

4.0 Sustainability Baseline & Policy Context

- 4.1 Chapter A4 of the SA (2007) analyses the data on baseline sustainability conditions within the region and this appraisal has used the same information (in accordance with Government guidance as summarised in Section 2.0 (“SAs of RSSs and LDDs”). To reflect the time lapse since the information was gathered for the SA (2007), a review of data sources and policy documents has been carried out to update where necessary and appropriate any key baseline trends and policy objectives. This updated information has been taken into account in carrying out the sustainability appraisal of the housing options but cross-reference should also be given to the detailed summary of baseline data and policy contained in the SA (2007).

Characteristics of Areas Likely to be Significantly Affected

- 4.2 Section A4.4 of the SA (2007) analysed the characteristics of the areas likely to be significantly affected in respect of the Preferred Option. This assessment concluded:-

“It can be seen from this analysis that the significant effects of the Phase 2 revision will be spread very widely throughout the region. In addition, this does not take account of the sensitivities of the receiving environment; some areas may not be identified to take significant levels of development, but the receiving environment may be such that the effects will nevertheless be significant. It is therefore considered that the whole region should be regarded as likely to be significantly affected.”

- 4.3 An analysis of the characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected as a result of the housing options has also taken place and it could be assumed that a similarly wide ranging effect would be expected from them. Whilst the options identified are focused in a number of locations the overall effect and cumulation with the Preferred Option would also be expected to have a wide ranging effect across the region as a whole.
- 4.4 Section A6.5 of the SA (2007) also provides some analysis of issues relevant to the sub-regional or district areas within the region which are also relevant to the appraisal of the housing options.

Summary of Baseline Environmental, Social & Economic Conditions – SA (2007) Update

- 4.5 For ease of comparison with the SA (2007), and where information has been available, the same data sources have been utilised to analyse any significant changes to the baseline conditions and key trends. A summary of the key changes is identified in Table 4.1 below along with a brief commentary on any changes to the anticipated future trends compared to those identified in the SA (2007)
- 4.6 Appendix 1 provides a more detailed analysis of the updated information identified.

Objective/Indicator	Summary of Baseline Review in SA (2007)	Summary of Key Changes/Issues Identified	Summary of Key Changes to Future Trends
Regional Context	2001 Census data indicated population of 5,267,500 in the region. 34 local authority areas identified in baseline review.	The 2006 Population estimates show growth in population of nearly 2% (99,000 residents) from 2001. More significant growth in some of the rural authority areas in comparison to the MUAs. Population in Stoke on Trent & Bridgnorth has declined. Shropshire is due to become a unitary authority in April 2009	No change foreseen
Access	Many rural communities suffer from relatively high access deprivation and little access to housing and key services.	Continued gradual decline in access to rural primary schools, post offices and pubs.	SA (2007) indicated access to services and jobs may be expected to improve as a result of positive policies within the RSS and other strategies. The updated baseline indicates this may not be the case and further analysis may be required.
Participation	High disparity in turnout between constituencies in the region with the highest rates in rural areas.	No update to data in baseline	No change foreseen
Poverty	Many areas of multiple deprivation particularly urban areas with a focus on areas of Birmingham and Coventry. Household income is lower than the national average – the remote rural communities are on average the worst off group in England (2002 data). Generally significant variations in total weekly household income. Considerable falls in fuel poverty from mid 1990s to 2001 but still above national average.	General improvements but no significant change in baseline position on key indicators	SA (2007) indicated levels of poverty may be expected to improve as a result of positive policies in the RSS and other strategies. Some evidence this could be occurring albeit slowly.
Health	The region's life expectancy (78) in 2001 was slightly below the national average (78.4) and there are major variations across the region. Stoke on Trent has the worst life expectancy (76.1) and Wychavon the best (80.2). Stoke on Trent (along with Coventry and Birmingham)	General improvements in health but no significant change in life expectancy, levels of obesity, infant mortality rates and Long Term Limiting Illness. Indications of a slight increase in the incidence of teenage pregnancy and remains	SA (2007) indicated levels of health may be expected to improve as a result of improving socio-economic conditions and health improvement plans and programme. Limited evidence that this is

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	<p>are in the bottom 2% of health deprivation in the country (albeit regionally there is generally a good level of health). In 2004, the region had the highest infant mortality rate of any region in the country and also the highest level of teenage conceptions (albeit conceptions have been falling since 1998). The region has also one of the highest overall rates of obesity; particularly of female obesity which is the highest in the country. Long Term Limiting Illness was above the national average in 2001 (19.9% to 17.9%) with marked variations (e.g. 40% in one area of Stoke on Trent to 4% in Bridgnorth).</p>	<p>above national average.</p>	<p>occurring.</p>
Housing	<p>2004 data concluded completions were in line with the requirements of the RSS. 38.5% of the Region's dwellings in 2001 failed to meet the Decent Homes standard (England average of 33%). This was the highest rate of all regions. House prices increased by 147% between 1992 and 2004 whilst incomes increased by 88%. Significant disparity in housing affordability in 2007. South Shropshire had the worst income to house price ratio (9.76) with Stoke and Trent the best ratio (5.52).</p>	<p>Net housing completions are below the targets in the RSS and the Phase 2 Preferred Option document although there has been a general increase in completions. No change to the baseline trends on house prices and housing affordability.</p>	<p>The current market downturn could be expected to have a major impact for at least 2-3 years (based on engagement with the development industry) but there are indications that following this time the rate of development can be increased to achieve the RSS policies provided future economic recovery is matched by the release of land that is capable of being developed. There is no evidence that developing beyond this to deliver the additional growth in the housing options could not be achieved due to there being finite capacity in the industry but delivery would require sufficient land being made available, cross working between the public sector and house-building industry and mechanisms existing to deliver infrastructure particularly for larger schemes</p>
Crime	<p>Similar crime rates in 2004 to those identified</p>	<p>Rate of decrease in crime levelling off in the</p>	<p>No change foreseen in trends moving</p>

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	nationally. The region had the largest decrease in crime of any region between 2001 and 2004. However crime in the main conurbation is above the national average. Fear of crime declined in the region and was just above national average in 2004/5.	region. Fear of crime has increased.	forward
Culture and Recreation	Smaller proportion of the region's population has access to woodland than anywhere else in the country. Numbers visiting public libraries are below national average.	No update to data in baseline	SA (2007) indicated participation could be expected to increase. The update to the baseline does not necessarily support this position but no evidence to suggest long term trends will lead to participation decreasing.
Balanced Development	Dramatic decline between 1981 and 2002 in the population in the large conurbations. Meanwhile increases in other urban and rural locations have shown significant increases. General net loss of population to the rest of the country between 1999 and 2004 (generally in 16-24 age group).	Information from 2005 indicates the lowest annual net loss to other regions in the country since 2001. Indications that following a high point in 2003, the net loss of population from MUAs has started to slow. No significant changes to intra-regional migration trends and population density.	It is unclear what effects the housing growth in the Preferred Option may have on the urban-rural shift or additional growth in the housing options. Potentially a number of scenarios taking account of how much land is available for development and the ability of the industry to increase supply of new residential in the region
Environmental Assets	Generally good quality living environment across the region with pockets of very poor quality within notably urban and also remote rural areas. 20% of region is a National Park and 10% is Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Analysis of the Joint Character Areas in 2004 indicated most had not changed but the region also had the highest national average of landscapes that had shown marked change.	East of the region is changing – much of it in a way inconsistent with the existing character. The west is more stable. There has been an increase in the number of listed buildings but a decrease in the number of Registered Parks & Gardens and Conservation Areas. Fall in the proportion of Grade I and II* listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments on the At Risk Register. 19% of the local areas within Birmingham fall within the bottom 2% nationally for living environment deprivation.	As with the SA (2007) future evolution of assets is uncertain but could be expected to improve on the basis of positive policies in the RSS and other strategies
Biodiversity	General fall in woodland bird species from	Significant decline in farmland bird species from	Changes to future biodiversity is

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	1994. Farmland bird species fell to 1999 but then increased slightly to 2003. SSSI condition survey indicates those sites in a favourable or unfavourable recovering state is increasing (71.63%) but substantially below target (95% by 2010).	baseline position. Woodland bird species show little change. Small decline in amount of ancient woodland. Improvements in reporting on quality of SSSIs but overall no change to data in baseline.	uncertain but could be expected to improve as identified in the SA (2007). However, the baseline update indicates further reinforcement of positive policies may be required
Land Use	Decrease in derelict land with the majority of remaining land in the MUAs. Significant decrease in derelict land (ha) in Warwickshire and Staffordshire. Slightly above national average % of development on PDL.	Continued reduction in quantum of derelict land. Majority of derelict land continues to lie in the MUAs. Significant increase in the amount of brownfield housing development since 2001. No significant change in the baseline position on dwelling density.	As with the SA (2007) it would be expected that the current trends would be expected to continue
Stewardship	No data available for this objective	No baseline data available for comparison	Unknown
Pollution	Nitrogen Dioxide is the only pollutant likely to exceed the National Air Quality Objectives. Significant improvement in both chemical and biological water quality from 1990. Reduction in the number of pollution events to 2003 but still a large number with the potential to affect the environment. Main focus in and around the urban areas. Light pollution has increased at the same level as the national average.	Little update to data in baseline. Number of local authorities declaring Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) – majority in respect of increase in Nitrogen Dioxide emissions. Generally good chemical and biological water quality but particular problem with nutrient enrichment – highest risk of sewage treatment works not being able to deal with additional housing is in the urban areas. Built up areas also have the greatest risks for water quality. No update on light pollution.	SA (2007) concluded air quality could be expected to improve. No change to the future evolution is anticipated as new AQMA Plans come into effect. Nutrient enrichment remains an issue without investment to support growth in the future
Climate Change	Data in 2002 indicates 11% of the UK's total CO ₂ emissions are from the West Midlands (i.e. 3.13 tonnes per capita compared to national average of 2.49 tonnes per capita). Emissions are concentrated in urban areas as well as Buildwas and Rugeley coal fired power stations. Approximately 6% of the land area in the region is at risk of flooding and there is an increase in the incidence of flooding.	No directly comparable data on carbon emissions from the baseline – for the UK as a whole indication of a general reduction. Significant increase in the number of properties in the region at risk of flooding and increased risk of surface water drainage flooding due to the effects of climate change.	Increased emissions and an increase of properties at risk of flooding could be expected to increase unless positive policies are reinforced to address both issues

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Energy	The region's energy consumption in 2002 was 9.6% of the UK total. West Midlands has target of generating 5% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2010 (national target of 10%). In 2002, they were achieving only 0.6%.	No accurate data available but evidence indicates West Midlands is the only region to have decreased its capacity for generating renewable energy. The generation of renewable electricity is also increasing at a slower rate than other regions.	The SA (2007) concluded renewable energy generation and efficiency could be expected to increase. Based on the baseline update evidence this is not occurring.
Efficiency	Sand and gravel reserves decreased whilst crushed rock reserves increased between 1998 and 2001. Increased conflicts between extraction and the environment (extraction from Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), AONBs and Green Belt). No information available on water resources headroom at time of baseline.	Continued fall in consumption of primary aggregates but also in reserves of sand/gravel. Crushed rock reserves remain static. Information now available on water resources headroom indicating that there are emerging issues of insufficient water supply to meet demand and without mitigation across the region.	The SA (2007) indicated resource efficiency could be expected to increase. Some evidence of this in updated baseline but reinforcement of positive policies and investment in new infrastructure is likely to be required particularly to support growth in the region.
Standards	At February 2006, 10.4% of the national total of buildings had received a BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environment Assessment Method)/Ecohomes rating in the West & East Midlands	Significant increase in the numbers of buildings rated by BREEAM particularly in the Excellent or Very Good rating. Vast majority of BREEAM rated buildings are residential (Ecohomes).	The SA (2007) indicated a slow increase in use of standards with growing awareness of environmental issues. Evidence that this growth trend may be more rapid than previously identified
Planning Transport	Increase in traffic flow of 17.3% from 1993 to 2002. Staffordshire and Warwickshire responsible for 17% of all vehicle kilometres in the region. Significant fall in average speeds on trunk roads since the mid 1990s. Number of trips made by population remained stable to 2004 but proportion by public transport/on foot has declined between 1992 and 2004.	Continued upward trend in traffic flows (apx 15% from 1995 to 2006) which is slightly above the national increase (14%). Staffordshire has the highest estimated traffic flows. Continual downward trend in average traffic speeds particularly in the peak periods. Slight increase in the overall number of trips being made and a continuing decline in the numbers of trips made by public transport/on foot. Cars are used more than any other mode (86% of miles travelled).	As with the SA (2007), the recent trends in transport patterns, road traffic and congestion could be expected to continue. Investment in alternative modes of travel and the impact of issues such as fuel costs may have an effect in altering these trends but unclear as to what extent
Waste	Volumes of waste generated and collected have been steadily increasing over time (total tonnage and kg per household). 15.3% of municipal waste collections between 1996	Overall increase in amount of construction/demolition waste. Recent drop in overall municipal waste generated. Significant increase in recycling/municipal recovery rates	As with the SA (2007) it is expected that the trends identified in the baseline are likely to continue

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	and 2002. Increase in recycling/composting between 2000/1 and 2004/5	from baseline position and consistent with the national growth. Region has the highest national municipal recovery rate in the country due to its high reliance on incineration.	
Local Sourcing	No data available for this objective	No baseline data available for comparison	Unknown
Resource Use	Region's ecological footprint of 5.36 global hectares per head (similar to national average). Food comprises an above average component of the footprint. Other elements are below the average.	No update to baseline data on ecological footprint	No particular change foreseen to SA (2007)
Growth	Growth of regional Gross Value Added (GVA) rose by 78% from 1989 to 2001 but is below the national average. Growth in other regions outstripped that in the West Midlands.	Consistent level of growth of regional GVA from baseline position and similar local variations although Solihull replaces Coventry as the local authority with the highest local authority GVA per head.	As with the SA (2007) the economy of the region is expected to grow as a result of regional and sub-regional economic development strategies
Employment	Unemployment levels fell from 1992 to 2003 but remain above national average. Employment deprivation is worst in the urban areas. Manufacturing remains the largest employer but fell as a % of total employment between 1998 and 2003	Continuing generally poor economic performance across the region. No change in other indicators. Birmingham dominates the region in terms of total jobs and also receives the greatest commuters but also has the highest national rate of unemployment outside of London.	As with the SA (2007) trends for employment could be expected to continue
Investment	R&D spending per capita is well below the national average. Employment in 'knowledge driven sectors' grew by 29% between 1991 and 2001	No update to data in baseline	The SA (2007) indicates an anticipated growth in investment which is considered to remain the likely trend
Skills	Region performs slightly below national average for literacy/numeracy. Education, skills and training deprivation widespread throughout urban areas and in some remote rural communities	Some improvements but no major update to data in baseline	As with the SA (2007) trends on skills development could be expected to increase

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Innovation	Continued increase in VAT registrations but slightly below national average.	No update to data in baseline	As with the SA (2007) trends could be expected to continue
Technology	Same baseline data as 'Investment'		
Responsibility	Levels of volunteering declined between 2001 and 2003 and below the national average	Levels of volunteering increased between 2001 and 2005. Data from 2007 indicates now levels are above the national average	No change foreseen

Table 4.1 – Summary of update to baseline Environmental, Social & Economic Conditions in comparison to that contained in SA (2007) Update and indication of likely future trends

Source: NLP

Summary of Baseline Policy Framework – Update from SA (2007)

- 4.7 The SA (2007) assessed the relationship of the Phase 2 Preferred Option and the effect on policies of other policies, plans, programmes and sustainability objectives at a European, national and regional level. There have been a number of new or revised strategies published since the baseline policy framework was identified for the SA (2007). The schedule at Appendix 1 highlights new or revised documents and comments on any key changes to the overall policy direction or approach that needs to be taken into account in the SA of the housing options being carried out. The schedule focuses only on updated documents and does not schedule all documents previously identified which remain otherwise relevant to the appraisal.
- 4.8 The general conclusion of the above review is that where documents have been reviewed, revised or reissued, and whilst the overall strategy may remain consistent, there is a greater emphasis in sustainable development, climate change, housing development and flood risk issues than identified in the SA (2007). There have been smaller shifts in emphasis in skills development, retail and economic development but these are not considered to be significant.
- 4.9 The review of changes in policy has not identified any further conflicts between those identified in the SA (2007).
- 4.10 Key issues to consider are: -
6. To ensure the role and effect of sustainable development and climate change are taken into account;
 7. Renewed importance on housing allocations over housing capacity in policy terms and the introduction of criteria for assessing housing site suitability;
 8. Need to ensure that development takes account of the effect of flooding and the sequential approach;
- 4.11 Potentially one of the most significant matters to consider is the changes to the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (2008). The SA (2007) was based on the previous Framework and any key issues need to be taken into account. This is considered further in Section 4.0.

