



Blackpool Borough Council
Sustainability Appraisal
Blackpool Core Strategy

Non-Technical Summary

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Core Strategy

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Core Strategy

Blackpool Borough Council (BC) is in the process of preparing its Local Development Framework (LDF), which will replace the existing Blackpool Local Plan (adopted in June 2006). The LDF will set out the Council's policies for spatial planning until 2026, and comprises a suite of Development Plan Documents (DPDs). The Core Strategy is the most important of these DPDs as it establishes the long-term framework for the delivery of strategic development needs within the Borough. The Core Strategy will particularly focus upon how proposed levels of housing and employment growth will be provided, together with how retail, resort and other developments' needs may be met in the future. The Blackpool Core Strategy will spatially represent Blackpool Council's wider Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

It is the intention to implement the Core Strategy in conjunction with the Fylde and Wyre Core Strategies, to ensure trans-boundary development needs are addressed. The Core Strategy will include:

- A Spatial Vision;
- Spatial Objectives; and
- The Preferred Option Policies and Development Proposals (including an Implementation Plan for delivering the Spatial Vision).

1.2 Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Core Strategy has the potential to have a wide range of significant sustainability effects (both positive and negative). There is a legal requirement for it to be subjected to Sustainability Appraisal (SA), under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. SA is an essential tool for ensuring that the principles of sustainable development are inherent throughout the preparation of the Core Strategy and that it broadly complies and contributes to relevant planning guidance. The overarching aim of the process is to contribute to better decision-making and planning.

In accordance with good practice, the SA also incorporates the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. The aim of SEA is to *'provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development'* (Article 1 of the SEA Directive). The combined SA/SEA ('the SA') has been undertaken in accordance with approved guidance.

SA is an iterative process and follows a series of prescribed stages in which the elements of the Core Strategy are appraised against sustainability objectives, to encourage the selection of the most sustainable options and to ultimately improve the sustainability of the development that is brought forward. Figure 1-1 presents these stages of the SA processes alongside the parallel stages in the development of the Core Strategy.

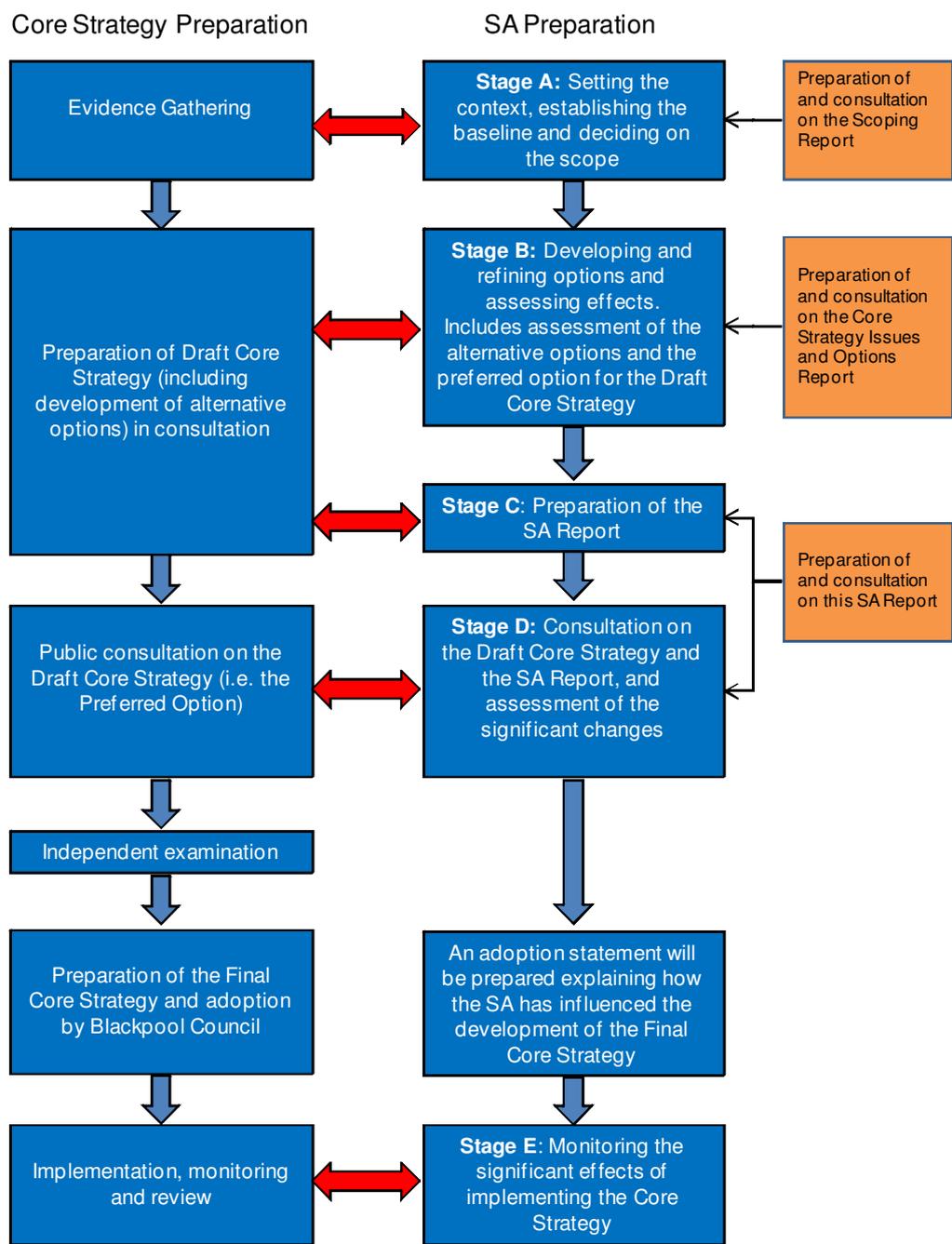


Figure 1-1 Key Stages in the Development of the Core Strategy and the SA

1.3 Purpose of the SA Report

Blackpool BC is committed to preparing a Core Strategy that contributes to sustainable development. The Council wants to achieve a balance between economic growth, social progress and environmental quality. The principle of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and in the future, lies at the heart of sustainable development.

This SA Report provides a summary of the SA process so far and presents the findings and recommendations of the assessment of the preferred option for the Core Strategy. Its key aims are to:

- Provide information on the Core Strategy and the SA process;

- Present the key existing social, economic and environmental conditions within Blackpool Borough, in the context of existing plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives, together with relevant baseline information;
- Identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the Core Strategy;
- Recommend measures to avoid, reduce or offset any potentially significant adverse effects; and
- Propose a monitoring framework that can be used to monitor the identified significant effects.

The SA Report will be used as a consultation document, issued to all statutory consultees and stakeholders for comment alongside the Final Blackpool Core Strategy Preferred Option, and will also be made available to the public. **It is essential that the Final Blackpool Core Strategy Preferred Option is read in conjunction with the SA Report.**

1.4 How to Have Your Say

Your comments are invited on the Final Blackpool Core Strategy Preferred Option and the SA Report. Details of our consultation process are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement, which can be viewed online at www.blackpool.gov.uk/EnvironmentandPlanning/PlanningPolicy. The Final Blackpool Core Strategy Preferred Option and the SA Report may be viewed at the address below:

Blackpool Council
Municipal Building
Corporation Street
Blackpool
FY1 1NF

Alternatively they can be viewed at Blackpool Council's Planning website:
www.blackpool.gov.uk/EnvironmentandPlanning/PlanningPolicy.

2 Existing Policy Background and Environmental Conditions

2.1 Plans, Programmes and Environmental Objectives

A review was undertaken of plans, policies and environmental objectives prepared at the international, national, regional, sub-regional and local levels to understand how they could influence the development of the Core Strategy and the SA process. A number of key themes were identified that should to be reflected in the scope and intent of the Core Strategy. These were used to develop the sustainability objectives for the SA, and can be found in full in Appendix A of the SA Report.

2.2 Existing Environmental Conditions

A key part of the SA process was establishing the current social, economic and environmental conditions across the Borough. The aim was to determine the current situation, identify trends over time, key sensitive areas or populations, and to assess the permanence and reversibility of current problems.

The analysis of conditions across the Borough enabled the existing sustainability issues and opportunities to be identified. Some of the main issues and opportunities are presented by broad topic area in Table 2-1.

Sustainability Topic	Key Sustainability Issues	Key Sustainability Opportunities
Environment	<p>Existence of Green Belt limiting Greenfield expansion, but low supply of vacant brownfield land.</p> <p>Localised poor air quality associated with traffic.</p> <p>Blackpool is a densely populated borough, with few areas of greenspace and low levels of biodiversity.</p> <p>Sites for nature conservation are rare and require protection.</p> <p>Blackpool's heritage features and historic townscapes are worthy of protection.</p> <p>The majority of household waste is landfilled.</p>	<p>Remediation of contaminated sites should occur during all developments on brownfield land.</p> <p>The protection and enhancement of urban greenspaces should be encouraged.</p> <p>Sustainable design principles should be incorporated into new developments, including water and energy efficiency, SuDS and sustainable waste management.</p> <p>Environmental quality in run-down inner areas can be improved as part of wider neighbourhood renewal.</p>
Social	<p>Population growth is estimated at over 14% in the period 2006-2031.</p> <p>Blackpool has high numbers of children and elderly people which places a disproportionate strain on health and social services.</p> <p>Education attainment is low and leads to a cycle of poor skill levels, unemployment and low aspirations amongst many young people.</p> <p>Health levels are low and are associated with unhealthy lifestyles.</p> <p>Crime levels are high, especially in the town centre where they are associated with alcohol-related disorder.</p> <p>Blackpool has a large stock of poor quality rented housing, including many units in multiple occupancy. The lack of affordable housing is an issue.</p>	<p>Raising educational attainment will have multiple benefits in the long-term.</p> <p>The Core Strategy provides an opportunity to address crime and its underlying causes.</p> <p>A key priority is the diversification of the housing stock. There is a need for an expansion in the numbers of high quality homes orientated towards families and those in professional and managerial occupations.</p>
Economic	<p>There is low diversity in the economy, which is highly dependent on the fortunes of the tourist industry. Declining visitor numbers are a concern.</p> <p>There is an over-supply of low quality tourist accommodation.</p> <p>Earning and productivity are both lower than national averages.</p>	<p>Strengthening the tourism sector is vital for the economic sustainability of the Borough.</p> <p>Regeneration may stimulate further investment in both tourism and other sectors.</p> <p>Blackpool Airport provides a focus for potential investment and opportunity.</p> <p>Blackpool's role as a sub-regional service centre for the Fylde sub-region is important and should be promoted.</p>
Transport	<p>Road links could be greatly improved from the north, north-east and south of the Borough and particularly within the town itself.</p> <p>Localised congestion and associated adverse air quality is an issue.</p>	<p>Sustainable modes of transport should be promoted, including walking and cycling, potentially along designated routes.</p> <p>Expansion of Blackpool's tram network is a major opportunity.</p> <p>Enhancements could be made to the town's bus system, including improved interchange facilities between bus and rail.</p> <p>Expansion of Blackpool Airport offers economic benefits but raises environmental concerns.</p>

Table 2-1 Key Issues and Opportunities

3 Assessment Methodology

3.1 Applying SA to the Core Strategy

The SA was undertaken in three stages:

- 1** The process began in October 2007 with the preparation of an SA Scoping Report for the Blackpool Council LDF as a whole. This set out the geographic scope of the SA, established baseline information and identified key sustainability issues and opportunities. The sustainability objectives were developed at this stage (see Section 3.2, below). The Scoping Report was issued to statutory consultees for the mandatory five-week period. Comments were incorporated into subsequent stages.
- 2** Six alternative Strategic Options for the Core Strategy were developed by Blackpool Council, and set out in the 'Blackpool Core Strategy Issues and Options' report (June 2008). The aim of this document was to determine the most appropriate path for the development of Blackpool, by exploring the complex relationship between growth and regeneration.

These were appraised against the SA Framework with the aim of informing the selection of a Preferred Option. The results were presented in an Assessment of Strategic Options Report. This report was also issued for consultation and further comments duly carried forward.
- 3** The appraisal of the Final Preferred Option for the Core Strategy is presented in the SA Report, of which this document is the Non-Technical Summary.

3.2 Sustainability Objectives

As part of the scoping stage of the SA process, 22 sustainability objectives were devised to assess the sustainability performance of the Blackpool Core Strategy, as listed in Table 3-1:

Sustainability Objectives	
1	To reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime
2	To improve levels of educational attainment for all age groups and all sectors of society
3	To improve physical and mental health for all and reduce health inequalities
4	To provide greater choice, quality and diversity of housing across all tenures to meet the needs of residents
5	To promote community spirit and cohesion and to provide opportunities for community involvement across all sectors of society
6	To maintain and improve access to basic goods, services and amenities for all groups
7	To encourage sustainable economic growth and business development across the borough
8	To develop the skills and training needed to establish and maintain a healthy labour market
9	To encourage economic inclusion
10	To deliver urban renaissance
11	To develop and market the borough as a place to live, work and do business
12	To protect and enhance biodiversity

Sustainability Objectives	
13	To protect and enhance the borough's townscape character and quality
14	To protect and enhance the cultural heritage resource
15	To protect and enhance the quality of water features and resources
16	To guard against land contamination and encourage the appropriate re-use of brownfield sites within the urban boundary
17	To limit and adapt to climate change
18	To protect and improve air quality
19	To increase energy efficiency and require the use of renewable energy sources
20	To ensure the sustainable use of natural resources
21	To minimise waste, increase re-use and recycling
22	To promote the use of more sustainable modes of transport

Table 3-1 Sustainability Objectives

The SA aims to contribute to the achievement of the sustainability objectives, and, where there is conflict, provides mitigation measures to ensure that development is carried out in the most sustainable manner. Each of the elements of the Core Strategy have been assessed against the sustainability objectives.

3.3 Assessment of Alternatives

Six alternative Strategic Options were initially identified for the Core Strategy, each one focusing on a different approach to development within the Blackpool Borough. These were assessed as part of the Issues and Options SA Report in 2008. As a result of this assessment, in which all six options were tested for their compatibility against the SA Objectives, two options were taken forward and combined to develop the Preferred Strategy. The remainder were not considered to be in the best interests of delivering a sustainable Blackpool.

The Draft Core Strategy still contains alternative emphasis options for two policies – R10 and R19. A review was made of these alternatives as part of the SA process. In each case, it was determined that the preferred policy version performed better in terms of promoting sustainable development than the alternatives.

3.4 Assessment of the Final Draft Core Strategy

The following elements of the Core Strategy have been assessed against the sustainability objectives

- The Spatial Vision;
- The Spatial Objectives; and
- Policies and Development Proposals, which are set out under the following headings
 - The Spatial Strategy: Regeneration Diversification and Growth
 - Town Centre and Resort Renaissance
 - M55 Hub Growth Point

- Balanced Healthy and Greener Blackpool.

Following the assessment, recommendations have been made to improve the sustainability of each element of the Core Strategy. These may involve alterations to the wording of certain policies, may indicate a need for amendments or clarification in the accompanying text, or may suggest new policies to address sustainability issues.

Following finalisation of the SA Report, an internal Blackpool Council review process was conducted. As a result, the Final Blackpool Core Strategy Preferred Option has incorporated a number of amendments and commentary to reflect the results of, and recommendations made within, the SA. Further amendments will be considered and incorporated as appropriate following public consultation.

4 Results of the Sustainability Appraisal

4.1 The Spatial Vision

The Spatial Vision offers a view of a 'New Blackpool' that positions the Core Strategy to focus primarily on the economic and neighbourhood regeneration of the town. The importance of the tourist industry is emphasised as being crucial to Blackpool's future prosperity. In addition, a range of topic areas are mentioned in the Vision covering housing, employment, safety, education, access to services and visual appearance.

The Vision performs well against sustainability objectives related to the human environment. However, it could be strengthened by referring explicitly to the need to protect open space and biodiversity features. A reference to the need for Blackpool to limit and adapt to climate change would also improve the sustainability of the Vision, given the long-term challenges this is likely to pose.

4.2 The Spatial Objectives

The Core Strategy contains four Spatial Objectives that the Council will seek to achieve by 2026. As with the Spatial Vision, the primary focus is on regeneration and economic growth. The objectives therefore perform well against the social and economic sustainability objectives, particularly those related to urban renaissance, access to services and the productive use of brownfield sites. However, it has been recommended that they also include references to green infrastructure as well as conventional built infrastructure (roads, buildings etc) and give a greater priority to protecting and enhancing the natural environment. This is important for its own sake, but making the link with environmental quality would also support the key aim of regeneration promoted by the Core Strategy.

4.3 The Spatial Strategy: Regeneration Diversification and Growth

The Spatial Strategy sets out the preferred spatial option for Blackpool and establishes the key priorities to be developed in the remaining sections of the Core Strategy. Two key strategies are pursued; namely the regeneration of central Blackpool and a new urban extension on land at Marton Moss known as the M55 Hub. This strategy, with its twin priority areas for investment, intervention and growth, provides the most sustainable viable option for future development, and has been devised following the assessment of the Alternative Strategic Options for the Core Strategy.

Retention of the town centre and inner resort neighbourhoods as the principal tourist, commercial and retail centre would ensure that access to existing services is maximised, with a range of sustainability benefits. The need to travel would be reduced, and new development would make productive use of brownfield sites. Presently underused, vacant or unsightly areas of inner Blackpool would be redeveloped, with a beneficial impact upon the townscape.

The development of sustainable communities at the M55 Hub aims to meet the need for new high quality housing essential for Blackpool's long-term future. However, as areas around the M55 Hub have potential for protected species presence, development has the potential to result in a loss of biodiversity and also potentially generate contaminated land. It is recommended that this section reinforces a commitment to protect and enhance biodiversity.

The Spatial Strategy aims to create a more balanced housing market that will address inequalities associated with housing affordability, tenure and unfit homes. Initiatives would cover both of the priority areas, but also outer neighbourhoods. Residential and employment development within inner urban areas and at the M55 Hub would bring jobs and homes closer together. Provisions are contained within this section to stimulate the local economy, both by building on Blackpool's role as a tourist resort and also attempting to diversify the economy. Links with neighbouring Fylde Borough in the development of the M55 Hub will be important for achieving greater economic inclusion.

The quantity and extent of new development proposed within the Spatial Strategy provides an excellent opportunity for Blackpool to showcase many of the principles of sustainable design. Several measures, including Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and energy efficiency, are promoted within the policies. However, all new development has the potential to generate increased waste production as a result of increased population, construction and demolition activities and it is recommended that mitigation be provided within the document.

4.4 Town Centre and Resort Renaissance

This section of the Core Strategy places tourism at the heart of Blackpool's future. Spatial policies either promote tourism-related developments in certain parts of the town, predominantly the town centre and Promenade, or they discourage further tourism growth and instead promote a diversification in land uses in the resort neighbourhoods – Foxhall, North Beach and South Beach. The Core Strategy should be viewed as part of a flexible and proactive approach to tourism management to ensure that the town continues to respond to the demands of the tourist market.

The policies in this section reinforce Blackpool Town Centre's primacy for current and planned retail and leisure uses related to the regeneration of the resort. Land is allocated for major new developments, and the heritage value of existing buildings is recognised within proposed enhancements. This concentration of development in the town centre is central to the regeneration of the Borough as a whole and therefore performs well against SA Objectives related to economic growth, sustainable tourism and urban renaissance. Such an approach also focuses development on those parts of Blackpool where the need for regeneration is highest.

A rationalisation of the supply of poor quality tourist accommodation is also proposed. The need to transform these areas is a significant challenge, but also a major opportunity for Blackpool to build new sustainable communities. Policies elsewhere in the Core Strategy set out more detailed environmental policies that would apply in the town centre and inner areas, and the document is designed to be considered as a whole.

Recommendations have been made to improve certain policies with references to sustainable design and enhancing the natural environment for the benefit of regeneration. It has also been

recommended that connectivity to the town centre is maximised, both physically and in terms of access to new employment opportunities. Opportunities should be taken to promote more sustainable forms of transport and reduce the use of the private car. Specific issues of how the policies will address town centre crime and the over-supply of apartments could also be clarified in the policy wording.

4.5 M55 Hub Growth Point

The M55 Hub is a major development proposed at Blackpool's south-eastern boundary with Fylde Borough. It represents a solution to the demand for new homes, especially for low-density developments of larger family-sized properties. There are limited opportunities for such developments within the existing urban area, and the M55 Hub is therefore proposed to be developed on land once mainly used for horticulture on Marton Moss, but now in wider mixed grazing, garden and other open land uses as well as remaining glasshouses.

The policies and proposals in this section perform well against many of the SA Objectives, especially those related to housing, economic growth, urban renaissance and promoting the Borough. Impacts on the environment are less certain and will depend to an extent on the more detailed design of housing units and neighbourhoods. In some areas there will be adverse impacts, and these will require mitigation if the development is to be acceptable from a sustainability perspective.

The construction of 2,700 houses on Marton Moss has the potential to generate adverse impacts on a number of topic areas, including air quality, resource consumption and waste. In other areas, the baseline conditions are likely to be altered but not necessarily degraded. Changes to landscape character, for example, would see the loss of some open land, but a number of unsightly horticultural sheds and glasshouses would be replaced by high-quality planned development with green linkages and sensitive landscaping. The present biodiversity value of the site is relatively poor and the development provides a major opportunity for the creation and enhancement of habitats.

Whilst the concept of building on open land at the urban edge appears initially at odds with several sustainability objectives, the impact of the M55 Hub proposals will ultimately depend on the rigour with which best practice sustainable design solutions are implemented. These should be maximised, and include integrating green infrastructure, incorporating energy and water efficiency measures into new buildings, promoting waste management in line with the waste hierarchy, providing viable sustainable transport options and reducing the need to travel to access services. Policies in other sections of the Core Strategy would act as mitigation for many of the potentially adverse impacts identified in the assessment.

Housing development will be phased, which ensure that the level of growth is appropriate to settlement size, meets needs at the time, and is also evenly spread across the Borough. It is therefore likely that the sustainability impacts identified as a result of housing development would also occur gradually as opposed to all at once. Benefits could be generated upon landscape, biodiversity (and potentially other environmental factors e.g. in relation to potential pressure upon water resources) and community spirit / cohesion, as change would be experience a little at a time and existing residents would be given time to become used to the changes. However, potential issues could arise if housing development is phased before the related provision of services etc.

4.6 Balanced Healthy and Greener Blackpool

This section of the Core Strategy proposes policies that relate to the entire Borough and act as mitigation for many of the more development-orientated policies in other sections of the document. The policies perform very well against the SA Objectives and would lead to both

direct and indirect benefits. Direct benefits will occur where policies specify particular targets or planning criteria to achieve enhanced sustainability outcomes. Other indirect benefits will occur as a result of the promotion of a more attractive living environment, including accessibility to services, the quality of the built environment and the creation of urban green spaces. The impacts of these changes are less certain and will often be site-specific.

The greatest sustainability benefits would occur in areas related to regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and improvements to housing. These would comprise physical changes, but also more long-term improvements related to the social and economic well-being of the Borough. For example, the programme to rebuild all of Blackpool's schools over the life of the plan shows a commitment to raising educational attainment, which is in itself an SA Objective, but which would contribute towards wider regeneration over time as skill levels and aspirations amongst young people improve.

Recommendations have been made to improve the sustainability performance of individual policies. These cover a broad range of issues, but common themes are a need to maximise the benefits of green infrastructure in such a heavily urbanised borough, and to make the most efficient use of land on brownfield sites within the existing urban area.

4.7 Cumulative Impacts

The combined impacts of the Core Strategy with the impact of other plans and programmes, including those in neighbouring authorities, have been assessed. The policies within the Core Strategy tend to be complementary and to contribute positively overall to sustainability objectives when viewed together. Cumulative benefits are identified on crime and the fear of crime, education, health, housing, access to services, sustainable tourism and economic growth and inclusion.

There are also some potential concerns centred on the combined impacts of various developments on biodiversity and air quality. A higher level of development is also likely to generate greater volumes of waste and to consume natural resources. Close to the boundaries of the Borough, there may be cumulative impacts on landscape/townscape character and on community spirit and cohesion.

Mitigation measures are proposed for individual policies which, if successfully implemented, would reduce the potential for cumulative impacts to occur.

5 Monitoring

Once the Blackpool Core Strategy is implemented, its significant impacts need to be monitored. Monitoring will be used to identify the performance of the Core Strategy, identify undesirable effects, and confirm whether the impacts predicted in the assessment were accurate.

The monitoring framework is presented in the SA Report, and defines:

- The potentially significant effects that need to be monitored
- How the effect should be monitored
- A target that should be achieved
- Where data could be obtained from
- How often the monitoring data should be gathered