



**North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal
Consolidated Sustainability Appraisal Report
Prepared for the Government Office for the North East**

*ENVIRON UK Limited
Swallow Court, Devonshire Gate,
Tiverton, Devon , EX16 7EJ
Tel: 01884 842 010*

<i>Project No:</i>	68C13395
<i>Issue:</i>	1
<i>Author (signature):</i> 	E Jones
<i>Reviewer (signature):</i> 	J Curran
<i>Date:</i>	June 2008

This report has been prepared by ENVIRON with all reasonable skill, care and diligence, and taking account of the Services and the Terms agreed between ENVIRON and the Client. This report is confidential to the client, and ENVIRON accepts no responsibility whatsoever to third parties to whom this report, or any part thereof, is made known, unless formally agreed by ENVIRON beforehand. Any such party relies upon the report at their own risk.

ENVIRON disclaims any responsibility to the Client and others in respect of any matters outside the agreed scope of the Services.

VERSION CONTROL RECORD

ISSUE	DESCRIPTION OF STATUS	DATE	REVIEWER INITIALS	AUTHORS INITIALS
A	First Internal Draft	02/05/2008	JC	EJ
1	First Draft to Client	05/06/2008	JC	EJ

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1 INTRODUCTION</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>2 THE RSS AND SA PROCESSES</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>3 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF RSS OPTIONS</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>4 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE SUBMISSION DRAFT RSS</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>5 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>6 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE FURTHER PROPOSED CHANGES</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>7 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE FINAL CHANGES TO THE ADOPTED RSS</i>	<i>22</i>

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This document is the consolidated Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report for the North East Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) published in July 2008. Planning Policy Statement 11 states that as soon as practicable after the RSS revision has been published by the Secretary of State, the Regional Planning Body should publish a consolidated SA report of the entire SA process covering all RSS revision stages. The consolidated SA report consists of:

- A short report (this report) summarising the various stages of the SA that were conducted and what they concluded; and
- A compendium of published SA reports from all previous stages of RSS. Because of the size of these documents they have not been amalgamated to form a single report. However, they will all be available on the GONE website and on a single CD available from GONE on request.

Please note that ENVIRON have only been responsible for the SA process from the Proposed Changes of the RSS onwards. Therefore, when reporting on the earlier stages of the SA, ENVIRON has had to rely on information made available by other parties and information which is currently in the public domain. Therefore ENVIRON cannot be held responsible for the accuracy or the comprehensiveness of this information.

THE RSS AND SA PROCESSES

The RSS and related SA processes are set out below:

RSS Stages	SA Activity	SA Deliverable
Stage 1: Identify the issues for a revision and prepare a project plan, including a statement of public participation	SA scoping	<i>SA Scoping Report</i> (ERM, April 2004)
Stage 2: Develop options and policies, taking account of assessed effects, and develop the draft revision	RSS options and policies were assessed in a series of stages between April to October 2004 resulting in a formal report published for consultation alongside the Draft RSS in November 2004.	<i>Sustainability Appraisal of the Consultation Draft North East Regional Spatial Strategy – Sustainability Appraisal Report</i> (ERM, November 2004)
Stage 3: Publish and formally consult on the draft RSS revision (The RSS Submission Draft was published in June 2005)	The Submission Draft RSS was subject to an appraisal of its significant sustainability effects.	<i>Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East – Final Report of the Sustainability Appraisal</i> (ERM, June 2005).
Stage 4: Examination-in-Public	NA	NA

RSS Stages	SA Activity	SA Deliverable
Stage 5: Publication of the Panel Report ¹	NA	NA
Stage 6: Consultation on the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes	The Secretary of State's proposed changes were subject to an appraisal of their significant sustainability effects	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on RSS Proposed Changes</i> (ENVIRON, May 2007).
Stage 6: Consultation on the Secretary of State's Further Proposed Changes	The Secretary of State's further proposed changes were subject to an appraisal of their significant sustainability effects	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on RSS Further Proposed Changes</i> (ENVIRON, January 2008).
Stage 7: Issue of revised RSS	The final changes to the RSS were subject to an appraisal of their significant sustainability effects.	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on Adopted North East RSS</i> (ENVIRON, June 2008). <i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Consolidated Sustainability Report.</i> (ENVIRON, June 2008).
Stage 8: Implementation, monitoring and review.	The SA monitoring indicators suggested as part of the SA report of final changes will be monitored as the RSS is implemented.	Set out in this adoption statement and also <i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on Adopted North East RSS</i> (ENVIRON, June 2008).

The purpose of this consolidated SA report is to report on the conclusions of each of these SA stages.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF RSS OPTIONS

As part of the process of developing a broad approach to spatial development for the North East RSS, three spatial development scenarios were developed by regional planners and appraised by the SA team. These three options were:

- Option 1: Continuation of past economic and demographic trends;
- Option 2: Reducing economic disparities, with development focus in the conurbations; and
- Option 3. Reducing economic disparities, through a more dispersed growth pattern.

The appraisal suggested that option 2 was more likely to address structural socio-economic problems and promote a balance of economic, social and environmental benefits for the region. However, the report noted that all of the development options are likely to have some negative environmental impacts as all will increase pressure on water resource infrastructure (e.g. wastewater treatment), waste arisings and energy use and emissions of greenhouse gases. The spatial development approach chosen lies broadly between options 2 and 3. This was chosen in the light of the alternative options as it was an option that seeks to concentrate development within the conurbations and regeneration priority areas, and provides for a limited amount of housing and employment land in rural areas, allowing for some development in the Rural Service Centres.

¹ RSS Examination in Public Panel (July 2006): *Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East. Examination in Public March-April 2006. Report of the Panel July 2006.*

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE SUBMISSION DRAFT RSS

As policies were being drafted they were subject to SA and changes were made to the Submission Draft policies as a result of the SA. Many of the changes to the RSS that arose from the SA were subtle but collectively they helped to strengthen the plan. Some of the more obvious changes that were made as a result of the appraisal include the introduction of a policy on sustainability statements (however, this policy was subsequently removed on the recommendation of the RSS panel), the addition of geodiversity issues to policy, the strengthening of the Aquatic Environment section to include more information on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, groundwater resources, SUDS, and improving degraded aquatic environments and water quality, the strengthening of BREEAM requirements to achieving ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ and the requirement for a local threshold to be set for new developments to have embedded within them a minimum of 10% of energy supply from renewables.

As the policies of the RSS had already been individually reviewed, the SA of the Submission Draft focused at a more strategic level concentrating on appraising each broad section of the Strategy in relation to each of the sustainability appraisal criteria set out in the Appraisal Framework. The SA concluded that in general terms the Submission Draft RSS appeared likely to promote a balance of broadly positive economic, social and environmental trends and if the policies within the plan were fully implemented, proposed increases in GVA could be achieved without a deterioration of environmental quality. The SA did make some minor recommendations of how sections of the plan could be strengthened in terms of sustainability. In summary these mainly relate to strengthening the consideration of degraded water environments in policy, recognising the impact on greenhouse gas emissions from airport expansion and addressing quality of life issues.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF PROPOSED CHANGES

The purpose of this stage of the SA is to ensure that any significant changes to the RSS have been assessed for their sustainability effects. A review by the SA team determined that in the main the Panel Report recommendations constituted minor modifications that should not have significantly different sustainability effects compared to the Submission Draft of the RSS. However, there were some new areas of policy and strategy and it was these that were the focus of the appraisal. On the basis of this the following policies were appraised.

- Policy 2: Sustainable Development
- Policy 2a: Climate Change
- Policy 6: Tyne and Wear City Region
- Policy 7: Tees Valley City Region
- Policy 18: Employment Land Portfolio
- Policy 30: Dwelling Provision
- Policy 38: Air Quality
- Policy 39: Sustainable Construction
- Policy 42: Onshore Wind Development
- Policy 45: Opencast Coal

-
- Policy 18a: Office Development Outside of City and Town Centres
 - Policy 19: Prestige Employment Sites
 - Policy 24: Delivering Sustainable Communities
 - Policy 26: Metrocentre
 - Policy 27: Out of Centre Leisure Developments
 - Policy 51: Regional Public Transport Priorities
 - Policy 53a: Strategic Framework for Demand Management
 - Table of Transport Investment and Management Priorities

Effects of the Proposed Changes: In general, the changes helped to move the plan on in a positive way. This was done through changes that strengthened the spatial strategy of the plan; through changes that helped the plan to deal more robustly with important environmental and sustainability issues including climate change and green infrastructure, through ensuring that sustainable construction and development issues were addressed such as the addition of a policy on sustainable construction and through strengthening the role of sustainable transport.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF FURTHER PROPOSED CHANGES

The scope of the appraisal remained the same with the same policies being assessed. The results of the assessment are shown below.

Effects of the Further Proposed Changes: The SA found that the Further Proposed Changes version of the plan had taken some of the SA recommendations on board and is a stronger plan in terms of sustainability in many areas. This includes changes to Policy 2 on Sustainable Development, Policy 2a on Climate Change, Policy 24 on Sustainable Communities and several policies which have been amended to ensure that they do not affect Natura 2000 sites. This includes Policies 6, 7, 24, 38 and 42.

SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE FINAL CHANGES TO THE ADOPTED RSS

Please note: For ease of understanding, the appraisal of final changes to policy in the RSS is listed with reference to the policy numbering system used in the SoS's Further Proposed Changes (February 2008), and the final changes being made to RSS are explained in the Statement of Reasons accompanying final RSS. However, in presentational terms some of the policies may have been renumbered in the final publication version of RSS as part of final reformatting.

The scope of the appraisal remained the same with the same policies being assessed. The results of the assessment are shown below along with a statement of the residual effects of the plan.

Effects of the final changes to the plan: Very few changes were made to the plan at this stage. The only changes that were made to the plan that had any effect on the sustainability of the plan were:

-
- **Climate Change Policy:** The policy now refers to national emissions targets rather than regional ones as the latest 2008 Integrated Regional Framework does not contain any regional targets. The amendment to the policy is positive in that it now makes reference to updated targets.
 - **Sustainable Construction Policy:** The policy re-introduced the interim 10% target for major developments to secure renewables / low carbon technologies and has changed the policy in that it now refers to ‘securing’ renewable and low carbon energy rather than embedding it in developments. The amendments to the policy are positive in that they allow for both on-site and off-site renewable technologies to ensure that the most appropriate technology is utilised and there is encouragement for larger renewable schemes serving a number of developments.

Final Conclusions and Statement of Residual effects: The only residual negative sustainability effect relates mainly to policies 6 and 7 (Tyne and Wear City Region and Tees Valley City Region) (N.B. the SA also notes that the transport priorities of the plan also support the spatial strategy emphasis on airports). These policies have a negative sustainability effect because of their emphasis on airport growth as an economic driver. The RSS Panel were of the opinion that the Submission Draft emphasis on airports as key economic drivers should be tempered and have recommended that the RSS should reflect the uncertainty over the future role of aviation and the growth forecasts. It is recognised that the RSS has no direct influence on airport growth and only has direct influence over surface access (and we note that Policy 21 has been strengthened in regard to sustainable modes for surface access). However, in line with the RSS panel the SA concludes that a tempering of the emphasis on airport growth would lead to a more sustainable plan and at the least the RSS should recognise the uncertainty over growth forecasts. If the policies did reflect the uncertainty over growth forecasts then they would have a neutral score.

Notwithstanding this residual effect, the SA that ENVIRON has undertaken has demonstrated that in the main, the later stages of the North East RSS have moved the spatial strategy for the region towards a stronger model of sustainability which embraces environmental, social and economic facets of sustainable development.

1 INTRODUCTION

This document is the consolidated Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report for the North East Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) published in July 2008. Planning Policy Statement 11 states that as soon as practicable after the RSS revision has been published by the Secretary of State, the Regional Planning Body should publish a consolidated SA report of the entire SA process covering all RSS revision stages.

The North East Regional Spatial Strategy is the one of the first Regional Spatial Strategies to reach this stage in the planning and assessment process and is, therefore, one of the first regions to produce a consolidated SA report as required by PPS11. In the absence of good practice and further guidance, the assumption has been made that the purpose of this document is to outline the different stages of SA and the conclusions that were drawn at these stages. This report is not a re-examination of the effects of the RSS. The consolidated SA report consists of:

- A short report (this report) summarising the various stages of the SA that were conducted and what they concluded; and
- A compendium of published SA reports from all previous stages of RSS. Because of the size of these documents they have not been amalgamated to form a single report. However, they will all be available on the GONE website and on a single CD available from GONE on request.

Please note that ENVIRON have only been responsible for the SA process from the Proposed Changes of the RSS onwards. Therefore, when reporting on the earlier stages of the SA, ENVIRON has had to rely on information provided by other parties. ENVIRON cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of this information.

2 THE RSS AND SA PROCESSES

The RSS and related SA processes are set out below:

RSS Stages	SA Activity	SA Deliverable
Stage 1: Identify the issues for a revision and prepare a project plan, including a statement of public participation	SA scoping	<i>SA Scoping Report</i> (ERM, April 2004)
Stage 2: Develop options and policies, taking account of assessed effects, and develop the draft revision	RSS options and policies were assessed in a series of stages between April to October 2004 resulting in a formal report published for consultation alongside the Draft RSS in November 2004.	<i>Sustainability Appraisal of the Consultation Draft North East Regional Spatial Strategy – Sustainability Appraisal Report</i> (ERM, November 2004)
Stage 3: Publish and formally consult on the draft RSS revision (The RSS Submission Draft was published in June 2005)	The Submission Draft RSS was subject to an appraisal of its significant sustainability effects.	<i>Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East – Final Report of the Sustainability Appraisal</i> (ERM, June 2005).
Stage 4: Examination-in-Public ²	NA	NA
Stage 5: Publication of the Panel Report ³	NA	NA
Stage 6: Consultation on the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes	The Secretary of State's proposed changes were subject to an appraisal of their significant sustainability effects	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on RSS Proposed Changes</i> (ENVIRON, May 2007).
Stage 6: Consultation on the Secretary of State's Further Proposed Changes	The Secretary of State's further proposed changes were subject to an appraisal of their significant sustainability effects	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on RSS Further Proposed Changes</i> (ENVIRON, January 2008).
Stage 7: Issue of revised RSS	The final changes to the RSS were subject to an appraisal of their significant sustainability effects.	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on Adopted North East RSS</i> (ENVIRON, June 2008). <i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Consolidated Sustainability Report.</i> (ENVIRON, June 2008).
Stage 8: Implementation, monitoring and review.	The SA monitoring indicators suggested as part of the SA report of final changes will be monitored as the RSS is implemented.	Set out in this adoption statement and also <i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on Adopted North East RSS</i> (ENVIRON, June 2008).

The purpose of this consolidated SA report is to report on the conclusions of each of these SA stages.

² The Examination in Public considered the Submission Draft RSS in relation to the RSS tests of soundness i.e. whether it had been subject to a satisfactory SA and whether options were correctly considered in relation to SA. The Examination found that the "criterion was generally met".

³ RSS Examination in Public Panel (July 2006): *Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East. Examination in Public March-April 2006. Report of the Panel July 2006.*

2.1 WHO CARRIED OUT THE SA?

As can be seen from the table above two consultancy companies have been involved in carrying out the SA of the North East RSS. ERM were contracted by the North East Assembly (NEA) and were responsible for the sustainability appraisal process up to (and including) the Submission Draft stage. ENVIRON were contracted by the Government Office for the North East (GONE) and the Planning Inspectorate to undertake the SA from the Proposed Changes stage onwards including the provision of this SA adoption statement.

3 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF RSS OPTIONS

<i>Stage: Option Development and Appraisal</i>	
<i>The Focus of the SA:</i>	Assessing the spatial development options proposed and advising plan makers on the sustainability effects of these options.
<i>Where is this reported?</i>	<i>Sustainability Appraisal of the Consultation Draft North East Regional Spatial Strategy – Sustainability Appraisal Report (ERM, November 2004)</i>

As part of the process of developing a broad approach to spatial development for the North East RSS, three spatial development scenarios were developed by regional planners and appraised by the SA, so that their relative strengths/weaknesses and implications for sustainable development could be understood. The three options were as follows:

Option 1: Continuation of past economic and demographic trends:

- 1.8% annual average growth in GVA (rate from 1997-2001);
- Population decline of 35,246 across the region as a whole;
- Trend of migration away from the urban sub-regions towards rural communities in County Durham and Northumberland. Low housing demand and decline in urban areas, high demand for housing in County Durham and Northumberland, with greenfield land being released for housing development in these areas;
- Region-wide requirement for 78,963 houses.

Option 2: Reducing economic disparities, with development focus in the conurbations:

- 2.8% annual average growth in GVA, over the RSS plan period. Population growth of 31,600 focused in Tyne and Wear and Tees Valley, supporting the regeneration of these areas. Employment sites also concentrated in these areas;
- Region-wide requirement for 110,560 houses.

Option 3. Reducing economic disparities, through a more dispersed growth pattern:

- 2.8% annual average growth in GVA, over the RSS plan period;
- Population growth of 32,200 spread across the region, with greenfield sites being used in rural areas;
- Region-wide requirement for 110,550 houses, distributed across the region in line with RPG1.

Table 5.1 in the ERM SA Report (ERM, June 2005)⁴ sets out the results of the appraisal of the three broad spatial development options. If readers would like to see the detailed option appraisal results they should consult this table. The appraisal of the three broad spatial options highlighted the implications of each approach, their strengths and weaknesses, and the extent to which each option could promote the achievement of IRF objectives. The likely implications of each option can be summarised as follows:

Option 1 - with a low economic growth rate, the development of housing in rural areas and a weak housing market in urban areas, current problems within the region would persist. Population would continue to decline, particularly in urban areas. New housing in rural areas would impact on greenfield sites (and potentially on biodiversity and environmental assets), and increased need for populations to travel to employment sites and services would heighten pressure on the road network, affect air quality and tranquillity, and ensure that emissions of greenhouse gases from transport increase. There would also be less scope for the development of effective public transport services.

Option 2 - the focus of economic development and provision of housing in the conurbations is more likely to promote urban regeneration and renaissance. Access to employment and services would be improved for more people, public transport infrastructure could provide an alternative for many car journeys, and larger scale, compact, mixed use developments could be developed. Development needs could, to a much larger extent, be met on previously-developed land. Opportunities would also be focused closer to areas of greatest need, with better homes, new jobs and improved services provided in or near to some of the region's most deprived communities.

Option 3 - a more dispersed growth option would provide houses in both rural and urban communities, as well as benefiting regeneration areas outside the conurbations. While this would clearly bring some benefits to rural areas, the provision of new housing in these areas would hamper the process of housing market restructuring and regeneration in the region's conurbations. Further development in rural towns would also impact on greenfield sites (and potentially on biodiversity and environmental/ heritage assets), and the need for populations to travel to employment sites and services would increase pressure on the road network, affect air quality and tranquillity, and ensure that emissions of greenhouse gases from transport increase.

The appraisal suggested that option 2 was more likely to address structural socio-economic problems and promote a balance of economic, social and environmental benefits for the region. However, the report noted that all of the development options are likely to have some negative environmental impacts. All will increase:

⁴ *Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East – Final Report of the Sustainability Appraisal* (ERM, June 2005).

-
- Pressure on water resource infrastructure (e.g. wastewater treatment);
 - Waste arisings; and
 - Energy use and emissions of greenhouse gases.

Furthermore, all of the spatial options could result in development being located in areas under threat from increasing flood risk, unless sited away from these areas.

The spatial development approach chosen lies broadly between options 2 and 3. This was chosen in the light of the alternative options as it was an option that seeks to concentrate development within the conurbations and regeneration priority areas, and provides for a limited amount of housing and employment land in rural areas, allowing for some development in the Rural Service Centres. The approach is likely to promote a balance of broadly positive economic, social and environmental trends within the North East as a whole. It focuses on delivering employment opportunities and housing accessible to the most deprived communities, areas of socio-economic need and potential (e.g. urban areas and Rural Service Centres). The preferred option is designed to promote more sustainable transport patterns, promote the development of sustainable communities, and to protect and enhance environmental/historic assets.

4 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE SUBMISSION DRAFT RSS

<i>Stage: Sustainability Appraisal of the Submission Draft RSS</i>	
The Focus of the SA:	To report on how the SA has inputted to the policy development of the RSS and to provide a final independent review on the sustainability of the Submission Draft RSS.
Where is this reported?	<i>Sustainability Appraisal of the Consultation Draft North East Regional Spatial Strategy – Sustainability Appraisal Report (ERM, November 2004).</i> <i>Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East – Final Report of the Sustainability Appraisal (ERM, June 2005).</i>

Policy appraisal: As policies were being drafted for the RSS they were subject to an iterative SA process. Changes were made to the Submission Draft policies as a result of the SA. Many of the changes to the RSS that arose from the SA were subtle, changing the focus or wording of policies, or clarifying and strengthening the supporting text. While many of these changes appear minor, collectively they have helped to ensure that all of the IRF objectives and many other regional and national targets/objectives are addressed by the RSS. Some of the more obvious changes that were made to the Submission Draft as a result of the appraisal include:

- The introduction of a policy on sustainability statements which introduces a requirement for local planning authorities to require applicants for certain planning permissions to complete a ‘Sustainability Statement’ in support of their applications (however, this policy was subsequently removed on the recommendation of the RSS panel);
- The strengthening of the policy on Sustainable Communities to require that when land is assessed for its suitability for development, the potential is assessed for the development to address crime/community safety issues, health issues, and resource consumption;
- The addition of geodiversity issues to policy;
- The strengthening of the Aquatic Environment section to include more information on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, groundwater resources, SUDS, and improving degraded aquatic environments and water quality ;
- The strengthening of BREEAM requirements to achieving ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ ratings for new developments or the refurbishment of existing buildings; and
- The requirement for a local threshold to be set for new developments to have embedded within them a minimum of 10% of energy supply from renewables.

SA of the Submission Draft: As the policies of the RSS had already been individually reviewed, the SA of the Submission Draft focused at a more strategic level concentrating on appraising each broad section of the Strategy in relation to each of the sustainability appraisal criteria set out in the Appraisal Framework. The SA concluded that in general terms the preferred spatial development strategy and

the policies of the Submission Draft RSS appeared likely to promote a balance of broadly positive economic, social and environmental trends within the North East as a whole, and should work towards the achievement of the objectives of the IRF. The assessment also concluded that if the policies set out to protect environmental assets and promote environmental sustainability within the Submission Draft RSS were fully implemented and not compromised, proposed increases in GVA could be achieved without a general deterioration environmental quality in the region.

The SA did make some minor recommendations of how sections of the plan could be strengthened in terms of sustainability. In summary these mainly relate to strengthening the consideration of degraded water environments in policy, recognising the impact on greenhouse gas emissions from airport expansion, promoting the role of organic agriculture and the use of locally produced materials and addressing quality of life issues as well as the need to maintain and invest in leisure and recreation facilities as well as more traditional tourism facilities.

5 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES

<i>Stage: Sustainability Appraisal of the Proposed Changes</i>	
The Focus of the SA:	To assess whether the significant changes to the plan will affect its sustainability performance.
Where is this reported?	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on RSS Proposed Changes (ENVIRON, May 2007).</i>

The purpose of this stage of the SA is to ensure that any significant changes to the RSS recommended within the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes have been assessed for their sustainability effects. In order to focus the SA, a review was undertaken to determine which changes to the plan were considered to be significant changes that would warrant appraisal. This review determined that in the main the Panel Report recommendations constituted minor strategy and policy modifications that should not have significantly different sustainability effects compared to the Submission Draft of the RSS. However, there were some new areas of policy and strategy and it was these that were the focus of the appraisal. The following policies were appraised.

- Policy 2: Sustainable Development
- Policy 2a: Climate Change
- Policy 6: Tyne and Wear City Region
- Policy 7: Tees Valley City Region
- Policy 18: Employment Land Portfolio
- Policy 18a: Office Development Outside of City and Town Centres
- Policy 19: Prestige Employment Sites
- Policy 24: Delivering Sustainable Communities
- Policy 26: Metrocentre
- Policy 27: Out of Centre Leisure Developments
- Policy 30: Dwelling Provision
- Policy 38: Air Quality
- Policy 39: Sustainable Construction
- Policy 42: Onshore Wind Development
- Policy 45: Opencast Coal
- Policy 51: Regional Public Transport Priorities
- Policy 53a: Strategic Framework for Demand Management
- Table of Transport Investment and Management Priorities

Effects of the Proposed Changes: Many of the amendments to the policies and additions of new policies helped to strengthen the sustainability of the plan. Some of the changes did this through strengthening the spatial strategy of the plan. Examples included:

- Policies 6 and 7 relating to the Tyne and Wear City Region and Tees Valley City Region respectively. These policies strengthened the spatial strategy by ensuring development is focused

in the core of the city regions and by ensuring that development in smaller settlements will not adversely impact upon this strategy;

- Policies 18, 18a and 19 dealing with employment sites were all strengthened through encouraging regeneration of existing sites around transport hubs and on previously developed land, the de-allocation of peripheral employment sites and the concentration of development in core areas that will lead to the accelerated growth and improved competitiveness needed in the region. Policy 19 has also been strengthened through the additional encouragement given to reducing carbon emissions, improving energy conservation measures, the use of decentralised and renewable or low-carbon energy sources and the cross reference to Policy 39 on sustainable construction.
- Policy 30 dealing with dwelling provision increased provision in Tyne and Wear and Tees Valley. There was, however, further scope for re-allocating to core areas from other districts; and
- Policies 26 and 27 which seek to concentrate any additional retail and leisure development in existing urban and rural centres.

Several of the changes (in particular the new policies) helped the plan to deal more robustly with important environmental and sustainability issues. Examples included:

- New Policy 2a on climate change which presents policy on climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- New Policy 38 on air quality which helps to address the impact of pollution on sites designated under the Habitats Directive; and
- Policies 6 and 7 which outline a strategic approach to green infrastructure.

Several of the changes helped to address sustainable construction and development issues. Examples included:

- Policy 39 and the inclusion of a broad policy on sustainable construction which would support the sustainable regeneration of the region; and
- The support for the use of the regional checklist for development. However, this will only support development moving towards more sustainable methods of construction if it is implemented fully and supported by Local Authorities.

Several of the changes sought to strengthen the role of sustainable transport and link transport schemes to the aspects of the spatial strategy they support. Examples included:

- Policy 51 which included a long term focus for public transport which wasn't previously present in the policy;
- Policy 53a which will help to *lock in* the benefits of public transport (promoted by other policies within the RSS), through further investment in demand management; and

-
- The Transport Investment and Management Priorities Table which had an increased emphasis on public transport ensuring that the policy would help to provide a sustainable transport system to support the spatial strategy. The link of each scheme to the spatial strategy are now made more explicit, making the strategy seem more like a coherent whole.

In general, the changes that were made helped to move the plan on in a positive way from the Submission Draft.

6 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE FURTHER PROPOSED CHANGES

<i>Stage: Sustainability Appraisal of the Further Proposed Changes</i>	
<i>The Focus of the SA:</i>	To assess whether the significant changes to the plan will affect its sustainability performance.
<i>Where is this reported?</i>	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on RSS Further Proposed Changes (ENVIRON, January 2008).</i>

A further review was undertaken at this stage to ensure that the scope of the SA was still correct once the Secretary of State's Further Proposed Changes were made. This review found that the coverage of the assessment was still valid and the SA, therefore, focused on those policies already reviewed as part of the SA of the Proposed Changes. The results of the assessment are shown below.

Effects of the Further Proposed Changes: The SA found that the Further Proposed Changes version of the plan had taken some of the SA recommendations on board and is a stronger plan in terms of sustainability in many areas. These include:

- Policy 2 on Sustainable Development has been strengthened in terms of social objectives;
- Policy 2a on Climate Change now includes a criterion on maximising positive impacts of climate change;
- Policy 24 on Sustainable Communities has new criteria on access to green-spaces and woodland and wastewater treatment;
- Several policies have had criteria added to ensure that they do not affect Natura 2000 sites. This includes Policies 6, 7, 24, 38 and 42.

7 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OF THE FINAL CHANGES TO THE ADOPTED RSS

<i>Stage: Sustainability Appraisal of the Adopted Plan</i>	
<i>The Focus of the SA:</i>	To assess whether the final significant changes to the plan will affect its sustainability performance.
<i>Where is this reported?</i>	<i>North East RSS Sustainability Appraisal. Sustainability Report on Final RSS Changes (ENVIRON, June 2008).</i>

A further review was undertaken at this stage to ensure that the scope of the SA was still correct once the Secretary of State's final changes were made. This review found that the coverage of the assessment was still valid and the SA, therefore, focused on those policies already reviewed as part of the SA of the Proposed Changes. The results of the assessment are shown below. Please note: For ease of understanding, the appraisal of final changes to policy in the RSS is listed with reference to the policy numbering system used in the SoS's Further Proposed Changes (February 2008), and the final changes being made to RSS are explained in the Statement of Reasons accompanying final RSS. However, in presentational terms some of the policies may have been renumbered in the final publication version of RSS as part of final reformatting.

Effects of the final changes to the plan: Very few changes were made to the plan at this stage. The only effects that were made to the plan that had any effect on the sustainability of the plan were:

- **Climate Change Policy:** The policy now refers to national emissions targets rather than regional ones as the latest 2008 Integrated Regional Framework does not contain any regional targets. The amendment to the policy is positive in that it now makes reference to updated targets.
- **Sustainable Construction Policy:** The policy re-introduced the interim 10% target for major developments to secure renewables / low carbon technologies and has changed the policy in that it now refers to 'securing' renewable and low carbon energy rather than embedding it in developments. The amendments to the policy are positive in that they allow for both on-site and off-site renewable technologies to ensure that the most appropriate technology is utilised and there is encouragement for larger renewable schemes serving a number of developments.

Final Conclusions and Statement of Residual effects: The only residual negative sustainability effect relates mainly to policies 6 and 7 (Tyne and Wear City Region and Tees Valley City Region) (N.B. the SA also notes that the transport priorities of the plan also support the spatial strategy emphasis on airports). These policies have a negative sustainability effect because of their emphasis on airport growth as an economic driver. The RSS Panel were of the opinion that the Submission Draft emphasis on airports as key economic drivers should be tempered and have recommended that

the RSS should reflect the uncertainty over the future role of aviation and the growth forecasts. It is recognised that the RSS has no direct influence on airport growth and only has direct influence over surface access (and we note that Policy 21 has been strengthened in regard to sustainable modes for surface access). However, in line with the RSS panel the SA concludes that a tempering of the emphasis on airport growth would lead to a more sustainable plan and at the least the RSS should recognise the uncertainty over growth forecasts. If the policies did reflect the uncertainty over growth forecasts then they would have a neutral score.

Notwithstanding this residual effect, the SA that ENVIRON has undertaken has demonstrated that in the main, the later stages of the North East RSS have moved the spatial strategy for the region towards a stronger model of sustainability which embraces environmental, social and economic facets of sustainable development.