



# **Dacorum Core Strategy Adoption Stage**

**Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement**

**September 2013**



# **PROJECT REPORT: RPN2672**

## **Dacorum Core Strategy – Adoption Stage**

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September 2013

**Rob Gardner and Clare Harmer (C4S at TRL Ltd)**

**Prepared for: Dacorum Borough Council, Strategic Planning and Regeneration**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

A Sustainability Appraisal (SA), that incorporates the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Regulations, has been undertaken during the preparation of Dacorum Borough Council's Core Strategy. This work has been carried out by the Centre for Sustainability at TRL Ltd, along with their partners Halcrow.

The Core Strategy includes the spatial vision and objectives for the Borough. It also contains the proposed spatial strategy, planning policies and strategic and local site allocations that are needed to achieve the strategy's objectives.

The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has identified the social, environmental and economic effects of the Core Strategy, with a view to recommend ways to avoid or minimise negative effects and maximise positive effects.

This SA Statement has been prepared to accompany the Core Strategy when it is adopted by Dacorum Borough Council in September 2013.

## 1.2 Purpose of the SA Statement

The SEA Regulations require that a 'statement' be made available to accompany<sup>1</sup> the adopted plan or programme which must contain information on:

- How environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme;
- How the Environmental Report has been taken into account;
- How opinions expressed in relation to the consultations on the plan/programme and Environmental Report have been taken into account;
- The reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
- The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.

This Sustainability Appraisal Adoption Statement has been produced to fulfil this regulatory requirement, and has been widened to cover all aspects of sustainability, not just those relating to the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> The Regulations require that the statement should be made available "As soon as reasonably practicable after the adoption of a plan or programme..." (SI 2004 No. 1633 Regulation 16 (1)).

This statement is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides a summary of the SA/SEA process including how sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Core Strategy and how the SA Report has been taken into account;
- Section 0 provides an overview of the consultation undertaken during the development of the Core Strategy and its accompanying sustainability appraisal and how representations have been taken into account;
- Section 4 describes the Core Strategy alternatives that were considered and provides the reasons why the adopted Core Strategy was chosen in light of the other alternatives considered; and
- Section 5 confirms the measures that will be taken for monitoring significant environmental effects of implementing the Core Strategy.

## **2 How sustainability considerations have been integrated into the Core Strategy and how the SA Report has been taken into account**

### **2.1 Sustainability Appraisal**

The combined SA/SEA process has been designed to ensure sustainability considerations are integrated into planning and decision making processes. SA is an iterative process, thereby influencing and informing each stage of plan development. Interaction between the planning and SA teams at several key stages during the development of the Core Strategy has helped to incorporate sustainability and environmental considerations into the plan. Throughout its development the SA process has improved the robustness of the plan by focussing attention on the sustainability implications of the options being considered.

An SA/SEA framework of objectives was used to structure each of the assessment stages. The framework covers all of the environmental topics listed in the SEA Directive as well as including wider social and economic objectives to ensure that all aspects of sustainability were covered.

At each stage, recommendations were made by the SA team, including suggestions for new or amended policies and revisions to options and objectives. The SA process aimed to ensure the integration of sustainability considerations into the Core Strategy preparation by:

- Undertaking the SA process in parallel with development of the Core Strategy and by providing information on sustainability implications to influence the content of the Core Strategy;
- Issuing the Scoping Report to the statutory consultees and wider stakeholder groups for comments on the key sustainability issues and proposed scope of the SA;
- Undertaking an assessment of the Core Strategy at several stages during its development;
- Recording an assessment of the predicted sustainability effects of the Core Strategy in several SA Reports and SA working notes written as the strategy was progressed; and
- Making recommendations in each SA Report for how the Core Strategy could be amended to reduce or offset adverse sustainability effects and enhance positive effects.

**The stages of Core Strategy and sustainability appraisal development undertaken are shown in**

Table 1. The documents are all available on the Local Planning Framework pages of the Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) website:

<http://web.dacorum.gov.uk/home/planning-development/planning-strategic-planning/local-planning-framework>

**Table 1: Stages in the SA/SEA and Dacorum Core Strategy DPD**

Dacorum Core Strategy DPD	SA/SEA Stages	Dates
Begin document preparation	<p>Stage A: Setting the context, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope.</p> <p>A1: Identify other relevant policies, plans and document programmes, and sustainability objectives.</p> <p>A2: Collecting baseline information.</p> <p>A3: Identifying sustainability issues and problems.</p> <p>A4: Developing the SA framework.</p> <p>A5: Consulting on the scope of the SA (<b>Scoping Report</b>).</p>	<p>SA Scoping Report, prepared February 2006.</p> <p>Consultation on Scoping Report February 2006.</p>
<p>Preparation of Issues and Options (I&amp;O) paper and consultation</p> <p>Preparation of preferred options, including consultation on possible preferred option</p>	<p>Stage B: Developing and refining options and assessing of effects.</p> <p>B1: Testing the DPD objectives against the SA framework.</p> <p>B2: Developing the DPD options.</p> <p>B3: Predicting the effects of the DPD.</p> <p>B4: Evaluating the effects of the DPD.</p> <p>B5: Considering ways of mitigating adverse effects preferred and</p>	<p>Consultation on Issues &amp; Options (I&amp;O) paper May 2006.</p> <p>Preparation of SA Working Note on I&amp;O<sup>1</sup> June 2006.</p> <p>Supplemental I&amp;O paper November 2006.</p> <p>Preparation of SA Working Note on Supplemental I&amp;O in November 2006.</p> <p>Consultation on the Emerging Core</p>



	<p>maximising beneficial effects.</p> <p>B6: Proposing measures to monitor the significant effects of implementing the DPDs.</p>	<p>Strategy June – August 2009.</p> <p>Preparation of SA Working Note on the Emerging Core Strategy, June 2009.</p> <p>Preparation of SA Working Notes for: Housing Growth Options at Hemel Hempstead (August 2009); Strategic Allocations (February and April 2010) and Working Draft Core Strategy (September 2010)</p>
Public consultation on Preferred options	<p>Stage C: Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report.</p> <p>C1: Preparing the <b>SA Report</b>.</p>	<p>Preparation of the SA Report of the Draft Core Strategy July - October 2010.</p> <p>Preparation of SA Report of the Pre-Submission Core Strategy August – September 2011<sup>2</sup>.</p>
	<p>Stage D: Consulting on the preferred options of the DPD and SA Report.</p> <p>D1: Public participation on the preferred options of the DPD and the SA Report.</p> <p>D2 (i) Appraising significant changes.</p> <p>D2 (ii) Appraising significant changes resulting from representations.</p> <p>D3: Making decisions and providing Information.</p>	<p>Consultation on Draft Core Strategy and accompanying SA Report November 2010.</p> <p>Consultation on the Pre-Submission Core Strategy and accompanying SA Report October - December 2011.</p> <p>Appraisal of proposed amendments to the Pre-Submission Core Strategy. Preparation of an addendum to the SA Report to reflect changes to the Core Strategy made between the Pre-Submission and Submission stages. SA Report Addendum, June 2012.</p> <p>Appraisal of the Proposed modifications to the Core Strategy that resulted from the Examination of the Core Strategy. SA Report Addendum, January 2013.</p>
Submission of DPD to Secretary of State	<p>Stage E: Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the DPD.</p> <p>E1: Finalising aims and methods for monitoring.</p> <p>E2: Responding to adverse effects.</p> <p>Preparing the <b>SEA Statement</b>.</p>	<p><b>SA Adoption Statement (this document).</b></p>

<sup>1</sup> This output is not required by the SEA Regulations but was produced to assist in selecting the preferred options.

<sup>2</sup> This is the Environmental Report required by the SEA Regulations.

## **2.2 Habitats Regulations Assessment**

A Habitat Regulations Assessment of the Core Strategy was conducted as an independent study alongside the SA/SEA, sharing information with the SA/SEA where applicable. In April 2008, a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report was prepared to comply with the UK's Habitats Regulations. Screening is required where a plan, alone or 'in combination' with other plans, could affect Natura 2000 Sites (Special Protection Areas for birds – SPAs, Special Areas of Conservation for habitats - SACs) following Article 6(3) of the European Habitats Directive. The site identified as having the potential to be affected by the implementation of the Core Strategy was the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC. However the screening report concluded that the Core Strategy would not lead to any significant effects on the SAC.

After the HRA Screening Report was produced, and as changes were made to the Core Strategy during the later stages of its development, the HRA was revisited to ascertain whether its assessment and conclusions still stood or whether they needed to be updated.

The assessment matrices found no significant effects on Chilterns Beechwoods SAC from individual developments as a result of either air pollution or recreation disturbance. However, these impacts were examined in more detail and updated avoidance and mitigation measures for both impacts were provided in order to ensure there are no cumulative significant impacts on the SAC due to development proposed around Hemel Hempstead and also in the wider region. Natural England was satisfied with the conclusions of the HRA and the avoidance and mitigation measures proposed.

## **3 How consultation comments have been taken into account**

### **3.1 Introduction to Consultation Process**

#### **3.1.1 SA/SEA Scoping**

The first round of SA/SEA consultation was undertaken at the end of the scoping stage in February 2006. The SEA Regulations and SA Guidance requires that the Scoping Report consultation and the Preferred Options Appraisal be carried out with stakeholders the Council finds appropriate to consult with, and four statutory environmental consultees i.e. Countryside Agency, English Nature (both now merged as Natural England), English Heritage and the Environment Agency. The aim of the scoping consultation was to ensure that all the relevant issues were identified and discussed at an early stage of the process so

that they could be addressed during the SA and plan making. The list of those who responded, along with a summary of the comments received and how they have been addressed were included in Appendix D of the SA Report (September 2011).

### **3.1.2 SA/SEA of Core Strategy**

Consultation was then carried out on the Core Strategy Issues and Options SA Working Notes (in May and November 2006) and on the Emerging Core Strategy SA Working Note (in June 2009). Some consultation responses were received that made reference to the Sustainability Appraisal. These are summarised in Appendix D of the SA Report (September 2011).

During November and December 2010, consultation was carried out on the SA Report of the Consultation Draft Core Strategy. Again, the list of those who responded, along with a summary of the comments received and how they have been addressed are included in Appendix D of the SA Report (September 2011).

## **3.2 Requirements for the SA Statement**

The SEA Regulations require that the statement produced on adoption of the plan or programme (this statement) should provide information on how the opinions expressed in response to consultation on "*the relevant documents*" have been taken into account. For this statement the relevant documents are as follows:

- The Pre-Submission Core Strategy and the Core Strategy Proposed Major Modifications; and
- The Sustainability Appraisal Report (September 2011) and the SA Report Addendum (January 2013).

## **3.3 Core Strategy consultation**

Over 1,000 representations were received during the consultation on the Pre-Submission Core Strategy. 141 additional representations were received during consultation on the proposed modifications. Full details of these representations and how they have been taken into account in finalising the Core Strategy are provided in the Report of Representations on the Pre-Submission Core Strategy (June 2012) and Report of Representations on the Proposed Major Modifications (April 2013). These documents are available on the Local Planning Framework pages of the Dacorum BC website:

<http://web.dacorum.gov.uk/home/planning-development/planning-strategic-planning/local-planning-framework>

## **3.4 SA Report**

### **3.4.1 Pre-Submission SA Report – September 2011**

Representations on the Pre-Submission Core Strategy and its accompanying SA Report were received during the two consultation periods, November-December 2011 and February-March 2012. Amongst the large number of representations received, seven were directly or indirectly related to the Sustainability Appraisal.

Details of the representations received and the responses to these comments are provided in Appendix 2 of the SA Report Addendum (June 2012). The representations from two respondents (Savills (on behalf of Grand Union Investments) and Boyer Planning (on behalf of W. Lamb Ltd)) were lengthy and detailed in nature. The Savills representation was in the form of a 44 page Sustainability Appraisal Review document. The Boyer Planning representation latter provided comments relating to the SA interspersed with comments on the Core Strategy itself, whilst also providing additional SA related information in Appendices.

None of the representations resulted in significant changes being made to the information or findings that were included in the Pre-Submission SA Report.

### **3.4.2 SA Report Addendum January 2013**

No responses relating to the SA Report Addendum were received during the consultation on the Proposed Modifications to the Core Strategy and its accompanying SA Report Addendum (June 2012).

## **4 Reasons why the adopted Core Strategy was chosen in light of the other alternatives considered**

### **4.1 Background**

During the development of the Core Strategy a wide range of both strategic and more detailed options were developed and subject to sustainability appraisal.

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004<sup>2</sup> require that the Environmental Report (the Pre-Submission SA Report in the case of the Dacorum Core Strategy) shall:

*"... identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of*

*-*  
*(a) implementing the plan or programme; and*

*(b) reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme."* Regulation 12 (2).

Section 5 of the Pre-Submission SA Report (September 2011) provided a summary of the assessments undertaken during the various stages of the development of the Dacorum Core Strategy, during which a wide range of options and alternatives were considered for delivering the plan objectives across the full range of spatial planning issues within the scope of the Core Strategy. Due to the length and detail of the assessments and their accompanying reports the full assessments were not provided in the SA Report. Instead signposting was used to direct the reader to the location of these other assessments.

This section of the SA Adoption Statement provides a summary of how alternatives have been considered within the SA process. A more detailed description of the consideration of alternatives is provided in Section 6 of the SA Report Addendum (June 2012).

#### **4.2 Issues and Options (2006)**

At the Issues and Options stage in May 2006 the SA assessed a range of different strategic options, including those for the distribution pattern of housing growth across the Borough; the amount of new dwellings to be provided; and options for the location of a greenfield extension (if required). A range of other less strategic options were also considered at this stage. These related to issues such as housing density, land-use patterns in local and town centres, transport, accessibility and community facilities. Details of the assessments of these options are sign-posted from Section 5.2 of the SA Report (November 2011).

#### **4.3 Supplemental Issues and Options - November 2006**

In conjunction with St Albans City and District Council, Dacorum BC undertook consultation on options for growth to meet the proposed extra growth at Hemel Hempstead which had

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<sup>2</sup> Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 1633

been recommended by the East of England Plan Panel Report and which had not originally featured in the Draft East of England Plan.

The sustainability appraisal found that if the proposed extra growth was required to be delivered at Hemel Hempstead it would be likely to have widespread sustainability implications. Whilst there may be positive social and economic effects, it is also likely that there would be some significant adverse environmental effects. These adverse effects were mainly linked to the intrusion into the Green Belt that would result from the growth considered and which would have the direct impacts of loss of greenfield sites and a range of other direct and indirect impacts.

The appraisal also provided an assessment of 17 potential urban extensions in terms of potential constraints and opportunities. No preferred option for an urban extension was selected at this stage.

#### **4.4 Emerging Core Strategy – 2009 and 2010**

Consultation on the Emerging Core Strategy was undertaken in June 2009. Following this there was further consideration (in August 2009) on options for significant levels of housing growth at Hemel Hempstead, which built on the work undertaken in November 2006. Additional strategic allocations in Tring, Berkhamsted, Markyate, Bovingdon and Kings Langley were then considered in February 2010, followed by consideration of further strategic allocations in Hemel Hempstead in April 2010.

During this stage of the development of Core Strategy options were considered in relation to the levels of new housing provision; options for growth at Hemel Hempstead; and strategic sites and local allocations.

Sustainability Appraisal was undertaken throughout this stage of the Core Strategy's development.

#### **4.5 Consultation Draft Core Strategy (November 2010)**

##### **4.5.1 Spatial Strategy**

Whereas the spatial strategy in the 2009 Emerging Core Strategy did not specifically plan for growth at Tring or Berkhamsted, the Consultation Draft Core Strategy allowed for some level of growth in these towns as detailed in Policy CS1: Distribution of Development:

"...

*The market towns and large villages will accommodate new development for housing, employment and other uses, provided that it:*

*(a) is of a scale commensurate with the size of the settlement and the range of local services and facilities;*

*(b) helps maintain the vitality and viability of the settlement and the surrounding countryside;*

*(c) causes no damage to the existing character of the settlement or its adjoining countryside; and*

*(d) is compatible with policies protecting the Green Belt and Rural Area*

*...”*

The SA found that the policy should provide a good balance between focusing development in the key settlements whilst allowing for demonstrated local needs to be met in smaller settlements and rural areas. The growth in key settlements will help to support certain regeneration needs in the towns and improve levels of community vitality, with associated social and economic benefits. It will also help to service the needs of surrounding areas. By concentrating growth in Hemel Hempstead and the other larger settlements the impacts on the Borough’s natural environment will be minimised.

This strategy was taken forward as the preferred strategy for inclusion in the Pre-Submission Core Strategy.

#### **4.5.2 Housing levels**

Further consideration was also given to the options for levels of housing growth (Option 1: 370 dwellings per annum (dpa); and Option 2: 430 dpa).

The appraisal identified that delivery of the higher level of growth (Option 2), whilst helping to achieve objectives relating to housing provision and in particular affordable housing, would have adverse effects on local landscapes given the requirement to develop sites in the Green Belt. Conversely the lower level of growth, whilst reducing environmental effects, was identified as falling short in terms of meeting local needs for housing and associated community infrastructure that would be provided as a result of new development.

In addition to the two housing growth options contained in the Core Strategy, a natural growth option of 500 dpa was also assessed as part of the SA to provide a comparison

assessment so that the implications of the two options could be compared with a situation in which all natural growth were to be met.

The SA found that delivering 500 dpa would result in the need for significant additional development in the Green Belt with associated adverse effects on some of the environmental objectives, in particular a significant adverse effect against the landscape and townscape objective. Resource use would increase and there would be increased waste, increased emissions to air and additional loss of tranquillity. However, the higher levels of new dwellings would go further towards meeting the needs for new housing and supporting the planned levels of new job creation that were proposed in the November 2010 Consultation Draft Core Strategy.

The Pre-Submission Core Strategy took forward the level of 430 dwellings per annum as the preferred option. In determining the appropriate level of housing the Council considered the following issues:

- *The amount needed to meet forecast household growth in the borough;*
- *The ability to deliver a sufficient, flexible and steady housing supply;*
- *The opportunities to ensure a mix of housing (both in terms of tenure and type);*
- *Local needs and opportunities, and potential benefits;*
- *The timing of key infrastructure to support new housing;*
- *The balance between jobs and homes;*
- *The support to the local economy and achievement of regeneration targets; the effect of new developments (i.e. the land used);*
- *The relationship to environmental constraints and impact upon the character of particular settlements; and*
- *The desire to protect the countryside.*

The sustainability appraisals undertaken on the range of housing number options during the development of the Core Strategy helped the Council understand the implications of the different options for growth against the majority of these issues.

#### **4.5.3 Employment provision**

In terms of employment provision, the Consultation Draft Core Strategy considered the creation of up to 18,000 additional jobs in the Borough between 2006 and 2031. As with all



the elements of the Core Strategy this was appraised against the SA objectives, with significant positive effects predicted against the economic objectives, but with potential adverse effects in terms of greenhouse gas emissions due to the imbalance between jobs and housing which would be likely to result in increased levels of in-commuting.

As the Core Strategy was developed further, changes in the planning context following the successful legal challenge to parts of the East of England Plan, which reduced the levels of housing planned for Hemel Hempstead, and the changing economic climate, led to a reduction in the forecast level of jobs growth over the plan period to a level 10,000 new jobs. This new level of jobs was arrived at through re-running the employment model<sup>3</sup> for the Borough and provides a balance that better reflects the planned level of future housing and the provision of new jobs than if 18,000 jobs were still in place with the new lower level of housing growth in Dacorum (post East of England Plan revision). Growth at Maylands is seen as providing some jobs for the sub-region and could therefore result in increased levels of in-commuting.

Despite that, the sustainability appraisal found that the better balance between homes and jobs provision would help reduce traffic congestion and carbon emissions which would exacerbated by high commuting levels.

## **4.6 Final stages in the Core Strategy's Development**

The previous sections describe how options were considered prior to the publication of the Pre-Submission Core Strategy. Following the consultation on that document a number of changes were proposed to the Core Strategy at the Submission and Examination stages.

### **4.6.1 Submission**

The changes proposed at this stage were minor in nature and did not have any implications for the strategic options that had previously been considered. There were also no implications for the earlier findings of the sustainability appraisal or Habitats Regulations Assessment.

### **4.6.2 Post-Examination**

Following the Examination hearings and at the recommendation of the Inspector a number of Main Modifications to the Core Strategy were proposed. These modifications were

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<sup>3</sup> By Roger Tym and Partners.

subjected to sustainability appraisal and a further round of consultation was undertaken. In addition a further series of Minor Modifications were proposed.

Only one of the 28 Main Modifications put forward required a new sustainability appraisal. This was the addition of a new policy to reflect the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', enshrined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

None of the proposed Main Modifications made major changes to the preferred strategic options and in addition none were identified as having a significant effect on the previous findings of the sustainability appraisal or the Habitats Regulations Assessment.

## **5 Measures for monitoring the significant effects of implementing the Core Strategy**

The SEA Regulations require that the responsible authority shall monitor the significant (adverse and positive) environmental effects of the implementation of each plan or programme with the purpose of identifying unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and being able to undertake appropriate remedial action. The combined SA/SEA process expands this to include other significant sustainability effects of the implementation of the plan (i.e. to also include significant social and economic effects).

The monitoring put in place should fulfil the following requirements:

- To monitor the significant effects of the Core Strategy;
- To monitor any unforeseen effects of the Core Strategy;
- To ensure that action can be taken to reduce/offset the significant effects of the Core Strategy; and
- To provide baseline data for the next SA/SEA and to provide a picture of how the environment and sustainability conditions of the area are evolving.

The SEA Regulations allow for existing monitoring arrangements to be used if appropriate. Monitoring may cover several plans or programmes as long as sufficient information about environmental effects is provided for the individual plans or programmes.

Potential significant positive effects were identified in SA Report (September 2011) and the June 2012 SA Report Addendum against the following SA objectives:

- SA1 – Biodiversity;
- SA2 - Water quality/quantity;
- SA3 - Flood risk;

- SA7 - Air quality;
- SA11 – Landscape & townscape;
- SA16 - Community identity and participation;
- SA17 – Crime and fear of crime;
- SA18 - Sustainable prosperity and growth;
- SA19 - Fairer access to services; and
- SA20 - Revitalise town centres.

No significant negative effects were identified in the assessment.

The monitoring measures that have been selected to measure the effects of the Core Strategy against the SA objectives for which the SA identified likely significant effects are shown in Table 2.

**[NB: Monitoring Measures to be Finalised]**

**Table 2 Monitoring Measures**

<b>SA Objective</b>	<b>Monitoring Measure</b>
SA1 - Biodiversity	Ecological status of the River Gade
SA2 - Water quality/quantity	Ecological status of the River Gade
SA3 - Flood risk	A % of new dwellings built on flood plains and/or contrary to Environment Agency (EA) advice
SA7 - Air quality	Existing town centre air quality monitoring
SA11 – Landscape & townscape	70% or more of sustainable statement assessments to achieve a green scoring each year through AMR
SA16 - Community identity and participation and SA20 - Revitalise town centres	Improvements to public realm (Satisfaction Survey) Sustainability Statements - 70% or more of all sustainability assessments should achieve the 'green' scoring level each year.
SA17 – Crime and fear of crime	Town centre crime statistics provided by Police
SA18 - Sustainable prosperity and growth	Net gain in retail floorspace and regular audit of vacant units
SA19 - Fairer access to services	Delivery of Access & Movement strategy

Monitoring measures required in relation to the implementation of the Core Strategy will be incorporated into the Authority's Monitoring Report that is required for the Local Plan.