alternatives, or 'options', identified by SMBC during the process of preparing the Draft SLP document. These relate to options for growth and the spatial strategy, policies and development sites.

1.11.2 The appendices of this report provide essential contextual information to the main body of the report. The contents of this SA Report are listed below:

- **Chapter 1** (this chapter) sets out the purpose, context and introduction to the SLP and the accompanying SA process.
- **Chapter 2** sets out the methodology used to present and assess the findings of the SA process.
- **Chapter 3** presents the assessment of the housing growth options.
- **Chapter 4** presents the assessment of the employment growth options.
- **Chapter 5** presents the assessment of the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople growth options.
- **Chapter 6** presents the assessment of the spatial growth options.
- **Chapter 7** summarises the SA findings in relation to the assessment of proposed SLP policies.
- **Chapter 8** summarises the SA findings in relation to the assessment of reasonable alternative development sites pre-mitigation, considers the likely mitigating impact of the draft SLP policies in regard to identified adverse impacts, and presents selection and rejection information.
- **Chapter 9** sets out recommendations for SMBC to consider to improve the SLP.
- **Chapter 10** sets out the conclusions of this Regulation 18 (II) SA, and outlines the next steps.
- **Appendix A** presents the SA Framework.
- **Appendix B** presents the detailed site assessment methodology, building on the information set out in **Chapter 2**.
- **Appendix C** presents the assessment of the reasonable alternative sites.
- **Appendix D** presents the assessment of the Draft SLP policies.