

‘Towards a more efficient and effective use of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) in spatial

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Background

- Legislation requires a **Sustainability Appraisal (SA)** to be undertaken for spatial plans - Regional Strategies and Development Plan Documents (local spatial plans)
- The 'SEA Directive' also requires a **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** of Regional Strategies and Development Plan Documents
- SEA Directive requirements incorporated into a wider SA process

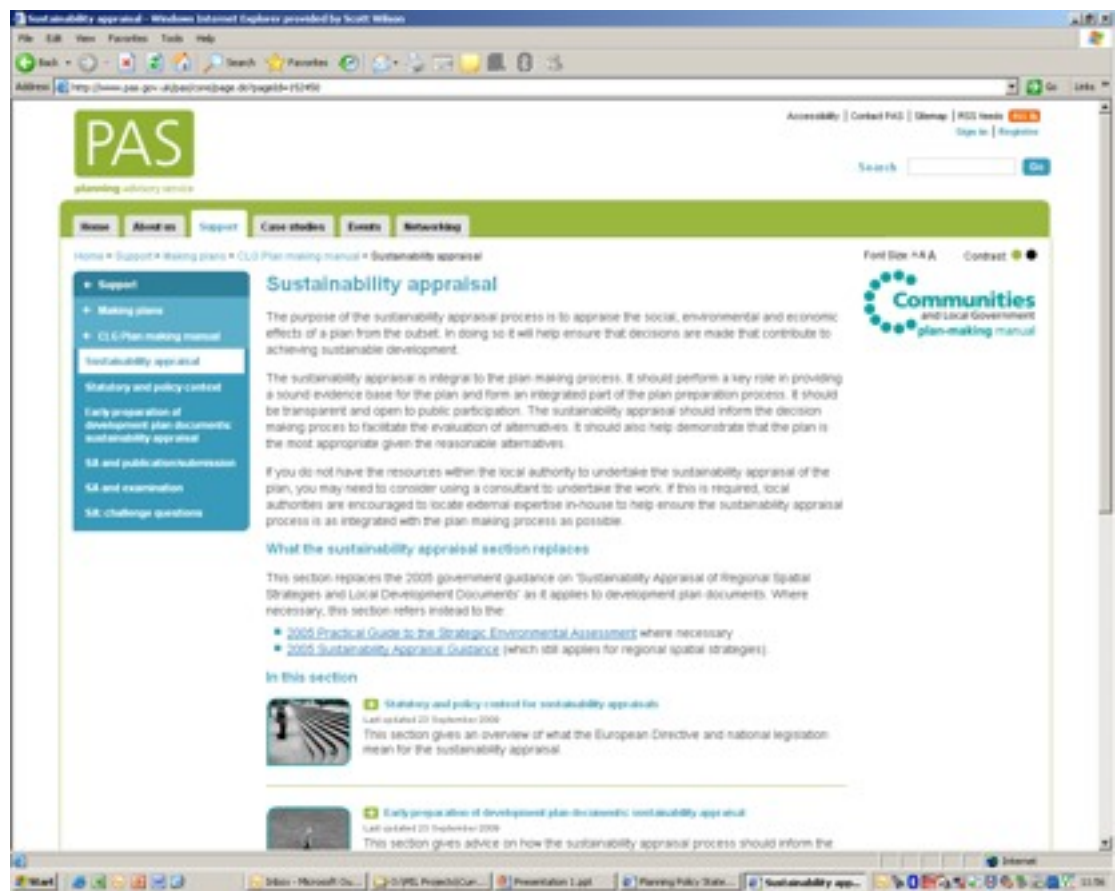
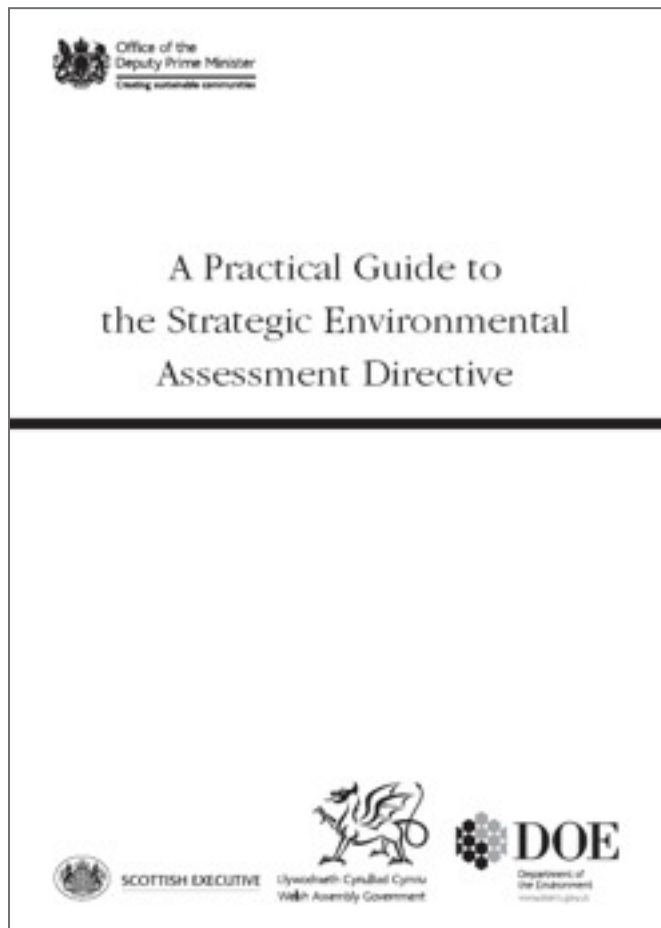


SA incorporating SEA

- “sustainability appraisal covers wider social and economic effects of plans, as well as the more environmentally-focused considerations in the [SEA] Directive”



Government guidance




What does SA / SEA look like?

Sustainability objectives	Option A: Locate the majority of new development in Settlement X	Option B: Locate half of new development in an urban extension to Settlement Y and distribute the remainder between Settlements X and Z	Option C: Locate the majority of development in Settlements Y and Z and provide for considerably higher densities in Y
Objective 1 Provide sufficient housing to meet identified needs	✓ Because...	✓✓	✓
Objective 2 Protect and enhance biodiversity	✓	?	X
Conclusions - Including the relative significance of the impacts, any assumptions made in undertaking the appraisal, different impact dimensions, potential mitigation and monitoring measures			

Research

- SA / SEA has now been undertaken for over five years and is envisaged to play a key role in plan preparation

- Scott Wilson commissioned by the **Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG)** to investigate:
 
 - Is SA / SEA being implemented and undertaken in an **efficient** way?
 - How **effective** is SA / SEA?
 - How effectively are economic, environmental and social considerations compared and contrasted through SA / SEA?

Efficiency and effectiveness

- **Efficiency:** the resources used in SA / SEA and the potential for streamlining the assessment process
- **Effectiveness:** the degree to which SA / SEA influences the content of the plan and facilitates public engagement

Research methodology

- Literature review
- 35 stakeholder interviews
- 15 case studies
- National stakeholder workshop
- Final Report



Is SA / SEA being implemented and undertaken in an efficient way?

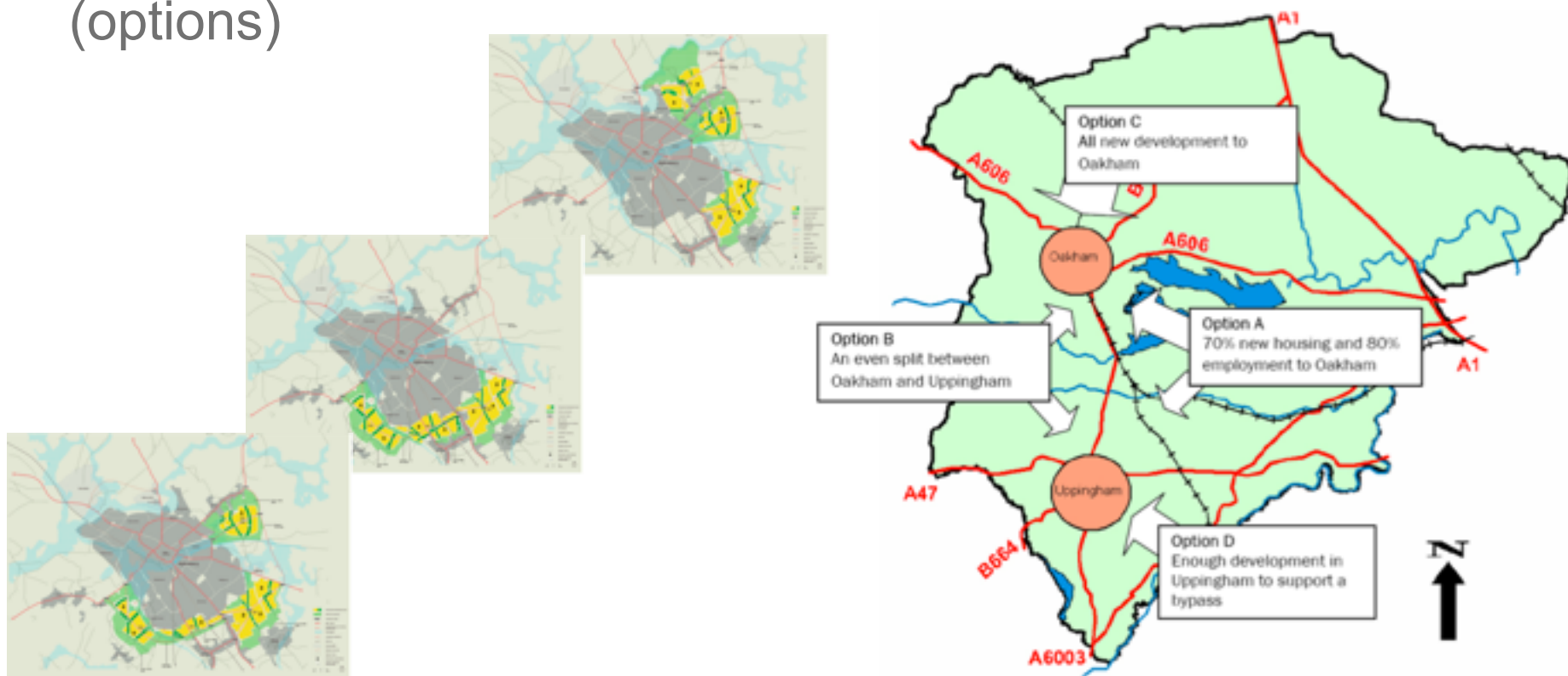
- SA / SEA would be more efficient if it were more closely integrated with the plan-making process
- Despite the synergies between plan-making and SA / SEA, they are often viewed as two parallel but separate processes
- This can lead to duplication of effort with those preparing the plan and those undertaking the appraisal performing very similar tasks

Is SA / SEA being implemented and undertaken in an efficient way?

- SA / SEA would also be more efficient if:
 - The evidence gathering focused on the spatial information needed to identify and appraise alternatives
 - the scope of the appraisal – i.e. the issues it addresses – was tailored to the options under consideration;
 - issues that are not likely to be significant were excluded from the scope;
 - the level of detail of the appraisal was proportionate to the level of detail in the plan
 - other appraisal processes, such as Equality Impact Assessment, and Health Impact Assessment were integrated where appropriate

Is SA / SEA being implemented and undertaken in an efficient way?

- SA / SEA would be more efficient if the appraisal focused on well thought out and clearly articulated **alternatives** (options)



How effective is SA / SEA?

- SA / SEA generally plays a ‘fine-tuning’ rather than a ‘plan-shaping’ role (plans already take environment / sustainable development principles into account)
- Many appraisals tend to take plan policies at face value rather than questioning the extent to which they will be implemented on the ground
- SA / SEA would be more effective if it generated explicit recommendations to plan-makers on how to improve the plan’s sustainability performance

How effective is SA / SEA?

- Planning bodies have difficulties engaging the public in SA / SEA given the complexity of the process
- There is scope to make reports easier to read, and interviewees suggested separate, more digestible non-technical summaries

How effectively are economic, environmental and social considerations compared and contrasted through SA / SEA?

- No straightforward answer to this question
- While some of the research participants argued that SA / SEA is biased in favour of the environment, others considered that it tends to support socio-economic objectives (SEA Directive includes a broad definition of the environment)
- Environmental impacts are easier to establish than social or economic ones, as cause-and-effect pathways are better understood

Key recommendations

Recommendation	CLG response
<p>Planning bodies should integrate the early, evidence gathering stages of the plan-making and SA / SEA processes in order to foster a more efficient and effective approach</p>	<p>Accepted Consistent with guidance</p>
<p>The scope of the appraisal should reflect the alternatives being considered</p>	<p>Accepted Consistent with guidance</p>
<p>Those undertaking the appraisal should not be afraid to omit from its scope issues that are not likely to be significant; however, this should be done transparently with a clear explanation</p>	<p>Accepted Consistent with guidance</p>

Key recommendations (cont.)

Recommendation	CLG response
<p>Plan-making should generate well thought out and clearly articulated alternatives</p>	<p>Accepted Formulation of distinct and genuine options is integral to good plan-making, and should satisfy the requirements of the SEA Directive</p>
<p>Plan impacts should be identified and evaluated with reference to the baseline situation</p>	<p>Accepted Consistent with guidance</p>

Key recommendations (cont.)

Recommendation	CLG response
<p>The appraisal should consider the extent to which options and policies will be effectively delivered on the ground to help avoid unrealistic assessment results</p>	<p>Accepted Deliverability is already a key test and should inform both plan-making and assessment</p>
<p>Separate, understandable non-technical summaries of SA reports should be prepared to facilitate public engagement</p>	<p>Accepted Required by the SEA Directive and established good practice</p>

Key recommendations (cont.)

Recommendation	CLG response
<p>Those undertaking the appraisal should ideally provide plan-makers with explicit recommendations to which they can respond</p>	<p>Accepted with reservations Recommendations, for example on mitigation, can be helpful but CLG would not want to suggest that an SA / SEA without recommendations is unsatisfactory</p>
<p>Links between SA / SEA and Annual Monitoring Reports should be strengthened with significant effects identified by the appraisal monitored through indicators included in the AMR</p>	<p>Accepted CLG is considering what further advice on monitoring might be helpful</p>

Supporting best practice

- Establishing a database of international and national policies, plans and programmes and their objectives
- Periodically making available the conclusions from relevant research (e.g. on the impacts of regeneration, the scope for promoting behavioural change through planning and the links between green infrastructure and wellbeing)
- Identifying synergies between SA / SEA and emerging concepts such as environmental limits and ecosystem services

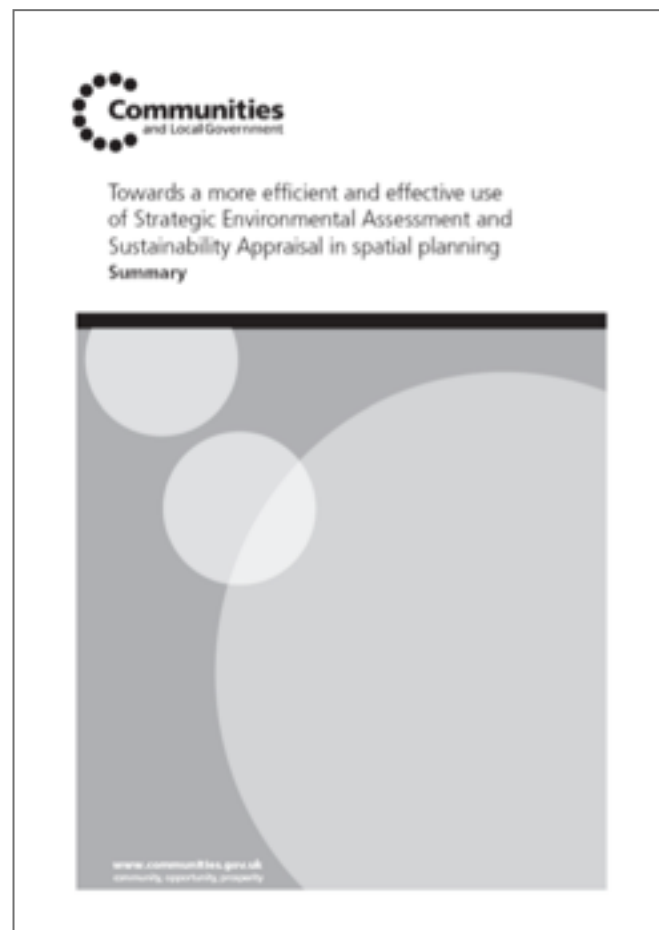
Stakeholder views

- *“In principle a brilliant idea and something needed for a long time”*
- *“(SA) a highly necessary process but a process that it is not yet fully developed”*
- *“one needs to allow sufficient time for the process to embed itself and become a natural adjunct to the plan-making process...”*
- *“often people focus on the process and not the outcomes”*

Research participants

Final Report

- **Final Report and Summary** available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/sustainabilityenvironmental/strategicenvironmentalassessment/>
- **CLG's response** to the recommendations available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1514614.pdf>



Thank you

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