

Appendix J

Sustainability appraisal signposting

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Appendix J Contents

	Page
J1 Background	1
J2 The SA signposting exercise	1
J3 SA issues and the SMP	1
J4 Wider issues of process compliance	2

J1 Background

The sustainability appraisal (SA) for the Essex and South Suffolk SMP2 has been provided as a 'signposting exercise' as agreed with the partners and stakeholders at the start of this exercise. The SA is intended to evaluate the social, economic and environmental effects of a plan or strategy. As a process it has strong links with the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process, which has a focus only on environmental effect. In this respect, SA's typically provide an inclusive SEA. The SEA therefore provides the environmental assessment for the SA, with the wider SA assessing the social and economic effects.

The situation with the SMP is slightly different. The decision has been taken nationally by Defra to provide a stand-alone SEA for SMPs. The Environment Agency-led SMPs in the Anglian region also include a signposting exercise for the SA. The SA signposting exercise will therefore need to refer to both the SMP and the SEA (environmental report) to show that the correct process has been followed and constituent steps provided.

J2 The SA signposting exercise

Figure J.1 gives an outline of the SA, SEA and SMP processes. It shows how the three processes are linked together to provide a final SMP (including a SA signposting) and a stand-alone SEA environmental report. It is important to remember that the SMP process itself is considered by many to be akin to a large-scale SA, since the SMP guidance provides a clearly-defined approach to developing policy in response to social, economic and environmental drivers. The signposting exercise therefore simply directs the reader towards elements of the SEA and SMP process where considerations and measures recommended in government guidance (the key source has been the DCLGP document on the provision of SA for RSS and LDF documents) have been followed. Figure J.1 provides a graphical account of where SA measures have been provided in the SEA and SMP process via a series of coloured flags. The intent is to offer a simple record of where in the SMP or SEA key stages of the SA have been addressed.

J3 SA issues and the SMP

The SEA for the SMP has been scoped to include the wider human environment (including historic environment features, quality of life factors etc). This means that most of the key issues the SA would be expected to address have been considered in the SEA. Also, the considerations in the SEA have (in response to SMP guidance) provided the core materials that have shaped the development and informed the selection of SMP policies.

The actual range of issues that lie outside the scope of the SEA, but within the scope of the SMP, is therefore relatively small.

J4 Wider issues of process compliance

The wider project planning of the SMP has made sure that the three processes are linked chronologically and that they have common consultation periods. The SMP, SEA and SA signposting will all therefore share a common consultation period. The requirements of the SEA and SA will be factored into the action plan that accompanies the final SMP. We believe that the process to date has provided a full account of SA issues.

The SEA process outlined a series of environmental issues that are considered to represent the key issues relating to the Essex and South Suffolk coast. Some issues identified were generic (relating to the coast as a whole), while others were specific to the actual nature of the Essex and South Suffolk coast. Collectively, the suite of issues is considered to provide a summary of the matters relating to the environment in its wider context. The environment, within the terms of the SEA regulations (and accompanying guidance) includes not only habitats and species, but also receptors that support life (air, water etc) and a consideration of the social and cultural environment (i.e. features that support communities – tourism, commerce etc). Also, cultural heritage features are also considered part of 'the environment'. Within the scope of this definition of the environment, the following issues have been identified in the SEA:

1. The need to maintain a balance of providing navigation and access to estuary communities;
2. Protection of coastal towns and settlements and the maintenance of features which support tourism and commerce;
3. Maintenance of the coastal landscape with regard to the provision of a mosaic of landscape features which is characteristic of the Essex and South Suffolk coast;
4. Potential loss of historic and archaeological features on a dynamic coastline;
5. Threat to biodiversity on a dynamic coast and the interactions between various coastal habitat types;
6. Maintenance of Balance of Coastal Processes on a Dynamic Linear Coastline with Settlements Along Estuaries;
7. Maintenance of Water Supply in the Coastal Zone;
8. Threat to the environmental conditions to support biodiversity and the quality of life; and
9. Maintenance of coastal processes required for sustainable coastal management and the integrity of critical coastal habitat and species.

This list of issues has been drawn fairly widely and includes matters that are also social and economic (typically a consideration of the SA). The SMP is in itself limited to the factors that it can affect and we believe there are no other social or economic factors (i.e. factors that would be considered in a SA, as opposed to the environmental focus of the SEA) that have not been considered in the SMP process.

The SMP guidance makes it very clear that the economic assessment of the plan, in addition to the socio-economic element fully included in policy appraisal, is limited to a high-level check of economic viability. This is based on the benefit - cost ratio of defence investment versus the benefits of flood and erosion damage prevented (see Appendix H – economics). This economic analysis, in addition to the SEA assessment, should encompass all the factors that should be assessed in a SA.

Fig J.1 - Integration of the Sustainability Appraisal, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Shoreline Management Plan Processes

