



REVISION SCHEDULE					
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AECOM Infrastructure & Environment UK Limited  
2 Leman Street, London E1 8FA  
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7798 5000

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### Background

- 1.1.1 The Swale Local Plan was submitted to Government, for Examination by an appointed Planning Inspector, in April 2015. Following a two year Examination process, the Inspector published a report into the Plan's legal compliance and soundness in June 2017. The Inspector concluded that the plan is legally compliant and sound, subject to a series of modifications being made. The Local Plan, incorporating modifications, is recommended for adoption at a Full Council meeting on 26 July 2017.
- 1.1.2 A parallel process of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) was undertaken alongside plan-making. AECOM (incorporating former companies URS and Scott Wilson) took lead responsibility for SA. SA is a mechanism for considering and communicating the likely effects of an emerging plan, and reasonable alternatives, with a view to achieving sustainable development.

### SA explained

- 1.1.3 It is a requirement that SA involves a series of procedural steps. The final step in the process involves preparing a 'statement' at the time of plan adoption. The aim of the SA Statement is to present –
- 1) The 'story' of plan-making / SA up to the point of adoption
    - Specifically, the Regulations<sup>1</sup> set a requirement to: *"summaris[e] how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme and how the environmental report... the opinions expressed... and the results of consultations... have been taken into account... and the reasons for choosing the plan... as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with."*
  - 2) Measures decided concerning the monitoring of plan implementation.

### This SA Statement

- 1.1.4 This is the Swale Local Plan SA Statement, and hence considers **(1) and (2)** in turn. This Statement concludes by presenting a **regulatory checklist** in order to clearly demonstrate when and where legal requirements have been met.

<sup>1</sup> The information to be provided in the Statement is listed in Article 9 of the SEA Directive / Regulation 16 of the Regulations.

**2 THE PLAN-MAKING / SEA 'STORY'****2.1 Introduction**

2.1.1 Essentially, SA must feed-into and inform plan-making in two ways:

- 1) Appraisal of alternatives informs preparation of the draft plan.
- 2) The SA Report, and consultation responses received during the Draft Plan / SA Report consultation, informs plan finalisation.

2.1.2 However, it is typical for the plan-making / SA process to involve more than two steps and this was the case with the Swale Local Plan.

2.1.3 This section gives consideration to each of the main plan-making / SA steps in turn:

- 'Pick your own' (2011)
- 'Bearing fruits' (2012)
- 'Bearing fruits' (2013)
- Publication and submission (2014/15)
- Post submission work (2015)
- Publication of Proposed Modifications (2016)
- Further post submission work (2017)
- Plan finalisation (2017)

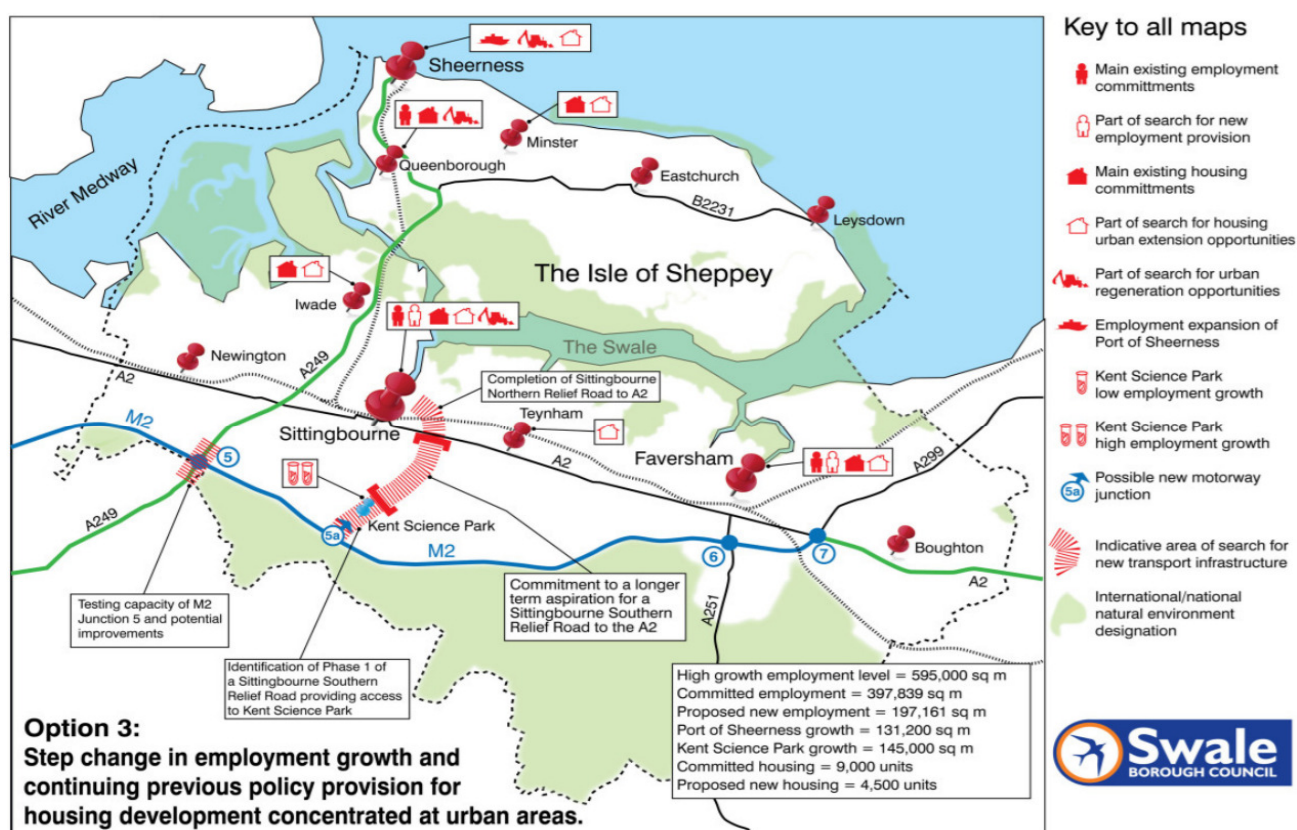
2.1.4 In line with regulatory requirements, there is a focus on explaining how sustainability considerations have been taken into account and influenced plan-making, including as a result of alternatives appraisal and other SA work, and consultation on plan / SA documents.

N.B. steps are covered in an increasing amount of detail, for the simple reason that findings from early plan-making / SA steps are now dated, and somewhat superseded.

## 2.2 'Pick your Own' (2011)

2.2.1 Four spatial strategy alternatives were presented for consultation within the 2011 'Pick your Own' consultation document (Regulation 18),<sup>2</sup> with the alternatives varying in terms of both development quantum (housing and employment) and broad distribution. The alternatives were non-site specific, as can be seen in **Figure 2.1**.

Figure 2.1: An example spatial strategy option (2011)



2.2.2 Appraisal findings were presented within an **Interim SA Report** published alongside the consultation document.<sup>3</sup> A notable conclusion of SA work from this time was that certain spatial strategy options would lead to 'significant negative effects' in respect of -

- Biodiversity - Option 4, as a higher growth option, would lead to significant negative effects, recognising the extent of local sensitivities, including the North Kent Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA);
- Landscape - Options 3 and 4 would lead to significant negative effects as these options would involve a 'Sittingbourne Southern Relief Road' linking the A2 east of Sittingbourne to a new M2 Junction, via Kent Science Park; and
- Soil - all options would lead to significant negative effects due to the loss of high quality ('best and most versatile') agricultural land.

<sup>2</sup> Within the Local Planning Regulations 2012 there are two regulations that aim to guide Local Plan-making up to the point of submission (to the Secretary of State): 1) Regulation 18: Preparation of a local plan; and 2) Regulation 19: Publication of a local plan.

<sup>3</sup> The 2011 Interim SA Report is available at <http://www.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Pick-Your-Own/Sustainability-Appraisal.pdf>

## 2.3 Bearing Fruits (2012)

2.3.1 In 2012 a preferred development strategy was established in light of the earlier alternatives appraisal and published within the 'Bearing Fruits Draft Core Strategy' consultation document. The preferred strategy sought to:

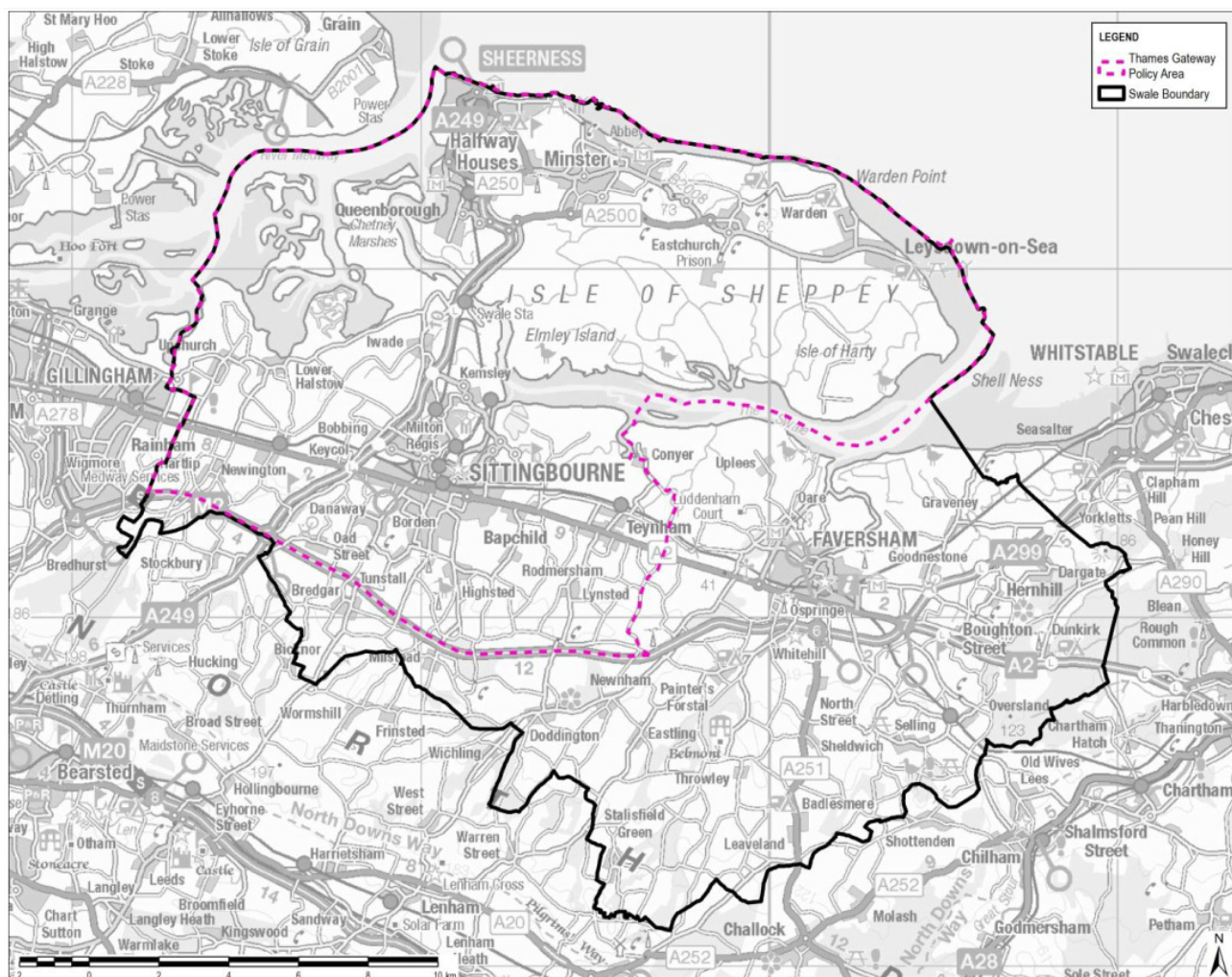
- Provide for 540 dwellings per annum (as per Options 1, 2 and 3 from 2011);
- Deliver employment growth to meet the future needs of the Borough (as per Option 3); and
- Focus development at the main urban areas but with a distribution involving a degree of 'weighting' towards the Thames Gateway sub-area / away from the Faversham sub-area - see **Figure 2.2**.

2.3.2 An **Interim SA Report**<sup>4</sup> was published for consultation alongside, presenting an appraisal of the Draft Core Strategy (with a range of specific policy recommendations made) as well as an appraisal of alternative policy approaches for a range of plan issues. Notably, within Appendix I, there was a particular focus on presenting an appraisal of alternatives in relation to -

- Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision; and
- Employment land provision at Faversham.

*Figure 2.2: The Thames Gateway sub-area within Swale Borough*

<sup>4</sup> The 2012 Interim SA Report is available at <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Local-Plan-2014/Swale-Borough-Draft-Core-Strategy-Interim-Sustainability-Appraisal.pdf>



## 2.4 'Bearing Fruits' (2013)

- 2.4.1 Subsequently, in 2013, the Council recognised that there was a need to develop the Core Strategy into a Local Plan, in order to address the new national planning policy context as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, March 2012).
- 2.4.2 A 'Bearing Fruits Draft Local Plan' (as opposed to a Core Strategy) consultation document was prepared and published for consultation in 2013, with the preferred strategy remaining broadly the same as that previously published in 2012 (540 dpa, weighted towards the Thames Gateway sub-area).
- 2.4.3 The **Interim SA Report**<sup>5</sup> published alongside the Bearing Fruits consultation document sought to present the information required of the SA Report.<sup>6</sup> As such, it essentially sought to answer three questions -

1. What has Plan-making / SA involved up to this point?

<sup>5</sup> The non-technical summary of the 2013 Interim SA Report is available at <http://www.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Local-Plan-2013/Local-Plan-SA-Aug-13/Swale-Local-Plan-SA-Reportrev2issued14-08-13-NTS.pdf>. The full report is available on the Local Plan Examination website. It is split into several 'Parts'.

<sup>6</sup> The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004) prescribe the information that must be presented within the 'Environmental Report'. For Local Plans, the required information must be presented within the SA Report published alongside the Proposed Submission Plan (in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Local Planning Regulations).

- Including in relation to 'reasonable alternatives'.

2. What are the SA findings at this stage?

- i.e. in relation to the draft plan.

3. What happens next?

2.4.4 In relation to “**plan-making / SA up to this point**” information was presented on 'reasonable alternatives' for several policy issues. Most importantly, the report presented an appraisal of the following borough-wide growth quantum alternatives (with the distribution held constant / assumed to reflect the preferred approach) -

1. 540 dwellings per annum

2. 604 dwellings per annum

3. 741 dwellings per annum

4. 887 dwellings per annum

2.4.5 The appraisal of the four alternatives found the preferred approach (540 dpa) to perform relatively well in terms of environmental objectives, but relatively poorly in terms of economic and housing related objectives. In particular, the appraisal predicted an imbalance between workforce and jobs locally, which in the short term could lead to a reduction in the amount of out-commuting, but in the long term could lead to significant in-commuting.



## 2.5 Publication and submission (2014/15)

- 2.5.1 The Proposed Submission Plan was published for consultation, under Regulation 19 of the Local Planning Regulations, in 2014, and then subsequently submitted for Examination in 2015, alongside representations received. The spatial strategy was broadly as per that previously consulted on (540 dpa, weighted towards the Thames Gateway sub-area).
- 2.5.2 As required by the Local Planning Regulations, the **SA Report**<sup>7</sup> was published alongside the plan and then subsequently submitted. With a view to providing the required information, the SA Report answered the three questions introduced above (para 2.4.3).
- 2.5.3 In relation to “*plan-making / SA up to this point*” a focus (in addition to presenting contextual/background information, and an explanation of how the reasonable alternatives were arrived at) was on presenting information on two reasonable alternatives - see **Table 2.1**.

Table 2.1: The reasonable spatial strategy alternatives 2014/2015

Option	Quantum (dpa)	Distribution*
1	540	Weighted towards the Thames Gateway
2	740	Unweighted

- 2.5.4 The alternatives reflected a refinement of those previously subjected to appraisal and consultation.<sup>8</sup> ‘Outline reasons’ text was provided to explain the alternatives.<sup>9</sup>
- 2.5.5 The alternatives appraisal conclusion was as follows -

*“The appraisal shows that there is the greatest potential to differentiate between the alternatives in terms of environmental issues. In particular, it is possible to conclude that Option 2 (higher growth distributed as per the current population split) would likely lead to significant negative effects in terms ‘heritage’ considerations, whilst Option 1 would not; the key issue being the sensitive nature of Faversham, and also the service villages that could also see additional growth under Option 2. Loss of best and most versatile agricultural land is another issue in terms of which Option 2 performs notably worse than Option 1, given the higher growth quantum and also the additional steer towards Faversham. It is also suggested that the spatial approach to growth under Option 2 would encourage commuting (with implications for climate change and air quality objectives) relative to Option 1, although there is also a need to take into account the influence that the total growth quantum will have on commuting patterns. This is a complex issue...”*

<sup>7</sup> The SA Report, as submitted (2015), is available at <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Local-Plan-2014/Sustainability-Appraisal-April-2015.pdf>. A non-technical summary is available at: <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Local-Plan-2014/Sustainability-Appraisal-Non-Technical-Summary-April-2015.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> National Planning Practice Guidance is clear that options/alternatives should be ‘refined’ over time, through the SA process.

<sup>9</sup> There is a requirement to present ‘an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with’, within the SA Report. Within the Swale Local Plan SA Report, the key matter to explain was why the options of ‘lower growth un-weighted’ and ‘higher growth weighted’ were ‘unreasonable’. With regards to the former, the reason was that low growth in the Thames Gateway would stifle regeneration; with regards to the latter, the reason was that high growth in the Thames Gateway would be hindered by poor viability.

*In terms of socio-economic issues/objectives, Option 2 clearly performs better in terms of 'housing' but otherwise the alternatives perform similarly. It is not necessarily the case that a lower housing growth strategy will significantly hamper delivery of economic growth objectives in the short term, although in the long term it is recognised that a housing shortfall could have a detrimental effect on the local economy if it is the case that an ageing population constrains labour supply. Either option would likely support the achievement of regeneration objectives in the Thames Gateway, although under Option 2 there could be some risks associated with bringing additional housing forward in advance of town centre improvements, employment and community infrastructure. More generally, there might be a risk that Option 2 would have the effect of 'distracting' from the regeneration agenda in Gateway, given more attractive greenfield development options at Faversham."*

- 2.5.6 The discussion of 'plan-making / SA up to this point' then concluded with a chapter giving the Council's response to the alternatives appraisal / reasons for supporting the preferred option (Option 1). The Council concluded as follows:

*"On balance, having considered various alternative approaches over the years, the Council is able to come to the conclusion that the preferred approach reflects sustainable development, providing a review of the Local Plan is undertaken once key indicators are triggered."*

- 2.5.7 In relation to **"SA findings at this stage"**, the conclusion of the appraisal is presented below, as **Box 2.1**.

*Box 2.1: Conclusion of the Proposed Submission Plan appraisal, from the SA Report (2014/15)*

The scale of growth proposed has negative implications for the achievement of environmental objectives given the sensitivities that exist locally; however, other than with respect to 'high quality agricultural land' (c. 134 ha of which is set to be lost, despite the plan seeking to maximise redevelopment opportunities on brownfield land as part of Thames Gateway regeneration schemes) it is not thought that effects will be 'significant'. The spatial strategy goes some way to avoiding negative effects, given a focus on main towns and a weighting of growth towards the Thames Gateway, and a detailed policy framework is in place to guide planning applications (albeit some policy requirements, most notably around sustainable design and construction, have been softened due to 'viability' concerns). With regards to 'heritage', significant positive effects are predicted given that A) the decision has been taken to follow a relatively low growth approach at Faversham, which is particularly sensitive; and B) the policy framework in-place should ensure that historic assets are protected and enhanced as part of development schemes.

The potential for the plan to support reduced car dependency and longer journeys by car is obviously a key environmental issue, given the need to address poor air quality locally as well as reduce CO2 emissions. The spatial strategy directs development towards existing larger settlements, where there will be the greatest potential to walk / cycle / use public transport, as opposed to relying on the private car, which is a positive; however, another factor is the quantum of housing growth proposed relative to quantum (and nature) of employment growth, as this has a bearing on levels of commuting by car. As a result of a decision to avoid delivering housing in advance of jobs, the effect of the plan will be to avoid a worsening of the current out-commuting trend, and whilst in-commuting could potentially become a problem in the future these concerns are negated by the fact that a mechanism is in place to trigger an early plan review should it transpire that additional housing can and should be delivered to achieve a balance of labour supply and employment opportunities locally.

Finally, in terms of environmental considerations, it is important to consider flood risk. Areas of risk have been avoided wherever possible (e.g. with Sheerness allocated less land than its position in the settlement hierarchy would suggest should be the case, with growth instead directed elsewhere within The West Sheppey Triangle), although it has not been possible to avoid such areas entirely given the need to focus growth at certain areas in order to achieve wider socio-economic and environmental objectives. Policy measures are in place to ensure that flood risk is mitigated through masterplanning and design measures as far as possible.

In terms of socio-economic objectives, the first point to note is that the draft plan establishes a low housing growth strategy, i.e. one that will not meet objectively assessed needs. In addition, relatively low

requirements for affordable housing delivery are set to be imposed on developers. It is recognised, however, that there may not be an alternative approach that could feasibly be pursued, given viability / deliverability issues. It is also noted that a clear mechanism is in place to trigger an early review of the plan, should monitoring demonstrate the potential to increase housing supply locally.

A fairly ambitious employment growth strategy is set to be followed, and it is difficult to conclude that the decision to follow a low housing growth strategy will constrain economic growth significantly, given the potential for an early plan review (which could allocate additional land for housing and hence increase the local labour supply). The decision to focus growth within the Thames Gateway is a positive, given the established opportunities that exist in key sectors. Employment led regeneration in the Thames Gateway is expected to support an up-skilling of the population in the long-term, and should also contribute to the achievement of wider health and regeneration objectives. Support for employment growth and town centre vitality in these locations should mean that new communities can develop that are 'sustainable' in the sense that there is good potential to access services, facilities and employment locally; however, it is noted that viability issues may mean that delivery of community infrastructure is a challenge.

## 2.6 Post submission work (2015)

2.6.1 Subsequent to submission of the Swale Local Plan, the Inspector wrote to the Council stating a concern regarding the housing quantum, and requesting further work. As part of this, two 'Post submission Interim SA Reports' were prepared, and submitted to the Examination.

### Post Submission Interim SA Report 1 (2015)<sup>10</sup>

2.6.2 The task was to develop and appraise refined **spatial strategy alternatives**, in order to address the Inspector's concern that: *"the justification for a housing target significantly below OAN [objectively assessed need] is very weak."*

2.6.3 The task of developing refined spatial strategy alternatives (as reported under the heading **"plan-making / SA up to this point"**) was undertaken in light of the Inspector's stated concerns, context / parameters provided by past alternatives appraisal, and new evidence. There was a need to give consideration to both growth quantum and distribution -

- Growth quantum - There was a need to take into account an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which identified that planning for Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN) would necessitate allocating sites to deliver 776 dwellings per annum (dpa), i.e. a level of growth above that previously considered to be a reasonable option. This figure was arrived at on the basis of certain assumptions regarding demographics and migration, and the SHMA work also identified another, even higher figure arrived at on the basis of varied assumptions. This higher figure would involve 861 dpa. In light of the 2015 SHMA, the Council accepted that there was a need to test the implications of delivering housing growth quantum options previously considered to be unreasonably high. This acceptance also reflected other newly emerged evidence / understanding, including in relation to viability. Ultimately, the Council determined a need to test both the growth quantum options established through the SHMA (i.e. 776 and 861 dpa).
- Distribution - Whilst in 2014 (see above) the view was that higher growth could only be delivered if the Council were to move away from the preferred distribution strategy of 'weighting' growth towards the Thames Gateway, this understanding had shifted by 2015. This was on the basis of new viability evidence pointing to an improved situation (albeit viability, and hence ability to fund infrastructure and affordable housing, was shown to remain challenging on Sheppey). As such, the Council recognised in summer 2015 that the option of delivering more homes in the Thames Gateway (i.e. a number over-and-above that supported through the submitted plan) could not be dismissed as unreasonable.

<sup>10</sup> Post submission Interim SA Report 1 (2015) is available at <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Local-Plan-2014/Further-evidence-2015/Swale-Local-Plan-Interim-SA-Report-151008-3.pdf>

2.6.4 Ultimately, the two reasonable spatial strategy alternatives were arrived at - see **Table 2.2**.

Table 2.2: The reasonable spatial strategy alternatives 2015

Option	Quantum (dpa)	Distribution*	
1	The submitted plan approach	637 <sup>11</sup>	Weighted towards the TG
2	OAHN	776	As above
3	Above OAHN	861	As above

2.6.5 The conclusion of the alternatives appraisal (as reported under the heading “**plan-making / SA findings at this stage**”) was as follows -

*“The first point to note is that higher growth options tend to perform worse in terms of environmental considerations (and perform much worse in some respects, most notably landscape and cultural heritage), but better in terms of socio-economic considerations. However, the picture is not entirely clear cut in this respect. Most notably, Option 2 is preferable to Option 3 in terms of ‘Economic growth, employment and skills’ reflecting the view that this option has the best potential to balance jobs and homes (i.e. reflecting the view that under Option 3 constraints other than labour supply would mean jobs are not provided locally commensurate with homes).*

*Finally, it is important to mention two areas of uncertainty. Firstly, in terms of ‘Population’ and ‘Health’ considerations, the alternatives are ranked on a par and no significant effects are predicted; however, it is recognised that as viability conditions improve there is greater potential for higher growth to support regeneration in the Thames Gateway. Secondly, in terms of ‘Water’, the alternatives are ranked on a par and no significant effects are predicted; however, there are considerable flood risk issues in Swale and whilst there is good potential to mitigate flood risk through masterplanning, design and engineering, there is also a need to ensure that areas of flood risk are avoided in a sequential fashion.”*

2.6.6 These appraisal conclusions served to inform the Examination. Whilst Post Submission Interim SA Report 1 was not formally published for consultation, it was placed onto the examination website ahead of hearings in December 2015.

[Post Submission Interim SA Report 2 \(2015\)](#)<sup>12</sup>

2.6.7 In parallel with Post Submission Interim SA Report 1, the Council and AECOM also worked together to produce Post Submission Interim SA Report 2, which focused on presenting an appraisal of **site options** - i.e. the pool of sites from which any additional allocations would be selected. The intention was that the two Post Submission Interim SA Reports should be complementary.

2.6.8 The report began with an important discussion explaining the links between the report and other reports / work-streams, including the Strategic Housing Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and parallel work being undertaken to ‘rank’ site options.

<sup>11</sup> The submitted plan made provision for 540 dpa, but this lower growth figure could not simply be rolled forward for testing in 2015. Rather, there was a need to take account of A) the fact that the plan period had been reduced from 20 to 17 years; and B) the latest situation with regards to housing completions and planning permissions. The adjusted figure was 637 dpa.

<sup>12</sup> <sup>12</sup> Post submission Interim SA Report 2 (2015) is available at <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Local-Plan-2014/Further-evidence-2015/Swale-Local-Plan-Post-Submission-Interim-SA-Report-II-151026.pdf>

- 2.6.9 Discussion under the heading of “**plan-making / SA up to this point**” then focused on identifying ‘reasonable’ site options. Ultimately, 170 site options were identified as ‘reasonable’.
- 2.6.10 The reasonable site options were then subjected to appraisal using a strict, criteria-based methodology, as reported under the heading of “**SA findings at this stage**”. The main output was a large table categorising the performance of each reasonable site option in terms of 31 criteria, using a red/amber/green (RAG) scale.
- 2.6.11 Also, sub-sets of site options were compared and contrasted. In particular, it was possible to compare and contrast the performance of (A) proposed allocations within the submission plan on average vs. (B) omission sites on average. The following conclusion was reached -
- “The analysis presented above primarily serves to highlight how allocated sites perform on average relative to non-allocated sites. This analysis is crude, but does perhaps serve to identify issues in terms of which there may be a need to accept sub-optimum outcomes if the approach to allocations within the submitted plan is to be modified, and conversely issues in terms of which modifications might result in an overall strategy that performs better.*
- In terms of environmental considerations, the analysis suggests that the allocations on average perform well in terms of the objectives relating to locally designated wildlife sites, woodland, locally designated countryside gaps and rural lanes. The analysis may also suggest a tendency for allocations to comprise sites less likely to impact a sensitive landscape or worsen air quality in an AQMA, but this is less clear. Similarly, the analysis is inconclusive with respect to avoiding the loss of Grade 1 agricultural land.*
- As for heritage assets (Conservation Areas / Listed Buildings), the analysis seems to highlight that these tended not to be seen as a major constraint, and indeed may have been seen as an opportunity (in-line with principles of positive planning for the historic environment and/or heritage led regeneration) when developing the preferred strategy for submission. Similarly, it seems that flood risk was not taken to be a major constraint (given the potential for mitigation) and indeed there was a tendency to allocate sites in flood risk zones (having followed national guidance).*
- In terms of socio-economic considerations, the analysis suggests that allocations on average perform well in terms of the objective to support development in areas of relative deprivation. The analysis also suggests a tendency for the preferred approach to comprise sites in close proximity to a train station, primary school, local shop, larger shop and GP. A decision to allocate additional sites would, therefore, potentially result in an overall strategy that performs less well in terms of accessibility to these community assets. Conversely, allocations do not perform any better than non-allocations in terms of proximity to a secondary school.<sup>13</sup>”*
- 2.6.12 These appraisal conclusions served to inform the Examination. Whilst Post Submission Interim SA Report 2 was not formally published for consultation, it was placed onto the examination website ahead of hearings in December 2015.

## 2.7 Proposed Modifications (2016)

- 2.7.1 Subsequent to Examination Hearings, the Inspector published two Interim Reports in February and March 2016. In light of these, the Council then undertook targeted work, and prepared Proposed Modifications for publication.

<sup>13</sup> It is likely that, were the analysis to have taken into account travel time (rather than ‘as the crow flies’ distance), then proposed allocations would be shown to perform better than non-allocations in terms of access to a secondary school. Also, had the data taken into account the secondary school that will be delivered as part of the proposed NW Sittingbourne allocation, then it might be the case that proposed allocations would have been shown to perform better on average.

- 2.7.2 An **SA Report Addendum**<sup>14</sup> was published alongside Proposed Modifications, presenting targeted information in order to inform the consultation. Once again, the report was structured in order to answer the three key SA Reporting questions (see para 2.3.2).
- 2.7.3 Under the heading of “*plan-making / SA up to this point*” the task was to present information on -
- 1) developing reasonable spatial strategy alternatives;
  - 2) appraising reasonable spatial strategy alternatives; and then
  - 3) establishing the preferred approach.
- 2.7.4 Steps 1 to 3 are considered in turn below, before the discussion then moves on to the “SA findings at this stage” element of the SA Report Addendum.
- 2.7.5 In relation to **(1)**, when developing reasonable spatial strategy alternatives in early 2016, there was a need to take into account the Inspector’s findings that -
- A) Proposed Modifications must allocate additional sites, such that the plan provides for Objectively Assessed Needs (OAN) for housing, which in practice means allocating sites to deliver an additional 2,224 homes plus an appropriate buffer, which the Council determined should mean allocating sites to deliver an additional **c.3,000 homes**.
  - B) Additional sites allocated through Proposed Modifications must be in accordance with the **submission plan’s spatial strategy**.  
Specifically, the Inspector’s interim finding was that: “*The settlement strategy is soundly based... subject to allocating additional sites to meet OAN whilst maintaining the broad proportional balance of growth between the two planning areas [i.e. the two planning areas of: A) the Thames Gateway; and B) Faversham and the rest of Swale].*”
- 2.7.6 Having considered background factors (A) and (B), there was an understanding that: firstly, the aim was to develop a single set of alternative approaches to distributing c.3,000 dwellings; and, secondly, only certain distribution options needed to be reasonably considered.
- 2.7.7 However, even with this understanding, it was recognised that there remained **a plethora of alternative approaches** that might be taken, with 116 site options in contention.
- 2.7.8 As such, it was recognised that there was a need to undertake work to examine reasonable **site options**, with a view to narrowing down the number of distribution alternatives in contention, and ultimately establishing a set of reasonable borough-wide alternatives. There were a number of different work-streams examining site options, including work presented in Appendices I - III of the SA Report Addendum.
- 2.7.9 Ultimately, having considered site options in isolation, and also considered how site options might be delivered in combination at each settlement in order to achieve a coherent growth strategy, **three reasonable alternatives emerged** - see **Table 2.3**.
- 2.7.10 Points to note are -
- There are numerous **constants** across the alternatives, including -

<sup>14</sup> The SA Report Addendum (2016) is available at <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Main-Modifications-June-2016/Sustainability-Appraisal-Addendum.pdf>. N.B. An Erratum document was also prepared and published, which is available at <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Main-Modifications-June-2016/Erratum-SBCPS105c-SA-Report-Addendum.pdf>.

- allocation of 18 sites judged by the Council<sup>15</sup> to stand-out as performing well, on the basis of work to examine site options, including large urban extensions southwest of Sittingbourne, south of Faversham and west of Minster.
- non-allocation of numerous sites judged by the Council<sup>15</sup> to stand-out as performing poorly, on the basis of work to examine site options, including: all sites at Teynham, at 'East Sheppey' and at villages; and two large urban extension options on Sheppey (see discussion at para 5.3.7 of the SA Report Addendum).
- The **variables/questions** reflected across the alternatives are -
  - Sittingbourne - allocate **A)** 700 additional homes, primarily through an urban extension to the SW of Sittingbourne; or **B)** 1,300 additional homes, through the (A) sites plus an additional urban extension to the SE of Sittingbourne?
  - West Sheppey - allocate **A)** 800 additional homes, through four sites to include an urban extension to the west of Minster; or **B)** 1,400 additional homes, through the (A) sites plus additional smaller sites?
  - Iwade - allocate **A)** nil additional homes; or **B)** 600 additional homes, through a strategic urban extension to the east?

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<sup>15</sup> The Council took lead responsibility for developing the reasonable alternatives (as was the case throughout the SA process), working closely with AECOM. In 2016, at the Proposed Modifications Stage, the Council prepared an 'LDF Panel Report' to summarise views on site options. This report was submitted to the Examination (PS/108) and is available at <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Main-Modifications-June-2016/LDF-Panel-report.pdf>.

Table 2.3: The reasonable spatial strategy alternatives 2016 (key differentiating figures in bold)

	Option 1 'Constants' plus... Growth at Iwade (east)	Option 2 'Constants' plus... Higher growth at West Sheppey (smaller sites)	Option 3 'Constants' plus... Higher growth at Sittingbourne (southeast)
Sittingbourne	700	700	<b>1300</b>
West Sheppey	800	<b>1400</b>	800
Iwade	<b>600</b>	0	0
Faversham	800	800	800
Newington	100	100	100
Teynham	0	0	0
East Sheppey	0	0	0
Boughton	0	0	0
Other villages	0	0	0
Total additional allocations through mods	3,000	3,000	3,000

- 2.7.11 In relation to **(2)** - see para 2.7.3 - the alternatives appraisal conclusion was that -
- *“Option 1 (Iwade) stands-out as performing best in terms of a number of objectives, although it performs worst in terms of ‘biodiversity’ (see the HRA for detailed discussion) and ‘soil’, as there would be some loss of ‘best and most versatile’ agricultural land.*
  - *Option 2 (West Sheppey) performs notably best in terms of ‘soil’, but notably poorly from a ‘housing’ perspective given poor development viability, and is potentially also most constrained from a heritage perspective.*
  - *Option 3 (Sittingbourne) is notably worst performing in terms of ‘landscape’, and also gives rise to some particular air quality concerns.”*
- 2.7.12 In relation to **(3)** - see para 2.7.3 - the Council made a range of comments in response to the alternatives appraisal, in order to explain the justification for the preferred option (Option 1), including -
- *Air - “The preferred approach performs equally as well as option 2, however, on balance, the Council believes that option 1 has a better relationship with the strategic road network and does not give rise to air quality concerns. Whilst option 2 would not give rise to air quality concerns on Sheppey, the longer journeys off-Island to employment and other services would be less favourable than for option 1.”*
  - *Biodiversity - “Significant effects within option 1 relate to HRA issues at Iwade, but examination of the HRA and the proposed policy AX5 put in place by the Council demonstrate that the issues are capable of being addressed and that these could, potentially, lead to certain biodiversity benefits.”*





- Cultural Heritage - *“Whilst the preferred approach leads to some issues, any potential impacts arising are capable of adequate mitigation with the issues appropriately addressed in proposed policy wordings.”*
- Landscape - *“The preferred approach is, on balance, the best performing and whilst the approach is not without potential adverse impacts, these are clearly addressed through proposed policy.”*
- Soil - *“Whilst option 2 performs better and significant effects are highlighted against option 1, the Council considers that this is not an overriding reason for not favouring option 1, once other factors, notably transport and traffic and housing (viability) are taken into account. The Council’s preferred approach seeks to avoid the use of high quality soils until such times as significant conflict with other objectives occurs. The Council believes that the balance that is required to be reached between these potentially conflicting objectives has been struck.”*
- Transport and traffic - *“The preferred approach performs best, even though it is acknowledged that this is not by a significant margin. This is largely due to outstanding or unknown impacts associated with further work required to assess impacts in the A249 corridor. However, the plan has in place the work required to address any issues arising.”*
- Health - *“Whilst the preferred approach does not stand out against other options, it does have the potential to deliver high quality infrastructure that supports health activities.”*
- Housing - *“Whilst the preferred approach does not perform any better than option 3, it is clearly preferable to option 2 in terms of that option’s more dispersed approach and poorer viability. This is particularly relevant in terms of the balance to be struck with the protection of soil and transport and traffic issues.”*

2.7.13

Finally, under the heading of **“SA findings at this stage”**, the SA Report Addendum presented an appraisal of Proposed Modifications, concluding -

*“The appraisal of proposed modifications finds the likelihood of significant positive effects in terms of ‘housing’ objectives, given that additional housing site allocations are proposed such that objectively assessed needs should be met, and also minor positive effects in terms of communities (‘health’ and ‘population’) and the local economy objectives. Significant negative effects are predicted in terms of air quality (albeit with much uncertainty), given an allocation at Newington in proximity to an AQMA, and in terms of the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. In respect of ‘biodiversity’, significant negative effects are not predicted, given the robust policy framework that is set to mitigate effects; however, it is clearly the case that major expansion at Iwade is not ideal in this respect. A number of other tensions are also highlighted (e.g. in respect of cultural heritage and landscape); however, again it is the case that significant negative effects are not predicted given the policy framework (particularly site specific policy) that is proposed. No formal recommendations are made at the current time (see footnote discussion above of past recommendations, which have already been addressed), although it is generally recommended that the Council / Inspector should consider ways to address the negative effects / tension highlighted through the appraisal.”*

N.B. the SA Report Addendum also gave explicit consideration to the effects of ‘the Submission Plan plus Proposed Modifications’. This essentially amounted to a consideration of ‘cumulative effects’, i.e. a consideration of the implications of the proposal being consulted-on (i.e. Proposed Modifications) being implemented alongside other proposals (i.e. those elements of the Submission Plan not the subject of consultation). This approach was subsequently endorsed by the Planning Inspector, within her report of June 2017. Para 33 of the Inspector’s Report stated: *“The SA Addendum, whilst making it clear that it should be read alongside the 2015 SA, focusses on the proposed modifications, enabling stakeholders and the public to identify their impacts, as well as the cumulative impacts of the Plan as a whole. This is entirely reasonable and provides a thorough sustainability appraisal with clear definition of the impacts at each stage of the Plan’s evolution.”*



## 2.8 Further post submission work (2017)

- 2.8.1 In early 2017, subsequent to publication of Proposed Modifications alongside the SA Report Addendum, and prior to the resumed examination hearings that had been timetabled, the Council determined a need for some targeted work to explore alternatives in relation to a specific site: South West Sittingbourne. The site was not allocated for development within the submitted plan, but a Proposed Modification (2016) proposed a 565 home development.
- 2.8.2 In order to inform the Council's thinking, and to inform the Examination, **Post submission Interim SA Report 3**<sup>16</sup> was prepared and submitted to the Examination.
- 2.8.3 Discussion under the heading "**plan-making / SA up to this point**" explained the 'context and background' to the site's proposed allocation, and the targeted work undertaken in 2016 by the developer and the Council, before then introducing three reasonable alternative approaches to allocation - see **Table 2.4**.

Table 2.4: Reasonable alternative approaches to development at South West Sittingbourne (2017)

	Option 1 Policy MUX1 as published	Option 2 Developer's proposed amended Policy MUX1	Option 3 HBA's proposed amended Policy MUX1
<b>Number of homes</b>	At least 565	At least 650	
<b>Other uses</b>	Small scale commercial floorspace; landscaping / open space; primary school	Small scale commercial floorspace; landscaping / open space; primary school; neighbourhood centre Rugby pitches and associated facilities	Small scale commercial floorspace; landscaping / open space; primary school; neighbourhood centre
<b>Transport infrastructure</b>	Explore access options, including any linked road between Wises Lane (A2) and Borden Lane	Explore access options, including any linked road between Chestnut Street, Wises Lane (A2) and Borden Lane, with new slip road onto the A249.	
<b>Size</b>	33.7 ha	49.5 ha	

- 2.8.4 Under the heading of "**SA findings at this stage**", the Interim SA Report presented an appraisal of the reasonable alternatives, concluding -

*"The appraisal serves to highlight that each option is associated with 'pros and cons'. There is an argument to suggest that option 2 is worst performing, given that a 'significant' negative landscape effect is predicted; however, option 2 performs better than the other two options in respect of 'health' and 'population', given delivery of a new rugby club. Option 1 performs well in terms of a number of objectives, but notably performs worst in respect of 'transport and traffic', as it would not deliver a new link road and hence not support 'strategic reassignment' of traffic from currently congested routes/junctions. Option 3 does not stand-out as performing notably poorly in terms of any objective, but is nonetheless associated with a number of issues, with this option performing poorly relative to option 1 in respect of heritage, landscape and loss of best and most versatile agricultural land."*

<sup>16</sup> Post submission Interim SA Report 3 (2017) is available at: <http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Evidence-Base/Main-Modifications-Nov-2016/Swale-Interim-SA-Report-in-respect-of-SW-Sittingbourne.pdf>

- 2.8.5 These appraisal conclusions served to inform the Examination. Whilst Post Submission Interim SA Report 3 was not formally published for consultation, it was placed onto the examination website ahead of hearings in late January 2017.

## 2.9 Plan finalisation (2017)

2.9.1 The Inspector's report into the soundness of the Local Plan was received on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The report concludes that the plan is sound, provided that modifications are made.

2.9.2 The Inspector's Report concludes that the modifications that should be made to the plan are broadly those that were published for consultation in 2016. However, there is one exception, i.e. one instance of the Inspector making a final main modification, subsequent to the 2016 consultation on Proposed Modifications. As stated by the Inspector -

*"In the light of the consultation responses and discussions and taking account of evidence regarding highway infrastructure that emerged during the resumed hearings, it has become clear that in order to be capable of adoption the Plan should be subject to an early review. I have therefore amended the Council's **proposed modification to Policy ST2 (MM42) to include a commitment to an early review.**"*

2.9.3 The Inspector's Report went on to discuss 16 **issues** that were a key consideration when reaching a conclusion on soundness / the need for main modifications, including -

Issue 1 - Does the Plan set out a clear overall strategy for the area which is supported by the evidence and sustainability appraisal?

Issue 2 - Is the OAN justified and up to date?

Issue 3 - Is the failure to meet the full OAN in the submitted Plan justified?

Issue 4 - Are the proposed housing allocations soundly based and has the Council's work to plan for the full OAN through updating allocations in the submitted Plan and allocating additional sites been undertaken in a robust and methodical way, subject to appropriate SA and consultation?

Issue 10 - Does the Plan include a robust strategy for protecting designated environmental sites?

Issue 11 - Does the Plan provide a clear strategy for future development at the Port of Sheerness and Kent Science Park?

2.9.4 These issues were all a focus of the SA process, with the Inspector's Report highlighting the role of SA in relation to Issues 1 and 4 in particular.

2.9.5 Under Issue 1, the Inspector concluded (para 36) -

*"In conclusion I am satisfied that the Plan sets out a clearly justified strategy and has been subject at all stages to robust **sustainability appraisal** which includes examination of alternatives and balances all the relevant issues to demonstrate that the Plan is appropriate and sustainable." [emphasis added]*

2.9.6 Under Issue 4, the Inspector concluded (paras 62 to 63) -

*"... the LDF [Panel] report presents a clear step by step analysis of options for allocating land around Sittingbourne, based largely on **sustainability appraisal**... I am satisfied that the presentation of reasonable alternatives and recommendation of site allocations set out in the LDF report is clear, consistent and logical.*

*Thus... the evidence is detailed and robust and provides an appropriate basis for the selection of new allocations. It is based on appropriate **sustainability appraisal**, takes account of all relevant issues including environmental risks, landscape and heritage and balances consideration of matters such as Air Quality and the use of BMV land with the need to meet development needs as set out in the NPPF. ” [emphasis added]*

### 3 MEASURES DECIDED CONCERNING MONITORING

3.1.1 In accordance with the SEA Regulations, this SA Report Adoption Statement must present ‘measures **decided** concerning monitoring’, building on the ‘measures **envisaged** concerning monitoring’ presented within the SA Report (2015) and SA Report Addendum (2016).

3.1.2 Chapter 8 of the plan document deals with implementation and monitoring. Chapter 8 -

- Lists key delivery milestones, before stating that: “A change in the delivery of one or more of the Key Local Plan Milestones may reflect matters which the Council will need to respond to. For example, in the case of housing, other sites may need to be brought forward, but a wider persistent and widespread structural problem either with a site or sites or in the wider economy may be clear signals of a need to review the Local Plan.”
- Lists a series of risks, along with contingency measures (with Local Plan Review discussed as a contingency for dealing with certain main risks). Risks listed are -
  - Poor growth in private sector employment
  - Fragility in housing market/market capacity delays investment
  - Investment in central Sittingbourne falls behind investment in urban extensions at Sittingbourne creating further leakage in retail spending
  - Key Infrastructure lags behind growth leading to unacceptable consequences
  - The need for the alignment of jobs and homes.
- Presents monitoring indicators for each policy within the Local Plan.

3.1.3 Table 3.1 presents a short selection of proposed monitoring indicators that are of particular relevance, in that they will serve to monitor effects predicted (or discussed as uncertain) through the SA process.

Table 3.1: A selection of monitoring indicators

Issue/objective	Select indicators
Agricultural land	Amount of best and most versatile agricultural land lost to significant scales of development
Air quality	Frequency of air pollution standards violations
	New designations of Air Quality Management Areas
Biodiversity	Change to overall condition of SSSIs
	Levels of new open space provided, especially natural/semi-natural greenspace.
	The established SPA Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy
Flooding	Number of planning permissions granted for residential development in flood risk areas contrary to the advice of the Environment Agency.
	Number of developments which use sustainable drainage systems.
	Number of developments permitted within the Coastal Change Management Area

	and the number relocated away from it.
Sustainable transport	Implementation of planned transport improvement projects
	Change in method of travel to work, distance travelled, car ownership (where data outside Census is available).
	Per capita expenditure on roads, parking and traffic services
	Number of schools with walking/cycling to school scheme

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS ON THE SA PROCESS

- 4.1.1 This SA Statement demonstrates that a robust SA process has been progressed alongside plan-making, with appraisal findings feeding in to decision-making at numerous junctures, and numerous reports having been published for consultation alongside plan documents, in order to help ensure informed and effective consultation.
- 4.1.2 In summary, the following reports were published as part of the SA process -
- Three Interim SA Reports (2011, 2012 and 2013)
  - The SA Report (published in 2014, and then submitted in 2015)
  - Three Post submission Interim SA Reports (2015 and 2017)
  - One SA Report Addendum (2016).
- 4.1.3 Most importantly, from a perspective of complying with both the SEA and Local Planning Regulations, the SA Report was published alongside the 'Publication' version of the plan in 2014, presenting the required information. The report served to inform representations on the plan, and then served to inform plan finalisation.
- 4.1.4 This SA Statement is the final step in the SA process. Its aim is to explain the 'story' of the plan-making / SA process, and also present measures decided concerning monitoring. Also, this report is prepared for the benefit of Elected Councillors of Swale Borough Council, who are tasked with making a decision regarding adoption of the Plan.
- 4.1.5 The Regulations require that this report presents certain information. **Table 4.1** serves to demonstrate that this report does present the required information.

Table 4.1: Regulatory checklist

The SA Statement must...	How has this report presented the required information?
Summarise how environmental (and wider sustainability) considerations have been integrated into the plan	This report has sought to provide examples of key sustainability considerations that have been highlighted through appraisal and consultation at each of the main stages of the plan-making / SA process. The appraisal of spatial strategy alternatives, in particular, served to highlight a range of significant negative effects, enabling the Council to then take steps to avoid (by selecting a better performing strategy) or mitigate the effect (through development management and/or site specific policy).
Summarise how the SA Report and consultation responses received, as part of the Draft Plan / SA Report consultation, have been taken into account when finalising the plan.	Most importantly, the discussion within Section 2.9 discusses how the Inspector took account of the SA Report and consultation responses received when finalising the plan, i.e. deciding on the necessary modifications.  Furthermore, as discussed within Sections 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8





	<p>representations received on the Proposed Submission Plan / SA Report, and discussions over the course of the Examination, led directly to targeted post submission SA work.</p>
<p>Summarise the reasons for choosing the plan as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with.”</p>	<p>The SA Report (2015) presented the Council’s reasons for supporting the Submission Plan (see Para 2.5.6, above).</p> <p>The SA Report Addendum (2016) presented the Council’s reasons for supporting Proposed Modifications (see Para 2.7.10, above).</p> <p>The Inspector’s Report (2017) presented the Inspector’s reasons for supporting the final plan (see Section 2.9, above).</p>

**APPENDIX I: THE SWALE LOCAL PLAN MONITORING FRAMEWORK**