

Halton Borough Council

Draft
Runcorn Old Town
Town Centre Strategy
Sustainability Appraisal Report

Public Consultation
January 2007

[] for public consultation
between X January and Y March 2007

to:
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I Summary and outcomes

Non-technical summary

- 1.1 This document contains the information relating to the appraisal of the draft Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in relation to how it contributes to meeting environmental, social and economic objectives. Put more simply, this document assesses how the SPD contributes towards achieving development that ensures a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations. The technical name for this document is a Sustainability Appraisal or SA for short. The SA is required to be produced because of new government guidance and legislation relating to the planning system.
- 1.2 The objectives that are used to test whether the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD contributes towards achieving sustainability have been taken from the information gathered during the production of the Core Strategy SA and from other documents that identify the sustainability priorities of the local community. The main source of these objectives is the Community Strategy, produced by the Halton Strategic Partnership in consultation with the people of Halton, which was based on a new State of the Borough Report and a telephone survey of residents.
- 1.3 The objectives that are used to test the sustainability of the SPD are set out in a table (Appendix A), this table is called the Sustainability Appraisal Framework (SAF). This table sets out how the Council will measure each of the objectives to see if quality of life in Halton is improving. In summer 2005, in advance of producing the full SA, the Council asked a number of bodies if they agreed with the objectives that we included in the SAF. These bodies agreed with us, all their comments and how the Council responded is set out in Appendix B.
- 1.4 At the same time as asking these bodies about the SAF, we also asked if they agreed with us if we needed to produce a Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) of the SPD. The SEA is like an SA but looks in more detail at the effects that the SPD could have on the environment. SEA is required by a European Directive on plans and programs that could have a significant effect on the environment. The Council made an initial screening of whether a full SEA was needed to be produced, and decided it was not. The bodies agreed with us. This decision has been set out in the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD – Statement of Determination, which can be found in Appendix C.
- 1.5 The Council then tested the draft SPD against the objectives in SAF, to appraise if the SPD contributes to achieving sustainability. This is set out in a table (Appendix D). The appraisal recognises that the SPD is supplementary policy and will not make dramatic changes to the way that we live, but will make small changes to the way buildings and places are designed. Therefore, the SPD will not significantly affect any of the environmental, social or economic objectives set out in the SAF.
- 1.6 Overall the appraisal shows that the SPD will have a positive effect upon contributing towards achieving sustainability, but there are several objectives that are difficult to test the SPD against because the Council is unsure how the SPD will affect those objectives. The appraisal also tells us that the positive effects will mainly only be seen in the longer term because the SPD will make gradual changes to places over many years as new development

happens.

- 1.7 This SA is not the end of the process, if you think that the appraisal has missed something out, or hasn't properly realised the effect that the SPD could have on a particular objective then let us know by following the instructions in section 1.10 – 'How to comment on the Appraisal'. A final SA, which includes all the comments received on this appraisal, will be published alongside the SPD when it is adopted. Sources of further information about the process and purpose of Sustainability Appraisals can be found in Appendix F.

Statement on the difference the process has made

- 1.8 Although the scope of the SPD is not significant, it is supplementary policy, providing practical guidance in relation to policies contained within Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), the SA process has made a valuable contribution to the process of producing the SPD. Firstly it focused attention at the pre-production scoping stage to identify the key areas that the SPD needed to address. This was achieved through the analysis of baseline information. This process has helped to shape the purpose of the SPD, which has provided a strong foundation upon which the rest of the SPD has been constructed.
- 1.9 By testing the SPD against the SAF it has helped to recognise the limitations of the SPD and how these might be overcome through additional planning policies or by other means (such as the need for better training within the planning section to understand 'design' better). The 'testing' process has also helped create a sharper more responsive SPD focused upon its purpose and contributing to achieving sustainability. The SA process has made a real difference to help ensure a quality end product.

How to comment on the Appraisal

- 1.10 If you would like to make comments on the SA or the SPD, which it has been produced to appraise, please complete one of the representation forms, which can be obtained from the places of inspection, from the Council's website or by contacting the Planning and Policy Division. Representations may be accompanied by a request to be notified at a specific address of the adoption of the SPD and hence the publishing of the final SA. The formal period of public participation in relation to the SPD and this SA, commences on 18th January 2007, for a six week period until 1st March 2007.

2 Sustainability Appraisal Rationale

Approach taken

- 2.1 The methodology selected to be applied within this Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has been chosen to ensure that the SPD, and the Local Development Framework (LDF) as a whole, is tested against the most appropriate sustainability criteria.
- 2.2 SA is fundamentally based on an objectives-led approach whereby the potential impacts of a plan are gauged in relation to a series of objectives for sustainable development. In other words, the objectives provide a methodological yardstick against which to assess the effects of the SPD. The Sustainability Appraisal Framework (SAF) – as the Guidance refers to it – consists of objectives and associated targets and indicators, the SAF is set out Appendix A.
- 2.3 The methodology of the SA has therefore been drawn from the information collected during the production of the LDF and the priorities, objectives and targets of other documents such as the Community Strategy, the sub-regionally agreed Merseyside objectives and the regional sustainability framework – ‘Action for Sustainability’. This approach has been agreed by both the Council and the Statutory Environmental Bodies and has been used for earlier SAs, which have assessed earlier SPDs. However, the SAF used in these earlier documents has now been updated using the information collected as part of the production of the Core Strategy.
- 2.4 It is our intention that the objectives, targets and indicators that form the SAF within this document will be broadly consistent throughout all future SAs that the Council undertakes. However, as the SAF evolves there may be situations that require the framework to be reviewed. These situations could

include:

- a new baseline information emerging that better reflects the current objectives in the sustainability framework,
- b changes to the objectives in the sustainability framework, and
- c direction from a consultation body that information within the framework needs amending, such as through consultation on this SA Report.

When the SA was carried out?

- 2.5 The SA process began in June 2005 with the production of the SA Scoping Report; this document was consulted upon between 30th June 2005 and 4th August 2005. The responses to the Scoping Report were considered and have informed and lead to the production of this document. The SA process has been an integral part of the production of the SPD, and has been prepared to enable its publication to coincide with the public consultation on the draft Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Planning Document.

Who carried out the SA?

- 2.6 Halton Borough Council has conducted the entire process of the production of the SA, with consultation at the appropriate stages with statutory consultation bodies (for the SA and SEA process) and other stakeholders as necessary. This approach was felt to be commensurate to the intended purpose of the SPD. Responses to the Scoping Report, particularly those from the statutory consultation bodies, acknowledged the scope of the SPD and did not raise any significant issues that would deem it necessary for the SA to be produced externally / more independently.

Who was consulted, when and how?

2.7 The scope of the SA was formally consulted upon between Thursday 30th June 2005 and Thursday 4th August 2005. The consultation was targeted at those who the Council felt were best placed to further shape the SA process and the purpose of the proposed SPD. A list of those consulted, their comments and the how these have been addressed in the SA is contained in Appendix B.

3 Background

Purpose of the SA process and the SA Report

3.1 The Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD will form part of the Halton Local Development Framework (LDF). This document will not form part of the Statutory Development Plan for Halton. To be able to be formally adopted as part of the Halton LDF, the process of forming the SPD must comply with Part Five of The Town and Country (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004. Part five requires the production of a SA for SPDs. The purpose of preparing a SA is to encourage sustainable development, through improved integration of sustainability considerations throughout the preparation and adoption of land use plans and policies.

Purpose of Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD (Draft)

3.2 The purpose of the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD is to complement the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), by providing additional guidance to those involved in the planning of new development within Halton Borough to:

- a Enable the town centres to prosper without adversely affecting the health of any other;
- b Safeguard and strengthen the individual role of each town centre as a safe and accessible place to shop, work and enjoy;
- c Co-ordinate public and private investment decisions;
- d Improve the economic prosperity of the Borough through the creation of employment opportunities; and
- e Ensure the highest standard of design and architecture within each town centre.

3.3 The geographical coverage of the SPD is Runcorn Old Town town centre and immediate surrounds.

Compliance with the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Regulations

3.4 In accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulation 2004, the SA Scoping Report included a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening statement. The Council's intermediate determination of the statement was that the proposed SPD was unlikely to have a significant environmental effect and accordingly does not require a SEA to be produced. The four statutory agencies (English Nature, Environment Agency, English Heritage and Countryside Agency) were consulted as part of the pre-production scoping stage and they agreed with the Council's determination, their comments are set out in Appendix B.

3.5 Therefore a formal determination can be made that the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Planning Document is unlikely to have significant environment effects and accordingly does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. This decision has been set out in the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD – Statement of Determination, which can be found in Appendix C.

4 Sustainability objectives, baseline and context

Relationship to other relevant plans and programmes

4.1 In producing the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Scoping Report for the Core Strategy the Council considered a large number of relevant plans, policies and programmes. However, in relation to the proposed SPD a smaller number of documents with a specific relationship to the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy have been identified.

National Planning Statements

4.2 **Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPSI):** Delivering Sustainable Development, states that planning policies should promote high quality inclusive design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. It also highlights the need to focus developments that attract a large number of people, especially retail, leisure and office development, in existing centres to promote their vitality and viability, social inclusion and more sustainable patterns of development.

4.3 **Planning Policy Statement 6:** Planning for Town Centres, states that the Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability by:

- planning for the growth and development of existing centres; and
- promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all.

4.4 It affirms that it is essential that town centres provide a high-quality and safe environment if they are to remain

attractive and competitive. Policies for the design of development for main town centre uses, regardless of location, and for development in town centres, should promote high quality and inclusive design, in order to improve the character, quality and function of areas.

4.5 **'Vital and Viable town centres: meeting the challenge'** (DOE, 1994) provides, through the use of a town centre health check, a method for evaluating town centre vitality and viability. It suggests collating a whole host of indicators, and analysing them using a variety of different techniques such as 4 'A's (attractions, accessibility, amenity and action) approach and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis.

4.6 **Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation tools** (ODPM, 2005) provides further detailed design guidance stating that the issues which should be considered for inclusion in local development documents, include:

- identifying the capacity of each centre to accommodate growth and making provision for this;
- providing a comprehensive plan for any area of renewal or development;
- addressing the location and layout of new development;
- developing an urban design strategy, which establishes a comprehensive urban design vision and is supported by specific urban design policies, guidelines or proposals for specific sites;
- addressing the spatial implications of strategies for parking, traffic management and improvement of the pedestrian environment; and

- setting out a detailed implementation programme for bringing forward development on key sites, including, where appropriate, proposals for addressing issues such as land assembly through compulsory purchase orders.

Regional Spatial Strategy & Sustainability Framework

- 4.7 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North West is currently in the process of being updated. Adopted RSS Policy SD2 Other Settlements within the North West Metropolitan Area, highlights Runcorn and Widnes as areas where wide-ranging regeneration and environmental enhancement should be secured.
- 4.8 Policy EC8 Town Centres – Retail, Leisure and Office Development states that Development Plans, town centre management initiatives and other strategies should recognise the continued need to protect, sustain and improve all of the town and city centres in the Region.
- 4.9 Action for Sustainability is the North West Regional Sustainability Framework has been produced by the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA). The main goal of the framework is to improve the quality of life within the region.

Unitary Development Plan

- 4.10 The Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which was adopted in April 2005, contains a number of strategic aims and objectives. These are set out in Part I of the UDP. In relation to Halton's town centres they include the aim to increase their vitality and viability and the need to ensure that no retail development is allowed in one town centre that would seriously harm another.
- 4.11 Part 2 UDP policies seek to implement the broad aims and objectives contained within Part I. Those that are directly

relevant to the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre SPD are:

- Policy TC1: Retail & Leisure Allocations, provides a list of sites that are allocated for specific uses, on the basis of both an assessment of need for new retail and leisure facilities in the Borough and a sequential approach to site selection.
- Policy TC2: Retail Development to the Edge Of Designated Shopping Centres, introduces criteria for assessing when development will be permitted on edge of centre locations.
- Policy TC4: Retail development within designated shopping centres, allows for retail development that contributes to the centre's vitality and viability.
- Policy TC5: Design of Retail Development, provides the design criteria for considering new retail development and extensions.
- Policy TC6: Out of Centre Retail Development, provides the criteria to assess out of centre retail proposals including small scale retail developments to meet local needs.
- Policy TC8: Retail uses within Primary and Secondary Shopping Areas, provides criteria to assess applications for change of use within the main retail areas.
- Policy TC10: Runcorn Town Centre Mixed Use Area, provides criteria to assess applications for change of use within the designated mixed use area.
- Policies LTC1, LTC2 and LTC3 in the Leisure, Tourism and Community Facilities chapter provide the criteria to assess major leisure and community facilities that are located in town centre, edge of town centre and out of centre locations respectively.
- Policy TPI6: Green Travel Plans, indicates the circumstances when a green travel plan will be required as

part of a new development. This may include major development proposals and smaller developments that would generate significant amounts of travel where there are particular local traffic problems.

- 4.12 The UDP was subject to a SA at two key stages in its production. These were the UDP First Deposit and Second (Revised) Deposit stages. This process has helped to ensure that the policies that this SPD is based upon contribute towards achieving sustainable development.

Community Strategy & Corporate Plan

- 4.13 The intended SPD will be produced to contribute to the priorities, principles, objectives and targets of the Halton Community Strategy (2006). This strategy co-ordinates the resources of the local public, private and voluntary organisations towards common purposes. The vision of the Strategy is that *“Halton will be a thriving and vibrant Borough where people enjoy a good quality of life with good health; a high quality, modern urban environment; the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential; greater wealth and equality sustained by a thriving business community; and safe and attractive neighbourhoods.”*
- 4.14 Within the ‘Halton’s urban renewal’ priority of the Community Strategy there is an objective “to revitalise the town centres to create dynamic, well designed high quality commercial areas that can contribute to meet the needs of local people, investors, businesses and visitors.”
- 4.15 Halton Borough Council is committed to contributing to achieving the priorities of the Community Strategy. The Council’s priorities are set out in the Corporate Plan. This plan also has five priorities, including ‘urban renewal’.
- 4.16 The priorities in the Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan are based on the priorities set by the people of Halton. These were identified

through community involvement via area panels, focus groups, and a telephone survey. The Corporate Plan was based on the same community involvement and statistical information compiled for the State Of Borough Report, 2005.

Baseline Information

- 4.17 The baseline information for this SPD can be put into two categories. Firstly, information and issues relating specifically to Runcorn Old Town that will be covered by the intended SPD; and secondly, other generic sustainability baseline information that is consistently applied as a baseline to all appraisals within Halton and that was collected as part of the production of the SA of the Core Strategy.

Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Issues

- 4.18 The following summary of Runcorn Old Town is taken from the Halton Borough Council Town Centre Baseline Report 2004 and supplemented by a survey of the town centre in summer 2005.
- 4.19 Runcorn Old Town is a specialised centre of a small size. Its catchment population is decreasing slowly in line with the trends of the rest of the borough. The age distribution shows shops and services should be tailored mostly to the 25 – 44 age group as in the other town centres in the borough. Being a small, localised town centre finding a specialised niche and consolidating its role as a local convenience service is more important than ever. Having said this the town centre at present still proves a popular destination for local people. It is obvious that Runcorn is not capable of direct competition with the other two centres in terms of the total retail provision,
- 4.20 The level of national multiple retailers is less than half of the other town centres. In terms of actual units, there are more vacant than used for convenience retail. In terms of floor space however

convenience has 2,600 Sq.M as with vacant properties occupying 2,140 Sq.M. The number of independents is 80% reflecting the highly localised centre.

- 4.21 In terms of the actual make up of the town centre, the vacancy rates are showing signs of falling, even though there are slightly contrasting sets of data. What is more worrying is the number of charity shops. In a small centre such as this any more than a few charity shops may damage the quality of the retail core. This may be part of the reason for the town centre yield being ≥ 10 . This figure may not decline much in the near future due to the nature of the centre. Certainly reaching a figure such as 6 or 7 will have to see a dramatic reduction in the number of charity shops and an increase in major retailers.
- 4.22 Car parking in Runcorn is used on the whole by people shopping in the area but there is a significant number of people who use parking whilst at work. The vast majority of those interviewed considered car parking to be safe. Together with the fact that bus usage is quite high the provision of car parking in the town centre seems to be adequate, at present, however it is at maximum capacity so room for further growth is needed and detailed figures on the total number of car parking spaces is required.
- 4.23 Street maintenance and cleanliness and poor public facilities were flagged up as continuing problems by the people interviewed in the Old Town. Unsurprisingly the willingness of those interviewed to visit the town centre during the evening was limited.
- 4.24 Crime in the area is now at a lower level than it has been for several years. However, instances of assault have increased significantly over the recorded period and further investigation is needed to determine whether this is a product of increased alcohol

consumption or a random increase over the years. The most important factor is that the total level of crime has decreased and that this progress continues.

Predicted future baseline information

- 4.25 The current generic baseline information will continue to be used until such a time as it is felt a review of the baseline is required. Situations that may require the baseline information to be reviewed could include
- a new baseline information emerging that better reflects the current objectives in the sustainability framework,
 - b changes to the objectives in the sustainability framework, and
 - c direction from a consultation body that baseline information needs amending.
- 4.26 It is felt that the current generic baseline information represents a competent rational for assessing the sustainability issues that are relevant to Halton and the wider area, specific baseline information to assess the effect of the proposed SPD.

Difficulties in collecting data and limitations of the data

- 4.27 Ideally the baseline information, found in Appendix 2 of the Core Strategy SA Scoping Report and in the SAF (Appendix A of this document), should relate to 2006, unfortunately due to the time it takes to collate data this has not been possible in many cases. As far as possible the most up date information has been used for each set of data provided.
- 4.28 The information tables also contain some omissions because, in some cases, it has not been possible to establish the most appropriate targets, figures or sources. Some difficulties in collecting data have also been associated with the reliance on external bodies to collect the data. For example, where external bodies have collected data for their own

purposes, in the future the data may not be available, or not available in the same format, in order to make reliable comparisons. Where possible the Council will look to overcome these problems by including information that is known to be collected by the Council or will be collected by the Council in the future. This may require further monitoring and data collection to be undertaken in the future.

- 4.29 It should be noted that the baseline information, found in Appendix 2 of the Core Strategy SA Scoping Report, represents a 'work in progress' in the sense that it will be added to / amended as new indicators / sources of baseline information come to the attention of the Council.

Sustainability Issues

- 4.30 In determining an appropriate SA approach to apply to this SPD, it is important to draw upon sources that identify those sustainability issues that are relevant to Halton and the wider area. This can be achieved by identifying issues that are based upon sound quantitative analysis; and / or involved extensive community participation.

- 4.31 The key sustainability issues for Halton and the wider area include:

- **Unemployment** - 'Halton: Gateway to Prosperity' 2005-2008
- **Disparity in employment** - 'Halton: Gateway to Prosperity' 2005-2008
- **Access to Employment** - State of the North West Economy (Sub-regional Report) (Oct 2004)
- **The need to raise the levels of education & skills** - The State of the Borough (Jan 2005)
- **The need to foster enterprise and entrepreneurship** - The State of the Borough (Jan 2005)
- **Reliance on a narrow economic base and low wage economy** -

'Halton: Gateway to Prosperity' 2005-2008

- **The need to improve the Economy** - The State of the Borough (Jan 2005)
- **The need to revitalise the Town Centres** - Community Strategy (2006)
- **The image of the Borough** - 'Halton: Gateway to Prosperity' 2005-2008
- **The need to improve health & life expectancy** - North West Public Health Observatory & Community Strategy (2006)
- **Long-term ill** - 2001 Census & Community Strategy (2006)
- **Ageing residents & the need to grow the health-care sector** - Department of Health
- **Perception of crime levels and fear of crime** - 'Quality of Life Survey' of 1999
- **Increased demand for affordable housing** - Land Registry and Housing Needs Study
- **Providing an appropriate and balanced housing supply** - Draft Housing Strategy 2005/06 to 2007/08
- **Providing appropriate sites to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers** - Circular 01-2006 'Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites'
- **Improve access to Services from the East of Runcorn** - Local Transport Plan 2
- **Improve access to Services in Widnes** - Local Transport Plan 2
- **Improve access to Services to those who do not own cars**
- **Community facilities**
- **Amount, location and access to Recreational Space** - PMP Open Space study
- **Population** - Nomis
- **Deprivation** - 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
- **Water quality** - Environment Agency

- **Conserving biodiversity, habitats and species-** Securing The Future - Delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy
- **SSSI** - English Nature, April 2005
- **Waste Management** - Halton's Waste Management Strategy 2004
- **Transport congestion & pollution** – Local Transport Plan 2
- **Air Quality** – Local Transport Plan 2
- **Design quality in development** - Housing Audit (CABE, 2005)
- **Protecting cultural & built heritage** – English Heritage (2005)
- **Obtaining energy from renewable sources** - Securing The Future - Delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy
- **Requiring energy efficiency improvements** - Securing The Future - Delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy
- **Ensuring the most effective use of land** – Draft RSS (2006)
- **Water resources** - Securing The Future - Delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy
- **Climate change** - Securing The Future - Delivering UK Sustainable Development Strategy
- **Industrial legacy** - Community Strategy (2006)

4.32 The issues highlighted blue are those issues which are considered to be of particular importance with regard to the proposed Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD.

5 Plan issues and options

Main strategic options considered and how they were identified

5.1 Three strategic options for delivering the purpose of the draft SPD were considered. These were identified and considered as part of the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SA Scoping Report. This approach was taken as it was felt important that before the Council resources were committed to progressing the policy response selected to deliver the intended purpose of the SPD, the option selected was:

- a based on which would address the issues identified in the scoping report;
- b most likely to contribute to achieving sustainable development, and
- c supported by the statutory consultation bodies and other stakeholders.

5.2 In summary, the options considered during the pre-production scoping stage were identified based on the preliminary purpose and geographical coverage of the intended SPD. Significantly the coverage of the SPD directly relates to an identified geographical area i.e. Runcorn Old Town town centre and the immediate surrounds. The preliminary purpose and coverage were consulted upon, and neither has been amended as a result of responses to the SA Scoping Report consultation exercise, however, the purpose of the SPD has been slightly amended to reflect changes made during the drafting of the SPD. The comments received in relation to the Pre-Production Scoping Report consultation and the Council's responses are contained in Appendix B.

5.3 The preferred option identified and selected in the Scoping Report is the option appraised within this SA. For

comprehensiveness the options considered at that stage in the process are contained in Appendix E.

How social, environmental and economic issues were considered in comparing the options and choosing the preferred option.

5.4 As stated in 5.1 the purpose and coverage of the intended SPD were tested as part of the Scoping Report and have not been amended as a result of the SA Scoping Report consultation exercise. The report included the formal screening exercise required by Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) regulations. This exercise made an initial assessment of the characteristics of the proposed SPD, and its (environmental) effects, and of the area likely to be affected by it. This assessment demonstrated that the purpose and coverage of SPD would not have a significant environmental effect.

5.5 This process also contributed to identifying the limited scope of the SPD, that it will only provide additional practical guidance to policies that have already been scrutinised and consulted upon through the plan making process, which are adopted in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP). This recognised that the UDP itself had been through the Sustainability Appraisal process. The screening process identified that the purpose of the SPD is to promote sustainable development by creating a more pleasant, healthier and safer environment. The statutory SEA bodies and other stakeholders have agreed with the Council's conclusions during the screening process.

5.6 The preferred option for delivering the purpose of the intended SPD has been established and tested through the Scoping Report, it is recognised as contributing to achieving sustainability

and that its scope is only to provide additional practical guidance. This is felt to represent a sufficient scrutiny of comparison of the options identified. It also establishes that the preferred option that has been selected is commensurate to the scope of the intended SPD.

Other options considered, and why these were rejected

5.7 This was established and consulted upon as part of the Scoping Report. The relevant extract is contained in Appendix E.

Proposed mitigation measures

5.8 No proposed mitigation measures were considered necessary at this stage in the process, because of the scope of the SPD and its purpose of providing supplementary practical guidance to the adopted UDP.

6 Assessment of the social, environmental and economic effects of the draft Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD

Significant sustainability effects of the draft SPD

- 6.1 The Scoping Report, which incorporated the formal SEA screening statement, established that the intended SPD was unlikely to have a significant environmental effect. Additionally, the screening statement established that the intended scope of the SPD will be to provide additional practical guidance to policies within the adopted UDP. Within the context of this, an assessment of the likely social, environmental and economic effects can be made to accompany the draft Runcorn Old Town Town Centre SPD, as set out in Appendix D.
- 6.2 The assessment tests the likely effects that the proposed SPD will have on the social, environmental and economic objectives, indicators and targets set out within the Sustainability Appraisal Framework (SAF). These objectives, indicators and targets have been derived from the Community Strategy, the sub-regionally agreed Merseyside objectives and the regional sustainability framework – ‘Action for Sustainability’. This will ensure that the SPD is tested against local, sub-regional and regional priorities. The SAF was established in the Scoping Report and is contained in Appendix A.

Consideration of sustainability issues in developing the draft SPD

- 6.3 The pre-production stage enabled the identification of the social, environmental and economic issues relevant to Halton and to the intended purpose of the SPD, this was mostly through the collection and analysis of baseline information. This process

influenced the preliminary purpose of the SPD (which has now been slightly amended during the drafting of the SPD) and the preferred option to achieve its delivery. Additionally, the approach taken in relation to the SA, was also identified. These issues were 'tested' and consulted upon through the Scoping Report consultation. The outcome of this consultation led to the production of the draft SPD which has continued to take into account the relevant social, environmental and economic problems that can be addressed through the purpose of the SPD.

Proposed mitigation measures

- 6.4 No proposed mitigation measures were considered necessary after the testing of the SPD against the objectives contained within the SAF because the assessment did not identify any issues that could be suitably mitigated for. Additionally, the scope of the SPD and its purpose of providing supplementary practical guidance to the adopted UDP means that necessary policy checks are in place that afford greater protection to areas such as protected wildlife habitat, which the SPD is supplementary to.

Uncertainties and risks

- 6.5 The assessment of the likely effects that the proposed SPD will have on the social, environmental and economic objectives (as set out in Appendix D) identified that the effect of the SPD on a number of objectives was difficult to determine. This creates a degree of uncertainty in relation to the effects of the SPD. Additionally, the incremental cumulative nature of the changes that the SPD will make to places is difficult to test and predict against the objectives in the SAF.

7 Implementation

Links to other tiers of plans and programmes and the project level

7.1 The strategy for implementation of the proposed SPD, once adopted as a formal SPD will include Council Officer training in relation to the guidance set out in the SPD. This is to ensure that its purpose is achieved consistently across the centre. The SPD will also be actively signposted by relevant Officers to ensure that the general public and the development industry is fully aware of the content of the SPD, and take it into account within their proposals.

Proposals for monitoring

7.2 The objectives, targets and indicators contained within the SAF will be monitored as part of the Council's Annual Monitoring Report. This will bring together the monitored data from their source, such as the Regional Sustainable Development Framework for the North West monitoring report, and collect data deficits where appropriate.

Appendix A: Sustainability Appraisal Framework

	Objective	SEA Directive	Detailed Criteria	Indicator	Target	Baseline Data
Economic	1. To continue reducing the unemployment rate in Halton and increase the economic activity rate	Social inclusiveness Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it encourage new employment that is consistent with local needs? 	Population employment in and unemployment	To bring Halton's employment and unemployment rates in line with England and Wales rate by 2021.	40% of people aged 16-74 in Halton are economically active and in full time employment, whilst 4.5% are economically active and unemployed. Compared to 40.6% of people aged 16-74 in England & Wales who are economically active and in full time employment with 3.4% economically active and unemployed. (Source: Office of National Statistics, April 2001)
				Job Density	To bring Halton's job density in line with England and Wales densities by 2016.	The 2003 job density, the ratio between total jobs to working age people, in Halton (0.76) is lower than the regional (0.81) and national average (0.83). (Source: Nomis)
	2. To improve educational attainment and opportunities for life long learning and employment	Social inclusiveness Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it provide improved access to vocational training, education and skills for young people? Will it provide improved skills and knowledge in the workplace? 	% of 15 yr olds achieving five or more GCSE's at grades A-C or equivalent	Increase proportions achieving five or more GCSE's at Grades A*-C to 60% by 2010. (Community Strategy)	49.1% (2005) (Source: Department for Education and Skills)
				% of adults educated to NVQ level 2, 3 or 4	Increase the % of adults qualified to Level 3 to 70% by 2010. Reduce the number of adults with no qualifications to 10% by 2010. (Community Strategy)	NVQ2 and above: Halton – 54.3%, GB – 61.5% NVQ3 and above: Halton – 33.1%, GB – 43.1% NVQ4 and above: Halton – 15.7%, GB – 25.2% (Source: Local Area Labour Force Survey, Nomis, Mar 2003-Feb 2004)
	3. To encourage sustainable economic growth and	Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it encourage the growth of indigenous businesses? 	Total number of VAT registered businesses	To increase the number of VAT registered businesses by 15% by 2010. (Community Strategy)	2,185 (2004) (Source: Nomis)

	Objective	SEA Directive	Detailed Criteria	Indicator	Target	Baseline Data
Economic	business development		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve the number of new, competitive businesses that last? Will it provide or contribute to the availability of a balanced portfolio of employment sites? 	Percentage of business registrations and de-registrations	To increase the % of VAT registrations whilst decreasing the % of de-registrations	10.8 % VAT registrations and 9.8% de-registrations (Source: InterDepartmental Business Register (IDBR), Nomis, 2004)
	4. To improve the competitiveness and productivity of business	Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve business development and enhance competitiveness? 	Gross Value Added (GVA) per head	Sustain levels of GVA at above the regional norm. (Community Strategy)	GVA per head for Halton and Warrington was £17,190 (Source: Merseyside Economic Review, 2005)
	5. To enhance the vitality and viability of the three town centres (Runcorn Old Town, Runcorn Old Town and Widnes)	Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it provide an improvement to one or more of the town centres? 	Footfall within the town centre	Increase footfall through each town centre by 25% by 2010. (Community Strategy)	Average weekly footfall within Runcorn Old Town of 292,605 Average monthly footfall for Widnes 595,747 (July – Nov 2005) Average monthly footfall for Runcorn Old Town 187,207 (July – Nov 2005) (Source: Runcorn Old Town – Brandspace, Runcorn and Widnes – Halton Borough Council Footfall Counters)
				Vacancy rates within the town centre	Decrease vacancy levels year on year.	Number of vacant units in 2005 Runcorn Old Town – 35 Widnes – 4 Runcorn Old Town – 41 (Source: Town Centre Survey 2005, Halton Borough Council)
	6. To improve the overall image of the Borough in order to attract investment.	Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it encourage inward investment? 	Number of investment enquiries and the number of conversions (enquiries that are translated into actual, completed investment or expansion projects).	To increase the number of investment enquiries and the number of conversions.	317 enquiries 42 conversions (2004/5) (Source: Economic Development, Halton Borough Council)

	Objective	SEA Directive	Detailed Criteria	Indicator	Target	Baseline Data
Social	7. To improve health and reduce health inequalities	Population and human health, Social inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve the standard of healthcare, particularly for the elderly? Will it support healthy lifestyles? 	Years of healthy life expectancy	Narrow the gap between life expectancy, at birth, in Halton and the national average by at least 10% by 2010. (Community Strategy)	Halton: Males – 73.90 years Females – 78.21 England: Males – 76.0 years Females – 80.6 (2000-2002) (Source: North West Public Health Observatory)
				Number of people who have a long-term illness	To reduce the % of residents in Halton with a long-term illness to within 1.5% of the England & Wales % by the 2011 Census.	21.5% of residents in Halton considered themselves to have a limiting long-term illness, compared to 18.2% for England and Wales as a whole. (Source: 2001 Census)
	8. To improve safety and reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime	Social inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it encourage crime-sensitive design? Will it target, reduce and sustain a reduction in crime? Will it reduce the likelihood of violence and antisocial behaviour? 	Recorded crimes per 1,000 population	To reduce number of offences per 1,000 pop.	Halton offences per 1,000 population: Violence against the person 04/05 – 23 Sexual offences 04/05 – 1 Robbery 04/05 – 1 Burglary dwelling 04/05 – 4 Theft of a motor vehicle – 7 Theft from a vehicle – 11 (Source: Basic Command Unit - Recorded Crime for Six Key Offences 2004/05, Crime in England & Wales 2004/5, Home Office)
				Number of people reporting fear of crime	Reduce levels of expressed fear of crime and anti-social behaviour by 25% by 2010. (Community Strategy)	16.4% of people in Halton thought reducing crime would improve their local area. Just under three tenths (29.2%) of residents stated that they feel 'fairly unsafe' (17.3%) or 'very unsafe' (11.9%) when they are outside in their local area after dark.(Source: Halton Strategic Partnership Consulting the Communities of Halton 2005, March 2005)

	Objective	SEA Directive	Detailed Criteria	Indicator	Target	Baseline Data
Social	9. To provide well designed, good quality, affordable and resource efficient housing	Social inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it provide for affordable housing for local people? Will it ensure that new housing is of a high standard of design and layout? Will it provide safe, secure and decent housing? 	Proportion of different housing types and tenures	To meet the requirements set out in the most up-to-date Housing Needs Survey.	Housing Type 2001: Detached 19.2% Semi detached 33.0% Terraced 37.5% Other (flats etc.) 10.3% Housing Tenure 2004: Private 71.9% Council 12.9% Housing Association 15.2% (Source: Annual Monitoring Report, Halton Borough Council, 2005)
				Average household income	To increase average household income in Halton to 90%+ of the national average by 2010. (Community Strategy)	The average household income in Halton is £27,898 which is 89.4% of the UK average (UK average salary is £31,200). (Source: Merseyside Economic Review, 2006)
	10. To improve access to basic goods, services and amenities	Social inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve transport provision and accessibility? Will it provide for local retail needs? Will it improve public access to services and amenities? 	Percentage of new residential development within 30 minutes public transport time of a GP, hospital, primary and secondary school, employment and a major retail centre.	To ensure that all new housing development is within 30 minutes public transport time of a GP, hospital, primary and secondary school, employment and a town centre.	% of housing completions 2004/5 within 30 minutes public transport time of key services: GP – 100% Hospital (Halton) – 48% Primary School – 100% Secondary School – 100% Employment – 100% Town centre – 100% (Source: Annual Monitoring Report, Halton Borough Council, 2005)
11. To ensure access to high quality public open space and	Social inclusiveness Biodiversity, fauna and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it ensure that all people have access to public open space within 	Number and area of Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)	Ensure no loss of LNR (number or area).	10 LNRs covering an area of 142.02ha (Source: Halton Borough Council, 2004)	

	Objective	SEA Directive	Detailed Criteria	Indicator	Target	Baseline Data
Social	natural greenspace	flora, Cultural heritage and landscape	a reasonable distance from where they live? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve access to natural greenspace? 	Number of Green Flag Parks	To maintain and if possible increase the number of Green Flag Parks.	5 parks in Halton have Green Flag Awards. (Source: the Civic Trust – Green Flag Awards, 2005)
	12. To reduce social exclusion, deprivation and social inequalities	Social inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it reduce poverty and social exclusion in those areas most affected? 	Index of Deprivation	For Halton to become less deprived and to move outside the 40 most deprived districts in England by 2010. (Community Strategy)	Halton is ranked 21 st , out of 354, in the average of ward scores where rank 1 is the most deprived. (Source: Indices of Deprivation 2004, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister)
Environmental	13. To protect, improve and where necessary, restore the quality of inland, estuarine and coastal waters	Water and soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve the quality of controlled waters? 	Water quality (chemical & biological) classification of rivers, canals, estuaries and coastal waters and percentage lengths in different classes	To increase the % of rivers, canals, estuaries and coastal waters that classified as either good or fair year on year.	Halton: Biology 2004 Good – 0% Fair – 13.18% Poor – 79.39% Bad – 7.4% Chemistry 2004 Good – 11.0% Fair – 60.43% Poor – 20.55% Bad – 8.02% (Source: Environment Agency)
	14. To protect, enhance and manage biodiversity	Biodiversity, Fauna & Flora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it protect sites and habitats of nature conservation value from inappropriate development? Will it improve the number and 	Number and total area of internationally and nationally designated nature conservation sites	To maintain the number and total area of internationally and nationally designated nature conservation sites	1 RAMSAR – 918.7ha 3 SSSI – 923.99ha 61 SINC – 742.65ha The RAMSAR site is also designated as a SSSI site therefore 918.7ha of the SSSI sites is also contributed as a RAMSAR. (Source: Annual Monitoring Report, Halton Borough Council, 2005)

	Objective	SEA Directive	Detailed Criteria	Indicator	Target	Baseline Data
Environmental			diversity of sites and habitats of nature conservation value in the Borough?	Condition of SSSIs	95% of SSSI land should be in favourable or recovering condition by 2010. (Public Service Agreement (PSA) target)	Flood Brook Clough SSSI - 100% unfavourable recovering (01/04/05) Mersey Estuary SSSI - 99.95% favourable, 0.05% unfavourable recovering (Various 08/02- 03/04) Red Brow Cutting SSSI - 100% favourable (06/01) (Source: English Nature)
	15. To minimise the production of waste and increase reuse, recycling and recovery rates.	Water and soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it result in a reduction in the amount of waste requiring treatment and disposal? 	Level and % of household waste recycled	Waste Strategy 2000 set national recycling targets To recycle or compost at least 30% of household waste by 2010, and 33% of household waste by 2015.	During 2004/05, 8885.57 tonnes (13.65%) of household waste arising was sent for recycling. (Source: Annual Monitoring Report, Halton Borough Council, 2005)
				Total annual amount of municipal waste generated and % recycle or composted.	Ensure 30% of waste is recycled or composted by 2010. (Community Strategy)	Total municipal waste(04/05) – 65,083 tonnes Total municipal waste recovered – 8885 (14%) Total municipal waste composted – 5957 (9%) Total municipal waste landfilled – 50240 (77%) (Source: Annual Monitoring Report, Halton Borough Council, 2005)
	16. To reduce the need to travel and improve choice and use of sustainable	Air, Human Health, Climatic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it minimise the need to travel? Will it reduce car use and encourage the use of integrated 	Number and total area of Air Quality Management Areas and population living in AQMAs	To maintain 0 AQMAs	0 AQMAs (2005) (Source: Local Air Quality Management website)

	Objective	SEA Directive	Detailed Criteria	Indicator	Target	Baseline Data
Environmental	transport modes, whilst protecting, and where necessary, improving local air quality		<p>and public transport?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it improve air quality? 	Travel to work by mode	To reduce the number of people travelling to work by car or van by 10% by 2011 and by 20% by 2021.	<p>Percentage of people in Halton aged 16 - 74 in employment who usually:</p> <p>Work at or from home – 6.16%</p> <p>Travel to work by:</p> <p>Underground, metro, light rail, Tram or Train – 1.31%</p> <p>Bus, mini bus or coach – 7.12%</p> <p>Motorcycle, scooter or moped – 1.07%</p> <p>Driving a car or a van – 62.42%</p> <p>Passenger in a car or van – 9.06%</p> <p>Taxi – 0.65%</p> <p>Bicycle – 2.03%</p> <p>On foot – 9.78%</p> <p>Other – 0.41%</p> <p>(Source: 2001 Census)</p>
	17. To protect, enhance and manage the rich diversity of cultural and built environment and archaeological assets	Cultural heritage and landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it safeguard sites of archaeological importance? Will it preserve and enhance buildings which contribute to Halton's heritage? 	Number of Listed Buildings and Number and Area of Conservation Areas	To maintain the number of Listed Buildings and Number and Area of Conservation Areas	<p>Halton has 122 Listed Buildings 2 of which are Grade I listed, 17 are Grade II* listed and the remaining are Grade II listed.</p> <p>Halton has 10 Conservation Areas and the total area is 92. 78ha.</p> <p>(Source: English Heritage and Halton Borough Council)</p>
				Number of Conservation Areas covered by an up-to-date Conservation Area Appraisal	To increase the number of Conservation Areas covered by an up-to-date Conservation Area Appraisal	<p>Currently there are 0 Conservation Areas covered by an up-to-date Conservation Area Appraisal</p> <p>(Source: Halton Borough Council)</p>
				Number of buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments 'at risk'.	To reduce the number of buildings 'at risk' to 0 by 2016.	<p>There are 2 buildings 'at risk' in Halton these are Daresbury Hall which is Grade II* Listed and the Undercroft of West Range at Norton Priory which is a scheduled monument.</p> <p>(Source: English Heritage, Buildings 'at risk' Register, 2005)</p>

	Objective	SEA Directive	Detailed Criteria	Indicator	Target	Baseline Data
Environmental	18. To use land, energy, and water resources prudently and efficiently, and increase energy generated from renewable sources	Water and soil, Climatic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will it enable development to re-use brownfield land and convert existing buildings? Will it encourage prudent and efficient use of energy? Will it use water efficiently and with care? Will it encourage the development of appropriate types of renewable energy resources? 	Proportion of housing built on previously developed land per year	PPG3 set a target of 60% of dwellings on PDL by 2008.	61% of new and converted dwellings on PDL in 2004/05 42% in 2004 49% in 2003 28% in 2002 (Source: Annual Monitoring Report, Halton Borough Council, 2005)
				Proportion of energy generated from sustainable and renewable sources	Energy White 2003 set a national target that 10% of the UK's electricity supply comes from renewable sources by 2010, 15% by 2015 and 20% by 2020.	Halton has capacity for the generation of 6.5MW from renewable sources. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biomass: PDM (2.10MW) Co-firing of Biomass: Shell Green Generation Plant (4.20MW) Sewage Gas: Runcorn CHP (0.26MW) (Source: renewables northwest)

Appendix B: Statement of Consultation: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Assessment (SA) process

Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD): Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy
 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) - Statement of Consultation

SA Pre-production Scoping Report (incorporating SEA screening statement): Thursday 30th June to Thursday 4th August 2005
 Date of consideration of representations: 22nd August 2005

Consultee	Date comments received and how responded	Comments	Response
Stephen Hedley The Countryside Agency	7/07/05 by email	<p>In relation to the SEA screening, the 2004 Regulations of course require the responsible authority to consider a number of questions in relation to the screening process. In its role as a consultation body, the Countryside Agency is unable to provide an opinion on many aspects of this process, such as whether the plan or programme sets the framework for future development consent of projects, or whether an environmental assessment is required, because these are matters for the responsible authority to determine and we have insufficient knowledge to give a view on these issues.</p> <p>We can, however, provide an opinion on the question: Is the plan or programme likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Article 3.5 of the 2001 Directive). In relation to the Countryside Agency's particular environmental interests, the question we have to address is: Will the plan or programme have a significant effect on the landscape or the enjoyment of it through access?</p> <p>On the basis of the information supplied, given location of the areas, the Countryside Agency considers that the SPD is unlikely to have a significant effect on the landscape or the enjoyment of it through access.</p>	No changes required.

Appendix C: SA of Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD - Statement of Determination

C1 Requirements of the SEA Regulations

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulation 2004 (from now on referred to as 'the regulations'), places an obligation on the Council to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) on land use and spatial plans. Part of this process includes a screening exercise to determine the need for a SEA to be undertaken, by assessing if the proposed plan is likely to have any significant environmental effects. This screening process stage is particularly relevant where the plan being proposed can be considered to be small scale. The Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) can be considered to be a small-scale land use plan.

C2 Screening Process Methodology

The regulations provide a set of criteria for determining the likely significant effects on the environment of land use and spatial plans. These criteria are derived from Annex 2 of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) and are set out in Schedule I of the regulations and can be summarised as:

1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:
 - a The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources;
 - b The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy;
 - c The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development;
 - d Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme; and
 - e The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:
 - a The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;
 - b The cumulative nature of the effects;
 - c The transboundary nature of the effects;
 - d The risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents);
 - e The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);
 - f The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:
 - i. Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;
 - ii. Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or
 - iii. Intensive land-use; and
 - g The effects on areas or landscapes, which have a recognised national, [European] Community or international protection status.

These criteria will form the framework of the screening process

C3 Screening Process for Supplementary Planning Document (Draft): Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy

The purpose of the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD is to complement the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), by providing additional guidance for anyone complement the Halton UDP, to provide additional practical guidance and support for those involved in the planning of new development within Halton Borough to:

- a Enable the town centres to prosper without adversely affecting the health of any other;
- b Safeguard and strengthen the individual role of each town centre as a safe and accessible place to shop, work and enjoy;
- c Co-ordinate public and private investment decisions;
- d Improve the economic prosperity of the Borough through the creation of employment opportunities; and
- e Ensure the highest standard of design and architecture within each town centre.

The intended geographical coverage of the SPD is Runcorn Old Town town centre and the immediate surrounds. Using the criteria in Schedule I of the regulations as a framework, the requirement for a need to carry out an SEA on the intended Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD can be determined.

C4 Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD - Statement of Determination

(as required by Regulation 11 of The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004)

Halton Borough Council in consultation with the statutory environmental consultation bodies (the Countryside Agency, English Heritage, English Nature and the Environment Agency) has determined that the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD is not likely to have significant environmental effects and, accordingly, an environmental assessment will not be carried out as part of the Sustainability Appraisal process.

The SA Scoping Report, (Incorporating the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Statement), for the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD was available for consultation between Thursday 30th June 2005 and Thursday 4th August 2005.

Reasons for this Determination

Using the criteria, detailed in Schedule I of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment the following assessments have been made.

1. The characteristics of proposed Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD

Criteria	Assessment
(a) The degree to which the SPD sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	The SPD is intended to be supplementary and complementary to the adopted planning policy contained in the UDP.
(b) The degree to which the SPD influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	It is intended that the scope of the SPD will be to provide additional practical guidance to policies that have already been scrutinised and consulted upon through the plan making process.
(c) The relevance of the SPD for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	By seeking to enable the town centres to prosper without adversely affecting the health of any other and ensure the highest standard of design and architecture, this SPD will help promote the image of the Borough, promote more sustainable travel patterns and therefore improve economic prosperity of the Borough.
(d) Environmental problems relevant to the SPD	The intended SPD is primarily concerned with enabling the town centre to prosper. However, this would be without adversely affecting the health of any other and therefore the roles of centres within the Borough should be strengthened.
(e) The relevance of the SPD for the implementation of [European] Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)	There are no direct linkages with the implementation of European Community legislation.

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected by the proposed Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD

Criteria	Assessment
(a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	<p>The probable effect of the intended SPD will be to improve the town centre in terms of economic health, prosperity and function.</p> <p>Once adopted as part of the Halton Local Development Framework (LDF), the short to medium term effects of the intended SPD could be incremental. However, as more SPD policies are implemented the longer term effect will be to create a comprehensive improvement in the town centre. The SPD will also set the platform for the further improvements via the future Retail and Leisure development DPD.</p> <p>As part of the LDF the intended SPD will be subject to annual review and its relevance and effectiveness will be</p>

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected by the proposed Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD

Criteria	Assessment
	monitored. The LDF system allows for the SPD to be amended, replaced or deleted relatively easily if required.
(b) The cumulative nature of the effects	The likely cumulative nature of the effects from the intended SPD are improving the quality of the built and natural environment of the town centre, to strengthen the role, improve economic prosperity and create an overall improvement in the environment.
(c) The transboundary nature of the effects	There are no transboundary effects from the SPD due to the intended scope of its purpose and the geographical coverage it will have.
(d) The risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	There are no significant or likely risks to human health or the environment from the intended SPD.
(e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The intended SPD is site specific but not time constrained. Greatest effects from the SPD will therefore be individually incremental and with progressive cumulative effects locally. More general effects of lesser magnitude such as improved economic prosperity will be felt Borough wide.
(f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage; ii. Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or iii. Intensive land-use. 	<p>The intended SPD is area specific. However, it will not impact upon areas of value or vulnerability as identified in i - iii.</p> <p>The SPD will provide guidance to existing planning policies and be seen with the context of part of the LDF and not part of the Development Plan, which contains policies relating to shopping and town centres and their natural and built environment.</p>
(g) The effects on areas or landscapes, which have a recognised national, [European] Community or international protection status.	The intended SPD is site specific and would be supplementary to adopted planning policy. The practical guidance it will contain will be considered in the context of planning policies relating to safeguarding and enhancing areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, community or international protection status. Therefore the SPD is not likely to have a negative effect on such areas, but will seek to provide additional guidance on enhancing such areas, where appropriate i.e. through acknowledging local distinctiveness in the design of new development.

In accordance with Part 2(9) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, the Council, as the responsible authority consider that the intended Supplementary Planning Document: Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy is unlikely to have

a significant environmental effect and accordingly does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

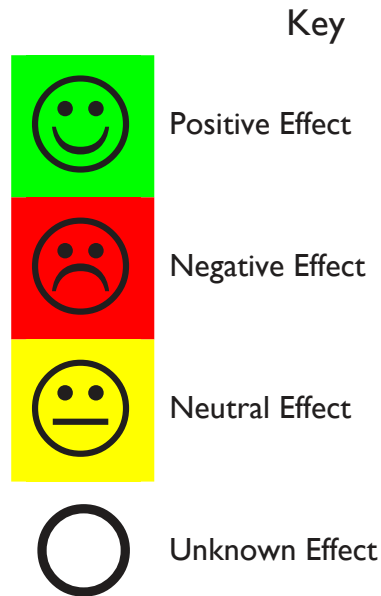
This determination has now been subject to consultation with the statutory environmental consultation bodies, none of the bodies have disagreed with the Council's determination.

Further Information










A copy of this determination and the accompanying statement of reasons may be inspected at each of the following locations Widnes, Runcorn Old Town & Ditton libraries; and Runcorn Old Town, Runcorn, Ditton and Widnes Halton Direct Links and can be viewed or downloaded free of charge from the Council's website at www.halton.gov.uk





If you require any further help or information, please feel free to contact the Spatial Planning Team on 0151 907 8300 or at forward.planning@halton.gov.uk

Appendix D: Testing the Purpose of the Runcorn Old Town Town Centre Strategy SPD against the Sustainability Appraisal Framework



	Objective	Nature of Effect	Additional Comments
Economic	1. To continue towards reducing the unemployment rate in Halton and increasing the economic activity rate		This SPD is expected to have a positive effect on the unemployment and economic activity rates in Halton.
	2. To improve educational attainment and opportunities for life long learning and employment		This SPD is not expected to have any effect on the educational attainment and opportunities for life long learning in Halton.
	3. To encourage sustainable economic growth and business development		This SPD is expected to have a positive effect on sustainable economic growth and business development in Halton.
	4. To improve the competitiveness and productivity of business		This SPD is intended to support the vitality and viability of the centre and therefore the strength and competitiveness of the businesses within it.
	5. To enhance the vitality and viability of the three town centres (Runcorn Old Town, Runcorn Old Town and Widnes)		This SPD is expected to have a positive impact on the vitality and viability of the three town centres.

	Objective	Nature of Effect	Additional Comments
	6. To improve and promote the overall image of the Borough in order to attract investment.		Strengthening the role and improving the design and quality of Runcorn Old Town Town Centre should improve the perception of the town centre and therefore should contribute towards improving the overall image of the Borough.
Social	7. To improve health and reduce health inequalities		The improved design, layout, and quality of Runcorn Old Town Town Centre will improve the perception of the town centre and will help to increase feelings of well-being. The promotion of better facilities for travel such as cycling will contribute towards improved health.
	8. To improve safety and reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime		The improved design, surveillance and security of Runcorn Old Town Town Centre will help to provide places that will contribute to reassuring communities and reduce the fear of crime.
	9. To provide good quality, affordable and resource efficient housing		The primary focus of this SPD relates to retail and leisure services, and whilst it does seek to encourage appropriate residential development it cannot allocate land for such uses.
	10. To improve access to basic goods, services and amenities		This SPD is expected to have a positive impact on access to basic goods, services and amenities.
	11. To ensure access to high quality public open space and natural greenspace		This SPD is expected to have some positive effect on access to high quality public open space and natural greenspace in Halton.
	12. To reduce social exclusion, deprivation and social inequalities		This SPD is expected to have an indirect but positive effect on social exclusion, deprivation and social inequalities in Halton.
Environmental	13. To protect, improve and where necessary, restore the quality of inland, estuarine and coastal waters		This SPD is not expected to have any effect on the quality of inland, estuarine and coastal waters.
	14. To protect, enhance and manage biodiversity		The direct / indirect of this SPD on biodiversity is difficult to quantify. However, it is likely that any negative impacts on biodiversity would be mitigated by the use of other policies from within the UDP.

Objective	Nature of Effect	Additional Comments
15. To minimise the production of waste and increase reuse, recycling and recovery rates.		The direct / indirect of this SPD on the production of waste and the increase reuse, recycling and recovery of waste is difficult to quantify. Whilst the SPD does contain a policy in relation to enhancement of waste recycling facilities the majority of waste issues are addressed presently by the UDP and, in the future, by the Joint Waste DPD.
16. To improve air quality by reducing the need to travel and improving choice and use of sustainable transport modes and reducing air pollution from other sources		The direct/ indirect effect of this SPD on air quality or the need to travel is difficult to quantify. Whilst the SPD does include policies to improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, the effects on air quality are likely to be imperceptible.
17. To protect, enhance and manage the rich diversity of the cultural and built environment and archaeological assets, whilst maintaining and strengthening a local distinctiveness through the enhancement of the character and appearance of the local landscape, townscape and coast		By seeking to ensure the highest standard of design and architecture within the town centre and improving quality, layout and design and local characteristics, the SPD will help to improve the built environment and maintain local distinctiveness.
18. To use land, energy, and water resources prudently and efficiently, and increase energy generated from renewable sources		The direct / indirect of this SPD on land, energy, and water resources is difficult to quantify. However, it is likely that this will be managed through the use of national guidance and other policies from within the UDP and emerging LDF.

Appendix E: Options Considered

Extract of Pre-Production Scoping Report

As a Local Planning Authority, it is important to consider the options available for meeting the purpose of the intended SPD. The options considered are:

Option 1: Do nothing

This approach relies on existing policy within the UDP and government advice, such as that contained within 'By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice', Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access or Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, to help inform planning decisions and applications. Alternatively another agency or function of the Council could produce guidance we can subsequently adopt.

In seeking to achieve sustainable forms of development, it is important that practical guidance is produced that will have sufficient weight to promote better design, access and prosperity within Halton. This can only really be achieved if the SPDs are adopted. It would be difficult for another agency or function of the Council to lead on the production of what are essentially planning documents. Therefore although this option is rejected, it is necessary to ensure that all relevant agencies and functions of the Council are closely consulted throughout the production of the SPDs, as their knowledge relating to town centre strategies will assist in creating effective SPDs.

Option 2: Adopt government documents as SPD

Another option is to seek adoption of government documents as SPD. There are four documents which each (in part) contributes to meeting the purpose of the

intended SPD. These are: By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice; Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access, Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres and Vital and Viable Town Centres.

It is possible to adopt these documents as SPD for Halton, but firstly it would be difficult to amend them after a consultation exercise; secondly, the combined length of the documents would be difficult to digest by those involved in the planning and design of development, and; thirdly, the documents would not have the flexibility to respond to local circumstances. Therefore, it would not be the most effective means to deliver more sustainable places. It is clearly important that these four documents are used as a basis for developing a specific tailored document for Halton.

Option 3: Produce the Town Centres SPDs

This option is to produce a Runcorn Old Town Town Centre SPD (and separately a Runcorn Old Town Centre SPD and a Widnes Town Centre DPD. This would be produced to meet the specific purpose and objectives of the need for its production.

This is the most likely option to create more attractive and sustainable places, although the SPDs must take into account national documents that relate to town centre development. The intended SPDs must be shaped throughout by those who are involved in seeking to meet the same objectives as those set out in the intended purpose of the proposed SPDs. It is therefore proposed to progress option 3.

Appendix F: Further Information

Further information relating to the purpose of the intended SPD:

To access a downloadable copy of the Planning Policy Guidance notes or Planning Policy Statements detailed in Section 2, or for further general planning information visit the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/> or for a hard copy contact the DCLG by phone on 0870 1226 236.

To access a downloadable copy of 'By Design, Urban Design in the planning system: Towards Better Practice' and 'Safer Places', documents relating to urban renewal, urban design and creating sustainable communities, and general planning information visit the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/>. 'Places, Streets & Movement. A companion guide to Design Bulletin 32' can be purchased from the DCLG for a cost of £20.00, quoting ISBN 1 85112 113 7.

Investing in the High Street can be purchased from the Civic Trust for £25.00. The Civic Trust, Winchester House, 259-269 Old Marylebone Road, London NW1 5RA.

Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access can be downloaded free of charge from the National Retail Planning Forum (NRPF) at www.nrpf.org. A hard copy can also be purchased online at the same website address.

Vital and Viable Town Centres: Meeting the Challenge, is out of print. However, a photocopy of the original document can be purchased from The Stationery Office online at www.tso.co.uk or by phone: 0870 600 5522, Fax: 0870 600 5533 or email: customer.services@tso.co.uk

Further information on the Secured By Design initiative, including details relating to the standards required for a development to

receive Secured By Design accreditation may be found at www.securedbydesign.com

For information regarding any development affecting a historic building or conservation area 'Building In Context' will be able to provide advice. It is available from English Heritage and the CABE and can be downloaded free of charge from <http://www.cabe.org.uk> or for a hard copy contact English Heritage at: Customer Services Department, PO Box 569, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN2 2YP, Tel: 0870 333 1181, Fax: 01793 414 926

You can find out about the planning system and how it works at www.planningportal.gov.uk

Further information regarding Sustainability Appraisals and the Strategic Environmental Assessment can be found in the following documents:

- The Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities (for land use and spatial plans), October 2003
- A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, September 2005
- Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents, November 2005

Are available via the Department of Communities and Local Government website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/>. This website also contains a general introduction to SEA and SA. The DCLG can be contacted on 020 7944 4400.

- Strategic Environmental Assessment and Biodiversity: Guidance for Practitioners, June 2004; and
- Strategic Environmental Assessment and Climate Change: Guidance for Practitioners, May 2004

Are available via the Environment Agency website at www.environment-agency.gov.uk or telephone 08708 506 506

