

## **Sustainability Appraisal of the draft North Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy - 2007**

*“The purpose of a Sustainable Community Strategy is to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK”.*

*(Preparing Community Strategies. Government Guidance to Local Authorities, Dec 2000)*

### **Introduction**

The North Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the strategic direction for the district for the next 25 years.

This report outlines how the draft strategy contributes to UK and regional sustainable development principles and to the national sustainable communities agenda. It is intended to flag up areas of particular strength and weakness and highlight any gaps, tensions or inherent conflicts from a sustainable development perspective.

### **1) National Sustainable Development Principles**

The draft strategy was first assessed against each of the 5 overarching principles for Sustainable Development as set out in ‘Securing the Future’, the national sustainable development strategy.

### **Conclusions**

- The draft strategy contributes to all 5 overarching principles
- It was found to be particularly strong on ‘Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society’, ‘Achieving a Sustainable Economy’ and ‘Using Sound Science [Evidence] Responsibly’.
- The area that did not feature as strongly across all of the shared priorities was ‘Living within Environmental Limits’.
- The appraisal identified a conflict between environmental and economic aims.

### **Action taken:**

- The draft strategy was found to adequately cover environmental issues but it is important that these are addressed through delivery of all of the priorities. This area will best be done by improved joined-up working across the Partnership (see Recommendations)

### **2) National Sustainable Communities Agenda**

The Sustainable Communities agenda is about putting sustainable development into practice at the local level. It aims to improve neighbourhood participation, address inequalities and support the delivery of sustainable development where it matters the most, in our communities and neighbourhoods.

National guidance identifies eight main components, and 43 sub-components, that make up a sustainable community.

The draft strategy was checked against each of the sub-components to assess whether it is likely to contribute to the development of more sustainable communities locally.

**Conclusions:**

- The aims of the draft strategy were found to contribute to all 43 sub-components.
- It was found to be broadly stronger on social issues such as improving community engagement, addressing inequalities and increasing accessibility of goods and services.
- The areas that did not feature so strongly were land use issues, the need for more sustainable patterns of consumption and production, international issues such as North Somerset's global impact and the use of new communication and information technologies and networks.
- The main conflict identified through the review was the need to reconcile economic and environmental aims.

**Action taken to address gaps:**

- Land Use Issues – Will be dealt with through the development of the North Somerset Local Development Framework
- Sustainable consumption and production – will best be addressed through improved communication between economic and environmental sectors (see Recommendations)
- International issues – will best be addressed through improved action planning and monitoring of partnership activities to take international issues into account (see Recommendations)
- New communication and information technologies – wording of strategy amended to include reference to this issue

**3) Regional Priorities**

Alongside the overarching sustainability principles and local sustainable communities agenda, it was recognised that the Sustainable Community Strategy also needs to take account of regional priorities.

The regional assessment was carried out using the 'Sustainability Shaper' - the sustainability tool and guide for the South West. The Shaper has been designed to translate the national sustainable development strategy 'through the filter' of the region's particular sustainability priorities.

**Conclusions:**

- The draft strategy was found to contribute to all ten regional principles.
- It was found to be particularly strong on Health and Wellbeing, Equality in Meeting Basic Needs and Inclusive Decision-Making.
- The areas that did not feature so strongly were Sustainable Sourcing, Sustainability Learning & Skills and the Long Term Approach
- Again, the main conflicts were found to be around economy and environment.

**Action taken to address gaps:**

- Sustainable Sourcing – will best be addressed through improved communication between economic and environmental sectors (see Recommendations)

- Sustainability Learning and Skills – wording of strategy amended to include reference to this issue
- Long Term Approach – will best be addressed through improved monitoring of actions to take into account their long-term impacts (see Recommendations)

### **Recommendations**

Delivering on sustainability is about joined-up working and this sustainability review has shown that the draft Strategy is likely to make an important contribution to the development of more sustainable communities in North Somerset.

In particular the framing of the strategy under ‘Shared Priorities’ rather than work areas or topic headings is a very positive development, that has the potential to help the Partnership move away from the limitations of ‘silo-working’ towards a more integrated and joined-up approach.

To ensure that the aim of sustainable development in the district is realised, it is vital that the Partnership is clear about how the different priority areas will link and influence each other in practice. To do this, the Partnership board will need to ensure that action planning and monitoring of partnership activities takes account of all 5 shared priorities along with broader sustainable development principles such as international issues and a taking a long term approach. .

The most significant issue identified in all three assessments is a tension between some of the environmental and economic aims. To overcome these, the Partnership board and delivery partnerships will need to develop close working between the economic and environmental sectors to enable them to find new ways of working that reconcile environmental and economic objectives.

In particular, North Somerset needs to be in a strong position to take advantage of the new opportunities that will be presented by the move towards a low CO2 and resource efficient future.

Dec 2007