



Strategic Environmental Assessment / Sustainability Appraisal of the West Lancashire Local Plan Preferred Options Paper 2012-2027

Non Technical Summary

Final Report
November 2011



West Lancashire Borough Council

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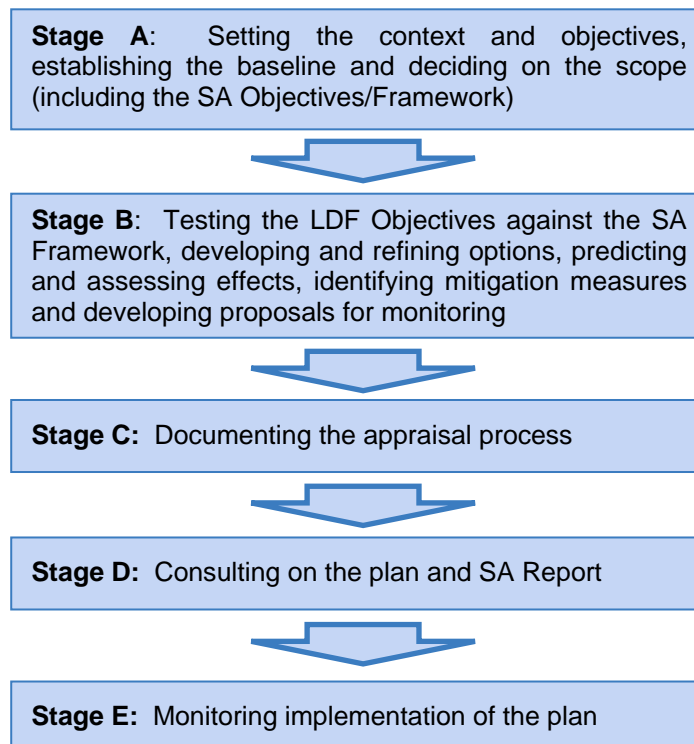
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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is required for all land use plans. The purpose of SA is to promote sustainable development through better integration of sustainability considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans. SA is an integral part of good plan making and should not be seen as a stand alone activity. It is an on-going process that identifies the likely significant effects of the plan and the extent to which implementing the plan will achieve the social, environmental and economic objectives which have been identified as being necessary to achieve 'sustainable development'.
- 1.1.2 The West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 will replace the existing West Lancashire Replacement Local Plan (2006) as the Development Plan Document (DPD) for West Lancashire. Up until Autumn 2011, the Council were preparing a Core Strategy to replace the existing Local Plan, but in light of the provisions in the Localism Act including the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Council have now moved towards preparing a new style, single Local Plan document.
- 1.1.3 The West Lancashire Local Plan Preferred Options DPD sets out the overall approach which the Council, working with other organisations at the local and sub-regional level, will use to guide and control the future use and development of land. Alongside the development of the Local Plan DPD, the Council has undertaken a process of SA, which incorporates statutory requirements to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).
- 1.1.4 A SA follows five key stages, which are outlined in **Figure 1** below. Some of the stages are revisited as the plan develops and begins to take shape, and in response to consultation. This report falls within Stage C of the process.

Figure 1: Five-Stage Approach to Sustainability Appraisal



- 1.1.5 The Local Plan Preferred Options Paper will eventually become a Local Plan for the Borough, and as such, is intended to set out and support a long term vision for the development of the West Lancashire area, and a number of strategic objectives which have been identified to meet that vision. Within the Local Plan, a spatial strategy for achieving the vision is set out, along with a series of spatial development policies, which establishes the framework for the quantity and broad locations for future growth, investment and regeneration in the Borough. The plan also includes a series of more generic, criteria-based development management policies, which provide the basis for assessing specific development proposals.

1.2 Summary of the SA/SEA Appraisal Process to date

- 1.2.1 As shown in Figure 1 above, the first stage in the SA process is to set up the framework for undertaking future appraisals. Generally this requires the adoption of a set of sustainability objectives and the collection of baseline information which can act as an evidence base to inform the appraisal. The framework and evidence base are presented in a 'Scoping Report' for consultation with stakeholders, including most importantly, the statutory consultees (English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England).
- 1.2.2 A Scoping Report was prepared by West Lancashire Borough Council in February 2008. The Scoping Report was formally consulted on between September and October 2008. A revision of the baseline information and SA Framework was undertaken in early 2009 by the Council.
- 1.2.3 A review of the Scoping Report was undertaken by Scott Wilson in February 2010. The purpose of the review was to ensure that the baseline data was up-to-date and that key sustainability issues had been identified and captured by the SA framework; and finally that the framework provided a logical and practical assessment tool for undertaking further appraisals. Further details of the findings of this review are set out in section 1.5 of the full SA Report (2011).
- 1.2.4 In preparing the Local Plan Preferred Options (January 2012) the Council must consider reasonable alternative approaches to achieving the vision and objectives of the Plan. A number of 'options' or alternative approaches were considered at the Issues and Options stage (2009) and published in a Core Strategy Options document for public consultation (September to October 2009). An Interim SA report was prepared to assess these options and published alongside the main consultation document. This Interim SA report, alongside the public consultation responses received in response to the publication of these documents, helped to inform the early work on policy development.
- 1.2.5 A review of the Interim SA report was undertaken by Scott Wilson in February 2010, alongside the review of the Scoping Report. The aim of the review was to comment on the robustness of the appraisal in light of best practice, government guidance and the regulations.
- 1.2.6 The review also recommended that the Sustainability Issues and SA Framework should be revisited to ensure that it reflected the new baseline. While such an update to the Scoping Report was not undertaken as recommended, the Council prepared a number of evidence base papers for the Core Strategy, which provide the relevant context, set out the baseline evidence (including maps and figures) and identify the likely future baseline and LDF issues. These papers have been prepared for a number of topic areas, as well as for the key spatial areas across the Borough, and have formed an important source of evidence for the latest SA assessment.

1.2.7 On the basis of the findings of the Core Strategy Options SA Report (2009) and in response to comments received on the Core Strategy Options consultation document, the Core Strategy Preferred Options Paper (2011) was prepared. This was published for public consultation between May and June 2011. The Preferred Options were accompanied by a SA/SEA Report, which used the same SA framework as the Core Strategy Options SA Report (2009).

1.2.8 Following this, West Lancashire Borough Council took the decision to move away from preparing a Core Strategy and to prepare a Local Plan instead. This decision was made in order to reflect the intended changes in plan making signalled by provisions in the Localism Act and in particular in the draft NPPF.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 A “whole-plan” assessment approach has been used, which considers the effects of the Local Plan as a whole on each SA topic, by highlighting those policies that will have an effect on the topic, on their own, but also in combination with other policies. Broadly speaking, this requires three over-arching sections in the SA Report.

1.3.2 The first section includes the introduction and methodology chapter, followed by a chapter which tests the Local Plan Vision and Objectives against the SA Objectives. This is a requirement of the SEA Directive. A summary matrix then identifies which policies are considered to have “significant effects”, “less significant effects” or “little or no effect” against each of the SA objectives. The full assessment is included in Appendix 2.

1.3.3 The second section of the report documents the assessment using a topic by topic approach, by assigning each SA objective to the most relevant topic(s) as set out below:

- Heritage and Landscape
- Biodiversity
- Water and Land Resources
- Climatic Factors and Flooding
- Transportation and Air Quality
- Social Equality and Community Services
- Local Economy and Employment
- Housing

1.3.4 For each topic the assessment sets out to answer the following questions:

- What is the objective of the plan?
- What is the policy context?
- What is the situation now?
- What are the key objectives and other decision making criteria that we need to consider?

- What will be the situation without the plan?
- What will be the situation with plan?
- How can we mitigate / enhance effects? (our recommendations)
- How can we best monitor plan impacts?

1.3.5 These questions correspond to the key requirements of the SEA Directive. It is not proposed to set out the detailed findings of the appraisal here, as this information is contained in the full SA report.

1.3.6 The third section of the report provides a “Summary Conclusions” chapter, which draws together the findings of the individual topic chapter assessments to identify the key effects of the Local Plan as a whole, and which summarises the recommendations made. This chapter also identifies the cumulative effects which arise across the topics and the cumulative effects in combination with other plans and programmes. Finally, the monitoring chapter sets out recommendations for the Council’s approach to monitoring the implementation of the Local Plan and its effects.

2 What is the Situation Now?

2.1 Policy Context

- 2.1.1 The policy context that guides the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper includes national planning policy (in the form of Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes) and a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North West published in September 2008¹.
- 2.1.2 A draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was subject to consultation in summer 2011. The aim of the NPPF is to simplify the existing regime to make the planning process more accessible. It focuses on using planning to promote sustainable development, including attracting growth and business, and creating the infrastructure for a growing population without damaging the environment. It aims to promote sustainable development without delay and introduces a “presumption in favour of sustainable development”. The emerging NPPF may be subject to considerable changes before it takes its final format.
- 2.1.3 With national planning policy providing an over-arching framework, the North West RSS provides the regional and sub-regional planning context. The RSS sits within the LDF of each Local Authority in the North West. The RSS refines national policy in the context of the North West of England, and includes important policy direction for the Local Authority level, including targets for housing development in the Borough.
- 2.1.4 One of the provisions of the Localism Act is to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies. With the proposed removal of RSS, it will fall on individual local authorities to determine appropriate housing and employment targets; but these must be able to meet the tests of soundness in terms of being justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy.
- 2.1.5 The currently adopted local planning policy of the Borough and its adjoining local authorities also informs the development of the Local Plan.
- 2.1.6 Local, sub-regional, regional and national policy on issues such as transport, health and education also informs the development of the Local Plan.

2.2 Summary of the Baseline Data

- 2.2.1 The SA Scoping Report for the West Lancashire LDF (initially prepared in 2008 and updated in 2009) and a number of evidence base papers (prepared in 2010), set out in full the current status and performance of the Borough in relation to a number of sustainability issues. The SA report for the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper cross references the Scoping Report in relation to this baseline information for each individual topic area. Overall, a few key issues emerge as the most prominent sustainability issues for West Lancashire.
- 2.2.2 There are a number of natural, ecological and cultural assets within the Borough that require protection, enhancement and management, including valued landscapes, sites for wildlife, including internationally significant sites (Martin Mere, Ribble Estuary), Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings.

¹ Please note the impending abolition of the RSS through the Localism Bill 2010.

- 2.2.3 In terms of water quality, West Lancashire has a significantly lower standard of quality in comparison to the rest of the North West. In 2006 only 23.6% of river length in West Lancashire was judged to have good water quality, in comparison to the North West average of 63.2%. In addition, 14.2% of river length in West Lancashire was judged to have poor water quality in comparison to the North West average of 7%.
- 2.2.4 In terms of land resources, West Lancashire has the largest area of Green Belt within England. The Borough has 34,630 ha of Green Belt, which comprises 91% of its total land area. In addition, West Lancashire has a greater proportion of grade 1, 2 and 3 agricultural land than the North West and England averages.
- 2.2.5 Over the six year period of 2004-2010, on average 72% of new housing completions in West Lancashire have been on Previously Developed Land (PDL). This exceeds the Council and government targets for new development on PDL.
- 2.2.6 The long term trends indicate an increase in recycling and composting of waste in the Borough, but eventually a ceiling will be reached beyond which further recycling/compositing will not be possible, and additional waste treatment facilities will be required.
- 2.2.7 West Lancashire has higher per capita CO² emissions than all of the other Lancashire local authorities with the exception of the Ribble Valley, and higher than the North West and the England average.
- 2.2.8 In terms of flood risk, there are significant areas of land potentially under threat from coastal and fluvial flooding. The highest areas of risk are to the north and west of the Borough, where coastal flooding is the greatest threat. The only significant sizeable settlement within such a high flood risk zone is Banks.
- 2.2.9 A recent study² indicates that the Borough has a strong wind resource within West Lancashire with average wind speeds of between 6.6 – 7.1 m/s.
- 2.2.10 The rural nature of West Lancashire means that it has relatively good air quality compared to more urbanised boroughs, where there are higher levels of traffic and industry emissions. West Lancashire has only one Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), which is located in Moor St, Ormskirk.
- 2.2.11 The total carbon dioxide emissions in West Lancashire are high in comparison to most other Lancashire authorities, and the rate of emissions in terms of tonnes per person is noticeably above the national level. Emissions from the industry and commerce sector are relatively high, and those from land-use change are also quite significant in comparative terms, reflecting the agricultural activity in the area.
- 2.2.12 In terms of transport, the majority of the Borough has relatively good road access to the neighbouring towns of Southport, Preston, St Helens, Wigan and Liverpool. There are also good connections to the wider motorway network via the M58 and M6. However, there is a major issue regarding traffic congestion around Ormskirk Town Centre as a result of the one-way system on the A570.

² Renewable Energy Capacity Study for the Liverpool City Region Authorities and Merseyside (2009)

- 2.2.13 There are varying levels of deprivation within the Borough. The Skelmersdale wards are the most deprived, with the Digmaor ward within the most deprived nationally. Hesketh Bank, Aughton and Parbold are amongst the least deprived areas.
- 2.2.14 Life expectancy in the Borough is equal or lower than the national average. The Skelmersdale wards of Digmaor, Birch Green and Tanhouse suffer from the most severe health deprivation in the Borough.
- 2.2.15 There is a decline in manufacturing and agricultural employment in the Borough, and there are rising levels of worklessness and employment deprivation, particularly in the wards of Digmaor, Birch Green and Tanhouse.
- 2.2.16 The Borough suffers from below average economic performance compared to the North West and UK and there is a lack of available employment land outside of Skelmersdale. The Borough experiences high levels of out-commuting, particularly to Sefton.
- 2.2.17 There is a need to respond to an increasing and ageing population, which will place particular demands on the housing stock in terms of the number and suitability of homes available. Demand for sheltered housing is likely to increase over the lifetime of the Local Plan. The lack of affordable housing is another key baseline issue, particularly in the rural parishes.

2.3 What will the Situation be with the Plan?

- 2.3.1 There is potential for negative impacts on the Borough's environment in the future if new development is not managed appropriately. In addition, without strategic direction, the Borough's social and economic problems will only be exacerbated, and with that will come greater social inequality.
- 2.3.2 The "saved" West Lancashire Local Plan 2001-2016, (reviewed in 2006) sets out a range of policies that govern development in the Borough. However, these policies are likely to become out of date over time, due to changes in population, climate change and central government policy. The 'saved' Local Plan policies will therefore not provide an adequate basis for guiding new development in the future. Without an up-to-date framework to manage new development and land use, West Lancashire would be likely to be subject to a continuation of negative sustainability trends and a likely loss of environmental assets.
- 2.3.3 In summary, it is clear that it would be unsustainable to move forward without a new planning framework for the Borough and the move to establish such a framework through the Local Plan is welcomed.

3 What will the Situation be with the Plan?

3.1.1 A detailed discussion of the predicted sustainability effects of the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper can be found in sections 4.5, 5.5, 6.5, 7.5, 8.5, 9.5, 10.5 and 11.5 of the SA report. This answers the question: ‘What will the situation be under the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper’ for each of the sustainability topics. Chapter 12 and Appendix 6 set out the appraisal of sites allocated or safeguarded in the Local Plan. These effects are summarised in Chapter 13 of the SA report. The following discussion provides a brief overview of the identified effects.

3.1.2 It is considered that the implementation of the Local Plan will achieve sustainable and sensitive growth in West Lancashire. This positive impact will be further enhanced if the minor recommendations suggested within the SA report are implemented.

3.2 Spatial and Cumulative Effects of the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper

3.2.1 The major urban areas within the Borough include Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and Burscough. The majority of proposed new development under the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper is directed to, and takes place within these urban areas. It is therefore not surprising that these towns will also attract the most significant impacts in relation to all the topic areas considered, almost without exception; and that this will almost inevitably lead to cumulative effects on certain aspects of sustainability in and around these towns.

3.3 Significant Direct and Indirect Effects of the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper on the Sustainability Topics

Heritage and Landscape

3.3.1 The sustainable location of new development through the allocation of housing and employment sites and the implementation of a number of Local Plan policies will help ensure that new development proposed within the Local Plan Preferred Options paper is unlikely to pose a threat to the heritage assets and key landscape areas located within West Lancashire. A potential risk to local landscape character is new development on Green Belt and Greenfield land. However, information within the West Lancashire Green Belt Study (2011) and the site specific SA in this report highlights that on the whole, new development on Green Belt land both during the plan period is unlikely to have a significant negative impact on the landscape character of the Borough.

3.3.2 Development in the vicinity of areas of heritage and landscape value could have negative secondary effects through the indirect effects caused by additional traffic / congestion and reduction in air quality (pollutants can cause damage to building structures). Furthermore, any negative effect in climatic factors and flooding may pose an increased risk to heritage and landscape assets within West Lancashire.

3.3.3 Biodiversity

3.3.4 The level of new development proposed within West Lancashire, the potential development of Greenfield Land and the release of Green Belt pose a risk to biodiversity assets within the

Borough. However, information within the West Lancashire Green Belt Study (2011) and the site specific SA in this report highlights that on the whole, new development on Green Belt land both during and beyond the plan period is unlikely to have a significant negative impact on the landscape character of the Borough.

- 3.3.5 Overall the implementation of the Local Plan over the plan period is likely to have a positive impact on biodiversity in the Borough.

Water and Land Resources

- 3.3.6 The implementation of the policies within the West Lancashire Local Plan Preferred Options paper would have a variety of impacts on key water and land resources within the Borough.

- 3.3.7 Whilst brownfield land is prioritised for new development, there will be a need to release Greenfield and Green Belt land over the plan period in order to meet housing and employment land targets, deliver renewable energy schemes and make improvements to the transport infrastructure. This could potentially have a negative impact on water and land resources within the Borough. However, it is recognised that there are policies within the Local Plan Preferred Option paper that will help to mitigate negative impacts to a certain extent.

- 3.3.8 Water resources in and around Ormskirk and Burscough could also be significantly affected by the level of proposed development in these areas.

Climatic Factors and Flooding

- 3.3.9 The implementation of the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper policies would have a positive impact on climatic factors and flooding in the Borough.

- 3.3.10 There are sufficient measures within the plan to counteract the negative impacts on climate change resulting from new development in the Borough. The Local Plan Preferred Options Paper promotes the development of development of renewable, low carbon and decentralised energy schemes over the plan period and highlights the importance of delivering low carbon development. This will help to minimise CO₂ emissions over the plan period, and contribute positively.

- 3.3.11 The majority of new development proposed within the plan is targeted towards areas that do not suffer from significant flood risk.

Transportation and Air Quality

- 3.3.12 The implementation of the Local Preferred Options Paper policies would have a positive impact on transportation and air quality in the Borough.

- 3.3.13 The implementation of the Local Plan will help to improve sustainable transport choice over the plan period. The Local Plan Preferred Options Paper emphasises the need for new development to be accessible, which will contribute towards a positive impact on transportation.

- 3.3.14 In the long term the development of renewable energy schemes in the Borough is likely to contribute to a positive impact on air quality by reducing carbon emissions over the plan period. In the longer term, should expected growth have been achieved, there will be a need for continual monitoring and mitigation of air quality issues.

Social Equality and Community Services

- 3.3.15 Overall the policies proposed in the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper should have a positive impact on social equality and community services in the Borough, especially in terms of increasing accessibility to services and facilities. The positive effects seen in the short / medium term should continue in the long term, especially in terms of increased levels of access to services and facilities.

Local Economy and Employment

- 3.3.16 The overall effect of the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper on the local economy and employment is positive. The implementation of the Local Plan will assist in the delivery of new employment opportunities within the Borough. By improving local job prospects for new and existing residents, the Local Plan will also help to counteract the level of out-commuting.
- 3.3.17 The positive effects seen in the short / medium term should continue in the long term, especially in terms of access to employment opportunities and increased economic activity in the Borough.
- 3.3.18 Like all economic growth, the impacts are likely to be temporary. However, the conditions needed to stimulate economic growth have much more permanent effects, such as good infrastructure.

Housing

- 3.3.19 Overall, the pattern of distribution of housing development set out within the Local Plan is considered to represent the most sustainable option for the Borough to deliver key housing and employment targets, in light of the range of development issues and constraints in the Borough, including existing patterns of development, the physical geography of the Borough, land availability and infrastructure constraints.
- 3.3.20 The Local Plan should result in an increase in the supply of housing (including affordable housing) within the Borough, whilst also creating mixed and balanced communities.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Recommended Mitigation

4.1.1 Overall, the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper is envisaged to have a positive impact on all of the topic areas. It is considered that the Local Plan achieves a sustainable balance between making provision for development to meet local needs, taking into account infrastructure requirements and the physical and environmental constraints of the area, in particular the amount of Green Belt land in the Borough and the waste water treatment constraints, and displaying flexibility to respond to changing circumstances across the lifetime of the Local Plan and beyond.

4.1.2 There is one minor recommended change to the Local Preferred Options Paper policies:

- Provide a cross reference to Policy EN2 within Policy IF2.

4.2 Recommended Monitoring

4.2.1 A list of potential indicators was put forward in the SA Scoping Report for the West Lancashire LDF (2008). This list included those indicators already being monitored by the Council in the Annual LDF Monitoring Report.

4.2.2 It is recommended that the following prospective indicators be used to help to detect and respond to the significant effects and mitigation identified in this SA Report.

- Number of Conservation Areas within the Borough;
- Change in areas of populations of biodiversity importance, including (i) change in priority habitats and species by type and (ii) change in areas designated for their intrinsic environmental value including sites of international, national, sub-regional or local significance;
- % of area of land designated as SSSIs within the local authority in favourable condition;
- % of river length assessed as (a) good biological quality; and (b) good chemical quality;
- CO2 emissions by sector and per capita emissions;
- Renewable energy capacity installed by type;
- % of the resident population who travel to work a) by private motor vehicle; b) by public transport; c) on foot or cycle;
- Out-commuting – % of residents working outside the Borough;
- Index of deprivation (including health and crime domain);
- Worklessness: a) % of the working age population who are economically inactive; b) % of the economically inactive working age population who want a job; c) working age unemployment rate;

- GVA £ per capita;
- Affordable dwellings completed as a percentage of all new housing completions; and
- % of all housing that is unfit.

4.2.3 The monitoring sections of the SA Report (within each topic chapter) show how these recommended indicators relate to the significant effects and mitigation recommendations observed.

4.2.4 Separately the Council is also responsible for publishing a LDF Monitoring Report, and it is expected that the two processes of monitoring can be combined in order to achieve efficiencies.

5 The Difference made by this Sustainability Appraisal

- 5.1.1 The SA report has made a minor recommendation that aims to improve the Local Plan and its implementation. West Lancashire Borough Council will consider if this recommendation will be incorporated into the final Local Plan document, which in turn will be informed by the pending period of consultation with the public and statutory bodies, including the three SEA Consultation Bodies³.
- 5.1.2 SA has contributed to plan development by providing an independent assessment of the sustainability of:
- firstly, the Council's Core Strategy Options document (September 2009);
 - secondly, the resulting Core Strategy Preferred Options Paper (2011); and
 - thirdly, the Council's Local Plan Preferred Options Paper (2012).
- 5.1.3 This SA Report (Appendix 6) has also provided a detailed appraisal of each site / area allocated for development in the Local Plan (and where appropriate alternative areas and sites) incorporating an assessment of the sustainability and suitability of locating specific development types on each site.
- 5.1.4 The process has therefore provided an ongoing check on the sustainability of the emerging Local Plan, in accordance with government guidance. The assessment also identifies likely effects, which should inform more detailed discussions over individual developments and planning applications.
- 5.1.5 In terms of sustainability, the ultimate effectiveness of the Local Plan will depend on an effective partnership between West Lancashire Borough Council, statutory partners, prospective developers and the community at large.

³English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England (the last effective from October 2006 - formerly the two separate bodies of English Nature and the Countryside Agency)

6 Next Steps

- 6.1.1 The SA report and this Non-Technical Summary are available for comments alongside the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper, from **5th January** and **17th February 2012**.
- 6.1.2 You can view these documents, along with other supporting documents, online on the Council's website at: www.westlancls.gov.uk/ldf and www.westlancls.gov.uk/2027.
- 6.1.3 Comments on both the Local Plan Preferred Options Paper and the SA Report are welcomed. Comments can be sent to:
- Local Development Framework Team**
West Lancashire Borough Council
52 Derby Street
Ormskirk
L39 2DF
- 6.1.4 Or by email to: ldf@westlancls.gov.uk
- 6.1.5 When the consultation period has finished, the Council will consider the responses that have been received, and may make changes to the Local Plan policies as a result. These changes will need to be subject to an updated SA. Any comments that are received on the SA report will also be considered, and reflected in the Final SA report, which will appraise the Publication Draft of the Local Plan. The Final SA report will be published for formal representations, alongside the Publication Draft Local Plan.