

Blaby Local Plan Review Sustainability Appraisal (SA)



SA Report Non Technical Summary June 2026



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Contents

Contents	
Introduction	1
Scoping.....	2
Options Consultation Stage	4
Pre-Submission Stage.....	6
Mitigation and Monitoring.....	12

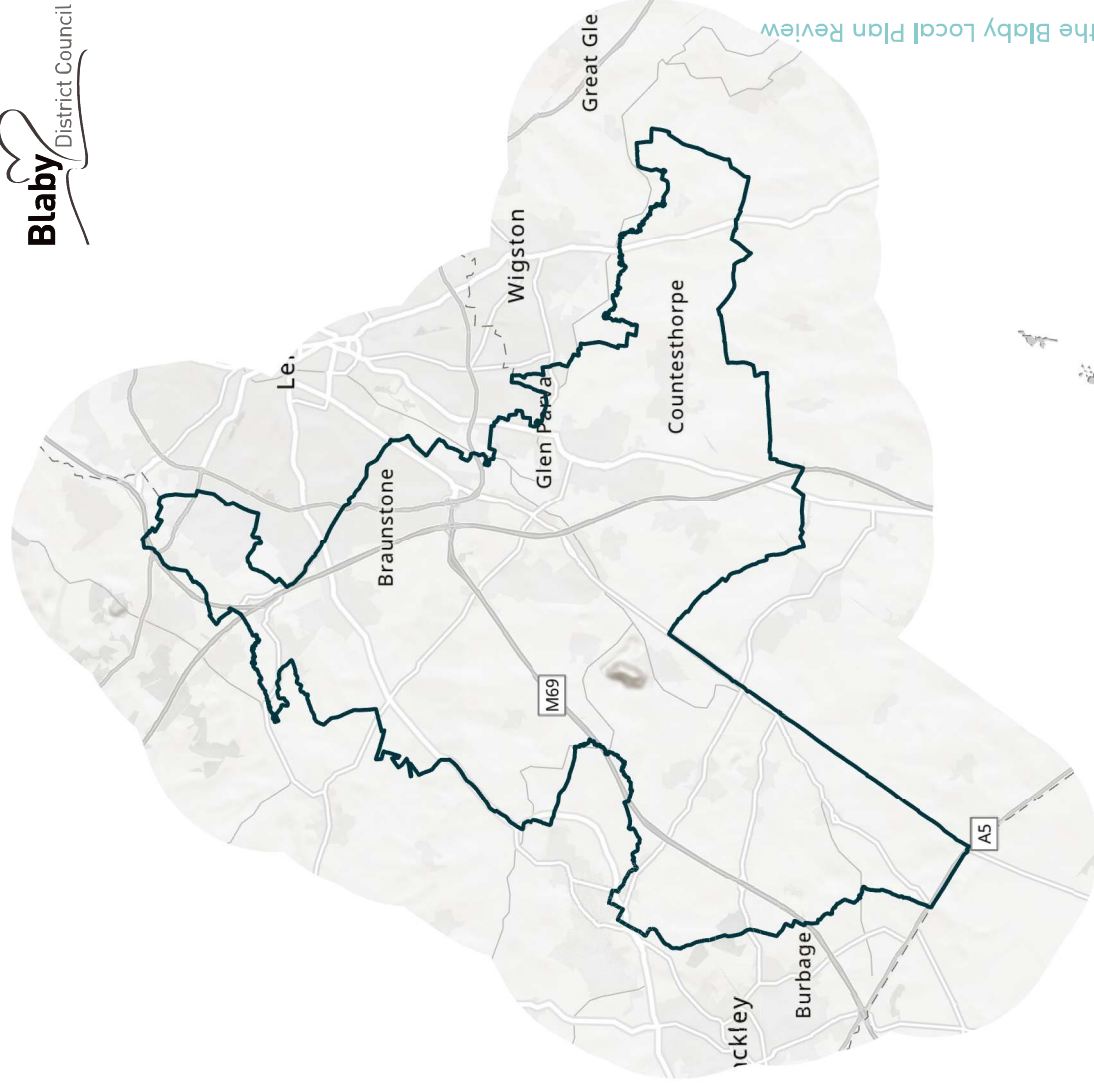


Introduction

The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for the Blaby Local Plan Review is intended to provide a clear and structured assessment of how the Plan performs across environmental, economic and social objectives. It has been prepared to inform decision-making at each stage of plan development, testing the Plan and reasonable alternatives to ensure that growth is both sustainable and deliverable.

The need to review the Plan reflects a combination of factors, including updated evidence on housing need, changes in national policy, and the requirement to respond to wider strategic priorities across Leicester and Leicestershire.

A full SA report brings together the findings of this process, covering the appraisal of the overall strategy, growth options and site allocations, alongside a consideration of mitigation measures to address potential impacts and strengthen outcomes. This is a non technical summary of the main report.



Scoping



The scoping stage is an early step in the Sustainability Appraisal process. Its purpose is to decide what issues the appraisal should focus on and how the assessment will be carried out. This helps ensure that the appraisal concentrates on the most important social, environmental and economic topics that are relevant to the Local Plan.

Informed by data collection and review of the evidence, the scoping stage involves establishing a set of sustainability objectives. These objectives act as a framework for assessing the Local Plan.

Legislation requires that key organisations with environmental responsibilities are asked for their views on the scope and level of detail of the appraisal. For this Local Plan, these organisations include the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England. The Scoping Report was shared with them, as well as being made available to the wider public through the Council's website.

Feedback received during consultation was carefully reviewed and used to refine and update the scope of the appraisal. This helped ensure that the Sustainability Appraisal is focused, relevant and based on up to date evidence before progressing to assess the draft Local Plan.

An initial scoping report was published and shared with consultees in July 2021. Focused updates were undertaken in January 2025 to ensure that the scope remained appropriate in light of significant changes to national policy and to reflect new evidence and data. The framework was consolidated at this stage to allow for a more proportionate assessment process.

Scoping

The Sustainability Objectives

- 

1. Provide a suitable level of housing to meet overall need within the district; and a range of housing types to meet the needs of different groups.
- 

2. Ensure that all groups within the community have good access to high quality local services (including schools, GP practices and open space).
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3. Support good health and wellbeing for all residents and focus on reducing inequalities.
- 

4. Direct growth away from the most sensitive wildlife habitats, whilst ensuring that ecological networks are strengthened and there is a net gain in biodiversity.
- 

5. Conserve and enhance the historic and cultural environment; whilst making it more accessible for public enjoyment.
- 

6. Protect mineral resources and associated infrastructure from sterilisation; whilst ensuring the efficient extraction and use of mineral resources.
- 

7. Minimise waste generation whilst supporting an increase in reuse, recycling and composting.

- 

8. Protect landscape and townscape character and distinctiveness throughout the district.
- 

9. To conserve the District's soils and make efficient and effective use of land.
- 

10. Improve the water quality status of the watercourses running through the district; seeking to achieve 'good' overall status for WFD classification.
- 

11. Reduce emissions of pollutants that contribute to poor air quality (particularly from traffic); whilst ensuring that new and existing communities (and environmental assets) are protected from the harmful effects that poor air quality causes.
- 

12. Ensure that existing and new development is resilient to the effects of climate change, particularly flood risk and other extreme weather events.
- 

13. Support the move to a zero carbon economy.
- 

14. Support the sustainable growth of Blaby's economy to ensure that a suitable range of employment opportunities are available to all and financial resilience is strengthened.
- 

15. Provide infrastructure to support economic growth, whilst prioritising sustainable modes of transport and reducing the need to travel.

Options Consultation Stage

At options consultation stage, the Council gathered evidence to explore how many new homes the district may need and where those homes could potentially be located.

Housing Need Being Tested



The Government's standard method indicated a minimum of 6,441 homes over the plan period at this stage. However, for testing purposes only, the Council also examined:

- **9,000 homes** – to help take some of Leicester's unmet need
- **12,000 homes** – an upper, more ambitious option

Nothing below 6,441 was considered realistic, and 12,000 was seen as the maximum amount of growth likely to be required at that point. These were options under exploration, not chosen levels.

Possible Ways Growth Could Be Distributed

To understand the implications, **five** spatial approaches were tested:

- A. Leicester Urban Fringe** – focus new homes next to Leicester
- B. Extended Urban Area** – include larger villages near Leicester
- C. More Dispersed Growth** – spread across medium/smaller villages
- D. Large Strategic Sites / Garden Villages** – big new planned communities
- E. Single New Settlement** – one major new village/town

These were combined with different housing numbers to create 11 scenarios for comparison.



Exploring Options

What the Appraisal Examined

Each scenario was assessed for its potential impacts against the SA Framework:

Type of effect	Likely	Uncertain / potential
Significant positive effects	++	++?
Minor positive effects	+	?
Neutral effects	0	0?
Minor negative effects	-	?
Significant negative effects	--	--?

This is technical analysis only, not a judgement on what would eventually be chosen.

Summary of appraisal findings

Scenario 1: 6,441 homes

- Mostly neutral effects due to modest growth
- Slight positives for housing, economy, and wellbeing

Scenario 2: 9,000 homes

- Strong housing outcomes across all options
- Options near Leicester (2a, 2b) perform better due to existing transport and services
- More dispersed option (2c) performs worse (more car travel, landscape pressure)
- Strategic sites (2d, 2e) have mixed/uncertain effects depending on infrastructure delivery

Scenario 3: 12,000 homes

- High positives for housing, economic potential, and infrastructure viability
- But also higher risks to:
 - Landscape
 - Wildlife
 - Traffic and air quality
 - Water and soils



Pre-Submission Stage

At this stage, the Council needed to update and refine its strategy before preparing the Pre Submission Local Plan. This required revisiting earlier assumptions from the Issues & Options stage, because both national requirements and local evidence had changed significantly since the original work was undertaken.

Why the strategy had to be revisited

National planning guidance and the Standard Method for calculating housing need changed substantially, which meant earlier figures were no longer appropriate. Alongside this, a large amount of new technical evidence became available — including work on housing need (HENA), updated transport assessments, the SA, and revised Statements of Common Ground.

Moreover, Leicester's unmet housing need was recalculated several times (2021, 2022, 2025). Each update changed how much housing Blaby was expected to take, and at times increased the amount significantly. Because of all this, the Council could no longer depend entirely on the original Options Consultation: the evidence base and housing numbers had moved on.

New Growth Scenarios Identified

Three new housing growth options were developed:

- **10,500 homes:** minimum requirement (Standard Method only)
- **12,000 homes:** meets Blaby's own need plus a proportion of Leicester's unmet need
- **13,500 homes:** includes potential unmet needs from other nearby districts, and adds flexibility

These offered realistic choices based on the latest evidence available at this point in time.

Appraisal Findings

Distribution Strategy Refined

The overall distribution approach from the Options Consultation largely remains sound. Updated analysis confirmed:

- Around **5,100** homes are already committed
- Strategic sites remain essential for delivery
- Growth should still focus on the PUA, larger villages and medium villages
- Higher growth options would require a wider spread of sites

This confirmed much of the emerging spatial strategy was still valid, and mainly the scale of growth needed updating.

Two strategic sites underpin the strategy across all options. Their delivery assumptions have been updated to reflect realistic lead in times. This provides continuity and certainty in the emerging plan.

Appraisal Findings

	Housing Option 1	Housing Option 2	Housing Option 3
Health: Facilities	++ ?	++	++
Health: Amenity and leisure	+	+	+
Population and housing	++	++	++
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	-	-	-
Cultural Heritage	._?	._?	._?
Waste	0?	0?	0?
Minerals	?	?	._?
Landscape	--?	--?	--
Soil	--	--	--
Water quality	._?	._?	--?
Air quality	._?	._?	-
Climate Change Mitigation	+	+	+
Flooding	._?	._?	._?
Economy	+++?	++	++
Congestion	._?	._?	._?
Sustainable travel	++	++	++



Appraisal Findings

The effects for each option have been determined through assessment against the SA Framework. All three options show broadly similar outcomes (in terms of significant effects) across most sustainability topics, with consistent positive effects on population and housing and sustainable travel, and negative impacts on biodiversity, soil, and landscape and 'congestion'. Areas such as cultural heritage, water quality, flooding, and climate change mitigation are marked by uncertainty across all options.

Key differences emerge in three areas:

- **Economy and housing:** Options 2 and 3 offer clearer economic and housing related benefits, while Option 1 is more uncertain.
- **Water:** Option 3 is more likely to have a significant negative effect compared to options 1 and 2, but there is a degree of uncertainty.
- **Air Quality:** Option 3 shows a more definite negative impact in this respect, making Options 1 and 2 slightly more favourable.
- **Minerals:** Option 3 may have a slightly more negative effect compared to the others.
- **Landscapes:** Whilst all three options are predicted to have significant effects on landscape, this is more certain / likely for Option 3 compared to options 1 and 2.

From a decision-making perspective, Options 2 and 3 may be stronger if economic certainty and housing delivery is prioritised, while Option 1 or 2 could be preferable where environmental sensitivity is a greater concern. It should be noted however, that the differences are marginal in respect of most sustainability topics.

Broadly speaking, the positive effects associated with greater housing delivery can be achieved without having a significantly different effect on environmental factors compared to a lower amount of growth.

Council rationale for the preferred approach

The Council's preferred approach is to plan for enough housing to meet both local needs and a share of Leicester's unmet demand, while allowing a buffer to provide flexibility if some sites are delayed. Although different growth options would have similar environmental effects, the Council considers it important to include this flexibility to ensure a steady housing supply can be maintained over time.

In deciding where development should go, the Council has balanced a range of practical constraints. While the most sustainable areas are within the Principal Urban Area (PUA), there is limited land available there and past plans have not delivered as expected. Large strategic sites are important for long-term growth but are complex and slow to deliver, so they cannot meet all needs in the short term. As a result, growth is spread more widely, with a significant share directed to larger and medium villages where development is more achievable, while avoiding smaller settlements that lack services and accessibility. Overall, the final distribution reflects a mix of planning ambition and the realities of what land is available and likely to come forward.

Strategic Employment Options

Strategic Employment Options

The Council has tested three broad approaches to employment growth, based on available evidence and the need to balance economic ambition with environmental and infrastructure considerations. These range from a more limited, baseline option focused on existing commitments and urban-edge sites, through to a more ambitious strategy that incorporates a wider range of locations and, at the upper end, significant new large-scale logistics development. Each option reflects a different interpretation of future demand and the role Blaby should play within the wider functional economic area, particularly in relation to strategic warehousing and regional growth.

Appraisal Findings

	Option 1: Lower growth	Option 2: Mid growth	Option 3: Higher growth
Health: Facilities / accessibility	+	++?	++
Health: Amenity / safety	0	?	-
Population and housing	0	0	0
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	?	-	-
Cultural Heritage	?	-	--?
Waste	0	0	-
Minerals	0	?	?
Landscape	-	-	--?
Soil	-	-	--
Water quality	0	?	?
Air quality	?	-	-
Climate change: Mitigation	0	?	-
Flooding	0	0	0
Economy	+	++?	++
Congestion	0	?	-
Sustainable Travel	+	+	+

Appraisal Findings

Individual site appraisals

A structured, evidence-led approach has been taken to identifying sites for housing and employment, combining technical assessment with wider strategic considerations. All promoted sites have been reviewed against a consistent set of sustainability criteria, alongside other factors such as deliverability, infrastructure requirements and how well they align with the overall growth strategy. Importantly, site selection is not simply about choosing the least constrained options, but about identifying locations that can realistically deliver development, support infrastructure provision and contribute to coherent, long-term patterns of growth across the District.

In practice, this has led to a clear spatial approach. Growth is focused first on the Principal Urban Area, where larger, well-connected sites can support infrastructure and sustainable travel, rather than smaller, piecemeal development. In larger villages, decisions are shaped by existing commitments and the need to avoid over-concentration, with preference given to sites that reinforce a logical direction of growth. A more cautious approach is taken in medium villages, where development is largely consolidated rather than expanded, reflecting more limited capacity to support sustainable growth. Smaller villages are treated more restrictively, with only modest, locally appropriate development supported. Overall, the selected sites reflect a balance between deliverability, infrastructure provision and sustainable development, recognising that the effectiveness of the Plan depends on how sites work together to shape growth, rather than their individual characteristics in isolation.

Whole plan appraisal

The SA reviews the Pre Submission Plan as a whole, looking at how the overall strategy, site choices, and policies work together to guide future development. Each sustainability topic is assessed by first considering the combined impacts of the planned growth and where it is located, and then looking at how the Plan's policies might reduce or influence these effects. This "whole plan" approach recognises that policies interact and should not be viewed in isolation.

The assessment was carried out by qualified specialists using well established methods. This included using baseline data from earlier scoping work, GIS mapping to identify sensitive areas, reviewing previous appraisal stages, and drawing on evidence such as landscape and transport studies. Although predicting future impacts is complex, the significance of effects was judged by considering factors like scale, duration, likelihood, permanence, and whether impacts might combine with those from other plans.

Appraisal Discussion

SA Topics	Overall effects
Health: Long term health outcomes	Significant positive
Health: Short term impacts	Minor negative
Population and housing	Significant positive
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	Minor positive
Cultural Heritage	Neutral
Waste	Neutral
Minerals	Neutral
Landscape	Minor negative
Soil	Significant negative
Water quality	Neutral
Air quality	Minor negative ?
Climate Change Mitigation	Minor positive
Climate Change resilience	Minor positive
Economy	Significant positive
Congestion	Minor negative
Sustainable travel	Significant positive ?

The Blaby Local Plan is expected to bring mainly positive benefits. It will help deliver more homes, improve health and wellbeing, strengthen the local economy, make it easier to travel sustainably, and respond better to climate change. It also includes stronger planning policies to manage environmental risks.

The Plan takes a long-term and strategic approach to growth. It plans for more housing than the minimum required, including helping to meet unmet needs from Leicester. It focuses on creating two large new communities designed to last beyond the plan period. A key change is that infrastructure like schools, health facilities, and services will be built into these new communities from the start, rather than added later. The Plan also better connects policies on housing, health, climate change, green spaces, and transport.

Some negative effects come from the scale and speed of development. These include permanent changes to landscapes and farmland, and short-term pressure on services and transport while new development is being built. Construction may temporarily affect local residents, wildlife, and some heritage settings. However, the Plan includes strong measures to reduce these impacts—for example, careful landscape design, green buffers, early delivery of infrastructure, better sustainable transport, biodiversity protection, and heritage-sensitive planning.

Overall, while some impacts cannot be completely avoided, most are limited, temporary, or reduced through these measures. The main lasting concern is the loss of soil, but steps have been taken to lessen this as much as possible.



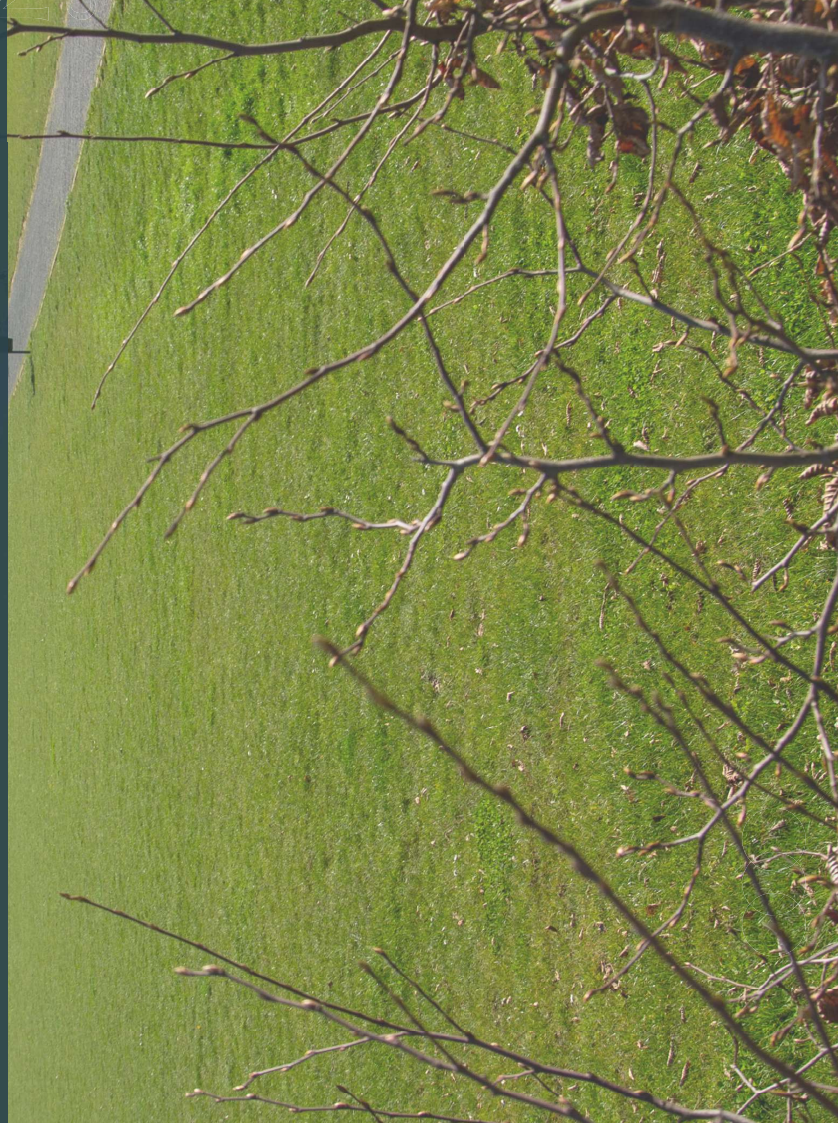
Mitigation and Monitoring

The Sustainability Appraisal has helped shape the Local Plan by identifying mitigation and enhancement measures throughout its preparation. Early recommendations focused on strengthening overall objectives—particularly biodiversity and environmental net gain—while later stages introduced more detailed, policy-led responses. The Council has largely addressed these through stronger and more integrated policies on green infrastructure, climate change, health, transport and design, embedding sustainability at the core of the Plan.

Key improvements include enhanced biodiversity policies, a strategic green and blue infrastructure framework, and clearer requirements for open space, active travel and healthy communities. The Plan also supports natural drainage, better alignment of homes and jobs, and improved accessibility through sustainable transport. At a detailed level, policies on construction management, air quality, landscape and heritage have reduced most negative effects to minor or manageable levels.

Some residual impacts remain, most notably the loss of soil resources, which is largely unavoidable due to the scale of growth and limited brownfield land being available in the district. This has been partly addressed through stronger policy requirements, including soil management plans, but remains a significant effect.

Short-term impacts on health, infrastructure and local amenity are also expected during early development phases, though these are being managed through phasing and infrastructure provision. Overall, remaining effects reflect necessary trade-offs in delivering growth rather than gaps in the Plan, and are generally limited, localised or temporary.



Monitoring

Monitoring and next steps

The Plan includes a set of monitoring measures to track whether it is delivering the expected outcomes, particularly where significant positive or negative effects have been identified. These indicators are intended to provide a practical way of checking progress over time, highlighting where the Plan is performing well and where further action may be needed. The measures are still draft at this stage and will be refined once the Plan is adopted, but they are aligned with the Council's existing monitoring framework to keep things consistent and manageable.

Key monitoring indicators



Health

- Use of Building for Healthy Life standards
- Delivery of specialist and accessible housing
- Loss of open space and recreation facilities



Housing

- Number of new homes delivered (net and gross)
- Five-year housing land supply
- Delivery of affordable housing
- Self-build plots provided
- Rural exception sites
- Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showperson provision



Biodiversity

- Number and condition of wildlife and conservation sites
- Number of Local Nature Reserves and management plans



Heritage

- Number of listed buildings, conservation areas and heritage assets



Waste and Minerals

- Use of Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP)
- Objections on mineral safeguarding grounds



Landscape

- Tree canopy cover
- Amount of green/blue infrastructure delivered



Soil

- Area of soil lost to development
- Efficient use of land (density compliance)



Water

- Permissions granted against flood or environmental advice

Monitoring

Air Quality



- Number of Air Quality Management Areas

Climate Change (Mitigation and Resilience)



- Carbon emissions per person
- Surface water runoff rates
- Water efficiency standards
- Tree canopy cover

Economy



- Amount of new employment floorspace
- Gains and losses of employment land

Transport and Movement



- Contributions to highway improvements
- Delivery of walking and cycling routes
- Access to public transport (e.g. proximity to bus services)

Next Steps

The SA report brings together the Sustainability Appraisal work completed so far to support the Regulation 19 version of the Blaby Local Plan. At this stage, consultation will focus on whether the Plan is sound, rather than revisiting its overall direction. Following consultation, the Plan will be submitted for independent examination, where a Planning Inspector will review it alongside any representations received and determine whether it meets the required standards.

As the Plan progresses through examination, further Sustainability Appraisal work may be needed to reflect any changes or modifications. This ensures that any updates to the Plan continue to be properly assessed in terms of their environmental, social and economic effects.



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