

The Role of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning in England

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of
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ABSTRACT

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The main aim of this thesis is to investigate how Sustainability Appraisal performed in Neighbourhood Planning in England. Neighbourhood Planning emerged in 2012 as a non-mandatory planning form, aiming to encourage communities to decide neighbourhood issues by themselves. Sustainability Appraisal of Neighbourhood Planning is not required if no significant impacts identified, but it still can be carried out to benefit the performance of Neighbourhood Planning.

In carrying out the study, 15 progressed Neighbourhood Plans that prepared Sustainability Appraisal have been investigated with an evaluation framework based on previous experience and characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning. For each case, the Sustainability Appraisal Report and Examiner's Report have been analysed. Moreover, 12 semi-structured interviews have been undertaken, including nine interviews of members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups, and three interviews of relevant experts and scholars.

The thesis discussed how to systematically establish an evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal. Based on the evaluation framework established in this research, the results showed that the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning is uneven in different cases. There are many factors could influence the result and they generally follow an influence chain. Planning skill capacity and neighbourhood context both could influence the quality of Sustainability Appraisal. The quality of Sustainability Appraisal was proved have close linkages with the effectiveness aspects which can directly influence the performance of Neighbourhood Planning. Three prominent dilemmas about the implementation of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning and possible recommendations were also discussed in this thesis, suggesting that voluntary Sustainability Appraisal might be better than compulsory; the Sustainability Appraisal could be simply or comprehensive depending on different contexts and needs; and if financial support is sufficient, to commission a consultant can be benefit, but Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups should hold the leading position and positively participant in the planning process.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CPRE	Campaign to Protect Rural England
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DEFRA	Department for Environmental, Food & Rural Affairs
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
IAIA	International Association for Impact Assessment
NP	Neighbourhood Planning
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAS	Planning Advisory Service
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate the role of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning in England. In the first chapter, backgrounds of this research will be introduced, including a general introduction of Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal, as well as current research problems. Then, the possible contributions of this research were discussed. And some fundamental issues, such as ontology, epistemology and methodology were discussed. Finally, the aim and objectives and the structure of this research were also introduced at the end of this chapter.

1.1.1 New research scope

Neighbourhood Planning was originally introduced in the UK through the Localism Act 2011 (DCLG, 2011a) which formally came into force in April 2012 (DCLG, 2012c), putting in place planning policies for the future development and growth. David Cameron (2010, p. 1) said: ‘a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control’ and Greg Clark MP said: ‘for too long people have felt alienated from the planning process and have had little influence over changes to their area. Neighbourhood Planning will help reverse that by putting communities at the heart of shaping developing in their area’ (DCLG, 2011d, p. 2).

Following such decentralisation principles, Neighbourhood Planning gives communities ‘direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They can choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead’ (DCLG, 2014b, p. 1).

In this sense, Neighbourhood Planning can provide a great opportunity for local communities to have more influence on how the places in which they live and work will change over time. Their local knowledge and sense of what needs to be protected and what needs to be changed can make a difference (CPRE, 2012). According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2014b) Neighbourhood Planning is not a legal requirement but a right that communities can choose.

Greg Clark argued in an announcement: ‘the large number of communities, eager to trial neighbourhood planning proves that localism and growth do go hand in hand. By giving local people, a greater say and incentives to benefit from growth, communities will start to welcome development rather than resist it’ (DCLG, 2011d, p. 2). That indicated Neighbourhood Planning was attractive at least at an initial stage. Although it is not compulsory, by September 2014 at the beginning of this research, there were approximately 1000 Neighbourhood Planning exercises underway and 29 had passed the referendum (DCLG, 2014c). And at the present (March, 2016), there are 1680 Neighbourhood Planning exercises and 162 have passed the referendum.

1.1.2 Current research problems

Alongside the development of Neighbourhood Planning, some problems have emerged, but as yet very few studies have been published in terms of Neighbourhood Planning implementation. Currently, governmental guidance mainly focuses on explaining fundamental questions, such as what is Neighbourhood Planning and how to produce a Neighbourhood Plan (CPRE, 2012; DCLG, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), and scholars’ contributions have been mainly focused on democracy, legitimacy, and procedural issues in Neighbourhood Planning (Parker, et al., 2015; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015).

Moreover, within the current research, the role of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning has been largely neglected (PAS, 2013a; Therivel, 2011). Because Sustainability Appraisal is not an obligation for most Neighbourhood Plans, some neighbourhood communities treat it as a burden and refuse to undertake it. However, it has been suggested that Sustainability Appraisal should not be used as merely an environmental assessment tool to meet relevant sustainability requirements, but it could play important role in guiding planning processes as well (OECD, 2006). From this perspective, Sustainability Appraisal should not be treated as a burden but an opportunity for Neighbourhood Planning.

Potential benefits of Sustainability Appraisal have been shown in Local Plans (Therivel & Fischer, 2012). Correspondently, in Neighbourhood Plans those benefits might also be available, although the form of Sustainability Appraisal may need to be different since Neighbourhood Planning has intrinsic characteristics that could be different from Local Plans.

1.1.3 Contribution of this research

This research, therefore, concentrated on the question what is the role of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning in England. The contribution of this research could be, at first, to provide empirical studies of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning since it will employ cases studies to investigate Neighbourhood Planning performance. Although most Neighbourhood Planning cases are at very early stages, some frontrunners have made progress and achieved a lot. That is the empirical study this research is based on. According to Parker (2015) empirical research on Neighbourhood Planning has been limited, this research could therefore add be meaningfully in this area.

Before case selection, it is necessary to establish a possible evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning since this is a new research area and previous evaluation frameworks may be unsuitable in this arena. The evaluation framework will include traditional criteria related to Sustainability Appraisal and new distinctive characteristics reflect in Neighbourhood Planning. This is an innovation as it will be the first time to build an evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

Finally, this research will expand current study of Sustainability Appraisal by combining it with Neighbourhood Planning (see Figure 1.1). As there has been little research published relating to this research topic so far, this one could be a pioneer. In this sense, obstacles of this research may also significant, e.g. a lack of research cases and relevant research experience.

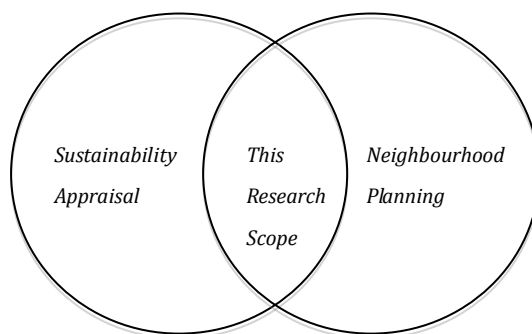


Figure 1.1 The Research Scope of This Thesis

Source: Author

1.2 Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

A research paradigm is ‘the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed’ (Kuhn, 1962, p. 16). According to Guba (1990), research paradigms can be characterised through their

ontology (What is reality?), epistemology (How do you know something?) and methodology (How do you go about finding it out?).

In detail, ontology is the question about ‘what is the nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social ‘reality’ that I wish to investigate’ (Mason, 2002, p. 14)? Or generally what is ‘out there’ to know? How does it exist (Grix, 2004)? Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, which concerns ‘the principles and rules by which you decide whether and how social phenomena can be known, and how knowledge can be demonstrated’ (Mason, 2002, p. 16).

There are different paradigms, but it is more like constructivist/interpretive in this research (see Table 1.1). This research aims to investigate the role of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning in England. The ‘role’ itself is a qualitative term for it needs interpretation. It is more like a judgement or conclusion rather than a solid reality waiting to be discovered. In this sense, to judge the role Sustainability Appraisal played in Neighbourhood Planning should rely on an evaluation method. In this research, drawing on previous experience, the usual approach is to employ an evaluation framework to systematically evaluate various indicators.

There is not only one case in this research as more than 1000 Neighbourhood Plans are undertaking. Each case might reflect different results, and there is no single reality or truth. This implies the investigation can only be carried out based on individual cases. Each of those has a ‘reality’, and the sum conclude a holistic picture of this research. Theoretically, to involve more case means more accurate results. However, in reality, the usual way is to selected sample cased to represent the holistic situation.

Table 1.1 Common Research Paradigms

Paradigm	Ontology (What is reality)	Epistemology (How can I know reality)	Methodology (How do you go about finding out?)	Method (What techniques do you use to find out?)
Positivism	There is a single reality or truth (more realist)	Reality can be measured and hence the focus is on reliable and valid tools to obtain that	Experimental research survey research	Usually quantitative, could include: sampling, measurement and scaling, statistical analysis, questionnaire
Constructivist / interpretive	There is no single reality or truth. Reality is created by individuals in groups (less realist)	Reality needs to be interpreted. It is used to discover the underlying meaning of events and activates	Ethnography grounded theory, phenomenological research, Action Research, Discourse Analysis, Standpoint research etc.	Usually qualitative, could include: Qualitative interview, Observation, Participant, Case study, Life history etc.
Pragmatism	Reality is constantly renegotiated, debated interpreted in light of its usefulness in new unpredictable situations	The best method is one that solves problems. Finding out is the means, change is the underlying aim	Mixed methods, design-based research, action research	Combination of any of the above and more, such as data mining expert review, usability testing, physical prototype
Subjectivism	Reality is what we perceive to be real	All knowledge is purely a matter of perspective	Discourse theory, archeology, genealogy, deconstruction etc.	Auto ethnography, semiotics, literary analysis, pastiche, intersexuality etc.
Critical	Realities are socially constructed entities that are under constant internal influence	Reality and knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society	Critical discourse analysis, critical ethnography action research ideology critique	Ideological review, civil actions, open-ended interviews, focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, open-ended observations, and journal.

Source: Adapted from Crotty (1998)

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The overall aim and associated objectives of this research are set out below:

Aim: To evaluate the role of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning in England

Objectives:

1 To investigate systematic approaches to establishing evaluation frameworks for environmental assessments, and develop an evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning;

2 To evaluate the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning;

3 To identify key factors influencing the performance of Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning;

4 To recommend possible ways to improve Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

The Table 1.2 below presents key issues for each objective.

Table 1.2 Key Issues for Each Objective

Objectives	Key issues for each objective
1. To investigate systematic approaches to establishing evaluation frameworks for environmental assessments, and develop an evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning	1.1 What are the concept and key components of an evaluation framework for an environmental assessment? 1.2 What is the previous experience for an evaluation framework? 1.3 How to establish a possible evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning?
2. To evaluate the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning	2.1 What are the implementation situations of the quality aspects of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning? 2.2 What are the implementation situations of the effectiveness aspects of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning?
3. To identify key factors influencing the performance of Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning	3.1 What are the key factors influencing the quality and effectiveness aspects of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning? 3.2 What is the relationship between aspects and effectiveness aspects of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning?
4. To recommend possible ways to improve Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.	4.1 What are the main issues influencing the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning? 4.2 What are the possible ways to improve the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning?

Source: Author

1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

To fulfil the four research objectives, this thesis involves five main research stages (namely introduction, literature review, research design, data analysis and conclusion) and eight chapters. The first chapter is introduction chapter, and the following Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are literature review chapters. From Chapter 4, the objectives are linked. Chapter 4 relates to Objective one, Chapter 6 relates to Objective 2, Chapter 7 relates to Objective 3 and the final chapter relates to Objective 4 (see Figure 1.2).

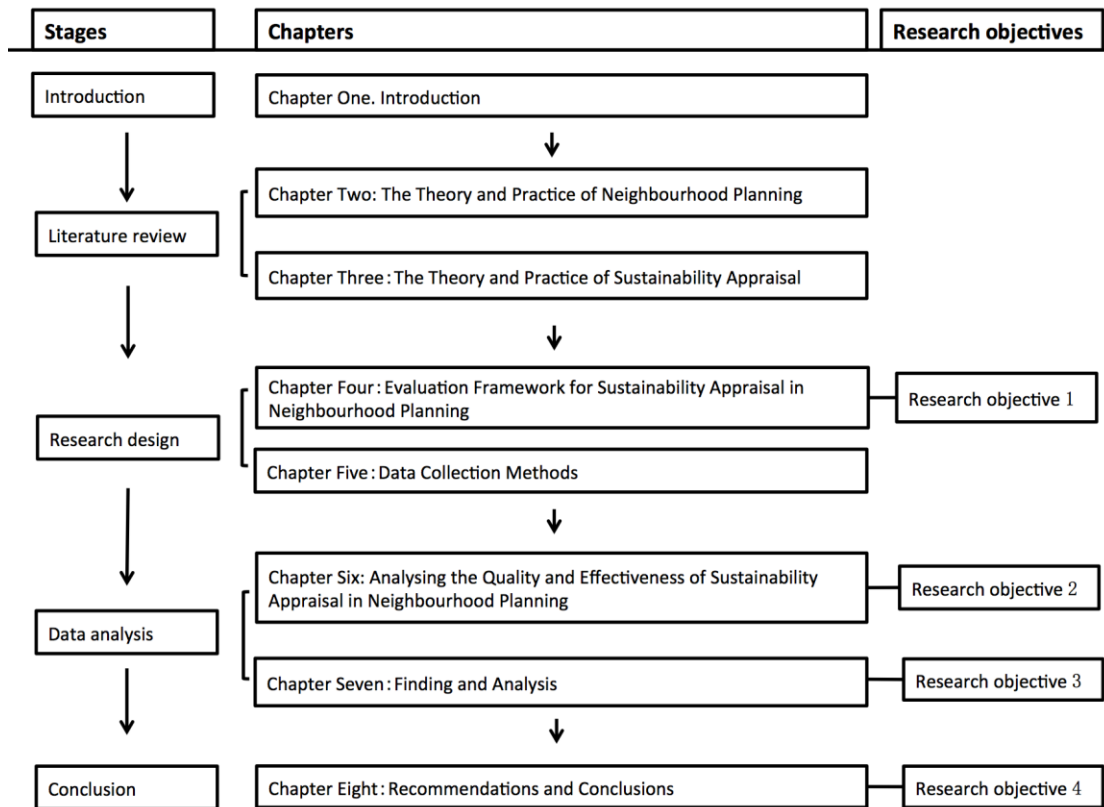


Figure 1.2 The Structure of the Thesis

Source: Author

The first chapter introduces the research background, ontology, epistemology and thesis structure. All these are fundamental issues, and need to be discussed at the onset. The second and third chapters are literature review chapters. Neighbourhood Planning is introduced in chapter 2, including Neighbourhood Planning theory, institutional arrangements, implementation and characteristics. Chapter 3 relates to Sustainability Appraisal, including its concept and implementation, as well as a discussion of previous evaluation frameworks. Chapter 4 designs a possible way to carry out this research. An evaluation framework is necessary for investigating Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. To establish the evaluation framework, previous experiences, though derived from other implementation contexts, could still contribute significantly. Moreover, the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning need to be factored in. Chapter 5 discusses the research methodology,

including data collection methods and data sources. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 relate to the findings of this research. In this research, both quality and effectiveness aspects of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning are investigated and presented in Chapter six. Then prominent findings are discussed in Chapter 7. Finally, Chapter 8 makes conclusions and recommendations based on the findings. Here the limitations of this research are discussed and further study objectives are set out.

CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

2.1 Introduction

Greg Clark, the UK's Decentralisation Minister, indicated that the new coalition government was attempting 'to reverse more than 100 years of centralisation, returning power back to citizens, communities and local groups' (DCLG, 2012a, p. 1). The 2011 Localism Act, which came into force in 2012, gave community groups a range of new powers related to Neighbourhood Planning. However, it was not the first attempt by a UK government to 'disperse power more widely in Britain' (Cabinet Office, 2010, p.7) or to 'make the planning system more democratic and more effective' (DCLG, 2011c, p. 4). For at least two decades prior to 2012 various governments had proclaimed their aspirations to put power closer to the people (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012). In relation to planning, previous community-led approaches to planning, including Parish Planning and Village Design Statements, had been applied since the 1990s. Equally there has been a significant tranche of reforms introduced by the previous Labour government in 2004, which claimed to place 'active participation... at the heart of the planning process' (ODPM, 2004, p. 8). Nevertheless, the new coalition government did not think the 2004 reforms were effective enough, choosing to introduce new legislation, continuing the trend in which the English planning system finds itself in a constant 'state of flux' (Gunn & Vigar, 2012, p. 534).

Neighbourhood Planning is one of the two core components (Sustainability Appraisal is the other) in this research. It provides the cornerstone for analysis of Sustainability Appraisal in this new arena of planning activity. Being an emerging planning form, only a few Neighbourhood Planning cases have been advanced to date and there is limited empirical research (Parker et al., 2015). However, since the 2011 Localism Act (DCLG, 2011b), there has been almost five years of implementation of Neighbourhood Planning in England. Although not an obligation for communities, Neighbourhood Planning powers have been taken up very enthusiastically in some areas and a review undertaken in 2014 revealed that over 1000 Neighbourhood

Planning exercises were on-going (DCLG, 2014c). The first five waves of 233 Neighbourhood Plans were granted frontrunner status by central government and were provided with a limited amount of financial support, and among this group, some have made considerable progress - the 2014 review indicated that 29 of them had been approved by the referendum stage (DCLG, 2014c).

Drawing on experience so far, an outline of Neighbourhood Planning implementation is provided in this chapter. Indeed, there is abundant information available on individual Neighbourhood Planning cases. However, to extract comparable information is not an easy task since they are in different development stages, and in very varied geographic areas and economic and social situations. A report by Turley (2014a) is one of the few studies to be published which analyses the breadth of Neighbourhood Plans, looking broadly across England at the estimated 75 draft Neighbourhood Plans that had been published by February 2014. Therefore, although it has been said that the report ‘set out to find something and did indeed find it’, it remains ‘a useful source of evidence’ (Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015, p. 597). Another study employed more cases and concerned a more comprehensive set of issues than Turley’s, using a sample of 120 Neighbourhood Planning groups and six focus groups for the research analysis (see Parker et al., 2014).

In addition to these overview studies a number other of researchers have also engaged in early investigations and reflections on Neighbourhood Planning experience to date, including Gavin Parker, John Sturzaker, Simin Davoudi, Duncan Bowie, etc. (see Davoudi & Cowie, 2013; Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013; Hall, 2011; Parker et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2014; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015; Sutcliffe & Holt, 2011). For example Parker published a series of papers on Neighbourhood Planning, summarising experiences and lessons of early Neighbourhood Planning cases both for theory and practice (see Parker, 2012, 2014; Parker et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2014; Parker & Murray, 2012; Parker & Street, 2014; Parker & Woodend, 2014); Sturzaker and Shaw (2015) used Upper Eden as single-case study providing an in-depth analysis

of Neighbourhood Planning implementation; and Davoudi and Cowie (2013) also investigated one case to develop an understanding of Neighbourhood Planning practice.

This chapter utilises this body of work together with literature from governmental sources to provide a position statement on early experience of Neighbourhood Planning in England. The chapter includes three main components: firstly, the structure of Neighbourhood Planning will be introduced, including Neighbourhood Planning components, Neighbourhood Planning qualifying bodies and Neighbourhood Planning implementation stages; then, the implementation situation of Neighbourhood Planning and related theoretical research will be summarised; finally, in drawing upon the literature produced so far, key aspects of Neighbourhood Planning and its connection to Sustainability Appraisal will be discussed.

2.2 Neighbourhood Planning Structure

2.2.1 Components of Neighbourhood Planning

According to government guidance Neighbourhood Planning encompasses three components: the Neighbourhood Plan; the Neighbourhood Development Order; and Community Right to Build Order (DCLG, 2011a, 2012b). In the implementation, for these community rights, the Neighbourhood Plan appears to be most prominent but it should be noted that the Neighbourhood Development Order and Community Right to Build Order can be applied independently in an area with or without a Neighbourhood Plan.

Neighbourhood Plan

‘A Neighbourhood (Development) Plan is about the use and development of land and may contain a vision, aims, planning policies, proposals for improving the area or

providing new facilities, or allocation of key sites for specific kinds of development' (Locality, 2012a, p. 4) ('Locality' is an organisation of DCLG, aiming to promote localism). Among the three components of Neighbourhood Planning, the Neighbourhood Plan seems the most important one (see Kaszynska et al., 2012; Ludwig & Ludwig, 2014; Moore, 2014; Parker, 2012). It is a community-led framework for guiding the future regeneration, development and conservation in the neighbourhood area (Colenutt, 2012; Parker, 2012; Wilson, 2012).

A Neighbourhood Plan aims at producing planning policies for the use of land in a neighbourhood, for example guiding where new houses should be built; their appearance and how many houses can be constructed (DCLG, 2011d). Moreover a Neighbourhood Plan may involve a wide range of environmental, economic and social issues or it might concentrate on just one or two issues (Locality, 2014). Therefore, a Neighbourhood Plan does not need to include every planning issue. The plan can be general or detailed. Those involved in making plan can determine the content based on the material conditions faced by their community and their judgment. The timeframe for a Neighbourhood Plan could be 5, 10, or 20 years and again this is a decision for the community (DCLG, 2011a, 2011b; Locality, 2012a).

Having indicated the scope for flexibility in the content of Neighbourhood Development Plans, it should be noticed that Neighbourhood Plans are required to be in accordance with plans and frameworks higher up in the planning hierarchy (DCLG, 2011a, 2012b, 2012c) i.e. the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at the national level, and the Local Development Plan at the local level. In this sense, a Neighbourhood Development Plan should not promote less development than that required in the Local Development Plan (i.e. housing allocations) (Locality, 2012a), whilst it can promote greater growth levels. Furthermore, it can set out policies about how development should be orientated, located and designed.

Neighbourhood Plans are still in the preparation stage in most of the designated

neighbourhoods. Up to September 2014, approximately 1,000 communities had taken the first steps in Neighbourhood Development Plan preparation; 80 draft plans had been submitted for consultation; while 28 had passed the community referendum stage (DCLG, 2014c).

Neighbourhood Development Order

A Neighbourhood Development Order removes the requirement for a planning application to be submitted to the local authority, since it grants planning permission for development that conforms with the order (DCLG, 2011d). A Neighbourhood Development Order allows planning permission for specific types of development in a specific area (it could be for the whole of or just for a part of a neighbourhood area), and it therefore can apply to specific sites or a wider geographic area; The orders allow a particular type or types of development and grant planning permission outright or subject to conditions. For instance, in historic areas, it could allow missing historical features such as front boundary walls to be reinstated or it might allow things like enhancements to shop fronts or extensions to houses or other buildings (Locality, 2012a). Additionally, the development types included under the order encompass building operations, material changes of land use and buildings, and engineering operations.

Community Right to Build Order

The Community Right to Build Order can be applied to grant planning permission for small-scale and site-specific development (DCLG, 2014a). Therefore it can be understood as a special kind of Neighbourhood Development Order, granting planning permission for development schemes.

It is set out that a Community Right to Build Order will mainly be used for approving the building of homes, businesses, shops, affordable housing, playgrounds or community facilities. Importantly, the Community Right to Build Order only applies

to development by community organisations that meet certain conditions or by town and parish councils. Where a community organisation is willing to develop the land itself, then the resulting assets have to be disposed of, improved or developed in a way which benefits the community or a section of it (DCLG, 2014b). Moreover, according to paragraphs 11 and 12 of Schedule 4C to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and Part 7 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended), a Community Right to Build Order can be used to develop affordable housing which offers certain legislative rights to tenants such as long leases to buy their freehold and the right given to qualifying tenants to obtain social housing (DCLG, 2014b).

2.2.2 Neighbourhood Planning qualifying bodies

Three sorts of organisations, referred to as ‘qualifying bodies’, might lead the preparation of Neighbourhood Planning. According to the Localism Act 2011 and Neighbourhood Planning Regulation 2012, a qualifying body could be a parish or town council; a neighbourhood forum; or a community organisation (DCLG, 2011a, 2012c).

Town or Parish Council

According to Turley (2014a) approximately 91% of draft plans have been prepared by Town or Parish Councils. Town or Parish Councils are among those bodies that qualify for producing a Neighbourhood Plan and as most designated Neighbourhood Planning areas encompass all or part of the administrative district of a town or parish council, it is evident that to date most neighbourhood plans have been prepared by existing community bodies (DCLG, 2014b).

Where a Town or Parish Council leads the preparation of a Neighbourhood Development Plan, it has to involve other members of the community who are

affected by or are interested in the plan. There is a requirement to involve local residents in the plan-making processes. The Neighbourhood Planning regulations also require that the formal functions of any group or body involved in Neighbourhood Planning, and their relationship with the leading Town or Parish Council must be made transparent to the wider public. For example, if a Neighbourhood Planning steering group or formal sub-committee of the Town or Parish Council are established the terms of reference for a steering group or other body have to be available to the public (DCLG, 2014b).

Neighbourhood Forum

Many parts of England, however, do not have an established system of Town and Parish Councils. If there is a wish to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan in such areas, an approach to designate a Neighbourhood Forum can be made.

A designated Neighbourhood Forum is a group or organisation which is empowered by government to lead the Neighbourhood Planning process. Here the process of Neighbourhood Planning is much more complex as it requires the constitution and organisation of a new Neighbourhood Forum as well as the challenges of navigating the Neighbourhood Planning process.

For an organisation or body to apply to become a designated Neighbourhood Forum the basic requirement is that it must include a minimum of 21 individuals who must live in the neighbourhood area, work there, or be an elected member for a local authority that includes all or part of the neighbourhood area. Furthermore, the application should explain how the proposed Neighbourhood Forum meets the conditions contained in section 61F (5) of the 1990 Act (DCLG, 2012c). The requirements to establish a Neighbourhood Forum are as follows (Locality, 2012a, p. 11):

- . It must be set up with express purpose of encouraging the social, economic and environmental welfare of an area that consists of or contains the neighbourhood area concerned
- . It must include purpose that reflects the features of the area in general terms
- . Its membership must be open to people living and working in the area, and elected members for the area
- . It must comprise at least 21 members from above groups
- . It must comprise membership drawn from different places in the area and different sections of the community.

Community Organisations

Other Community Organisations are not able to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. However they may still participate in wider Neighbourhood Planning through the Community Right to Build Order if it meets the conditions stated in relevant policies (DCLG, 2004b, 2012c). A Community Organisation does not require to be designated by the local authority, for this limited role in Neighbourhood Planning. However, the local planning authority has to assess whether the organisation is in conformity with the legal requirements of a Community Organisation when a Community Right to Build Order proposal is submitted to it (DCLG, 2014b). Usually, a Community Organisation should be a body that meets basic membership requirements. For example, its constitution has to allow neighbourhood residents to become voting members and have the majority of voting rights; it also should ensure that assets of the Community Organisation could only be disposed of, or used for the profit of the community.

2.2.3 Key stages in Neighbourhood Planning

Designating a Neighbourhood Area

Although, before this stage, a community group has much to consider, such as the aspirations and issues a Neighbourhood Plan could cover, the first formal step in producing a Neighbourhood Plan is to designate a Neighbourhood Area. This is a fundamental step as work on a Neighbourhood Development Plan can only commence formally when the Neighbourhood Area has been designated by the local authority (Locality, 2012a). Once the Neighbourhood Area is designated, the Parish/Town Council or Neighbourhood Forum can formally begin the plan.

With their designation application to their local authorities groups must provide a statement demonstrating why the proposed Neighbourhood Area is appropriate (DCLG, 2011b, 2012c). According to section 61G(2) and Schedule 4C(5)(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Act, a local planning authority should take this statement into account when approving designation. If an application is considered inappropriate, the local planning authority has the right to refuse the designation. However, if it does so, acceptable reasons should be given and there is still an opportunity to re-submit an improved application. This might be a time-consuming and resource-wasting process. Therefore, before submitting a formal application, it is recommended that community groups consult the local planning authority to ensure the application is sound (DCLG, 2014b).

From the above discussion it is evident that there are two types of groups with the right to lead a Neighbourhood Plan, i.e., a Town or Parish Council or a Neighbourhood Forum. In terms of Neighbourhood Area designation, a Town or Parish Council may find the designation process easier. A Town or Parish Council can use its existing administrative boundaries to determine the Neighbourhood Area, as is suggested by Locality (2012a, p. 17): ‘For town or parish councils, there is a

strong presumption that the Neighbourhood Area will be the same as the parish boundary'. According to 61G(4) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, in a parished area a local planning authority is obliged to 'have regard to the desirability of designating the whole of the area of a parish or town council as a Neighbourhood Area'. However, if material considerations suggest otherwise, the Neighbourhood Area could be smaller or bigger than the existing town or parish boundary. Where only a part of a Parish or Town Council's area is proposed for designation as a Neighbourhood Area, it is crucial to provide adequate reasons for this. On the other hand, a Neighbourhood Area also can extend beyond a single Town or Parish Council's boundaries, and involve co-operation among different Town or Parish councils. Again if this is the case reasons must be provided (DCLG, 2014b).

Deciding on the Neighbourhood Area boundary could be fairly challenging in non-parished areas (Locality, 2012a). Here those wishing to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan might use their knowledge of the geography and character of the neighbourhood to set boundaries (DCLG, 2014b). Normally a Neighbourhood Area will be designated prior to the formal designation of a Neighbourhood Forum. Although there is no legislative reason why they cannot be applied for at the same time, if the Neighbourhood Area is revised through further assessment processes, the membership of the Neighbourhood Forum might also need to be re-considered and a revised application for the designation submitted.

A Neighbourhood Forum can be established for any Neighbourhood Area, which could be large or small. According to DCLG (2014b) there are, however, some considerations that need to be taken into account in deciding a Neighbourhood Area, these can include: village or settlement boundaries; the catchment area for walking to local services (i.e. shops, primary schools, doctors' surgery, parks or other facilities); the physical appearance or features of the neighbourhood; the area where formal or informal networks of community based groups operate; whether the area forms all or part of a coherent estate either for businesses or residents; the natural characters of an

area; whether the area is entirely or predominantly a business area; whether infrastructures outline a natural boundary; and the size of the population in the area.

Inevitably, some contradictions might emerge in deciding a Neighbourhood Area. For instance, two or more applications might compete for one designated area. It should be noted, there can be only one Neighbourhood Area for each Neighbourhood Plan and only one Neighbourhood Plan for each Neighbourhood Area (Locality, 2012a). If a prospective Neighbourhood Area might overlap with another, the Local Planning Authority should encourage the competing forums to work together as a single Neighbourhood Forum. Nonetheless, the prospective Neighbourhood Forums may not agree to be combined. In this case, the Local Planning Authority should evaluate each forum application against the conditions for designation set out in relevant regulations and where appropriate designate them as separate Neighbourhood Areas (DCLG, 2011b, 2012c). This is also as set out in the Neighbourhood Planning Roadmap Guidance (Locality, 2012a, p. 10) which states the: ‘Solution could be to amend the Neighbourhood Area boundaries to create two separate and distinctive areas with no overlap, or for the prospective Neighbourhood Forums to merge into one prospective forum and to propose a Neighbourhood Area they can agree on’.

It is also possible for Neighbourhood Areas to cross-administrative boundaries, and in this case, the area application should be made to each of the local planning authorities that have part of its administrative area within the Neighbourhood Area. Groups involved i.e. a Town or Parish council, and prospective Neighbourhood Forum, should put forward the Neighbourhood Area if it is considered as a sound one. Additionally, where a Neighbourhood Area crosses the administrative boundaries of two or more local planning authorities, one of them can be a lead authority, if agreed by others, to handle Neighbourhood Planning in a specific Neighbourhood Area. This approach is supposed to simplify the planning process, minimise the duplication of work and provide opportunities for resources sharing (DCLG, 2014b).

Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan

According to relevant Neighbourhood Planning guidance (CPRE, 2012; Locality, 2012b; PAS, 2013b), prescribed documents should be submitted with a Neighbourhood Plan to demonstrate an appropriate evidence base. There is not a 'tick box' list to check the evidence available, but a Neighbourhood Plan needs to demonstrate that it is underpinned by robust evidence. The evidence is required to be drawn upon to illuminate the intention and rationale of policies included in the Neighbourhood Plan. Policies included in a Neighbourhood Plan are required to be concise, precise, explicit and clear. These should be written with adequate clarity for decision makers to use when determining planning applications, and based on sufficient evidence. The policies ought to reflect the unique character of the particular Neighbourhood Area.

Normally, there are two key issues that need to be considered in Neighbourhood Planning. The Neighbourhood Plan has the right to allocate sites for development, and it also may wish to consider what infrastructure needs to be delivered alongside the development of houses, offices or shops.

Allocating sites for development could be one of the main components of a Neighbourhood Plan. Here an appraisal of options and an evaluation of individual sites should be carried out by the qualifying body in line with clear criteria. If a Local Planning Authority and a Neighbourhood Planning qualifying body both intend to allocate sites in the same Neighbourhood Area then duplicate planning should be avoided and the local planning authority should work together with the qualifying body to coordinate the appraisal of the development in such cases.

If there is adequate evidence to indicate that a Neighbourhood Plan needs to allocate additional or alternative sites to those allocated in a Local Plan, a Neighbourhood Plan has the rights to apply such changes. However, according to the National

Planning Policy Framework a Neighbourhood Plan must support the strategic development demands set out in the Local Plan. In this sense, the Neighbourhood Plan should positively contribute to local development and cannot promote less development than require a within the Local Development Plan (see paragraph 16 and paragraph 184 of the National Planning Policy Framework). Therefore, Neighbourhood Plans can only promote development rather than constrain it. Section 38(5) of Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 demands that if there is policy conflict between a Neighbourhood Plan and a Local Plan, it has to be resolved in favour of the policy which is encompassed in the last document to form part of the development plan.

A Neighbourhood Plan may also contain policies for infrastructure planning in the Neighbourhood Area. The main considerations of neighbourhood infrastructure could be what infrastructure might be required to enable development proposed in a Neighbourhood Plan to be delivered in a sustainable way? How any additional infrastructure requirements might be delivered? What effect the infrastructure requirements may have on the viability of a proposal in a draft Neighbourhood Plan and therefore its delivery? What are the likely effects of proposed site allocation choices or policies on physical infrastructure and on the capacity of existing services which could shape decisions on the best site choices (DCLG, 2014b)?

Consulting on, and publicising, a Neighbourhood Plan

In the light of regulation 14 and regulation 21 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, a qualifying body is required to publicise a draft version of a Neighbourhood Plan for at least six weeks, as well as consult each of the relevant consultation bodies whose interests might be influenced by the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

The consultation bodies are set out in Schedule 1 to the Neighbourhood Planning

(General) Regulations 2012 (as amended). Normally, the consultation bodies include the Local Authority, the Home and Community Agency, Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Historic England. These are considered to be very important consultation bodies. In addition, other public bodies, the development industry and landowners should all be participants in producing a Neighbourhood Plan.

A qualifying body must make sure that the draft Neighbourhood Plan also conforms to any specific publicity and consultation requirements set out in relevant legislation. The most relevant legislations for Neighbourhood Planning might be the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended); the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) and the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (as amended)).

Submitting a Neighbourhood Plan to a Local Planning Authority

Before formally submitting the plan for independent examination, a draft Neighbourhood Plan should be submitted to the local planning authority for them to check if it is contrary to the relevant statutory requirements. Only if the local planning authority can satisfy itself about this can the Plan move forward to independent examination.

Alongside the Neighbourhood Development Plan, a basic condition statement is normally required, although it is not required to consider whether the draft plan satisfies the basic conditions. But after the independent examination and the examiner's report have been received, the local planning authority should formally consider whether the draft plan meets the basic conditions. Comments of the local planning authority are required in this stage and the qualifying body can follow them to improve the neighbourhood plan before final submission.

Where a draft Neighbourhood Plan submitted to a Local Planning Authority is considered sound, the Local Planning Authority has to publicise it for at least six weeks, invite representations, notify any consultation bodies referred to in the consultation statement and submit the draft plan to independent examination (see regulations 16, 17, 23 and 24 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended)).

Independent Examination

The local authority should appoint a qualified and experienced person to hold an independent examination of a draft Neighbourhood Plan who is referred to as an ‘independent examiner’. The main role of the independent examiner is to test whether or not a Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions, as well as other issues set out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). According to Locality (2012a), the independent examiner will be considering whether the Neighbourhood Plan: has proper regard to national policy; contributes to sustainable development; is in line with the strategic policies in the local development plan; is compatible with human rights requirements; and is in accordance with EU obligations.

Following the examination, the independent examiner should issue an examination report to the Local Planning Authority and the qualifying body (Town or Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum). If the Neighbourhood Plan is considered by the independent examiner to be appropriate and in accordance with basic conditions, then it should proceed to referendum. The examiner has to recommend the extent of the referendum area, and if the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood area, they must explain what they consider that this should be the case (DCLG, 2014b). If the plan does not meet the basic conditions, the examiner may suggest further modifications so that it meets the basic conditions before it can

proceed to the referendum (Locality, 2012a).

However, the examiner can announce that a Neighbourhood Plan does not meet the basic conditions and the obligation of local referendum. In this situation, it is crucial that local planning authorities, neighbourhood organisations, and local partners or stakeholders discuss possible solutions. According to Locality (2012a, p. 27) the options could be either to ‘abandon the plan’ or to ‘change it and then go through the process again, from the pre-submission 6-week consultation’.

Normally, the examination will not include a public hearing. If individuals wish to make their opinions known to the independent examiner, or wish to provide evidence, they will achieve this by submitting written representations to the local planning authority during the six-week statutory publicity period (DCLG, 2011b, 2012c).

The Neighbourhood Planning Referendum

If a Neighbourhood Plan is considered to be appropriate, a referendum should be arranged by the ‘relevant council’ (i.e. district councils; London boroughs; metropolitan district councils; and county councils in any area in England for which there is no district council). If the ‘relevant council’ is not the Local Planning Authority, they should work together to carry out a referendum as set out in regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendum) Regulations 2012 (as amended) (DCLG, 2012c).

A person is entitled to vote if at the time of the referendum, they live in the referendum area and meet the eligibility criteria to vote in a local election for the area. If the majority vote ‘yes’ in a referendum, then the Neighbourhood Plan must be made by the Local Planning Authority. Local Planning Authority should do this promptly following the announcement of the referendum result. If a majority of those who vote in a referendum do not agree with a draft Neighbourhood Plan, the Local

Planning Authority must decide whether the Neighbourhood Plan should be brought into force.

Additionally, this will be arranged 28 working days before the date of the referendum and the Local Planning Authority is obliged to publish information about the Neighbourhood Plan 25 working days before the referendum (Locality, 2012a).

2.3 Neighbourhood Planning Implementation

It can be seen from the above that Neighbourhood Planning is a complex process that might seem a little daunting for neighbourhood groups to engage with. By September 2014, around 1000 Neighbourhood Planning cases were being undertaken but most of these were still at a very early stage – there were only 29 cases had been approved in the referendum. However, the figure has dramatically increased within two years, according to the newest data, up to March 2016, 1680 Neighbourhood Plans had been undertaken with 162 referendum-approved cases (see Table 2.1). This indicates that there is discrepancy between different areas.

Table 2.1 Progress of Neighbourhood Plans (Number) (March 2016)

Stages	Designated	Pre-submission Consultation	Submitted for examination	Passed examination	Referendum	Passed referendum	Plan made
Number	1277	403	306	205	179	162	126

Source: Adapted from DCLG (2016)

Note: The number in each column calculated all Neighbourhood Planning cases that have achieved that stage.

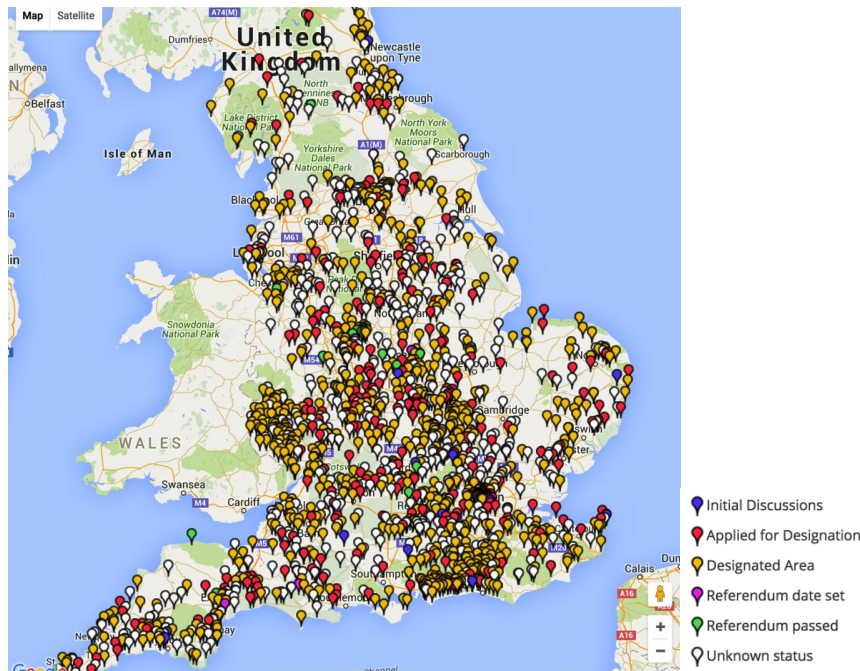


Figure 2.1 Existing Neighbourhood Plans in England (March, 2016)

Source: DCLG (2016)

Figure 2.1, demonstrated the geographic distribution of the 1680 Neighbourhood Plans in March 2016, emphasising a marked regional unevenness in Neighbourhood Planning experience at that time. Noting in particular that, there is an appreciable discrepancy between the North and South of England. Most of the cases distribute in the South while relatively fewer Neighbourhood Planning initiatives were being undertaken in the North. This discrepancy also has been mentioned by a Turley's (2014a) early survey with 75 Neighbourhood cases.

The reasons for the discrepancy have been discussed. One idea is that the people in Southern areas are generally richer than those in Northern areas, meaning that they have more resources and capacity to engage with Neighbourhood Planning activity (Turley, 2014a). The Turley Report also highlights that areas of below average affluence have so far been less involved in the Neighbourhood Planning processes, with just nine plans published in areas categorised as 'most deprived' (Turley, 2014a). Moreover, around two thirds of Neighbourhood Planning cases were located in rural areas while only one third were in urban areas. This distribution could be attributed to

the fact that around 86 per cent of England's landmass is rural (DEFRA, 2013b). It may also reflect the fact that Neighbourhood Planning is required to be produced by specific groups (which could be Neighbourhood Forum or Town/Parish Council). Neighbourhood Forums, must first nominate themselves to the Local Planning Authority, but in rural areas, the Neighbourhood Planning lead this is usually by default the existing Town/Parish Council (Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015). Finally, according to Sutcliffe and Holt (2011), in wealthier areas the proportion of people engaged in voluntary activity is higher than in poorer areas. Therefore, those participating in localism-type activities may fundamentally be 'well-meaning, well-educated people living in nice places – mostly rural – with time on their hands' (Hall, 2011, p. 60).

To sum up, the current picture is that Neighbourhood Planning is not occurring everywhere. Although there are around 1000 cases ongoing, most of these are located in the South and in relatively wealthy areas. The uneven spread of Neighbourhood Planning take up seems very significant in terms of implementation experience. However, it has to be acknowledged that Neighbourhood Planning implementation is a cumulative process and is still at an early stage. So, it is very early to draw any firm conclusions at this point.

2.4 Characterising Neighbourhood Planning Implementation

2.4.1 Introduction

From the above discussion of the legal context of Neighbourhood Planning and experience so far, it is apparent that Neighbourhood Planning might have some key characteristics that could significantly influence its implementation. Although these characteristics might still be unclear due to the limited cases and research undertaken so far, current research provides some useful information about what Neighbourhood Planning characteristics might be. Before paying attention to Neighbourhood Planning, Parker (2008) had a long-studied community-led planning and was able to

draw upon this understanding in approaching this new era of Neighbourhood Planning (Parker, 2012). In a series of papers (See Parker, 2012, 2014; Parker et al., 2015; Parker & Murray, 2012; Parker & Street, 2014; Parker & Woodend, 2014), Parker discussed several dominant issues in Neighbourhood Planning, including community engagement, priorities and resources, cooperation and joint working, diversity, inclusivity and quality of process, alternatives, support, and learning. Moreover, in their 2014 survey, data collection concentrated on gathering evidence about what issues and means were most pertinent to Neighbourhood Planning groups in terms of enabling and constraining successful plan making and across the stages of plan-making (Parker et al., 2014). Recently, Parker et al. (2015) focused on two points: user experiences of Neighbourhood Planning and developing the Neighbourhood Plan with others. Moreover, Sturzaker and Shaw (2015) also emphasised some issues pertinent to Neighbourhood Planning in practice, including attitudes of communities to development, capacity, legitimacy, participation, and decentralisation in planning.

Drawing upon these sources and other Neighbourhood Planning related literature, this section attempts to outline the key characteristics related in the early experience of Neighbourhood Planning that might be significant factors influencing Neighbourhood Planning implementation and the approach to Sustainability Appraisal within this process.

2.4.2 New tier in planning system

The English spatial planning system used to have three tiers set out in the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (DCLG, 2004b), including national, regional and local levels. The UK Government removed the regional level in 2012, and Neighbourhood Planning as a new planning level was added (DCLG, 2012c). Correspondently, the hierarchy of the English spatial planning system has changed with the neighbourhood level becoming the lowest planning level.

In this sense, the overall numbers of planning tiers did not change - it still has three layers, but some scholars have argued that the additional Neighbourhood tier 'did not fit the ethos of small state localism, making the planning system more complex and impenetrable' (Bailey & Pill, 2014, p. 160). However, other scholars considered Neighbourhood Planning an opportunity for the English planning system to realise the spirit of localism (Moore, 2014; Parker et al., 2015; Pemberton et al., 2014; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015; Turley, 2014b).

One characteristic is that the Neighbourhood Plan should be in conformity with higher-level policies and plans, including EU regulations, National Planning Policy Framework requirements, and Local Plan policies. It could be a tough challenge for communities as it is evident that 'Neighbourhood Planning clearly requires ... a good understanding of the planning system' (Parker, 2012, p. 11). Furthermore, some have argued that compulsory conformity could impair the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Planning (see Davoudi & Cowie, 2013; DEFRA, 2013c; Parker et al., 2015; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015) and residents 'may become disillusioned when they realise the limitations of Neighbourhood Development Plans', such as 'their need to conform with Local Development Frameworks and their limited opportunity to affect service delivery' (Bailey & Pill, 2014, p. 161). On the other hand, ideally the Neighbourhood Plan still needs a strategic planning context (i.e. a local plan) to be in place and 'there is some tension emerging over who and on what basis site allocations can be made in Neighbourhood Plans where a local plan is absent' (Parker, 2012, p. 11).

2.4.3 Non-mandatory

Because there is not a mandatory requirement to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan (DCLG, 2012c), before making a decision, a community should very carefully consider whether or not to carry it out. Even if a Neighbourhood Area has enough funding to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, some other issues still need to be

considered. The needs of local residents in some Neighbourhood Areas might have been encompassed in the Local Development Plan. If most local residents are satisfied by the policies of the Local Development Plan, there is no need to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan in those areas (Locality, 2012b). By contrast, if the Local Development Plan does not address the issues of concern to local people (e.g. some might like more developments that are not in the Local Plan, or some would like the plan to move more quickly), a Neighbourhood Plan might be seriously considered as a helpful instrument. To sum up, whether or not to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan depends to 'a significant extent on the adequacy of existing local policies contained in the Local Plan' (Locality, 2012a, p. 6).

There are also alternatives to a Neighbourhood Plan, including an Area Action Plan, Parish Plan, and Village Design Statement (DCLG, 2011a; Land Use Consultants, 2011; Locality, 2012a). The Area Action Plan would form part of the Local Plan so would have statutory status, and it would avoid the costs to the local authority associated with holding a public referendum (Parker, 2012). Nonetheless, they are led by the Local Planning Authority rather than by a Town/Parish council or Neighbourhood Forum, and there are different legal steps required. On the other hand, the Parish Plan and Village Design Statement would not have any statutory status, so might carry less weight. Locality (2012a, p. 14) suggested 'If you find your issues are 'big picture' ones such as the need for additional roads (such as a by-pass) or flood-related or to do with sustainability and urban design standards, then you may be better off trying to influence the higher level Local Plan'.

To sum up, the non-mandatory nature and alternatives to Neighbourhood Planning require local communities to think about benefits and costs before making a final decision. For instance, a community that has just completed a Parish Plan might wish to concentrate on delivery rather than put further investment in policy work. Certainly, they could still prepare a Neighbourhood Plan to put their ambitions on a statutory footing (Locality, 2012a).

2.4.4 Local relevance

Unlike the Local Plan which covers the whole area, a Neighbourhood Plan can be concentrated on the needs of the Neighbourhood and can allow the community to specify in more detail what they expect (Locality, 2012a). For instance, it could encompass more detail on issues like urban design, affordable housing, and preferred locations for housing and other development. Then, the Neighbourhood Plan could be considered as a 'simpler version' of a Local Development Plan (Parker, 2012).

2.4.5 Community-led plan

According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2012c), Neighbourhood Planning needs to be led by an authorised local community (i.e. mainly Town or Parish Council, or Neighbourhood Forum) rather than the local council's planning section. Wide public engagement is also required at different stages of Neighbourhood Planning - from the initial preparation to the public referendum stage to make sure a Neighbourhood Plan genuinely represents the range of wants and needs in the area. Public engagement from the beginning stage, before the plan's vision and aims are developed, is essential. The purpose is to identify key issues and themes and to inform the vision and aims. Ongoing community engagement can involve consultation on the draft plan and aims and also workshop events or discussions to examine detailed issues. Once a draft plan has been built, it must be subjected to further consultation. Local partners and other interested bodies in the Neighbourhood Area will have opportunities to comment on matters of detail; and the referendum requires a public vote to approve the plan (Locality, 2012a).

In spite of some concerns over co-option and the abuse of participation opportunities (Taylor, 2007), the fundamental assertion is that attempts to get the public engaged with and understanding the challenges and needs of society seems to be a good thing. So public engagement in planning needs to be encouraged but also need to be careful about keeping the motives and interests of communities in mind when designing such

tools to better encourage more inclusive planning within the parameters of sustainable development (Parker, 2012).

One critique to community-led planning was that it tended to provide a Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) charter, meaning local people are unlikely to support new housing if given the choice (Healey, 2010; O'Connor, 2010). This opposition to development is nothing new, and the term NIMBY is now in common use to categorise such opposition as reflecting self-interest (Clifford & Warren, 2005).

Since 'NIMBY' has been discussed for many years, there is no shortage of evidence to support the assertion that communities often oppose new housing development. The term NIMBYism in fact is very ambiguous and often used as a pejorative catchall to describe any and all opposition to development commonly perceived as being in the public interest (Wolsink, 2000, 2006). In order to understand what motivates people to oppose new development, specific types of motivations will be discussed, including the thinking that opposition could be treated as communities mobilising against the power of huge business (Lake, 1993); and the fundamental role that trust, or the lack of it, plays in determining responses to development (Margolis, 1996; Smith & Marquez, 2000). Therefore, besides a communities' self-interest, other factors also could be important, including a perceived duty to challenge inappropriate housing development and the so-called 'democratic deficit' in decision-making processes.

On the other hand, in the light of recent research, some suggest that more bottom-up or community-led planning could reduce opposition to housing development (Parker et al., 2010; Sturzaker, 2011a). Furthermore, Orme (2010) explained that local planning is a cauldron of self-interest and the culture of planning at local level is negative. Gallent and Robinson (2012) argued that communities coming forward with Neighbourhood Plans are more supportive of development than when part of local authority planning processes.

2.4.6 Inadequate planning capacity

The skills required in producing a Neighbourhood Plan encompass both ‘general skills’ and ‘specialist skills’ (Locality, 2012a, p. 6). General skills include e.g. organisational skills, project management skills, negotiation and communication, the capacity to engage a diverse range of bodies and to listen, capacity to co-operate and analytical skills. Specialist skills are potentially more difficult for non-planners, and include reading maps or plans, urban design, analysing data, leading regeneration and protecting heritage. (see Locality, 2012a). These sorts of specialist skills either could be internally provided by members of Neighbourhood Plan steering group or by the Local Planning Authority.

For some areas to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan it could be easier because they might have previous community-led planning experiences (such as Parish Plan or Village Design Statement), or might be well supported by the Local Planning Authority (Davoudi & Cowie, 2013; Parker et al., 2015). However, the reality might be that most of the Neighbourhood Steering Group members do not have the necessary planning experience or receive very limited assistance from the Local Planning Authority (Parker et al., 2014). Parker (2012, p. 11) sums up by arguing that ‘existing parish arrangements and past experience are very helpful for a head start, given that defining the neighbourhood for some areas may be quite problematic or sensitive’. One possible approach is that knowledge about how to carry out a Neighbourhood Plan can be obtained from various guidance documents and regulations (e.g. Burton, 2012; CPRE, 2012; Locality, 2012a, 2012b, 2014; PAS, 2013b; Therivel, 2011). In this way, specialist skills for Neighbourhood Planning might be improved, but it is a time-consuming and tough process for a Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group.

Alternatives it might be beneficial to bring in consultants or other outside support to assist in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (DEFRA, 2013a; Howell, 2013; Vigar et al.,

2012). Although consultants could also be employed in helping prepare Local Plans, the situation could be considerably different as the planning capacity of the Neighbourhood Steering Group members is normally inferior to that of the Local Planning Authority, outside professional skills support could be more significant for Neighbourhood Planning. Moreover, the cost of employing a consultant for Neighbourhood Planning also could be a tough problem that needs to be considered in advance. According to Locality (2012a, p. 47) to keep costs down, ‘the work required should be clearly defined and limited only to the tasks that cannot be done without such (external) support’.

2.4.7 Inadequate funding

Costs will be associated with preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, but the demands vary widely from less than £10,000 to several times this amount for larger plans. The local planning authority is required to cover some of the costs, including the costs of holding the independent examination and the referendum, while other costs will need to be covered by the Parish or Town Council or the Neighbourhood Forum preparing the plan (DCLG, 2012c). According to DEFRA (2013b) some of the frontrunner cases have been supported by Central Government with a small amount of money – from £5,000 to £10,000. Considering that to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan could cost more than £60,000 (Parker, 2012), the government support is minimal. Moreover, that government subsidy has ceased after the application of these frontrunners, which has made the financial situation much worse for most Neighbourhood Planning cases. According to a council officer in Bristol ‘how we balance our resources which are less than they were 18 months ago ... in the last financial year we spent more than £15,000 just on staff time’ (for neighbourhood planning) (Bailey & Pill, 2014, p. 157).

However, it seems unfair to blame the government. Neighbourhood Planning was being rolled out in a milieu of austerity (Parker, 2012) – planning budgets were

suffering cutbacks and there was reduced fee income for planning at that time (Bailey & Pill, 2014), but even at present, the economic situation of the UK is still far from optimistic. Locality (2012a) listed some possible sources of funding, including particular Neighbourhood Planning programmes, local authority contributions or income from fund-raising activities in Parish or Town Councils. Some developers, local businesses or landowners have expressed interest in helping with costs, particularly where they have an interest in land within the declared boundary (Parker, 2014). On the other hand, to prepare an estimated budget for the plan process and manage costs carefully could also be a possible way to solve funding problems (Locality, 2012a). These approaches may be helpful, but the effect so far is considered to be very limited (Parker, 2014).

The limited funding for Neighbourhood Planning could lead to deprived areas giving up the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. Some deprived Neighbourhood Areas could prepare Neighbourhood Plan in house to cut down expense, as discussed above, based on having sufficient planning experience in their Neighbourhood Steering Group. However, the situation might be that most areas are both lacking funding and planning experience (Bailey & Pill, 2014). According to Parker (2012, p. 14) ‘deprived areas will not engage with Neighbourhood Planning through a combination of inertia, lack of resources and skills, and a general cynicism about governmental programmes’.

2.4.8 Uneven requirements

As discussed above, the baseline situation in different Neighbourhood Areas could be considerably different, which might lead to uneven development levels of Neighbourhood Planning. A Neighbourhood Plan might be wide-ranging, or only focused on one or two issues. It could be very detailed, or merely set general principles for development. The scope and complexity of the plan may have significant implications in terms of time and cost (Parker, 2014). This could be

influenced by various factors, including what is already covered in the Local Plan, the nature of the area (for example economic conditions and population size) and the community's willingness and capacity (Locality, 2012a).

It is agreed by most scholars that early research on Neighbourhood Planning frontrunners indicates a mixed picture (see Bailey & Pill, 2014; DEFRA, 2013b; Parker, 2012; Parker & Street, 2014; Turley, 2014a). Some communities positively wanted to be proactive about Neighbourhood Planning in their area while some areas had found the process problematic. Some had been enthusiastic about the idea of having more control over planning and development, while some had either not understood, or had Neighbourhood Planning carefully explained early on, for example that the scope for influence is set within tight boundaries.

Generally, most neighbourhood cases are located in rural areas. One reason could be most places in England are rural areas; while another is that rural communities may find it more straightforward and advantageous to engage with Neighbourhood Planning. By contrast, in many urban areas, there are clearly a range of difficulties and obstacles, especially in where there is either a lack of developed capacity or demand for development (Parker, 2012). That view was reflected by Bailey and Pill (2014, p. 158) in a survey from a Westminster officer who commented that 'Neighbourhood Planning does work better in rural areas ... an existing parish council, a village with clear boundaries, many fewer applications ... fewer people' and: 'My feeling on all of this stuff is that it was designed for a village with two hundred people. And that's been the whole of the Localism Act. It was not designed for an urban context.'

To sum up, the unevenness revealed from the above highlights some problems, for instance the danger of a 'postcode lottery' in Neighbourhood Planning, worsened by socio-economic context. Argued by Parker (2012, p. 14), 'it cannot be right that

Neighbourhood Planning remains realistic only for those with deep pockets, or areas where an active and articulate group can already steer the community’.

2.4.9 Support is crucial

As already mentioned, communities might find it very hard to develop neighbourhood planning themselves. Support and advice is therefore crucial. This is both in terms of raising interest and understanding of planning issues, and also in technical and expert planning knowledge and understanding. Parker (2012) argued that such inputs would be prerequisites in the early period since it is so hard for neighbourhoods to steer the Neighbourhood Planning process totally on their own. As time passes, experience develops and is refined there will still need to be support but perhaps at a less intense pitch. Still it is clear that inadequately resourced local authorities might struggle to achieve their statutory duties here.

Despite possible external planning assistance (e.g. external consultants), the Local Planning Authority is legally required to advise or assist preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan in its area (DCLG, 2012a, 2012c). The Obligation to Support does not mean the giving of financial support to Neighbourhood Planning bodies, but the Local Planning Authorities are encouraged to do so (Locality, 2012a). Drawing from the lessons of the frontrunners, attitudes of different Local Planning Authorities appear to be significantly distinct on Neighbourhood Planning – ‘some were enthused, some skeptical, some downright opposed and with many just hanging back’ (Parker, 2012, p. 11). Local Planning Authorities had been generally supportive in the areas where frontrunners were working but not all Local Planning Authorities were ready, willing or able to support Neighbourhood Planning, or at least ‘they feel aggrieved that Neighbourhood Planning was being pushed hard’ (Parker, 2012, p. 11).

One reason for the reluctance of some Local Planning Authorities might be their willingness to retain control of the integrity and shape of the local plan. Part of this is

certainly related to the ‘culture of planning’ questions that are being frequently aired at the moment (Parker, 2012). Additionally, the previous relations between neighbourhoods and the Local Planning Authority also could exert strong influence – if their relations used to be bad, support from Local Planning Authority could be very limited (Turley, 2014a).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the theoretical foundation of Neighbourhood Planning, as well as its institutional structure, implementation and characteristics have been discussed (Table 2.2 summarises the characteristics).

Table 2.2 Characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning

Characteristics	Comments
New tier in planning system	Neighbourhood Plans should be in conformity with higher-level policies and plans.
Non-mandatory	As Neighbourhood Planning is non-mandatory, neighbourhoods can decide whether or not to prepare it.
Local relevant	A Neighbourhood Plan can be concentrated on the needs of the neighbourhood and can allow the community to specify in more detail what they expect.
Community-led	Neighbourhood Planning is a sort of community-led planning form, which require public involvement and should consider possible ‘NIMBY’
Inadequate planning capacity	For most Neighbourhood Planning cases, the planning capacity was very limited
Inadequate funding	Funding for some neighbourhood areas was very limited
Uneven requirements	The baseline situations in different Neighbourhood Areas are considerably different
Support is crucial	Local Planning Authority support to Neighbourhood Planning is crucial

Source: Author

Neighbourhood planning as an implementation form of Localism, showed the Government’s determination to decentralise its planning system (DCLG, 2011a). However, the institutional arrangements are rather disordered, leading to some community confusion and hesitation (Bailey & Pill, 2014; Farnsworth, 2012; Parker & Street, 2014). Up to present, most of the Neighbourhood Plans are still on going,

and not yet completed. All implementation experience of Neighbourhood Planning has so far only been drawn from progressed frontrunner cases, which may not represent an overall situation or predict future trends. Nonetheless, those pilot cases could still be helpful in characterising Neighbourhood Planning.

The characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning discussed in this chapter could therefore be very helpful in developing an evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. As with Neighbourhood Planning itself, Sustainability Appraisal will be influenced by its milieu, and may correspondingly need to have some new characteristics in the arena of Neighbourhood Planning compared with Sustainability Appraisal of local-level plans. Although assumptions rather than facts, those characteristics of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning could be vital for establishing a sound evaluation framework. Adding new indicators based on those characteristics may lead to more accuracy in evaluation results, since previous indicators used in Sustainability Assessment may not reflect emerging issues in the arena of Neighbourhood Planning.

CHPATER THREE: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is a key part of the literature review. Firstly, the terms ‘Sustainability Appraisal’ and ‘Sustainability Assessment’ should perhaps be distinguished - the former term is particularly used in the UK, and the latter refers to a general notion of kinds of impact assessment instruments. Additionally, other alternatives to ‘Sustainability Assessment’ also exist, including ‘Integrated Assessment’, and ‘Sustainability Impact Assessment’ (Bond et al., 2014). However, for consistency, in this research, the terminology ‘Sustainability Appraisal’ is used. Sustainability Appraisal can be broadly defined as any process that directs decision-making towards sustainability (Bond & Morrison-Saunders, 2011). This definition involves various potential forms of decision-making from choices of individuals in everyday life through to plans, projects, programmes or policies more familiarly addressed in the fields of impact assessment.

The application of Sustainability Appraisal in English Neighbourhood Planning is new and few studies have been published related to this topic (Therivel, 2011). However, Sustainability Appraisal has been implemented in other arenas for decades, and these previous experiences are a useful starting point for researching the use of Sustainability Appraisal in this new arena of planning activity. A search for the term ‘Sustainability Assessment’ in January 2012 on the Scopus database indicated that related publications increased sharply from 2004 and continuing growth was evident (see Figure 3.1).

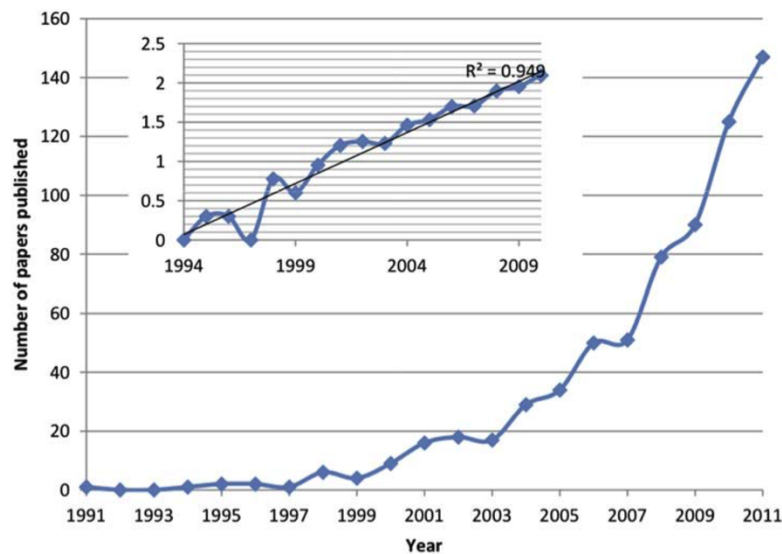


Figure 3.1 Number of Papers Published with the Phrase ‘Sustainability Assessment’ in the Article Title, Abstract or Keywords

Source: Bond et al. (2012, p. 54).

Today, there is a wealth of literature available pertinent to Sustainability Appraisal. Generally, the early papers on Sustainability Appraisal related to specific case studies rather than general practice or conceptual advancement of the field (see Sadler, 1999). Therefore, in this section, the theoretical concept of Sustainability Appraisal will be discussed; implementation in England will be reviewed; and the procedural stages of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Plan will be introduced.

3.2 Conceptualising Sustainability Appraisal

3.2.1 Introduction

Sustainability Appraisal has been called the third generation of Impact Assessment or Environmental Assessment, following Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (Sadler, 1999). According to Fischer (2003) the concept of Environmental Assessment was formulated initially based on the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in the USA. Before it emerged, consideration of environmental problems in strategic planning and project

decision-making took place in an incremental manner, meaning practice was to move away from problems rather than towards achieving objectives (Meyer & Miller, 1984). As a solution to this unsatisfactory situation, formal Environmental Assessment was introduced as a pro-active tool for addressing environmental consequences.

Environmental Assessment is rooted in rational planning theory, developed in the mid-1950s (see Meyerson & Banfield, 1955) and widely spread in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Faludi, 1973). Environmental Assessments reflect the search for rationality involving specific procedural stages that enable the environmental consequence of plans and programmes to be understood and adverse effects addressed (Fischer, 2003). In this sense, Environmental Assessment has frequently been perceived as a learning and negotiation process between multiple actors (Caldwell, 1982; Elliot, 1981).

Sustainability Appraisal shares the characteristics as a kind of Environmental Assessment, but unlike EIA or SEA, it also embodies principles of sustainable development (Bond et al., 2013; Bond et al., 2012; Dalal-Clayton & Sadler, 2010; DCLG, 2014d; Kidd & Fischer, 2007; Nicholson, 2005; PAS, 2010; Therivel et al., 2009; Therivel & Fischer, 2012). Sustainability Appraisal was introduced into the UK as an adapted version of the EU SEA Directive (Bartlett & Kurian, 1999; DCLG, 2004a; Gibson, 2005; Therivel & Brown, 1999; Therivel & Partidario, 2000), which embraced the wider concept of sustainable development and provided a mechanism to consider the balance between environment, society and economy (Partidario, 1996; Therivel et al., 2009; Therivel & Fischer, 2012; Wood & Djeddour, 1992). In this vein, to understand Sustainability Appraisal, the core principles of sustainable development and the development history from SEA to Sustainability Appraisal should be discussed.

3.2.2 Sustainable development

Many argue that the concept of sustainable development is ‘normative and cannot be defined singularly or categorically’ (Bond et al., 2012, p. 55). In this sense it can be concluded that the elements of sustainable development might vary according to context. It has been argued by Gibson (2005) that sustainable development is a moving target and there is ‘no state to be reached’. From this it is evident that the nature of sustainable development is complex and uncertain. With this important caveat as a starting point – this section attempts to present a general history and principles of sustainable development but acknowledge that Sustainability Appraisal processes should accommodate precaution and adaptation based upon being flexible, expecting to learn and to anticipate surprises (Gibson 2006).

History of sustainable development

Even in ancient times, people began to notice that uncontrolled development could cause catastrophic results and maintaining continuous gains was an optimum choice. However this history of human civilization reveals repeated recognition that the pursuit of monetary benefits was often linked to significant environmental degradation. Into this milieu, the modern concept of sustainable development was introduced as a possible solution to such problems (Cullingworth et al., 2014).

Sustainable development as a broad idea was first mentioned in the early 1970s, following two decades of significant environmental deterioration and growing concern about resource shortages linked to patterns of human development (Meadows et al., 1972). As a response to these deepening worries about environmental deterioration and climate change, the United Nations, at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, proposed a solution to reconcile environmental protection with promoting wellbeing for the world’s poor. Ward and Dubos (1972) recommended the term ‘sustainable development’ in their book linked to the

conference. Nonetheless, sustainable development at that time was just a formative idea. It was lacking in details and guidance on implementation.

Also in the year of 1972, the Club of Rome launched the findings of a computer project to predict trends in terms of resource use, pollution, food availability, population, and industrial outputs (Meadows et al., 1972). Although the project was much criticised in its attempt to establish a complete system to predict future trends, it did attract considerable attention in terms of searching for a balance between environment protection, resources conservation and economic development (Brundtland et al., 1987).

Consequently, Harlem Brundtland, the Norwegian Prime Minister then, made a significant declaration in late 1983 to cope with the tensions that had arisen in Stockholm. She was the leader of a UN commission which argued that the challenges facing the world were not only about protecting the environment but also about eliminating poverty and promoting general progress on the already abused earth (Butlin, 1989). The prestigious commission report: *Our Common Future* (Brundtland et al., 1987) provided a solution - sustainable development - for such a dilemma between development and conservation, which at once was considered to be significant and profound. Brundtland et al. (1987) argued that the environment and development are not independent issues – rather they are closely connected and influence each other, thus they both should be equally factored in when considering sustainable development. In this vein, a main aim of sustainable development was to establish conditions and capabilities that allow individuals to sustain themselves, as well as the environment.

Sustainable development was defined in the Brundtland Report as ‘development that meets the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Brundtland et al., 1987, p. 5). Shaw (1993) pointed out three key words in this definition – ‘development’, ‘needs’ and

‘future generations’. ‘Development’ resembles growth but is more nuanced since growth tends to refer to physical or quantitative expansion of an economic system. Development, by contrast, is a more qualitative notion, meaning progress and improvement in terms of cultural, social and economic dimensions. The word ‘needs’ here refers to necessary needs to live. Misbalanced development among different regions has led to a huge gap of living conditions and how to eliminate the discrepancy is one of the main challenges of sustainable development. To conquer unfairness, redistribution in various forms seems to be needed, including financial aid, technology transfer and compensation to protect the environment. Protecting the environment and reserving resources for ‘future generations’ is the ultimate aim of sustainable development as Brundtland et al. (1987) believed that we have a moral duty to look after our planet and to hand it on in good order to future generations.

Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development into the 21st century, introduced by the 1992 Rio Earth Summit - the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), endeavour to promote awareness of and participation in the quest for sustainability by individuals, businesses and governments. Agenda 21 is a comprehensive document with 40 chapters in 4 sections, setting out issues such as social and economic needs, conservation and management of resources, strengthening the role of major groups, and means of implementation (UNSD, 1992). Agenda 21 covers more issues than the Brundtland Report since it factored in economic development and social issues and gave detail about approaches to implementation. In addition, Local Agenda 21, a local level supplement of Agenda 21, comes into play at local level, encouraging every local authority to prepare and adopt their sustainability strategy. One cardinal principle of Local Agenda 21 is allowing local residents to have their voice in local development, because they tend to have better understanding of their needs than anybody else. In the light of such principles, Local Agenda 21 was designed to suit various local characters (Institution of Civil Engineers, 2000).

Sustainability in the UK

Following the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the UK made a very positive response to Agenda 21 through the introduction of numerous regulations, documents and laws pertinent to sustainable development. Approximately two years later after the Rio Earth Summit, the British Government replaced *This common inheritance: Britain's environmental strategy* (Department of the Environment, 1990) with its *Sustainable development: the UK strategy*, known as the first national sustainable development strategy of the UK (UK Government, 1994).

In 1997, the Labour government of the time set out to revise the sustainability strategy and during 1998, many consultation documents were published. The final revised version of the strategies was issued in May 1999 as *A Better Quality of Life-strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom*, which encompassed four main objectives supported by a considerable number of sustainable indicators. Levett (2000, p.58) argued that these indicators were 'a towering achievement', particularly in their breadth, but notes that many were concerned with inputs as proxies for ends or measuring actual progress towards greater sustainability.

A report published in 2004 was an assessment by the Sustainable Development Commission of the Government's reported progress on sustainable development. It was titled *Shows promise but must try harder* (SDC, 2004) and included a considerable number of recommendations for government about how to improve its sustainability performance (see SDC, 2004).

As a response to the report, a new strategy was published - *Securing the Future: Delivering UK Sustainability Strategy* (DCLG, 2005). This looked wider than the UK and included the aim to enable people worldwide to satisfy their essential needs and enjoy higher quality of life, and at the same time to avoid harm to the life quality of future generations. Through the report, the UK government indicated its

determination that developed countries should not only be concerned with domestic sustainability but also support developing countries in their transition towards a more sustainable earth. The 2005 strategy highlighted how governmental sectors share responsibility and ownership to fulfil a more sustainable future. It expanded previous sustainability principles, for example, through recognition of the limits of natural resources and unrecoverable capacity of the environment. It also promoted the planning system to a prominent position in terms of coping with climate change. However, since the 2005 strategy, there have been no new strategic updates related to sustainable development in the UK.

Sustainable development principles

The principles of sustainable development are defined by many different documents. Prominent sources of principles, traditional and more recent, include *Agenda 21* (UNSD, 1992), the *Millennium Development Goals* (UN, 2000); the *EU Sustainable Development Strategy* (CEC, 2001); the *EU Flagship Policies 2020* (CEC, 2010); and the report *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A future worth choosing* (UN, 2012). Within these principles, several elements and several visions can be distinguished. For example, the planetary boundaries model by Rockstrom et al. (2009) might represent essential principles that ought to be respected no matter what the particular cultural and socio-political driven values are. Alternatively, sustainable development principles could have different sources and perspectives, which also depend on the geographical region in which they are established, meaning the sustainable development principles in the U.S., Europe and Asia may be noticeably different reflecting the deep cultural peculiarities and differences associated with these areas (Sala et al., 2015).

The above discussion presents a general history of sustainable development. It reveals that during the past half century from its first emergence in 1970, Sustainable development has gradually evolved to be a more mature concept, but still the

principles and criteria of sustainability are altering in different milieus and remain much debated in both theory and practice.

In the UK, the government's refreshed vision for sustainable development builds on the principles that underpinned the UK's 2005 sustainable development strategy, by recognising the needs of the environment, the economy, and the society, alongside the utilisation of good governance and sound science (DCLG, 2005) (see Figure 3.2). Sustainable policy is required to follow all these principles, though some policies will place more emphasis on certain principles than others.

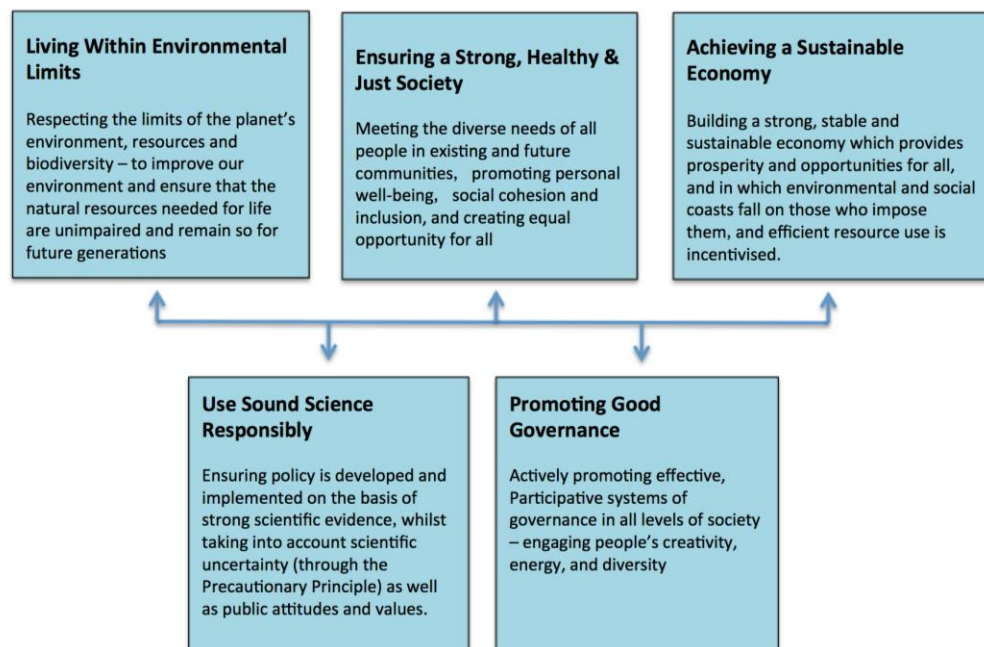


Figure 3.2 Five Sustainability Development Principles

Source: (DCLG, 2005)

Note: more currently, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that came into effect in January 2016

3.2.3 EIA and SEA

EIA and SEA as two main instruments in the Environmental Assessment family, have significantly contributed to the theoretical foundation of Sustainability Appraisal for

this research, and are both required in England. Therefore, understanding EIA and SEA is an important backdrop.

As acknowledged that EIA emerged as part of increasing environmental awareness in the 1960s and involved a technical evaluation intending to contribute to more objective decision-making. It is usually applied to projects rather than higher-level programmes and plans and aims to ensure environmental impacts are sufficiently considered when deciding whether or not to proceed with a development. EIA is always applied at project level, requiring tools to assess environmental problems that might arise from higher-level activities. SEA is always applied in higher level to deal with strategic environmental issues. The main differences see Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Comparison of Characteristics between EIA and SEA

	EIA	SEA
Stage of assessment in the proposal	Take place at the end of decision-making process	Take place at earlier stages of decision-making process
	Reactive approach to development proposals	Pro-active approach to development proposals
Scope of impacts	Identify specific impacts on the environment	Identify environmental and sustainable development issues
	Limited review of cumulative effects	Early warning of cumulative effects
Range of alternatives	Consider limited number of feasible alternatives	Consider broader range of potential alternatives
Characteristics of assessments	Emphasis on mitigating and minimizing impacts	Emphasis on meeting environmental objectives, maintaining natural framework
	Narrow perspective, high level of detail	Broad perspective, lower level of detail to provide a vision and overall framework
	Well-defined process, clear beginning and end	Multi-stage process overlapping components, policy level is continuing iterative
	Focuses on standard agenda, treats symptoms of environmental deterioration	Focuses on sustainability agenda, gets at sources of environment deterioration

Source: Adapted from UNEP (2002)

The ultimate aim of SEA is to ‘help protect the environment and promote sustainability’ (Therivel, 2010, p.9). Although there could be many other instruments for achieving this, SEA is widely considered an efficient tool for ‘integrating the environment into the policy-making process at a much earlier stage’ (Sheate et al., 2003, p. 4). Among all definitions of SEA (e.g. Fischer, 2003; Partidario & Clark, 2000; Sheate et al., 2003; Therivel et al., 1992), the one derived from the essences of two prestigious definitions of SEA (Sadler & Verheem, 1996) is introduced: ‘SEA is a systematic, decision aiding procedure for evaluating the likely significant environmental effects of options throughout the policy plan or programme development process, beginning at the earliest opportunity, including a written report and the involvement of the public throughout the process’ (Sheate et al., 2003, p. 4).

Nevertheless, approaches to SEA differ in terms of openness, scope, intensity and the duration over which they are applied, and the sheer variety of approaches has been viewed by some as potentially confusing and an impediment to take-up of SEA (Verheem & Tonk, 2000).

3.2.4 Sustainability Appraisal

The theories of sustainable development and Environmental Assessment have been discussed above, but how have these two combined together to form Sustainability Appraisal?

There are two main schools of thought in terms of the relationship between Environmental Assessment and Sustainable Development (Marsden 2002). Some scholars argue that the contribution of Environmental Assessment towards sustainability arises directly from the integration of environmental considerations into decision-making (Sheate et al., 2003; Wood, 2002), while others believe that Environmental Assessment provides a sound basis that can be extended to include

broader sustainability concerns (Gibson, 2001; Verheem & Tonk, 2000).

The former thinking argues that Environmental Assessment like EIA itself contributes to sustainability based on a view that ‘environmental impacts are at the core of sustainability’ (Sadler, 1999, p. 13) and that ‘integrating the environment into decision-making is an essential pre-requisite for moving towards sustainable development’ (Sheate et al., 2001, p. 5). This is in line with the ‘deep green’ (Sadler, 1999) ecological sustainability model (see Figure 3.3).

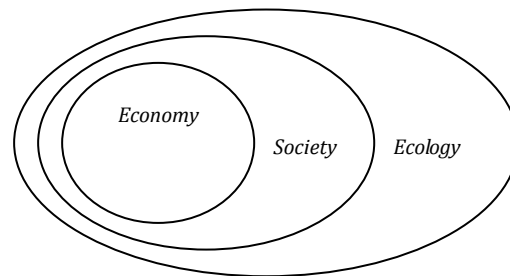


Figure 3.3 The ‘Deep Green’ Model of Sustainability

Source: (Sadler, 1999)

Others think that Sustainability Assessment emerged as Environmental Assessment extended its scope to include social and economic considerations alongside environmental ones (Devuyst, 2001; Sadler, 1999). In this milieu, the three aspects of sustainability - environment, society and economy - are treated in equal position, which refers to the ‘Three-pillar’ or ‘Triple-Bottom-Lines model’ (Gibson, 2001) of sustainable development (see Figure 3.4). Consequently, this extension of environmental assessment resulted in ‘Integrated Assessment’ or ‘Sustainability Assessment’ (Twigger-Ross, 2003).

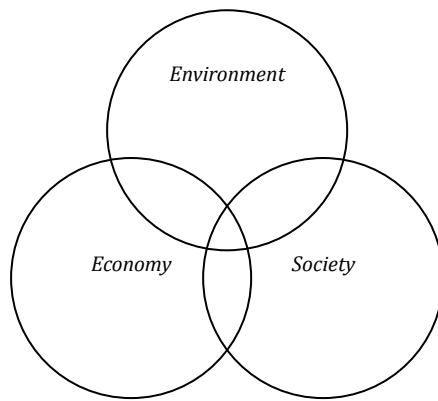


Figure 3.4 The ‘Three-Pillar’ Model of Sustainability

Source: (Gibson, 2001)

Presently, the ‘Three-pillar’ interpretation of sustainability is considered as mainstream and this has significantly influenced the development of Sustainability Appraisal (Sala et al., 2015). A related development is that of the term ‘Integrated Assessment’ (Sheate et al., 2003) which also emerged as a term to describe a combination of Environmental Assessment with sustainability thinking. Bond et al. (2012) explain that integrated here means more than just putting social, economic and environmental issues together.

However, these subtle distinctions in terminology need to be set alongside the view of Sheate (2009) that in fact all of the ‘Environmental Assessment’ tools have sustainability as an underlying purpose. This leads us to a consideration of the differences between SEA and Sustainability Appraisal, if they both substantively embody the principles of sustainability. Indeed many have argued that Environmental Assessment is equivalent to ‘Sustainability Appraisal’ (e.g. Gibson, 2005; Retief, 2005; Therivel, 2010; Therivel & Walsh, 2006) – for instance SEA in the UK under the EU Directive (Feldmann et al. 2001), in Canada (with variable commitment to sustainability) (Noble, 2009) and in South Africa (Govender et al., 2006).

On the other hand, some scholars admit a distinction between SEA and Sustainability Appraisal. Unlike SEA, some suggest that Sustainability Assessment can be equally

applied to projects as well as strategic decision-making (Hacking & Guthrie, 2008; Pope, 2006). Equally, it is suggested that SEA has a primary purpose to raise the profile of the environment while social and economic considerations are combined in a more objective way (Kørnøv & Thissen, 2000). By contrast, Sustainability Appraisal treats the three pillars as equivalent and unifies them together (Devuyst, 1999). In addition Gibson (2012) claims that many sustainability imperatives have not been achieved by traditional methods to Environmental Assessment, and he also argues that minimization of adverse effects is not enough – ‘assessment requirements must encourage positive steps towards greater community and ecological sustainability, towards a future that is more viable, pleasant and secure’ (Gibson, 2006, p. 172).

3.3 Sustainability Appraisal in the UK

3.3.1 Introduction

In the previous part of this chapter, the general principles and development history of Sustainability Appraisal have been discussed. As previously noted, Sustainability Appraisal could be applied in Neighbourhood Planning as a useful sustainability instrument. However, Sustainability Appraisal has been applied in the UK since 1999 (Fischer & Seaton, 2004). Previous research and studies of Sustainability Appraisal in England could greatly contribute to the theoretical basis of it in Neighbourhood Planning.

In this section, the objective is to understand the institutional arrangements of Sustainability Appraisal in the English spatial planning system, as well as the previous implementation experience of Sustainability Appraisal performed in the arena of Local Development Plans. Additionally, the Sustainability Appraisal process in Neighbourhood Planning will be introduced.

3.3.2 EU SEA Directive

English Sustainability Appraisal was considerably influenced by the implementation of the European SEA Directive 2001/42/EC, as this introduced ‘specific procedural’ and ‘other requirements that had not been in place before’ (Therivel & Fischer, 2012, p. 17). The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced a new spatial planning system in England and Wales, which had to be implemented virtually concurrently with the EU SEA Directive. These had partly overlapping requirements, applying to both local and regional level plans. The intention was that the requirements of the SEA Directive in relation to the spatial planning system would be incorporated within the broader Sustainability Appraisal requirements of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (ODPM, 2005).

The objectives of the SEA Directive are: ‘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’ (European Commission, 2001, p.2). According to Therivel et al. (2009) these objectives seem incompatible but the main aim of the SEA Directive as suggested by the sequence and wording is environmental protection.

The SEA Directive did not identify environmental targets that plans are expected to achieve (EC, 2001). Instead, it set a series of procedural requirements aiming to fulfill its objectives: preparation of an environmental report that describes the significant environmental impacts of a plan; consultation on the environmental report with relevant institutions and stakeholders; consideration of the environmental report and consultation responses in the plan-making process; documentation of how the SEA process informed the plan-making process; and monitoring of the environmental effects (Therivel et al., 2009). The procedural requirements of preparing an English Sustainability Appraisal generally drew from these aspects the SEA Directive.

In this way, The EU SEA Directive can be seen as underpinning English Sustainability Appraisal. Although there are distinctions between SEA and Sustainability Appraisal, they share a common procedural base.

3.3.3 Previous Sustainability Appraisal implementation

As discussed in Section 2.4, some new characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning, which are not so apparent in Local Planning, have emerged. However, it seems likely that most of the general benefits and problems of Sustainability Appraisal applied in Local Planning might also occur in Neighbourhood Planning. With this in mind, an outline of the experience of Sustainability Appraisal in Local Planning seems a useful starting point for analysis of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning, as the Sustainability Appraisal experience and empirical research specifically related to Neighbourhood Planning is still very limited.

Institutional arrangements

Sustainability Appraisal can be applied in various arenas and according to Therivel and Fischer (2012) there is extensive experience in England of the implementation of Sustainability Appraisal in policy, plan and programme making in various sectors and administrations, involving land use, transport, resource management, energy and waste management. However, the most widespread use of Sustainability Appraisal has been related to regional (this level was removed in 2012) and local plans. At the local level, Core Strategies and some other Local Development Framework documents require SEA under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 and Sustainability Appraisal under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

As Sustainability Appraisal and SEA are both legal requirements, and have similarities and areas of overlap, a joint Sustainability Appraisal and SEA process has been promoted in Government guidance (ODPM, 2005). This typically follows the SEA process but considers social and economic as well as environmental issues: it uses Sustainability Appraisal objectives to examine impacts of the plan; involves substantial use of expert judgments to test whether or not the plan achieves the Sustainability Appraisal objectives; and involves consulting on a scoping report and a Sustainability Appraisal report with relevant stakeholders and the public.

SEA however has been considered as being ‘baseline-led’ and ‘integrated’, while Sustainability Appraisal is seen as being ‘objective-led’ and ‘advocative’ (Kørnø & Thissen, 2000; Smith & Sheate, 2001; Therivel et al., 2009). The move from SEA to Sustainability Appraisal can therefore be considered as changing the emphasis from ‘the current situation and problems’ towards ‘the future situation and ambitions’, as well as from being mainly concerned with environmental issues in decision making, towards a ‘more balanced integration of all aspects of sustainable development in decision making’ (Therivel et al., 2009, p. 157). According to ODPM (2005) Sustainability Appraisal carried out in England should follow five general stages:

1. Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope; resulting in the production of a scoping report;
2. Developing and refining options and assessing effects (the SEA Directive requires for reasonable alternatives to be considered);
3. Preparing the SA report;
4. Consulting on the preferred plan option and SA report; preparing the final SA report;
5. Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the plan.

Benefits and costs

The benefits of applying a Sustainability Appraisal in Local Plans in England have been discussed extensively. Criticisms of course exist, but many scholars acknowledge that important benefits can be derived from Sustainability Appraisal (Fischer, 2007; Kidd & Fischer, 2007; Sherston, 2008; Therivel & Walsh, 2006; Thomas, 2008).

According to a questionnaire survey conducted by three researchers with 116 local authorities about the preparation of Sustainability Appraisal in Local Plans (Sherston, 2008; Thomas, 2008; Yamane, 2008), approximately four-fifths of plans are changed as a result of Sustainability Appraisal. In the unchanged cases typically this situation arose because the Sustainability Appraisal was started when the plan was already near completion.

Apart from evidence of these direct benefits the respondents to the survey (see Sherston, 2008; Thomas, 2008; Yamane, 2008) also reported indirect benefits of Sustainability Appraisal in the form of a greater awareness of Sustainability, a better understanding of the plan, a more transparent plan preparation process, and inspiration for the next round of plan-making. Additional benefits of Sustainability Appraisal were also mentioned by Therivel and Fischer (2012), including the creation of a sustainability officer post to tackle a variety of sustainability tasks in the planning section; greater emphasis on joint-working between local authority planners and external agencies during plan preparation; and accumulation of backdrop data to inform the wider plan.

The main problems identified by the survey in implementation of Sustainability Appraisal related to the cost and resource implications and delay in the plan-making process: it was estimated that standard Sustainability Appraisal for a Local Plan, involved around 50 person days of effort, and longer for some more comprehensive

cases. However, most respondents felt optimistic that these costs would go down over time – partly due to increased familiarity with the process and partly because of the reduced time needed to update rather than produce new scoping report (Sherston, 2008; Thomas, 2008; Yamane, 2008). According to the 2008 survey, less than half of respondents believed that Sustainability Appraisal was significant in delaying the plan-making process. More respondents said that other factors were more significant there with changing government policies and advice, elections and subsequent political changes, lack of resources, and lack of relevant guidance being the most often cited reasons (Sherston, 2008; Thomas, 2008; Yamane, 2008).

To sum up, the previous implementation of Sustainability Appraisal in England has been mainly concentrated on Local Planning. It generally has followed the process set out in the EU SEA Directive, but has broadened the scope of consideration to include the economic and social as parts of sustainability in a joint Sustainability Appraisal and SEA process. The benefits of Sustainability Appraisal at the local level have been identified in many studies, and it has been suggested by Therivel (2011) that these benefits might also apply in Neighbourhood Planning. However, problems have also been revealed indicating that carrying out a Sustainability Appraisal costs considerable resources and can extend the plan making process (Therivel & Fischer, 2012). Despite this, many still broadly believe that the benefits of Sustainability Appraisal are worth the cost and potential delays involved (e.g. Dalal-Clayton & Sadler, 2010; George, 2001; Gibson, 2005; Nicholson, 2005).

3.3.4 Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning

It has been acknowledged that Sustainability Appraisal for Neighbourhood Planning is not compulsory if it is judged that no significant environmental impacts would occur from the plan's proposals. However, at an early stage in the development of Neighbourhood Planning, this was a controversial question. Section 19 of the

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a local planning authority to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal of each of the proposals in a Local Plan during its preparation (DCLG, 2004b). More generally, section 39 of the Act requires that the authority preparing a Local Plan must do so ‘with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development’ (DCLG, 2004b, p.125). In contrast, the requirement of Sustainability Appraisal for Neighbourhood Plan is less strict than for Local Plans. Government Neighbourhood Planning Practice Guidance states ‘there is no legal requirement for a Neighbourhood Plan to have a Sustainability Appraisal as set out in section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004’ (DCLG, 2014d, p. 1). Similarly the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) point out that ‘Sustainability Appraisal of the type that is legally required for development plan documents is not required for Neighbourhood Plans’ (PAS, 2013a, p. 1).

However following the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (DCLG, 2004b), SEA will be required if a Neighbourhood Plan might have significant environmental impact. As in the case of Local Plans, sustainability consideration also should be demonstrated by Neighbourhood Plans (DCLG, 2012b). Consequently, if a Sustainability Appraisal is judged to be required, Neighbourhood Planning groups commonly carry out a joint Sustainability Appraisal and SEA process. To sum up, a community could decide whether or not to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal but SEA might be legally required in some circumstances.

The normal process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan has been introduced in Chapter 2, and in this section, the process of carrying out a Sustainability Appraisal alongside the Neighbourhood Planning process is introduced (see Table 3.2). According to related advice, there are seven general steps involved.

Table 3.2 Links between Plan Making and Sustainability Appraisal Stages

Stage in developing the plan	SA step	SA outputs
. Getting started and organized		
. Review existing plans and strategies for the area	1. Identify what the neighbourhood need and need not do	
. Create a profile of your community . Audit existing infrastructure and designations . Carry out surveys and needs assessments . Summarise findings and consider how to tackle the issues	2. Identify the characteristics of the neighbourhood, including existing issues/problems	
. Draft a vision and objectives for the area . Feedback and further community involvement	3. Identify possible things to include in the plan (options/alternatives)	
	4. Prepare an SA 'scoping report' and check with expert bodies to make sure that the SA process so far is OK	Formal SA 'scoping report'
. Assess impact of alternatives . Choose preferred alternatives and draw up proposals . Check for conformity with strategic policies in the development plan . Consult on proposals	5. Assess the environmental, social and economic impacts of the alternatives, choose a set of preferred alternatives (the draft neighbourhood plan), and explain the reason for the choice	On going documentation of the assessment findings to inform the development of the neighbourhood plan
. Fine tune your plan to minimise overall impacts . Agree monitoring, evaluation and review	6. If the draft neighbourhood plan would have any major impacts, try to minimise these by fine-tuning the draft plan	
. Prepare final neighbourhood plan document . Consultation	7. Prepare a final SA report and make it available alongside the draft neighbourhood plan for comment by the public and expert bodies	Formal final SA report
. Independent examination . Recommended alterations . Referendum and adoption	Where appropriate, additional cycles of steps 3, 5, 6 and 7 to deal with changes to the plan	Possibly other SA report(s)

Source: (Therivel, 2011, P. 5)

The details for each step are discussed below:

Identify what the neighbourhood need and need not do

Neighbourhood Planning is not an obligation for a community (DCLG, 2012c), and those who want to have a Neighbourhood Plan should carefully consider the benefits and cost involved, and what the plan need and need not address. One very important thing to do in this step is to make sure the Neighbourhood Plan is consistent with national planning policy and conforms to the strategic elements of the Local Authority's Core Strategy and other development plan documents (Therivel, 2011). Furthermore, national government guidance on sustainability and planning also should be factored in including an assessment of Sustainability Appraisal requirements (DCLG, 2014d).

Identify the characteristics of the neighbourhood, including existing issues/problems

It is an essential part of Sustainability Appraisal to identify the 'baseline environment' (Bond et al., 2013; Dalal-Clayton & Sadler, 2010) in the neighbourhood area. This is required by the *2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act* (DCLG, 2004b). Issues to consider include:

- . Nature conservation
- . Landscape
- . Heritage
- . Air and climate
- . Water
- . Soil
- . Human population
- . Human health
- . 'Material assets', which include transport, waste and infrastructure (ODPM, 2005)

Moreover, for Sustainability Appraisal, three other issues should also be considered:

- . Employment and jobs
- . Education and skills
- . Different groups of people in the neighbourhood (Therivel, 2011)

Not all of the issues will be relevant for all Neighbourhood Plans, but if it is decided not to cover one of these topics, reasons should be given (Therivel, 2011). This information could be a part of Sustainability Appraisal 'scoping report'. For some neighbourhoods, this step might be easier since they may have an existing Parish or Town Plan, or baseline data may have already been collected for other purposes. Additionally, as part of their 'duty to support' (DCLG, 2012c), Local Planning Authority planners might also be able to provide much relevant information. However, some Neighborhood Planning groups might need to collect information without support. Therivel (2011) suggested that a useful starting point in identifying baseline data is to refer to maps of key designations related to nature conservation, landscape, heritage and to consider presenting other information on maps, with accompanying explanation, photos etc.

Identify possible things to include in the plan (options/alternatives)

Consideration of alternatives and options, is a core requirement of Sustainability Appraisal, and needs to be a carefully considered step. Discussion of possible alternatives or options may be facilitated by broad-ranged public participation, ideally through meetings or else through other approaches such as surveys (Dalal-Clayton & Sadler, 2010; PAS, 2010). Therivel (2011, p. 16) suggests that 'inadequate consideration of alternatives has, to date, been the most frequent Sustainability Appraisal-related reason for plans being legally quashed'. In this step, it is important to discuss reasonable alternatives, and to explain how alternatives have been

identified and rejected. Alternatives could be developed related to (Therivel, 2011, P.16):

- . 'Business as usual': what would happen if no neighbourhood plan was in place;
- . Different ways of dealing with existing environmental, social or economic problems;
- . Different ways of grasping opportunities or responding to threats from the SWOT analysis;
- . Ideas suggested by local residents as part of the survey or public meetings;
- . Ways of implementing your local authority's development plan in your neighbourhood.

Prepare an SA 'scoping report' and check with expert bodies to make sure that the SA process so far is OK

The local Planning Authority and 'statutory consultees' must be consulted to assess the need for a formal Sustainability Appraisal and to make sure the Sustainability Appraisal includes the right information at the right level of detail (DCLG, 2014d; PAS, 2009). Such statutory consultees include: Natural England, Historic England, and the Environment Agency. Normally, the scoping report will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority and they will help neighbourhoods consult with the statutory consultees. At least five weeks will be given for the statutory consultees to comment on the draft report (Locality, 2012b).

Therivel (2011) notes that it is not obligatory to modify the report following comments given by statutory consultees, but note must be kept of what the consultees suggested and how the Neighbourhood Plan has responded to their comments.

Assess the environmental, social and economic impacts of the alternatives, choose a set of preferred alternatives (the draft neighbourhood plan), and explain the reason for the choice

There are several objectives in this step, but to assess and identify the best option from several alternatives was considered to be the fundamental one (PAS, 2013a). The ‘Sustainability Appraisal Framework’ (Sala et al., 2015) is always applied to check the possible impacts of different alternatives, which encompasses a series of questions to make sure all of the possible environmental, social and economic impacts of the alternatives were systematically considered. Moreover, it is essential that the process of alternative assessment has wide public participation – as many people as possible (Therivel, 2011).

The use of the ‘Sustainability Appraisal Framework’ in Neighbourhood Planning might be slightly different from that in Local Planning – a Neighbourhood Plan is only required to consider relevant assessment questions for alternatives evaluation rather than taking an overall assessment framework as the Local Plan processes does (Locality, 2012a). Within the ‘Sustainability Appraisal Framework’, whether the option would have a good or bad impact compared to the condition without the Neighbourhood Plan will be discussed for each assessment question. Particularly, in terms of when the impacts would happen (short, medium or long term) and whether they would be permanent or temporary.

This does not mean that the alternative that has minimum sustainability impacts is the best one. The selection of the preferred alternative maybe influenced by various considerations, such as conformity with local plans, satisfying housing supply, or demands of local development. However, whichever alternative is chosen, the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal should be factored in and the reason why choices have been made should be clearly explained (Therivel, 2011).

If the draft neighbourhood plan would have any major impacts, try to minimise these by fine-tuning the draft plan

In this stage all kinds of impacts should be carefully checked, even minor impacts, for the combined impacts of the Neighbourhood Plan might go beyond merely the sum of each impact. These ‘cumulative impacts’ (Therivel, 2010) need to be minimised by ‘fine-tuning’ (Therivel, 2011) the draft Neighbourhood Plan. The SEA Directive also legally requires this. In addressing this step, the Neighbourhood Plan should, for example, avoid exacerbating existing environmental problems or deprivation.

Prepare a final SA report and make it available alongside the draft neighbourhood plan for comment by the public and expert bodies

The final Sustainability Appraisal report is generally based on the ‘scoping report’ but with extra material added - information about ‘everything that you have done since you wrote the draft SA report’ (Therivel, 2011, p. 27). In this respect, the Sustainability Appraisal report represents the story behind the preparation process of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Sustainability Appraisal report explains why certain choices have been made, how alternatives were considered and assessed, in what way people were involved, and how findings were considered. In this way Therivel (2011, p. 28) suggests that the Sustainability Appraisal for a Neighbourhood Plan could be ‘a buffer against legal challenge’. Finally, it should be noted that there is a requirement to monitor the significant effects of the Neighbourhood Plan identified through the Sustainability Appraisal. This monitoring may be carried out by the Local Planning Authority or through national level monitoring activities, for example in relation to the conservation status of protected sites.

3.4 Conclusion

Two underpinning elements of Sustainability Appraisal have been introduced in this

chapter. As the third-generation of Environmental Assessment, it is seen that Sustainability Appraisal has developed based on SEA but has also embodied the social and economical principles of sustainability. Arguably, there is no universal consensus on what Sustainability Appraisal is or how it should be applied, since international practice varies significantly depending on the legal and governance structures in different areas, as well as different conceptualisations of sustainability. Nevertheless, some key characteristics of Sustainability Appraisal practices are available, including strategic (the degree of emphasis on strategy); integrative (the extent to which the various assessment techniques used are combined); and comprehensive (the coverage of the three pillars of environmental, social and economic effects as well as indirect effects) (Bond et al., 2012).

The benefits of Sustainability Appraisal in England have been discussed by many researchers (Therivel & Fischer, 2012). Considering these benefits, carrying out Sustainability Appraisal might be also helpful for Neighbourhood Planning although its application is likely to be slightly different from other levels of Sustainability Appraisal application.

To understand how Sustainability Appraisal influencing Neighbourhood Planning, as shown in Figure 3.5, it is very important to reveal the relationships between the quality of Sustainability Appraisal, the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal and the performance of Neighbourhood Planning. The quality of Sustainability Appraisal may influence the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal and together these may influence the Neighbourhood Plan. The ‘influence chain’ shows the complete story and prominent questions related to the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

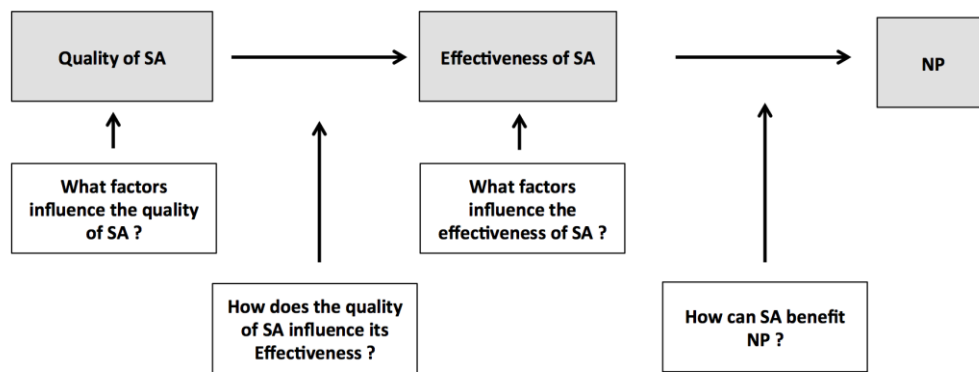


Figure 3.5 The ‘Influence Chain’ of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning

Source: Author

CHAPTER FOUR: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL IN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

4.1 Introduction

This chapter relates to Objective 1, discussed systematic approaches to establishing evaluation framework for environmental assessments, and developed a workable evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. Drawing on past research experience it is evident that the usual way of examining the performance of an Environmental Assessment is to use an evaluation framework (Thissen, 2000a). So far, there is no systematic evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning, and this means that a new evaluation framework is required to suit this new planning regime. Sustainability Appraisal shares underpinning principles with other Environmental Assessments, and this suggests that the previous experience could be drawn upon to help to build framework. With this in mind, this section will review previous evaluation frameworks that might contribute to this research, and establish a workable framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

There have been various examinations of all sorts of Environmental Assessments, but many of them were not carried out in a ‘systematic’ way, or focussed on specific aspects of the performance rather than taking a holistic approach. However, before developing specific evaluation indicators, it is necessary to build a conceptual framework (Bossel, 1999; Brown, 2009). A conceptual framework provides a formal way of thinking about a topic area, which is useful in terms of establishing a coherent set of indicators. It also provides a valuable device for organising and reporting on indicators in a structured and meaningful way.

Drawing on relevant Environmental Assessment evaluation framework studies, it is evident that a complete framework should encompass three components: ‘Attributes’, ‘Criteria’ and ‘Indicators’ (see Table 4.1). There is no formal and unified terminology to describe the components, but many scholars used the terms mentioned to describe their framework (e.g. Lawrence, 1997; Retief, 2006; Thissen, 2000a).

Table 4.1 The Structure of a Complete Evaluation Framework

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators
To categorise and differentiate criteria	To describe more detailed aspects under each attribute	To focus the evaluation on the central issue to which each criterion relates
For example:		
Process	Integrative	Was the SA fully integrated with the plan or programme formulation process, from conceptualization to implementation?

Source: Author

‘Attributes’, for example is used by Lawrence (1997, p. 220) as a broad term that is employed to categorise and differentiate criteria. Attributes referred to in earlier Environmental Assessment studies include, ‘Institutional arrangements’, ‘Processes’, ‘Methods’, ‘Documents’, and ‘Outputs’ (including direct outputs and indirect outputs). The specific terms used vary but these attributes reflect key issues that should be considered in Environmental Assessment. ‘Criteria’ is a widely-used term, which is employed by many scholars to describe more detailed aspects under each attribute, e.g. Jones et al. (2005, p. 28) note that ‘the judgement of the quality and effectiveness of the SEA process involves the use of different types of criteria’.

Nevertheless, as noted by Retief (2006, p. 107) ‘criteria imply precision (that is) not always achievable due to complex nature of SEA’. As a consequence ‘criteria’ should be developed and accompanied by associated indicators designed to ‘focus the evaluation on the central issue to which each criterion relates’ (Jones et al., 2005, p. 29). From this perspective, hundreds of criteria and indicators have been used by researchers in past environmental assessment studies depending on the research purpose and application. Apparently, attributes suggest what issues are generally important and should be considered, whereas criteria and indicators are more detailed, precise and specific to the focus of the research.

4.2 The ‘Quality-Effectiveness’ Model

4.2.1 Conceptualising the ‘quality-effectiveness’ model

In this respect, the use of criteria and indicators seem to be essential for an evaluation study since these provide detailed ‘evidence’ needed to inform the evaluation process (OECD, 1999). Jackson et al. (2000, p.110) also confirm that indicators provide ‘a sign or signal that relays a complex message, potentially from numerous sources, in a simplified and useful manner’. However, for a specific study, criteria and indicators should be carefully designed to obtain useful information. The question is how have the criteria and the indicators been selected and organised? Dale and Beyeler (2001, p. 6) observe, ‘a lack of robust procedures for selecting indicators makes it difficult to validate the information provided by those indicators.’ A rigorous and transparent indicator selection process would increase both the value and the scientific credibility of Environmental Assessment Reports and ensure these meet management concerns (Belnap, 1998; Niemeijer & Groot, 2008; Slocombe, 1998). Another benefit of a structured indicator selection process is that it allows for proper conceptual validation of indicators (Bockstaller & Girardin, 2003). Finally, it may also help in identifying indicators that can link ecological dimensions with environmental, social and economic dimensions, which is vital for good policy making (Niemi & McDonald, 2004).

Many previous studies have investigated the performance of Environmental Assessments in various contexts. For example, some have been designed to inform theoretical discussions (see Partidario, 1996; Therivel, 2010; Verheem & Tonk, 2000; Wood & Djeddour, 1992). Others have developed detailed protocols and tried to test them in practice (see Fischer, 2010; Sadler, 1990, 1996b; Thissen, 2000a, 2000b).

Common to most previous evaluation frameworks related to Environmental Assessment is a concern with matters of ‘quality’ and ‘effectiveness’ (see Baker &

McLelland, 2003; Cashmore et al., 2010; Fischer, 2010; Lawrence, 1997; Retief, 2005, 2006; Sadler, 1996b; Sherston, 2008; Thissen, 2000a). It has become a common sense that the principles of ‘quality and effectiveness’, referred to as ‘inputs and outputs’ of environmental assessment should be considered when building a comprehensive evaluation framework (Lawrence, 1997). Although not all past studies have attempted to develop a complete evaluation framework, many have used ‘quality-effectiveness’ as a guide for indicator selection. The original idea of separating ‘quality’ and ‘effectiveness’ aspects of an Environmental Assessment was promoted by Lawrence (1997) in EIA evaluation research in Canada. Lawrence’s work translated the piecemeal consideration of assessment attributes into a systematic evaluation framework, leading to an explicit standard for indicator selection (see Lawrence, 1997).

Some other scholars had mentioned the quality and effectiveness aspects of Environmental Assessment before Lawrence (see Doyle & Sadler, 1996; Ortolano, 1993; Sadler, 1996a; Welles, 1997), but some attributes were often overlapping, including e.g. ‘analysis and methods’ (Ortolano, 1993; Welles, 1997), ‘regulatory compliance’ (Ortolano, 1993; Sadler, 1996a), ‘accuracy of effect predictions’ (WorldBank, 1996), and ‘public involvement’ (Sadler, 1996a; Welles, 1997). Lawrence’s framework outlined in Figure 4.1 addressed these overlaps. The ‘Quality’ involves the ‘regulatory framework and the processes, methods and documents associated with individual proposals’. ‘Effectiveness’ contains both ‘direct and indirect outputs from individual cases and from the overall EIA system’ (Lawrence, 1997, p. 3).

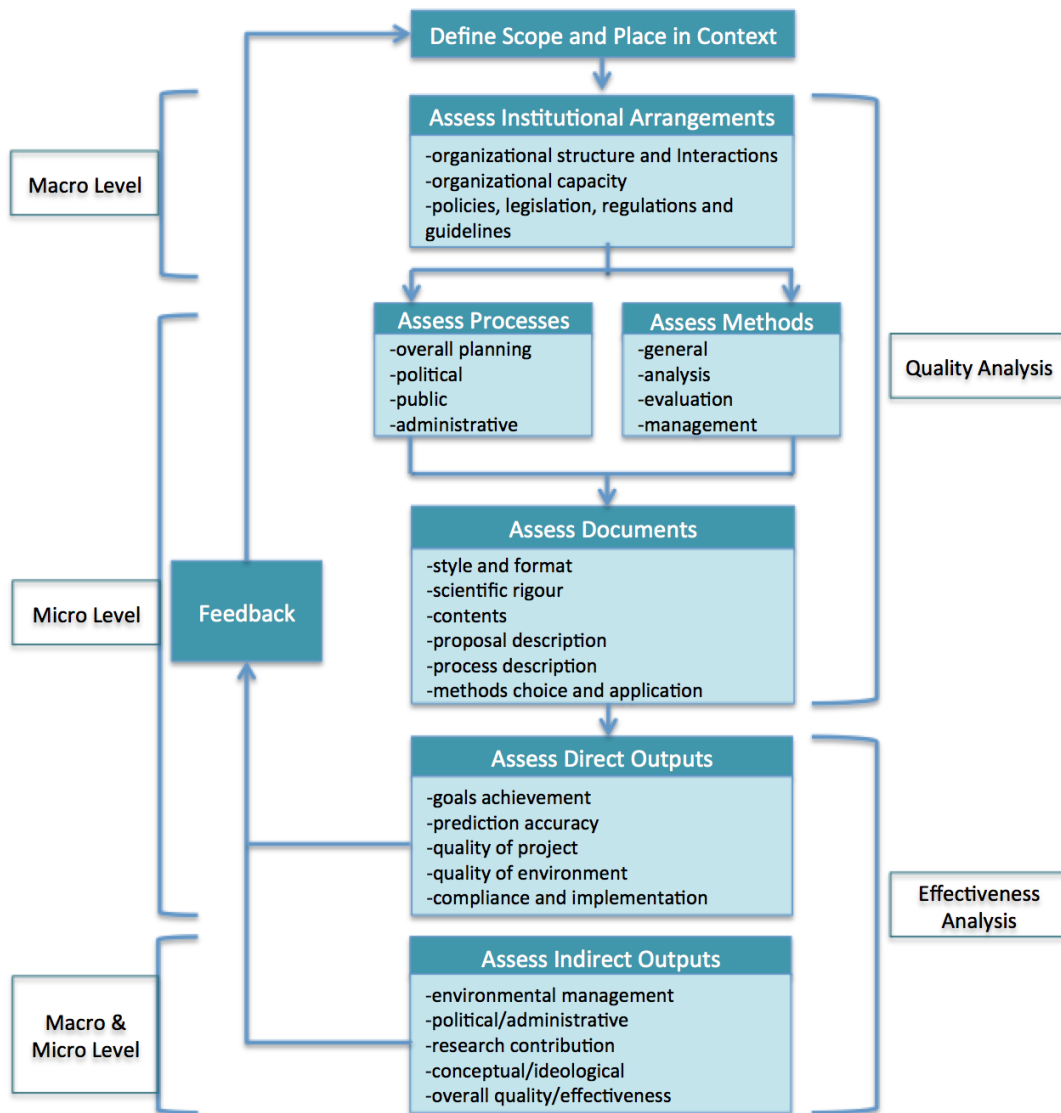


Figure 4.1 Lawrence's Quality-Effectiveness Framework

Source: Lawrence's (1997)

In Lawrence's (1997) framework, 'institutional arrangements' are a macro-level attribute; 'processes', 'methods' and 'documents', and 'direct outputs' are all micro-level attributes; and 'indirect outputs' is a mixture of both macro and micro attribute. In detail, 'institutional arrangements' includes several sub-attributes namely: organisational structure and interactions; organisational capacity; and policies, legislation, regulation and guidelines. The 'processes' attribute includes: overall planning, political, public, and administrative issues. The 'methods' attribute

encompasses: general, analysis, evaluation, and management consideration. 'Documents' includes: style and format, scientific rigour, contents, proposal decision, process description, and methods choice and application. 'Direct outputs' include: goals achievement, prediction accuracy, quality of project, quality of environment, and compliance and implementation. 'Indirect outputs' involve: environmental management, political/administrative, research contribution, conceptual/ideological, and overall quality/effectiveness.

Lawrence's framework systematically considered the relationships between 'quality' and 'effectiveness' and sorted every attribute in a clear hierarchy. However, it still need acknowledged that some of the attributes are interrelated and could influence each other. For instance, 'processes' and 'methods' attributes and their indicators should be separately discussed, but their outcomes should be recorded in documents, meaning the quality of 'documents' could directly influence the evaluation of the other two attributes – a poor quality document cannot sufficiently reflect the details of 'processes' and 'methods' even if they are undertaken to a good standard.

Lawrence (1997) did not introduce indicators as part of his evaluation framework, but he suggested detailed criteria for each attribute (see Appendix 1). As criteria and indicators might be significantly different in different research milieus, so the criteria suggested by Lawrence (1997) may only reflect the requirements of his specific research – a general evaluation framework for EIA in Canada. It is a comprehensive framework but rather ideal than practical. In fact, even in Lawrence's own empirical research under this framework, he focused most of the criteria to consider some key aspects (see Lawrence, 1997). Nonetheless, Lawrence provided a systematic way to consider how to establish a comprehensive evaluation framework for an Environmental Assessment.

4.2.2 Previous applications of the ‘quality-effectiveness’ model

Following Lawrence’s work, many other evaluation frameworks have been established carrying forward the light of the ‘Quality-effectiveness’ method. There are three prominent research cases undertaken by Jones et al. (2005), Retief (2006), and Bond et al. (2013), which have broadened Lawrence’s idea to various Environmental Assessment types and implementation contexts (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 The Context and Purpose of the Four Evaluation Frameworks

Authors	Types	Level	Detail	Background
Lawrence (1997)	EIA	Project	Detailed	The framework established to evaluate ten EIA cases in Canada
Retief (2006)	SEA	Strategic	Detailed	The framework established to evaluate the SEA implementation in the case of the Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) in South Africa
Jones et al. (2005)	SEA	Strategic	General	The framework established mainly for SEA situation comparison between different countries all over the world
Bond et al. (2013)	SA	Strategic	General	To provides a coherent framework for competitive evaluation of sustainability assessment

Source: Author

The framework developed by Jones et al. (2005) is built on the theory of ‘quality-effectiveness’ but was developed to compare international SEA systems. Their work separated ‘quality’ and ‘effectiveness’, but some attributes were combined and criteria were reduced to suit the research purpose. Retief’s (2006) study, based on SEA evaluation in South Africa, was significant in highlighting the implementation experience of the ‘quality-effectiveness’ model, and established a practicable framework and associated indicators derived from the requirements of SEA principles. Finally, Bond et al.’s (2013) study was more theoretical than the other two cases but it was established specifically to evaluate Sustainability Appraisal, and is therefore considered to be a useful input to this research.

Jones et al.’s evaluation framework

Jones et al. (2005) employed the ‘quality-effectiveness’ model for their study of international SEAs in land-use planning. According to Jones et al. (2005) ‘quality’ aspects include ‘system inputs’ and ‘process inputs’, which is a slight variant of Lawrence’s approach (see Table 4.3).

As shown in the table, the ‘system criteria’ include many criteria that relate to the ‘institutional arrangements’ in Lawrence’s framework. The ‘process criteria’ include some mixed criteria from Lawrence’s ‘processes’, ‘methods’ and ‘document’ attributes, but most other criteria put forward by Lawrence were omitted. As the purpose was to examine global experience of SEA implementation, Jones et al.’s simplified framework was designed to reflect on the general situations of the SEA practices in different countries (for detailed criteria and indicators see Appendix 2).

Table 4.3 Jones et al.’s SEA Evaluation Framework

	Attributes	Criteria
Quality (inputs)	System criteria	Legal basis; integration; guidance; coverage; tiering; sustainable development
	Process criteria	Alternatives; screening; scoping; prediction/evaluation; additional impacts; report preparation; review; monitoring; mitigation; consultation and public participation.
Effectiveness (outputs)	Outcome criteria	Decision-making; costs and benefits; environmental quality; system monitoring.

Source: Adapted from Jones et al. (2005, p. 28)

Retief’s evaluation framework

Retief’s (2006) framework was developed to evaluate the performance of SEA in Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) in South Africa. Following the notion that ‘overarching context specific SEA principles and objectives should form the basis for the application of SEA’ (Retief, 2006, p. 107), he introduced the method of Key Performance Areas (KPA) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Eventually, 14 KPAs and 48 KPIs were identified for quality review purpose based on the principles that SEA involves a ‘context-specific, sustainability-led, participative, proactive and efficient process’ (Retief, 2006, p. 107). In terms of effectiveness, 4 KPAs and 9 KPIs were established. (Summary for all the KPAs and KPIs see Appendix 3).

Bond et al.’s evaluation framework

Bond et al.’s framework was designed to evaluate Sustainability Assessment applications and includes four attributes drawn from earlier research - three drawn from Sadler (1996b) and one from Baker and McLelland (2003) (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Attributes of Bond et al.’s Sustainability Assessment Framework

Sadler (1996b)	
Procedural	Indicates the extent to which the assessment process properly follows established, or legally mandated, procedures
Substantive	Indicates the extent to which the goals, or objectives, of the assessment process have been met (this might mean a more sustainable outcome)
Transactive	Considers the extent to which the substantive outcomes are delivered efficiently in terms of cost and time
Baker and McLelland (2003)	
Normative	The extent to which the assessment facilitates the achievement of the normative goals

Source: Adapted from Bond et al. (2013)

The first three attributes were put forward by Sadler (1996), for an international effectiveness study of Sustainability Appraisal undertaken for the International Association of Impact Assessment. This study attempted to take a global view to evaluate the effectiveness of Environmental Assessment. In this study ‘effectiveness’ was defined as ‘whether something works as intended and meets the purpose for which it was designed’ (Sadler, 1996b, p. 37). The final attribute identified by Bond et al. drew upon work by Baker and McLelland (2003) and Gibbs (1965) and concerned

the normative goals of Environmental Assessment. These ‘Normative’ goals are those which are derived from a combination of social and individual norms, although there is no universal definition of what such norms are, they could be considered as standards which society expects conformance with. In the context of Sustainability Appraisal, these norms reflect what the sustainability Appraisal is expected to achieve, and how it is expected to achieve them (see Appendix 4 for details).

From the above discussion it can be concluded that a suitable evaluation framework is important for this research, for it provides a systematic way to evaluate Sustainability Appraisal experience. Lawrence’s original framework and subsequent research by Jones et al., Retief, and Bond et al. were introduced to examine the ‘quality-effectiveness’ model in different contexts in order to comprehensively guide this research. Some of the attributes, criteria and indicators seem appropriate to be drawn into this research, but reflecting the new experience of Neighbourhood Planning, it is felt that new indicators may also be required.

4.3 Evaluation Framework for This Research

Based on the ‘quality-effectiveness’ model and other applications, a feasible evaluation framework for this research can be established. There are useful attributes, criteria and indicators used in previous evaluation studies, which could be drawn on as a good starting point. However, meanwhile, the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning discussed in Section 2.4 also should be taken into account when establishing an evaluation framework, for they could significantly influence the implementation of Sustainability Appraisal. Therefore, some previous criteria and indicators need to be refined, and new criteria and indicators many need to be added.

4.3.1 Developing attributes and criteria for the evaluation framework

The ‘quality-effectiveness’ model and its application in the evaluation of Environmental Assessment were discussed in Section 4.2. Although the evaluation applications considered were all built based on the ‘quality-effectiveness’ method, considerable differences between them were evident for example they employed different terminologies to describe their attributes and criteria.

The attributes and criteria of the four evaluation frameworks are presented in a comparison table (see Table 4.5). Similar attributes and associated criteria contained are aligned in rows to aid comparison. This exercise reveals however that the criteria related to each attribute may to some extent be mingled.

Firstly, it is evident that the same criteria might be classified under different attributes in the different evaluation frameworks. For example, in Retief’s model ‘screening’ is classified under ‘method’, while in Jones et al.’s model it is included under ‘process’. Secondly, the same or extremely similar criteria might be described by different terminology and lead to further confusion and overlap. For instance, the ‘institutional arrangements’ in Lawrence’s model, and the ‘system criteria’ in Jones et al. relate to the same aspects but different terminologies are used. Therefore, in refining criteria, it was felt that a consistent set of terminology should be developed.

Table 4.5 The Comparison Table of Attributes and Criteria of the Four Cases

Lawrence (1997)	Institutional Arrangements Organisation structure and interactions, organisational capacity, policies, legislation, regulations and guidelines	Document Style and format, scientific rigour, contents, proposal description, process description, methods choice and application	Process Overall planning, political process, public involvement, administrative procedures used to review the application	Method General, analysis, evaluation, management	Direct output Goals achievement, Prediction accuracy, quality of project, quality of environment, compliance and implementation	Indirect output Environmental management, political/administrative, research contribution, conceptual/ideological, overall quality/effectiveness
Jones et al. (2005)	System criteria Legal basis, integration, guidance, coverage, tiering, sustainable development		Process Alternatives, screening, scoping, prediction/evaluation, additional impacts, report preparation, review, monitoring, mitigation, consultation and public participation		Outcome Decision-making, costs and benefits, environmental quality, system monitoring	
Retief (2006)		Document Description of Context, description of the state of the environment, description of assessment methodology and results, communications of results	Process Context specific, sustainability, participative, proactive, efficient	Method Screening, situation analysis, scoping, environmental assessment, monitoring and review	Direct output Policies, plans and programmes, SEA objectives, decision making, environmental quality/sustainability	
Bond et al. (2013)	Transactive Time, Spending, Skills, Responsibility		Procedural Alternatives, screening, scoping, prediction/evaluation, additional impacts, report preparation, review, monitoring, mitigation, consultation and public participation		Substantive Environmental quality, decision making, consultation, monitoring, environmental limits, alternatives, mitigation	Normative Political/administrative, conceptual/ideological, overall quality

Source: Author

The starting point in resolving these discrepancies was establishing a clear set of attributes (the broadest level of the framework). Lawrence's list of attributes was considered to be the most comprehensive, including six main attributes. Lawrence's categorisation was therefore employed to form the structure of the comparison table as it was considered to be comprehensive in coverage and helpful in avoiding omission. However, it was felt that Lawrence's framework contained too many detailed criteria that were inappropriate for evaluation of Sustainability Appraisal in the relatively simple context of Neighbourhood Planning. It was therefore felt that the criteria under each attribute should be merged and sorted using the following method. If the criteria were largely similar but employed different terminology, they were combined to use a single term. Secondly, if the criteria described similar issues but from different perspectives, then the approach was to combine these different perspectives to form a new criterion. The third situation is where one criterion was broader than some others. Depending on the requirements of this research the approach was to select the most suitable one, or to slightly modify them to form a new one.

Furthermore, in addition to these attributes and criteria used in previous cases, it was felt that the characteristics of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning would also bring some new criteria. These characteristics should be carefully taken into account in the framework refinement and development process as very important elements to tailor the framework to the context of Neighbourhood Planning. The details of the selection and development process are set out below.

Institutional arrangements: The 'system criteria' attribute used in the Jones et al. (2005), and the 'transactive' attribute used in the Bond et al. (2013) framework are very similar with the 'institutional arrangements' used in Lawrence's (1997) study. Criteria included by these three attributes were reviewed following the aforementioned merging method and a consideration of the implementation background as Neighbourhood Planning.

The ‘legal basis’ of a plan may resemble ‘policies, legislation, and regulations’, which indicates its statutory position. As discussed in Section 2.4, planning experience and capacity is extremely lacking in Neighbourhood Planning, as such elements of ‘planning skill capacity’ and ‘organisational capacity’ should be taken into account as important criteria. ‘Guidance’ is also an important source of planning skills to guide Neighbourhood Planning process. ‘Financial capacity’ was also discussed previously as a big problem, and should be reflected in this part. Moreover, Neighbourhood Planning as a neighbourhood level planning form, how it is tiered and integrated with other level plans is also an important consideration. Therefore, the criteria ‘tiering’ should be highlighted. And Local Planning Authority should play a key role to support the development of Neighbourhood Plan, so the criterion ‘Local Planning Authority’ needs to be added. Finally, ‘time arrangement’ is also worth consideration.

Documents: Although according to Lawrence (1997) the documents of Environmental Assessment will vary depending on the proposal, the environmental setting and the jurisdiction, there are still many valuable criteria which could be drawn, such as, completeness of documents, clarity of content and format, and the structure of each chapter. Because no unified style and format is required for the Sustainability Appraisal report in Neighbourhood Planning, then, criteria should be flexible. The criteria ‘style and format’, ‘informative’ and ‘contents’ reflect a general sense about how reports have been prepared.

The attribute of ‘documents’, included both in Lawrence’s and Retief’s framework, could involve the descriptions of methods, processes, and outcomes. In this perspective, the ‘description of context’, ‘description of assessment methodology’, ‘description of the current sustainability baseline’, and ‘description of the process’ are all valuable criteria indicating how the context process and methods have been described in the report.

Process: criteria of ‘methods’ and ‘processes’ are often tangled. Jones et al. (2005)

and Bond et al. (2013) combined the two attributes as ‘process criteria’. According to Jones et al. (2005, p. 29) the process criteria ‘evaluate the quality of SEA procedures and methods applied during the SEA’. In this sense, their ‘process criteria’ in fact encompasses both the method criteria and process criteria. By contrast, Lawrence (1997) and Retief (2006) separated the two attributes. ‘Processes’ criteria were designed to indicate whether or not Sustainability Appraisal has followed procedural requirements. Moreover, it also involves criteria to examine the how well the procedural requirements were fulfilled.

In despite of some important traditional criteria (such as ‘proactive’, ‘integrative’, and ‘statutory consultation’), some criteria could be more important in this application milieu due to the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning discussed in Section 2.4. Neighbourhood Planning is a kind of community-led planning, then the ‘public involvement’ and ‘fairness’ becomes extremely important. Moreover, as Neighbourhood Planning is a new added planning layer, ‘other previous neighbourhood level plans’ (such as Town and Parish Plan) could somehow influence its implementation effect. Finally, ‘consultant involvement’ also could be added to indicate the performance of consultants in Neighbourhood Planning.

Methods: various methods are employed in an assessment, such as ‘to identify alternatives; characterize the proposal and the potentially affected environment; measure and predict impacts; interpret impact significance; mitigate and monitor impacts and involve stakeholders’ (Lawrence, 1997, p. 220). However, the criteria that could be employed to evaluate methods should vary by type of method and be responsive to the context.

As Sustainability Appraisal is not an obligation for Neighbourhood Planning, ‘screening’ is applied to demonstrate why it was carried out. The criterion ‘alternatives’ from Jones (2005) involves reasonable alternatives and preferred option selection. It is a very useful method and to some extent it could form the core element

of a Sustainability Appraisal report (Therivel, 2010). Additionally, ‘scoping’, ‘cumulative impact’, ‘mitigation’ and ‘monitoring’ are also worth noticing.

Direct outputs: direct outputs mainly reflect short-term influences (such as influencing a decision, a planning proposal changed, or sustainability objectives included), while indirect criteria reflect the future effectiveness and the educational outputs (such as sustainability awareness, capacity building or developing, cross-agency working).

As argued by Jones et al. (2005, p. 9) ‘it is important to gain an indication of whether or not the SEA is having any discernible impact on decisions about the content of the plans and consequently, on the sustainability quality of the region’. In this research, ‘goals achievement’, ‘policy changes’, and ‘decision making’ are factors worth consideration.

Indirect criteria: the evaluation of indirect outputs is difficult. According to Jones et al. (2005, p. 9) ‘the assessment of indirect outputs is largely a subjective exercise reliant on the opinions of experts and practitioners’.

Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning requires wide public involvement. During the plan-making process, the planning knowledge of participants would be improved, which could accumulate for further planning making process. Therefore, indirect criteria, such as ‘planning skill improvement’, ‘administrative level improvement’ and ‘conceptual/ideological improvement’ could be very important in this research.

To sum up, the final attributes and criteria are represented in the Table 4.6. There are in total 34 criteria within 6 attributes, these are, institutional arrangements, process criteria, method criteria, documents criteria, direct outputs and indirect outputs. The attributes and criteria are the basis for developing indicators. In this part, criteria were

established based on previous experience, as well as a consideration of the real situation of this research. Furthermore, characteristics of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning have been taken into account. And some new criteria were added to reflect the aims of this research.

Table 4.6 Attributes and criteria for the Evaluation Framework

	Attributes	Criteria
	Institutional arrangements	Guidance, Tiering, <i>Local Planning Authority</i> , Organisational capacity, Planning skill capacity, Financial capacity, Time arrangement
Quality	Process	Proactive, Integrative, Public involvement, Fairness, Statutory Consultation, <i>Other neighbourhood level plans</i> , Consultant involvement
	Method	Screening, Scoping, Alternatives, Cumulative impacts, Mitigation measures, Monitoring
	Document	Style and format, Contents, Informative, Description of policy context, Description of assessment methodology, Description of the current sustainability baseline, Description of the process, Communication of results
Effectiveness	Direct outputs	Goals achievement, Policy changes, Decision making
	Indirect outputs	Planning skill improvement, Administrative level improvement, Conceptual/ideological improvement

Source: Author, Lawrence (1997), Jones et al. (2005), Retief (2006) and Bond et al. (2013)

Note: *Local Planning Authority* and *Other neighbourhood level plans* are new added criteria for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning and other indicators are adapted from Lawrence's, Retief's, Jones et al.'s and Bond et al.'s evaluation frameworks.

4.3.2 Selecting Indicators for the Evaluation Framework

As previously discussed, 'indicators' connect the 'criteria' to the real-life situation. In this sense, indicators are the lowest level of the whole evaluation framework and should be developed very carefully. Poorly formulated indicators will hamper the robustness of data and could lead to obstacles to information collection. In contrast, sound indicators could make the data collection process easier and more accurate. At

this point, therefore, what are the principles behind selecting indicators are discussed and possible indicators for this research are developed.

Theoretically, the more indicators produced, the more accurate the evidence would be. However, indicator development needs to reflect the money, time and other resources available. From this perspective, indicators should be appropriately designed based on resources available and to reflect research objectives. In fact, according to Bossel (1999, p. 7), the ‘the number of indicators should be as small as possible, but not smaller than necessary. That is, the indicator set must be comprehensive and compact, covering all relevant aspects’. There are a number of principles that should be followed when developing sound evaluation indicators (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Principles of Indicators Selection

Principles	Comments
Valid and meaningful	An indicator should adequately reflect the phenomenon it is intended to measure and should be appropriate to the needs of the user
Sensitive and specific to the underlying phenomenon	Sensitivity relates to how significantly an indicator varies according to changes in the underlying phenomenon
Grounded in research	Awareness of the key influences and factors affecting outcomes
Statistically sound	Indicator measurement needs to be methodologically sound and fit for the purpose to which it is being applied
Intelligible and easily interpreted	Indicators should be sufficiently simple to be interpreted in practice and intuitive in the sense that it is obvious what the indicator is measuring
Relate where appropriate to other indicators	A single indicator often tends to show part of a phenomenon and is best interpreted alongside other similar indicators.
Ability to be disaggregated over time	Indicators should be able to be broken down into population sub-groups or areas of particular interest, such as ethnic groups or regional areas.
Consistency over time	The usefulness of the indicators is directly related to the ability to track trends over time, so as far as possible indicators should be consistent.
Timeliness	There should be minimal time lag between the collection and reporting of data to ensure that indicators are reporting current rather than historical information
Linked to policy or emerging issues	Indicators should be selected to reflect important issues as closely as possible. Where there is an emerging issue, indicators should be developed to monitor it.

Source: Brown (2009)

In this research, indicators are selected, following these principles, especially, ‘valid and meaningful’, ‘statistically sound’, and ‘intelligible and easily interpreted’ are three main principals followed. Within the four frameworks mentioned, excepting Lawrence’s, the other three frameworks all included detailed indicators. A comparison of these indicators is made in Appendix 5. These previous indicators could be regarded as a good starting point, and could to be optimised following the indicator selection principles.

In terms of the measurement method, Retief (2006) used three conformance scales, namely ‘conformance’, ‘partial conformance’ and ‘non-conformance’. Jones et al. (2005) also employed three scales namely ‘yes’, ‘partially’ and ‘no’, with the addition of ‘don’t know’. The basic assumption is that better conformance to more indicators implies better quality or effectiveness. Nonetheless, it felt that just adding up variable scores as with a quantitative survey method is inappropriate (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003) as the ‘local web of causality would be destroyed’ resulting only in a ‘smoothed down set of generalizations’ (Retief, 2006, p. 107). In this sense, as reflected in the following sections the research ultimately aims to tell a story rather than produce a quantitative performance score. This research, therefore, will follow Retief (2006) three conformance scales method to avoid destroying the local web of causality.

Then, the scale of conformance should be judged. Reflecting the nature of this research, it is judged that most of the data to be collected would be more qualitative rather than quantitative. Yin (2009) mentioned six sources of evidence commonly employed in doing case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct-observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. An overview of the six major sources considers their comparative strengths and weaknesses (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Six Sources of Evidence: Strengths and Weaknesses

Source of evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Stable-can be reviewed repeatedly . Unobtrusive- not created as a result of the case study . Exact-contains exact names, references, and details of an event . Broad coverage- long span of time, many events, and many settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Retrievability -can be difficult to find . Biases selectively, if collection is incomplete . Reporting bias - reflects (unknown) bias of author . Access - may be deliberately withheld
Archival records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Same as those for documentation . Precise and usually quantitative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Same as those for documentation . Accessibility due to privacy reasons
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Targeted- focuses directly on case study topics . Insightful- provides perceived causal inferences and explanations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Bias due to poorly articulated questions . Response bias . Inaccuracies due to poor recall . Reflexivity- interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear
Direct observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Reality- covers events in real time . Contextual- covers context of 'case' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Time- consuming . Selectivity-broad coverage difficult without a team of observers . Reflexivity- event may proceed differently because it is being observed . Cost- hours needed by human observes
Participant-observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Same as above for direct observations . Insightful into interpersonal behaviour and motives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Same as above for direct observations . Bias due to participant- observer's manipulation of events
Physical artifacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Insightful into cultural features . Insightful into technical operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Selectivity . Availability

Source: (Yin, 2009, p. 102)

Reviewing the previous data collection experience on Environmental Assessments, most were based on documentation (see Acharibasam & Noble, 2014; Bond et al., 2013; Fischer, 2012; Lawrence, 1997; Retief, 2006; Sadler, 2004; Therivel & Fischer, 2012; Thissen, 2000a). In this research, documentation could be particularly helpful since each Sustainability Appraisal produces a report to reflect the relative issues and outcomes. For instance, taking the indicator ‘was a description provided of the current state of the environment?’ The data sources for this indicator would be the Sustainability Appraisal documentation. Moreover, Neighbourhood Planning also produces other relevant documents, e.g. examiner’s reports, which could also be sources of data.

In addition, Yin (2009) argues to rely only on documents might reflect bias and interviews could be employed as a means of cross-checking. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that the ‘effectiveness’ aspects of Sustainability Appraisal are hard to measure and the most appropriate way of gaining information related to this is through interviews (Cashmore et al., 2010; Lawrence, 1997; Retief, 2006; Sherston, 2008; Thissen, 2000a).

Other data sources are less useful for this research. Yin (2009) mentioned archival records e.g. maps and charts of the geographical characteristics of a place; survey data; and organisation records. These data sources could be useful, but are encompassed in the Sustainability Appraisal Report rather than separate archive. Direct observation and participant observation are only available in real time, but not suitable for historic events. Finally, physical artifacts were referred to as ‘a technological device, a tool or instrument, a work of art, or some other physical evidence’ (Yin, 2009, p. 113), and are therefore not relevant to this research.

In this research, therefore, the main evidence will be drawn from Sustainability Appraisal reports and additional documentary evidence, e.g. the independent examiner’s report. Interviews with key practitioners will also be an important data

source (detailed data collection methodology see Chapter 5). Finally, following the principles and previous experience of Sustainability Appraisal evaluation, the indicators for each criterion are recorded in the Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Completed Framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning

		Criteria	Indicators	
Quality	Institutional arrangements	Guidance	Was the guidance helpful for SA preparation?	D, I
		Tiering	Was the SA undertaken within a tiered system of SA?	D
		Local planning authority	Was the local planning authority involved?	D, I
		Organisational capacity	Was the planning process well organised?	D
		Planning skill capacity	Was the SA carried out by practitioners with high planning skills?	D, I
		Financial capacity	Was the financial input sufficient?	D, I
		Time arrangement	Was the SA carried out within a reasonable time frame without undue delay?	D
	Processes	Proactive	Did the SA ensure availability of the assessment results early enough to influence the decision making process?	D, I
		Integrative	Was the SA fully integrated with the plan or programme formulation process, from conceptualization to implementation?	D
		Public involvement	Was a formal public participation process followed?	D
		Fairness	Was the public satisfied with the planning processes?	D
		Statutory Consultation	Have the statutory consultation bodies had a fair opportunity to contribute and have their views and comments been taken on board?	D
		Other neighbourhood level plans	Were other neighbourhood level plans produced during or before the Neighbourhood planning process?	D, I
		Consultant involvement	Was the SA carried out in house or by consultant?	D, I
	Methods	Screening	Was the need for the SA clearly defined?	D
		Scoping	Did scoping assist in defining the scope and extent of the SA?	D
		Alternatives	Were different alternatives considered to identify the best development option?	D
		Cumulative impacts	Were cumulative or additional impacts considered?	D
		Mitigation measures	Does a mitigation strategy exist to promote environmental enhancement and the reduction of potentially negative environmental effects?	D
		Monitoring	Did the SA propose a plan for monitoring, and did this take place?	D

Table 4.9 Completed Framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning (continued)

		Criteria	Indicators	
Quality	Documents	Style and format	Does the style and format suit the contents?	D
		Contents	Were the contents clearly explained, justified and logically arranged in sections or chapters?	D
		Informative	Did the SA report provide sufficient information for decision-making?	D
		Description of policy context	Was the decision making contexts and linkages with other decision-making processes described?	D
		Description of assessment methodology	Were the different methods applied in the SA described (relating to for instance screening, scoping and environmental assessment)?	D
		Description of the current sustainability baseline	Was a description provided of the current sustainability baseline?	D
		Description of process	Was a description provided of the SA process followed?	D
		Communications of results	Were the SA results well presented in the report?	D
Effectiveness	Direct outputs	Goals achievement	Were the SA objectives achieved?	D, I
		Policies changes	Were any plans or programmes amended based on the proposals of the SA?	D, I
		Decision making	Were decisions changed or amended based on the outcomes and proposals of the SA?	I
	Indirect outputs	Planning skill improvement	Was planning skill of residents improved after the preparation of SA in NP?	I
		Administrative level improvement	Was the administration capacity improved after the preparation of SA in NP?	I
		Conceptual/ideological improvement	Has the SA been used as a guideline for other future development proposals?	I

Source: Author

Note: D: Documents; I: Interviews

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter established a workable evaluation framework (see Table 4.9), drawing on previous experience and considering the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning. There are many existing evaluation frameworks established for various purposes and contexts, and Lawrence's (1997) 'quality-effectiveness' model is an eminent one with many evaluation frameworks established following its principles.

Jones et al. (2005), Retief (2006) and Bond (2013) are considered to be typical cases applying ‘quality-effectiveness’ principles to establish their evaluation frameworks. However, these frameworks were established to serve different evaluation purposes and contexts, and differed in the use of terminologies, attributes, criteria and indicators. To draw on these previous experiences, this chapter made comparisons between the four ‘quality-effectiveness’ evaluation frameworks and sorted them by merging, modifying, and where relevant cancelling attributes and criteria. In particular in establishing a comprehensive evaluation framework for this research, the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning were taken into account. As discussed in Section 2.4, these characteristics could significantly influence the implementation of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. Therefore, to sum up, effort was made to establish the evaluation framework in a systematic, comprehensive and rational way.

In this chapter, the possible data sources for the evaluation are also discussed. Evidence related to an indicator will be sought through documentation and/or interviews. The detailed data collection methods will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA COLLECTION METHODS

5.1 Introduction

As the evaluation framework has been established, the next question is how to obtain necessary evidence to test these indicators. This chapter discussed research methods for this research. As the topology and epistemology discussed in Chapter 1, in each Neighbourhood Planning case, the performance situations could be different. In this research, to select suitable cases is a primary question. Although there are more than 1000 Neighbourhood Planning cases in the UK, most of them still at very initial stages. There are only 29 cases have almost completed and 15 prepared Sustainability Appraisal. The possible qualitative data collection methods have been discussed as documentation and interview. In this chapter, the case study selection, detailed documentation and interview designing, ethical issues and pilot were discussed.

5.2 Cases Selection

In February 2014, when the case selection started, there were around 1000 Neighbourhood Planning undertaking in the UK. However, most of these were still at very initial stages, and only 29 Neighbourhood Plans that had been approved by the referendum (see Appendix 6). The 29 Neighbourhood Plans are considered to be the most progressed cases, containing much information than others. Nonetheless, within these there were only 15 cases that had conducted Sustainability Appraisal (see Table 5.1). The 15 cases will be employed as case studies in this research.

Table 5.1 The Fifteen Cases Prepared Sustainability Appraisal Within the 29 ‘Most Progressed’ Neighbourhood Plans

	Cases	Region	P/ T/ F	Rural/ Urban	Area sq.km	Population (2014)	Local authority	Index of multiple deprivation ranking	Consultant involvement
1	Thame	SE	T	Urban	12.7	11,561	South Oxfordshire	309	Tibbalds Planning & Urban Design
2	Exeter St James	SW	F	Urban	0.9	1,234	South Oxfordshire	309	In-house
3	Lynton and Lynmouth	SW	T	Rural	30.5	1,441	North Devon	127	Clare Reid Consultancy
4	Cringleford	E	P	Rural	4.1	3,200	South Norfolk	229	In-house
5	Sprowtson	E	T	Urban	9.5	14,691	Broadland	273	In-house
6	Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale	SE	P	Urban	19.3	18,121	Windsor and Maidenhead	306	URS Consultancy
7	Woodcote	SE	P	Rural	7.1	2,604	South Oxfordshire	309	In-house
8	Kirdford	SE	P	Rural	20	1,603	Chichester	231	Terrafiniti Consultancy
9	Strumpshaw	E	P	Rural	11.7	634	Broadland	273	In-house
10	Woburn Sands	SE	T	Rural	1.4	2,916	Milton Keynes	181	In-house
11	Tettenhall	NW	F	Rural	11.8	2,709	Wolverhpton city	19	Lepus Consultancy
12	Winslow	SE	T	Rural	7.7	4,407	Aylesbury Vale	283	In-house
13	Bembridge	SE	P	Rural	9.1	3,688	Isle of Wight	83	In-house
14	Cuckfield	SE	P	Rural	4.3	3,500	Mid Sussex	321	In-house
15	Chaddesley Corbett	W	P	Rural	22.8	1,422	Wyre Forest	123	In-house

Source: Author

Note: 1. E: East; W: West; SE: South East; SW: South West; NW: North West

2. P: Parish; T: Town; F: Neighbourhood Forum

3. The index of multiple deprivation ranking refers to DCLG (2015)

5.3 Documentation

Documents are a valuable source of data. As argued by Yin (2009), documents play an explicit role in any data collection in undertaking case studies. However, weaknesses still exist and criticism largely focuses on the potential for overreliance on documents. However, according to Yin (2009) the case study investigator acts as a vicarious observer, and the documentary evidence mirrors a communication among other parties attempting to achieve some other objectives. By constantly trying to identify these objectives, the researcher can avoid being misled by biased documentary evidence and can more accurately interpret the contents of documents.

5.3.1 Relevant documents

Table 5.2 lists the most relevant documents in this research. It was felt that documents at the national and local level are too general to be referenced. These documents mainly refer to general policies, laws and regulations, but not specific implementation issues emerged in Neighbourhood Planning. Usually, the Neighbourhood Planning documents include: the Neighbourhood Plan, Sustainability Appraisal report, independent examiners' report, basic situation report, screening report, scoping report, consultation statements, and decision statements. And these potentially provide rich sources of evidence.

The Sustainability Appraisal report, of course, is key, as the main output from the Sustainability Appraisal. The independent examiner's report is also important as it provides an independent perspective to test the quality of the Neighbourhood Planning process. The independent examiner's report could encompass key information such as basic conditions, public participation situations, or consultation problems. Besides these two main documents, the Neighbourhood Plan itself could contribute to some extent. Other documents might also contribute, but they are always included in the Sustainability Appraisal report. Such as consultation statement, basic condition statement, screening report, and scoping report.

Table 5.2 Possible Documentation Sources in This Research

Levels	Comments	Importance
National level		
NPPF	NPPF contains some potential information for sustainability consideration, but not important in individual cases	Low
The Neighbourhood Planning Regulations	It provides comprehensive regulations of the Neighbourhood Planning preparation, and could be used as context documents.	Low
Local level		
Core Strategy	Because the NP should be in conformity with Local level Plans, the Core Strategy has some information	Low
SA of Core Strategy	It might provide experience and a comparison model for SA in NP.	Middle
Neighbourhood level		
Neighbourhood Plan	The Neighbourhood Plan is outputs of Neighbourhood planning, and it might reflect part of the SA outputs (such as plan or decision changes).	Middle
SA Report of Neighbourhood Plan	It is the main output of SA, and it contains the most evidence we might need in documentation.	Very High
Consultation statement	It represents the responses and results of consultation	Low
Independent Examination Report	The Independent Examination Report includes the independent examiner's opinions toward the SA and NP	High
Basic condition statement	The basic condition statement always included in Scoping report.	Middle
Screening Report	It describes the reasons whether to carry out a SA.	High
Scoping Report	It describes the environmental baseline and SA objectives, but the SA Report always contains its summarised version.	High

Source: Author

To sum up, the main investigation here will focus on the Sustainability Appraisal report and independent examiner's report (see Table 5.3). Both of which one are easily accessed via downloading from Internet websites.

Table 5.3 Documents Employed in This Research

Cases		Author or examiner	Publication date	Pages
Thame	SA	Tibbalds Planning& Urban Design (consultancy)	November 2012	33
	EX	Nigel McGurk	February 2013	35
Kirdford	SA	Terrafiniti (consultancy)	June 2013	55
	EX	Janet L Cheesley	January 2014	30
Bembridge	SA	Bembridge Parish Council	October 2013	68
	EX	James Derounian	April 2014	22
Woodcote	SA	Woodcote Parish Council	September 2013	64
	EX	Nigel McGurk	December 2013	38
Tettenhall	SA	Tettenhall Neighbourhood Planning Forum	May 2013	35
	EX	Jeremy Edge	May 2014	49
Cuckfield	SA	Cuckfield Parish Council	July 2013	55
	EX	Ann Skippers	April 2014	37
Lynton and Lynmouth	SA	Clare Reid (Consultancy)	November 2012	58
	EX	Graham Self	August 2013	18
Winslow	SA	Winslow Town Council	December 2013	19
	EX	Nigel McGurk	May 2014	31
Chaddesley Corbett	SA	Chaddesley Corbett Parish Council	January 2014	36
	EX	Peter Biggers	June 2014	31
Cringelford	SA	Cringelford Parish Council	June 2013	33
	EX	Timothy Jones	November 2013	43
Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale	SA	URS (consultancy)	September 2013	11
	EX	Nigel McGurk	January 2014	45
Sprowston	SA	Sprowston Parish Council	May 2013	*363 (30)
	EX	Elizabeth Wrigley	December 2013	24
Woburn Sands	SA	Woburn Sands Town Council	April 2013	15
	EX	Peter Biggers	March 2014	39
Exeter St James	SA	Exeter St James Neighbourhood Planning Forum	December 2012	26
	EX	Graham Self	February 2013	16
Strumpshaw	SA	Strumpshaw Parish Council	October 2013	*110 (44)
	EX	Elizabeth Wrigley	March 2014	18

Source: Author

Note: SA: Sustainability Appraisal report EX: Examiner's report

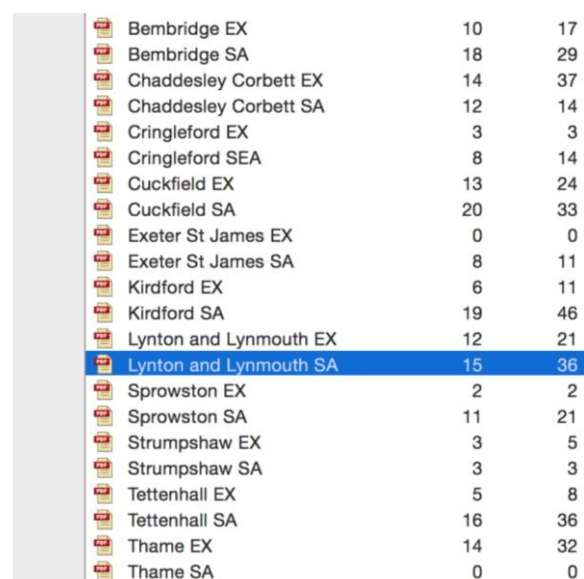
* Sprowston SA report is only 30 pages but attached to many appendices

Strumpshaw SA report is only 44 pages but attached to many appendices

5.3.2 Analysis techniques

In this research, the computer software NVivo was employed to assist the qualitative data collection. NVivo, is designed for qualitative researchers working with text-based and multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required. This software helps to organise and analyse non-numerical or unstructured data, and it also allows users to classify, sort and arrange information; examine relationships in the data; and combine analysis with linking, shaping, searching, and modelling.

NVivo, in this research, plays three important roles in managing, coding and analysing documents. 30 documents from the 15 Neighbourhood Planning cases were imported to NVivo (including 15 Sustainability Appraisal reports, and 15 examiner's reports). Each Neighbourhood Planning case contains one Sustainability Appraisal report and one examiner's report. In this sense, it is not easy to manage these documents without an assistant tool. NVivo provides a convenient way to sort and managed them by labelling and categorising text, for closer and consistent analysis (see Figure 5.1).



Bembridge EX	10	17
Bembridge SA	18	29
Chaddesley Corbett EX	14	37
Chaddesley Corbett SA	12	14
Cringleford EX	3	3
Cringleford SEA	8	14
Cuckfield EX	13	24
Cuckfield SA	20	33
Exeter St James EX	0	0
Exeter St James SA	8	11
Kirdford EX	6	11
Kirdford SA	19	46
Lynton and Lynmouth EX	12	21
Lynton and Lynmouth SA	15	36
Sprowston EX	2	2
Sprowston SA	11	21
Strumpshaw EX	3	5
Strumpshaw SA	3	3
Tettenhall EX	5	8
Tettenhall SA	16	36
Thame EX	14	32
Thame SA	0	0

Figure 5.1 Screenshot of NVivo Documents Management

Source: Author

Moreover, NVivo can code the document texts by using ‘nodes’. In this research, the nodes were created following the criteria in the evaluation framework (see Figure 5.2). In this way, the evaluation framework can be completely embodied in NVivo to collect relevant evidence. NVivo could code documents by locating ‘key words’ in texts, but it is still hard to identify relevant evidence in this research, since most of the relevant texts do not necessarily include particular key words. For example, the sentence ‘there is substantial evidence to demonstrate close, collaborative and effective working between the Steering Group and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead’ from the examiner’s report of Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, might relate to criterion ‘organisational capacity’, but it does not include the term ‘organisational capacity’ and can not be automatically identified by NVivo. This means, most of the coding work should be made based on my judgement rather than automated identification of key words.

Some evidence is easier to be identified than others, such as ‘guidance’, ‘screening’ and ‘monitoring’, for these are always set out in relatively fixed parts of documents. By contrast, some evidence is fragmented and abstract, and hard to identify e.g. ‘proactive’, ‘informative’ and ‘contents’. Finally, in NVivo, the number of evidence sources and references is showed for each node. This clearly indicates the data collection situations for each evaluation criterion. In this way, the distribution and frequency of evidence can be easily analysed (see Figure 5.2). In this way, the evidence distribution for each criterion can be identified via NVivo, and the outcomes presented in Table 6.1 in conclusion section.

Name	Sources	Refer...	C
Development descr...	4	5	
Screening	17	27	
Processes	0	0	
sustainable develo...	11	18	
integrative	4	5	
Proactive	11	26	
Key significant strat...	10	17	
Public involvment	21	75	
Statutory consultati...	16	27	
Fairness	11	17	
other neighbrouhoo...	2	2	
DIY level	9	14	
Institutional arrangem...	0	0	
Time arrangement	17	38	
Financial capacity	0	0	
Planning skill capa...	10	19	
Organisation capacity	16	37	
Experience of SA pr...	1	1	
Local Planning Auth...	9	20	
Tiering	8	9	
Guidance	8	12	

Figure 5.2 ‘Nodes’ of NVivo in This Research

Source: Author

5.3.3 Conclusion

Documents of course are very important as a form of data source, for they are main information carriers. Documents involved in this research include Sustainability Appraisal reports and examiner’s reports - the former providing information of Sustainability Appraisal and the latter providing a relatively independent perspective. However, the limits of documentation should be recognised – only recording procedural requirements while omitting some important information e.g. feelings, relationships, and personal thinking.

5.4 Interviews

Interviews are an important data collection method in this research as the planning process relies on human interactions and behavioural events, and well-informed interviewees can provide key insights into this process (Yin, 2009). Silverman (2000) describes the aims of interviews are to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations, which could provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods. Kvale (1983, p. 174) defines the qualitative research interview as 'an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena'.

Moreover, in this research, interviews could not only 'provide in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic' (Turner, 2010, p. 754), but also a usual approach to appraise the 'effectiveness' of Sustainability Appraisal as a very complex issue that is imperfectly reflected by documents (Bond et al., 2013; Cashmore et al., 2010; Retief, 2006; Therivel, 2010; Therivel & Fischer, 2012). In this section, important interview elements will be discussed, including interview types, interview techniques, interviewees and interview questions.

5.4.1 Interview types

Qualitative interviews have been categorised in a variety of ways. However, many contemporary texts loosely categorise qualitative interviews as 'unstructured' 'semi-structured' and 'structured' (Bernard, 1988; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Fontana & Frey, 2005). Additionally, there are other classifications, such as Yin's (2009) 'in-depth interviews', 'focused interviews' and 'survey'. Or Gall et al.'s (2003) 'informal conversational interview', 'general interview guide approach', and

‘standardized open-ended interview’. Although these classifications use different terms of description, they are similar in many ways.

Unstructured interviews are conducted in conjunction with the collection of observational data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In fact, no interview can truly be unstructured. But some are relatively unstructured and are more or less equivalent to guided conversations. With the unstructured interview, the researcher does not ask any specific types of questions, but rather relies on the interaction with the participants to lead the interview process (McNamara, 2009). Many consider this type of interview helpful since the lack of structure allows for flexibility in the nature of the interview. Nevertheless, many researchers view this type of interview as unstable or unreliable because of the inconsistency in the interview questions, making it difficult to code the data (Creswell, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews are the most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research and can be used either with an individual or in groups. Semi-structured interviews are often the sole data source for qualitative research projects (Adams et al., 2002). They are usually scheduled in advance at a designated time and location outside of everyday events, and only conducted once for an individual or group and typically take between 30 minutes and several hours to complete (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314).

Structured interviews can provide precision and reliability required in certain situations. They can collect a lot of quantifiable data and could run well in circumstances where the interview cannot be recorded. However, they might not really represent what the interviewee wants to express. Less structured interviews could be more efficient in terms of giving interviewees the chance to talk and collecting primarily qualitative data. Table 5.4 discussed the advantages and disadvantages of structured and less structured interviews.

Table 5.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Kinds of Interview

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Structured interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Can reach a large sample . A representative sample is possible and results can be used to make statements . Questions are structured and asked in the same way so that respondents' answers can be more easily analysed . Can do face to face interviews where electronic recording is not possible . Can ensure questions are fully understood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Respondents are 'forced' to choose between the alternative answers the interviewer gives them . It can be difficult to obtain reliable data on attitudes, opinions and values (unless validated questionnaires are used) . Interviewer has to stick to the agreed questions, even though interesting lines of enquiry might merge in an interview . Time consuming in terms of data collection
Semi-structured interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Respondents can answer questions in as much detail as they want . More valid information about respondents' attitudes, values and opinions can be obtained, particularly how people explain and contextualise these issues . An informal atmosphere can encourage the respondent to be open and honest . Flexibility- the interviewer can adjust questions and change direction as the interview is taking place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Only a relatively small number of these interviews can take place because each one can last for a long time . It is difficult to directly compare the results of in-depth interviews because each interview is unique . Because your sample size is small your results are unlikely to be representative of a particular population . Time – consuming - both in terms of data collection and data analysis

Source: (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 96)

5.4.2 Interview techniques

There are several approaches that can be employed when conducting interviews e.g. face-to-face interviews, telephone, and Internet. Among them, the face-to-face interviews could be the most common, and interviewing by telephone is also popular. However, recently, the popularity of Internet interviewing is rising. Especially, e-mail and Skype are commonly used Internet interviewing techniques (Yin, 2009).

When comparing the four interview techniques, one of the primary differences is related to the timing of communication, i.e. synchronous or asynchronous communication. Table 5.5 shows the four interview techniques related to this

dimension. Face-to-face and Skype interviews enable synchronous communication in time and place, while telephone interviews offer synchronous communication in time, but asynchronous communication in place. E-mail interviews are asynchronous communication in time and place.

Table 5.5 The Four Common Used Interview Techniques

	Time	Place
Synchronous communication	Face to Face Skype Telephone	Face to Face
Asynchronous communication	E-mail	E-mail Skype Telephone

Source: (Yin, 2009)

From these four interview techniques, face-to-face interviewing is argued to be the most appropriate for this research. Due to the synchronicity, one significant advantage are social cues (such as voice, intonation, and body language), which can provide the interviewer with lots of extra information which can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee on a question (Opdenakker, 2006). Another advantage of synchronous communication is that the answer of the interviewee is more spontaneous, without an extended reflection. The interviewer is also able to build good interview ambience. Finally, the finishing of a face-to-face interview is easy, compared to other interview measures. Additionally, as I am not a native English speaking, this might lead to misunderstandings to some extent. Elron and Vigoda (2003, p.330) warn that ‘... the lack of face-to-face social cues results in greater cultural and language barriers’. Therefore, the ideal way to carry out interviews is considered to be face to face.

Nevertheless, because the cases in this research are spread across England, it is impossible due to the time and resources available to take face-to-face interviews for each case. Fortunately, telephone or Skype can be employed as convenient interview tools. Although compared with face-to-face interviews, using the telephone may result in a loss of some information. Therefore, where possible Skype interviews were

requested and for some key in-depth interviewees, face-to-face interviews were organised.

5.4.3 Possible interviewees

Interviewees are the sources of interview evidences. Therefore, who should be interviewed could be a significant question. As Yin (2009) explained, interviewees' responses are subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation. Therefore, interviewees should be carefully selected. Creswell (2007) discusses the significance of selecting proper candidates for interviews. He emphasized that the researcher should utilise one of the various types of sampling strategies such as criterion based sampling or critical case sampling in order to acquire qualified candidates that will provide the most credible information to the study. Creswell (2007) also suggested the importance of acquiring participants who will be willing to openly and honestly share information or 'their story' (p. 133). Therefore, it is important to conduct the interviews with participants in a comfortable environment where the participants do not feel restricted or uncomfortable to share information. Additionally, according to Yin (2009) interviewees may be able to recommend other key interviewees, and this is also a possible way to find more interviewees.

Possible interview candidates in this research include: members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups, members of Local Planning Authorities, consultants, scholars and researchers, and local residents. These all could contribute their perspectives on Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal. However, it was considered that key interview candidates were the members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups, who led the planning process and writing of the Sustainability Appraisal report. In this sense, they have an overall view on planning situations in their neighbourhood area, including resources, planning organisation, methods employed, and use of consulting companies.

Members of Local Planning Authorities could also be interviewed, for they have an important role to support Neighbourhood Planning. According to Parker (2012) Local Planning Authorities play a crucial role in providing necessary planning skill capacity for Neighbourhood Planning. Moreover, advice from Local Planning Authorities could help reveal the relations between them and Neighbourhood Planning groups.

External consultants might also be involved in the Neighbourhood Planning process, but not all cases commissioned consultants. To interview consultants could obtain more details about how cooperation was carried out and to what extent a consultant may shape the final report. Consultant companies involved in this research would be emailed to ask if it is possible to make a phone interview.

Relevant scholars and researchers could also provide in-depth thinking about Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal. They could stand in an independent position being more explicit and impartial than other interviewees who participated the planning process. As a result, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were arranged to obtain in-depth information.

Additionally, local residents could be potential interviewees as they could be participants in Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal processes. Their views might contribute information related to public involvement, planning skill improvement, ideology, and awareness. Moreover, different interviewees could show different perspectives, as the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members do not necessarily represent the views of less closely involved residents. However, it could involve a massive number of interviews or questionnaires to obtain comprehensive data from local residents, meaning the interviews towards residents are hard to be fulfilled. Therefore, local residents will not be interviewed in this research.

To sum up, although we plan to collect as much as possible evidence from various sorts of interviewees, few Local Planning Authorities and consultancies responded to the interview request. Therefore, this research mainly focused on two sorts of interviewees - Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members and scholars.

5.4.4 Interview questions

Normally, there are two kinds of interview questions – open questions and closed questions. An open question allows the respondent to give a full answer to a question with as much explanation as they are willing to give. However, a closed question involves a simple response such as yes or no, or offers a list from which the respondent can choose a response. It does not allow the interviewee to expand upon their answers (Kvale, 1996).

McNamara (2009) suggested several principles for establishing effective research questions: (a) wording should be open-ended, respondents should be able to choose their own terms when answering questions; (b) questions should be as neutral as possible, avoid wording that might influence answers, e.g., evocative, judgmental wording; (c) questions should be asked one at a time; (d) questions should be worded clearly, this includes knowing any terms particular to the programme or the respondents' culture; and (e) be careful when asking "why" questions.

In this research, the indicators of 'effectiveness' were the main focus of the interview questions. However, besides these effectiveness questions, some questions related to significant 'quality' issues were included as it was not possible to assess these from documentary sources, being omitted by documents. Moreover, it was felt that for different kinds of interviewees, the interview questions might be slightly changed to obtain maximum information (detailed pilot questions and final questions for Steering Group members see Table 5.6 and questions for relevant scholars see Table 5.7).

5.5 Ethical Issues and Pilot

In any research, value conflicts, posing possible risks to participants, colleagues and society, usually cannot be avoided. To minimise these risks, ethical issues should be discussed in advance. Generally, there are three sorts of risks in social research (Diener & Crandall, 1978). Firstly, the potential for participants to be harmed, including death or injury, stress, guilt, reduction in self-respect or self-esteem, unfair treatment, withheld benefits, and minor discomfort. Secondly, professional relationships and knowledge foundation may be damaged, including falsification of data, abuse of confidentiality, plagiarism and deliberate violation of regulations. Finally, the community or society might be damaged, involving the effect of cultural values and beliefs on the knowledge produced and the impact of that knowledge on society. Usually, the harm to participants is predominant and prevalent (Appell, 1974). Moreover, in this research, the main ethical issues are concentrated on potential harm to participants.

Normally, injury or death in such research is extremely rare while psychological harm, such as feelings of guilt, depression and anxiety (Milgram, 1963), are more frequent (Appell, 1974). Firstly, self-esteem might be reduced, as Diener and Crandall (1978) suggested that participants who received negative reports might feel unhappy, and those who received positive reports may be embarrassed. Secondly, social relationships might become damaged. For example, team efforts in organizations can be disrupted, when superiors, peers, and subordinates openly exchange feelings and opinions, and resentments may linger. Finally, participants in research may suffer adverse effects of their careers and other kinds of economic damage, as a consequence of their involvement (Nagel, 1990).

Reflecting on the above, in this research, it was considered that ethical issues related to three sorts of participants should be considered. For Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members, criticizing Neighbourhood Planning or the government might bring

feelings of pressure or guilt about their criticisms. Moreover, social relationships and career prospects might also be affected. Moreover, ethical issues should also be considered to protect academic researchers and the freedom of expression of the scholars involved. Although in research context it is unlikely to be as severe as discussed above, measures to take account of such ethical issues are worthy of reflection in advance. There are many different approaches to reduce the risk of ethical hazards. Four are particularly useful in this research: informed consent, privacy and anonymity, intrusiveness and pilot.

5.5.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is related to an individual's willingness to participate in research. Individuals who provide informed consent have been made aware of the design and procedures with enough detail to exercise a rational decision to participate. The provision of informed consent also includes the knowledge that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw from the study at any time.

In this research, key information related to the research purpose, responsibility, time and procedures were explained to interviewees at the start and informed consent was taken from each participant before participation using a formal consent form.

5.5.2 Privacy and anonymity

Any individual participating in a research study has a reasonable expectation that privacy will be guaranteed. Thus, no identifying information about the individual should be revealed in written or other communication. Further, any group or organization participating in research has an expectation that its identity will not be exposed. In this research, the names of all interviewees - NP steering groups, scholars in Universities and members from consultancy companies - will be 'anonymised' (their name will be substituted with numbers and single letters).

5.5.3 Intrusiveness

Individuals participating in research have a reasonable expectation that the conduct of the researcher will not be excessively intrusive. Intrusiveness means intruding on their time, intruding on their space, and intruding on their personal lives. When designing a research plan, it is necessary to make an estimate of the amount of time participation might take. In this research, in order to minimise intrusiveness, initial communication with interviewees will be by email. If deciding to accept the interview, a time for a follow up interview was then made. In case where no email address was available or there was no reply, calls clerks of Town and Parish Council were also made appropriate.

5.5.4 Pilot studies

As in any quality research plan, a researcher should pre-test the interview protocol, or list of interview questions, before the main data collection process (Burke & Miller, 2001). Pilot studies could increase both the scientific rigor of the study and the protection for participants (Appell, 1974). The pilot will help the researcher to determine if there are flaws, limitations, or other weaknesses within the interview design and will allow necessary revisions prior to implementation (Kvale, 2007). The pilot will also assist the researcher with the refinement of research questions. An initial pilot interview was carried out and necessary revisions made to the questions and the recoding process.

In this research, Bembridge was chosen as a pilot case for it is the first replied my interview request. It is a semi-structured interview via telephone. Following the advice of Burke and Miller (2001) if you want to audiotape phone conversations, prepare well in advance for exactly how you are going to do it (e.g., what equipment you will use, where you will obtain the equipment, and so on). Therefore, as the interviews were carried out via telephone, then a voice recording software was

applied. And the interviewee was also informed that the conversation would be recorded.

Meanwhile, an independent voice recorder was also used for double security in case of some unforeseen problems, for instance, some low-end speakerphones that tended to 'cut out' after a length of time, and when this happened, the tape recording of the conversation could be lost. Furthermore, before the pilot test, several 'tests' were conducted to make sure that the person on the other end can hear me, the phone does not cut out, I can hear the interviewee, and the equipment can endure the length of the interviews. Also, interviews were carried out away from other background noise to avoid unwanted distractions during the interviews.

Participants need time to reflect and think about their responses, and as argued by Burke and Miller (2001) this time ultimately yielded more thick, rich descriptive data from participants. Therefore, before the interview, the interview questions were sent to the interviewee (see Table 5.6), following the approach of Burke and Miller (2001). The interviews followed this basic structure. I introduced myself as a University of Liverpool researcher. I also introduced that I am not a native English speaker that they might slow down their speed, so I can easily follow the points. Finally, I explained that I was taping the conversation for data-recording accuracy purposes, but that the comments will be held confidentially.

Finally, in this stage, the logistics should was also considered. For each interviewee, an interviewee code was created and placed on the interview's specific protocol sheet (written list of questions and responses). Additionally, the same code was recorded onto the audiotape before taping the particular interviewee's responses. This ensures a good method for matching the written record with the audio taped record of each interview.

Generally the pilot interview went smoothly, but some problems still emerged. The main problem is that some questions were a little bite vague, which caused misunderstanding. For instance, the question ‘were other neighbourhood level plans produced during or before the Neighbourhood Planning process? I in fact meant to investigate the other neighbourhood level plans like Village Design Statement or Parish/Town Plan in their neighbourhood area. However the interviewee misunderstood that I was asking the situation of other Neighbourhood Planning preparation, and given the answer said it is the first Neighbourhood Plan in Isle of Wight district but there are many other Neighbourhood Planning cases around the country. Therefore, I altered the question to ‘Were other neighbourhood level plans produced during or before the Neighbourhood Planning process in your neighbourhood area (for instance, the Village Design Statement or Parish/Town Plan)?’

Moreover, some of the pilot questions are very general, and the answers are simple and brief. However, for some questions, detailed answers are considered to be better. Therefore, new sub-questions were added to guide interviewees to talk more and deeper. For instance, the pilot question eight is not clear for interviewees to answer. Therefore, two sub-questions added: ‘Was planning skill of the whole neighbourhood improved after the preparation of SA in NP?’ and ‘Was the administration capacity of the steering group improved after the preparation of SA in NP?’

All pilot and final questions see Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Pilot and Final Interview Questions for Members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group

Pilot questions	Final questions
1. Could you please introduce me why your neighbourhood decided to prepare the SA report for neighbourhood planning?	1. Could you please introduce me why your neighbourhood decided to prepare the SA report for neighbourhood planning?
2. Could you please tell me about your role during the neighbourhood planning and SA preparation?	2. Could you please tell me about your role during the neighbourhood planning and SA preparation?
	----- Do you know who is the key person in charge of the SA preparation?
3. Could you please have a talk bout planning skill capacity of your neighbourhood?	3. Could you please have a talk bout planning skill capacity of your neighbourhood?
4. Were other neighbourhood level plans produced during or before the Neighbourhood planning in your neighbourhood area	----- Were other neighbourhood level plans produced during or before the Neighbourhood planning in your neighbourhood area (for instance, Village Design Statements)?
	----- Do you know somebody in the community have the experience of SA preparation before?
5. How do you think about the role local planning authority played in your Neighbourhood Planning preparation	----- To what extend do you think, the local planning authority and relative guidance contribute to planning skills?
6. Could you please introduce me how much money cost to prepare the neighbourhood plan and the SA of it?	4. Could you please introduce me how much money cost to prepare the neighbourhood plan and the SA of it?
	----- Where did the money come from?
	----- Was the financial input sufficient?
7. If the SA prepared in-house, What are the main difficulties and benefits of preparing SA in house in your opinion?	5. If the SA prepared in-house, What are the main difficulties and benefits of preparing SA in house in your opinion?
8. Were the SA objectives achieved in your opinion?	6. Were the SA objectives achieved in your opinion?
9. Were any decision, plan or programme amended due to the proposals of the SA?	7. Were any decision, plan or programme amended due to the proposals of the SA?
10. In your opinions what's the further influences of preparing SA of NP?	8. In your opinions what's the further influences of preparing SA of NP?
	----- Was planning skill of the whole neighbourhood improved after the preparation of SA in NP?
	----- Was the administration capacity of the steering group improved after the preparation of SA in NP?
11. Do you have some suggestions for the SA preparation depends on your experience?	9. Do you have some suggestions for the SA preparation depends on your experience?

Source: Author

Note: comparing pilot questions, some detailed following questions added to obtain deeper information; the order of questions slightly adjusted; and some questions slightly modified.

In terms of interview questions for relevant scholars and researchers, there was no pilot carried out. The interview questions asked as present in Table 5.7

Table 5.7 Interview Questions for Relevant Scholars and Researchers

1. As Neighbourhood Planning must conformity with the policies of the local plan, will it harm the enthusiasm of participant communities? Or weaken the power of Neighbourhood Planning?
2. As Neighbourhood Planning is a community-led planning form, how to avoid the so-called ‘NIMBY’ (not in my back yard)?
3. The Parish/Town Council and Neighbourhood Forum seemed to be two very different ‘qualifying bodies’. What are the main distinct between them? Which is better in carrying out Neighbourhood Plans?
4. So far as I can see, Planning Capacity could be one of the most primary problems of Neighbourhood Planning. How could a neighbourhood steering group obtain necessary planning skills? Which could be the most efficient way? And what could be the most helpful methods to improve neighbourhood-planning capacity?
5. Considering the planning capacity, which way do you think is the best way to carry out Neighbourhood Planning – in house or commission external consultant?
6. As Neighbourhood Planning was rolled out in an austerity period, do you think the financial support is sufficient? What are the situations of those with limited financial support?
7. You mentioned the critical role of Local Planning Authority. I agree that the support is necessary, but the Local Planning Authority might influence the decision-making process. Would that somehow challenge the leading position of neighbourhood steering group?
8. The distribution of Neighbourhood Plan cases seems uneven, very limited cases have been carried out in deprived areas. It that unfair for them? How to improve the participation of deprived areas?
9. As you have been studying Neighbourhood Planning for a long time, have you paid attention to Sustainability Appraisal of it?
10. What are the most significant problems of Neighbourhood Planning so far? Could these be solved by involving Sustainability Appraisal? If could, how? If could not, why?
11. Do you know any case have been in trouble because having not prepared SEA/SA appropriately?
12. Do you have some further recommendations about neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal, or about my research?

Source: Author

5.6 Conclusion

Documentation and interview were employed as data collection methods in this research. 30 documents (including Sustainability Appraisal reports and Examiner's reports) from the 15 Neighbourhood Planning cases were collected and analysed in assistance with NVivo. From these evidence related to the quality of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning was examined. For the effectiveness aspects of the evaluation framework and for some quality issues where documentary evidence was not available – interviews were undertaken. These involved Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members in each case study and selected academics providing wider perspectives.

The main issues of data collection focused on these interviews. For each case, if it is possible to involve more than one interviewee from the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups, evidence will be richer. However, as anticipated that there was always only one possible interviewee for each case, and many cases even rejected the interview requests (see Table 5.8). The interviews towards scholars were involved one Sustainability Appraisal expert and two Neighbourhood Planning experts. Finally, few Local Planning Authorities and consultants responded to my interview request.

Furthermore, as discussed, face-to-face interview is the preferred interview form. Therefore, members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups and scholars, being able to provide detailed information, would ideally be interviewed face to face. However, real-life limits also should be factored in. Most Neighbourhood Planning cases are far from Liverpool and the long distance means that the transportation and accommodation costs were potentially very significant (see Figure 5.3).



0	Liverpool	8	Winslow
1	Thame	9	Chaddesley Corbett
2	Kirdford	10	Cringleford
3	Bembridge	11	Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale
4	Woodcote	12	Sprowtson
5	Tettenhall	13	Woburn Sands
6	Cuckfield	14	Exeter St James
7	Lynton and Lynmouth	15	Strumpshaw

Figure 5.3 Distributions of the 15 Cases in This Research

Source: Author

To sum up, the discrepancy between assumption and real-life situations is a normal phenomenon in research. Here an attempt was made to involve as many as possible interviewees in sending interview request emails to each possible interviewee candidates. However, it is impossible to involve all interviewees expected, as the limitations of resources and possible rejection on the interview request. However, the difficulties were anticipated at the interview designing stage. It was estimated that the response from Local Planning Authorities and Consultants could be very limited, and some Neighbourhood Planning cases also would reject the interview request. The results are generally in line with the estimation.

Nevertheless, the key interviewees for this research are members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups and relevant scholars. Many of them responded to my interviewee request and provided considerable evidence for further analysis. Finally, interviewee respondents, as well as interview types and interview techniques are presented in Table 5.8 and Table 5.9. Table 5.8 shows the response from scholars and researchers. Totally four requests were sent, and three of them replied.

Table 5.8 Responded Scholars and Researchers

No.	Institutions	Research areas	Achieved date
Interview a	University of Liverpool	Neighbourhood Planning	04/11/2015 face to face
Interview b	University of Liverpool	Sustainability Appraisal	17/11/2015 face to face
Interview c	University of Reading	Neighbourhood Planning	24/03/2016 face to face

Source: Author

Table 5.9 clearly reflects the responded Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members. Within the 15 cases, nine responded for my requests. The reasons why the reminders did not accept the interview requests are also presented in Table 5.9. Finally, there are totally 12 interviews for both scholars and Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members. All the interviews were transcribed.

Table 5.9 Responded Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group Members

Interview No.	Case	Interviewee background	Interviewee role in SA preparation	Note
	Thame			The people in charge has retired
	Exeter St James			Do not want accept any interview
Interview 1	Lynton and Lynmouth	Town councilor	Chairman	13/11/2015 by telephone
Interview 2	Cringleford	Retired geographer	Coordinator, wrote the first draft	12/10/2015 by telephone
Interview 3	Sprowston	Town councilor	Chairman	14/09/2015 by telephone
	Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale			The Neighbourhood Plan was produced by external consultant, so they cannot answer the questions
Interview 4	Woodcote	Parish councilor	Chairman	15/09/2015 by telephone
Interview 5	Kirdford	Parish councilor	Chairman	16/09/2015 by telephone
	Strumpshaw			No response
Interview 6	Woburn Sands	Town councilor	Wrote the report	16/09/2015 by telephone
	Tettenhall			Clerk has left
Interview 7	Winslow	Town councilor	Chairman	08/10/2015 by telephone
Interview 8	<i>Bembridge</i>	Parish Clerk	Wrote the report	11/09/2015 by telephone
Interview 9	Cuckfield	Parish councilor	Chairman	10/10/2015 by telephone
	Chaddesley Corbett			The person in charge has left

Source: Author

Note: 1. Bembridge is the Pilot interview case

2. For each case only one interviewee available

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSING THE QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL IN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

6.1 Introduction

This chapter relates to Objective 2 to investigate the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. In this chapter, both the quality and effectiveness aspects of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Plans were analysed based on the evidence collected. To investigate the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning Quality evidence was mainly collected from two documents – the Sustainability Appraisal reports and the examiner’s reports. And main effectiveness evidence was collected through interview. Moreover, some indicators of quality aspects were also obtained via interview.

All the interviews were transcribed. The distribution of interview evidence was also reflected in evaluation outcomes, combining with the distribution of documentary evidence. In this way, a completed evidence distribution table (see Table 6.1) was established for the analysis in next chapter.

Table 6.1 Documents and Interview Data Distribution

		TH			EX			*LY			*CR			*SP			AS			*W			*KI			ST			*WO			TE			*WI			*BE			*CU			CH		
		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3						
Institutional arrangements	Guidance																																													
	Tiering																																													
	Local planning authority																																													
	Organisational capacity																																													
	Planning skill capacity																																													
	Financial capacity																																													
	Time arrangement																																													
Processes	Proactive																																													
	Integrative																																													
	Public involvement																																													
	Fairness																																													
	Statutory Consultation																																													
	Other neighbourhood level plans																																													
	Consultant involvement																																													
Methods	Screening																																													
	Scoping																																													
	Alternatives																																													
	Cumulative impacts																																													
	Mitigation measures																																													
	Monitoring																																													

Table 6.1 Documents and Interview Data Distribution (continued)

		TH			EX			*LY			*CR			*SP			AS			*W			*KI			ST			*WO			TE			*WI			*BE			*CU			CH		
		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3						
Documents	Style and format																																													
	Contents																																													
	Informative																																													
	Description of policy context																																													
	Description of assessment methodology																																													
	Description of current sustainability baseline																																													
	Description of process																																													
	Communications of results																																													
Direct outputs	Goals achievement																																													
	Policies changes																																													
	Decision making																																													
Indirect outputs	Planning skill improvement																																													
	Administrative level improvement																																													
	Conceptual/ideological improvement																																													

Source: Author

Note: * Cases involved interview data

TH: Thame; EX: Exeter St James; LY: Lynton and Lynmouth; CR: Cringleford; SP: Sprowtson; AS: Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale; W: Woodcote; KI: Kirdford; ST: Strumpshaw;

WO: Woburn Sands; TE: Tettenhall; WI: Winslow; BE: Bembridge; CU: Cuckfield; CH: Chaddesley Corbett;

No evidence
 Relevant evidence included
 More than one evidence or strong evidence
 1: Sustainability Appraisal report 2: Examiner's report 3: Interview

However, for some indicators it was impossible to identify relevant material from all the documents. For instance, evidence related to the indicator ‘guidance’ could only be found in the Sustainability Appraisal and examiner’s report for Thame, Lynton and Lynmouth, Bembridge, and Tettenhall.

In terms of quality aspects of Sustainability Appraisal, generally, it was possible to find more evidence for the indicators ‘tiering’, ‘Local Planning Authority’, ‘organisational capacity’, ‘proactive’, ‘public involvement’, ‘statutory consultation’, ‘screening’, ‘monitoring’, and ‘description of the current sustainability baseline’, while for indicators like ‘financial capacity’, ‘other neighbourhood level plans’, ‘Integrative’, ‘Cumulative impacts’ and ‘Mitigation measures’, evidence was limited. In addition, evidence could be readily found in some cases, e.g. Thame, Bembridge, Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, and Tettenhall, while for the remainder of Neighbourhood Planning cases generally less evidence could be found.

It is also worth noting that it was apparent that the Sustainability Appraisal reports and examiner’s reports contained different kinds of information. For instance, evidence related to the indicator ‘alternatives’ was mainly recorded in the Sustainability Appraisal reports, while details of ‘public involvement’ and ‘fairness’ was discussed in examiner’s reports.

Sometimes, evidence could be obtained from both sources and this provided useful different perspectives for crosschecking purposes. The discrepancy in accessing evidence between different indicators might be explained by a variety of reasons. For example, some indicators, such as ‘guidance’, ‘alternatives’, and ‘monitoring’ were easier to find information on because they related to specific issues that tended to be described in fixed chapters or paragraphs. In contrast, other indicators such as ‘tiering’, ‘proactive’, ‘integrative’, and ‘informative’ are more abstract and the evidence related to these was frequently scattered in different parts of the documents.

Because of the fragmentation of such evidence, these indicators were hard to assess merely based on identifying keywords via NVivo. Overall, however the method was to collect as much as information as possible and then make a judgement. Just like a ‘jigsaw’ - putting each piece of evidence together, it is hoped that relatively accurate results will emerge. Furthermore, it should be noted that some indicators, for instance ‘financial capacity’ were not considered by reference to documents, as they could be more easily investigated via interview.

In terms of evaluating effectiveness, it is acknowledged as a very difficult task. The ‘effectiveness’ here is not procedural effectiveness (Acharibasam & Noble, 2014). As discussed before, the procedural issues could be in part related to the quality of an assessment process, while effectiveness is different (Lawrence 1997). Understanding the quality inputs and processes is significant, but the outputs are the ultimate measures of Sustainability Appraisal’s added value (Acharibasam & Noble, 2014). Moreover, the assessment of Sustainability Appraisal effectiveness is largely a subjective exercise, often reliant on the opinions of experts and practitioners (Jones et al., 2005). In this chapter, despite information on a few indicators being recorded in documents, information about effectiveness issues was mainly obtained via interview (see Table 6.1), providing a more holistic review.

To sum up, the evidence related to quality was assembled from documents although the distribution of evidence varied considerably. Information on fewer quality indicators was only obtained from interviews. Nonetheless, there were still some indicators for which it was impossible to examine because of a lack of evidence. To evaluate the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal is acknowledged as a tough task, and in this research evidence was mainly collected via interviews with Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members.

6.2 Analysing Sustainability Appraisal Quality

In this section, the quality evidence that was collected in line with the evaluation framework (see Table 4.9 in Chapter 4) will be analysed and discussed. Most of the evidence is based on documents, especially the Sustainability Appraisal reports which contributed much valuable data. Moreover, interviews also helped to reveal some hidden evidence.

6.2.1 Institutional arrangements

Guidance

There are two kinds of guidance mentioned in this section: the generic guidance for Neighbourhood Planning, and specific guidance for Sustainability Appraisal of Neighbourhood Plans. Guidance could be very helpful as a starting point for newly emerging Neighbourhood Planning. It could provide necessary information on policies, tips, and suggestions for Neighbourhood Planning steering groups to follow.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are various kinds of legislation, regulation, policy and guidance published by government bodies or other relevant institutions for Neighbourhood Planning, legislation covering ‘the Localism Act’ (DCLG, 2011a), ‘the National Planning Policy Framework’ (DCLG, 2012b) and ‘the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations (2012)’ (DCLG, 2012c). These are fundamental as they set out the essential principles of Neighbourhood Planning. However these are not intended to guide the detail of Neighbourhood Planning implementation and more specific and professional guidance has been provided with this in mind, including: ‘How to shape where you live: a guide to neighbourhood planning’ (CPRE, 2012), the ‘Neighbourhood Plans Roadmap Guide’ (Locality, 2012a), ‘Neighbourhood planning: A simple guide for councillors’ (PAS, 2013b), and ‘Planning Help: Shape your local area’ (CPRE, 2014).

According to Table 6.1, most cases do not include evidence about guidance used in their Sustainability Appraisal preparation. However, as Neighbourhood Planning is new, it felt that they more or less have referred to the guidance, but do not need to mention it in Sustainability Appraisal reports. In terms of the preparation of Sustainability Appraisal, it should be noted that these documents were published to guide the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans and make limited reference to Sustainability Appraisal. As a result it is evident from the document analysis that some Neighbourhood Plans have looked to previous Sustainability Appraisal guidance on this specific aspect: Lynton and Lynmouth mentioned ‘A practical guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive’ (ODPM, 2006), and the ‘Sustainability Appraisal Advice Note’ (PAS, 2010). Tettenhall followed guidance: ‘A Practical Guide to the SEA Directive’ (ODPM, 2006), Local Development Frameworks Guidance on Sustainability Appraisal (PAS, 2009), ‘CLG Plan Making Manual: Sustainability Appraisal’ (CLG, 2009), and Thame followed government guidance ‘Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents’ (ODPM, 2005).

The ‘DIY Sustainability Appraisal of Neighbourhood Plans’ (Therivel, 2011) so far is the only guidance produced specifically for Sustainability Appraisal of Neighbourhood Planning. This guidance supposed to be a very important guidance for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning, but only one case mentioned it. The Sustainability Appraisal report of Bembridge mentioned that it followed that guidance to decide different stages in the process (Bembridge SA Report, P6).

Tiering

There can be a tiering of strategic actions, from policy, to plans, to programmes and, finally to projects. In theory, aspects of decision-making and Sustainability Appraisal carried out at one level do not need to subsequently be revisited at ‘lower’ levels, meaning tiering of decision-making and Sustainability Appraisal could save time and

resources (Therivel, 2010).

Neighbourhood Planning is the lowest level in the English system of spatial planning and in principle the Neighbourhood Plan should be in conformity with local, national and EU level policies (regional planning has been removed since 2012). In the research the main evidence of ‘tiering’ was obtained from the examiner’s report, as examiners are required to conclude whether or not a Neighbourhood Plan conforms to higher-level policies. All the cases, as shown in Table 6.1, are contained evidenced of ‘tiering’ in their examiner’s report. The examiner’s reports generally confirmed that these cases conform to tiering requirements.

For instance, the Bembridge examiner’s report stated that ‘overall, I agree that the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with strategic policies for the local area, bearing in mind the points made above.’ (Bembridge Examiner’s Report, p. 13) and in the examiner’s report of Chaddesley Corbett, it is stated that ‘it is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area ...’ (Chaddesley Corbett Examiner’s Report, p. 4).

Generally, all cases performed well in relation to tiering. The main conflict was concentrated on housing issues, because Neighbourhood Plans cannot develop fewer houses than the local plan requires (DCLG, 2012c). Some Neighbourhood Planning interviewees argued that this made local Neighbourhood Planning groups feel frustrated, for the tiering system limited the function of Neighbourhood Planning.

Local Planning Authority

The Local Planning Authority is obliged to provide necessary planning support for Neighbourhood Planning (DCLG, 2012c). According to the government guidance it should put in place a process to provide a screening opinion to the qualifying body on whether a proposed Neighbourhood Plan will require a SEA/Sustainability Appraisal,

and that in determining whether proposals are likely to have significant environmental effects, the Local Planning Authority should consult the statutory consultation bodies (DCLG, 2014b).

According to Table 6.1, some examiner's reports include descriptions of good Local Planning Authority participation. Prominent cases include Winslow and Thame. In contrast, the support from Local Planning Authorities seemed very limited in some cases, such as Kirdford and Cringleford. The information for this indicator seems generally limited, for the rest cases do not provide any evidence of Local Planning Authority participation. Relevant evidence of this indicator was obtained both via documents and interviews. The examiner's reports are more likely to contain important information, if the cases positively involved Local Planning Authorities. Negative evidence was always obtained via interviews.

In detail, it is evident that the steering group of Winslow Neighbourhood Plan 'has worked closely with officers of Aylesbury Vale District Council since the start of the project' (Winslow Examiner's Report, p. 17). The Examiner's Report of Winslow demonstrates that there is evidence of 'significant joint, collaborative working between the two bodies (Neighbourhood community and Local Planning Authority)' (Winslow Examiner's Report, p. 18). The South Oxfordshire District Council also worked together with the Thame Neighbourhood Community: 'One helpful piece of support on retail matters provided by South Oxfordshire District Council was the drafting of a framework for the retail section of the Neighbourhood Plan' (Thame Examiner's Report, p. 13).

In terms of negative cases, in the case of Kirdford, the interviewee noted that since the Local Planning Authority was focused on their emerging Local Plan it was sometimes difficult to keep the Neighbourhood Plan up-to-date with the District's position. Equally an interviewee of Woodcote said that the 'Local Planning Authority didn't trust Neighbourhood Plans. They thought it would be a distraction, so they were not at

all supportive at first, until they began to trust us, they thought that we were just trying to stop development’ (Interview. 4). Also in the case of Cringleford ‘our Local Planning Authority ... gave the impression of not being enthusiastic about a parish being involved directly in preparing a development plan’ (Interview. 2).

Organisational capacity

To prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, residents, the Local Planning Authority, advisors, steering group members, external consultants and other stakeholders all should be well organised to work together. Both Sustainability Appraisal reports and examiner’s reports do not need to specifically include description of ‘organisational capacity’. However, the evidence can be identified and concluded from many piecemeal descriptions in those reports. As shown in Table 6.1, all the 15 cases encompass such evidence in both Sustainability Appraisal reports and examiner’s reports. Generally, evidence indicates that the organisational capacity seem enough to Neighbourhood Planning.

The Chaddesley Corbett Neighbourhood Plan, for instance, was developed by a Steering Group, appointed by the Parish Council, made up of Parish Councillors and local residents as well as representatives from the local business community. It has also recorded the participation of different groups, but no details are provided about how they worked together. In the case of Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, the Parish Council was the qualifying body leading the neighbourhood plan, which was produced by a group of around 50 local residents from Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale and the surrounding areas. These people formed into a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and Topic Groups, and worked in partnership with the two Parish Councils. According to the examiner’s report on Ascot, Sunninghill, and Sunningdale Neighbourhood Plan, ‘there is substantial evidence to demonstrate close, collaborative and effective working between the Steering Group and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead’ (Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale Examiner’s Report, p. 56). For Cuckfield, a

Community Engagement Action Plan was developed. This is a well-written document that clearly sets out how various bodies and organisations as well as individuals and other groups will be engaged in the process. In the Bembridge case, once the initial identification of the structure of Neighbourhood Plan was achieved, a sub group was established to produce Sustainability Appraisal, in which the organisation of each meeting and discussion were clearly recorded.

Planning skill capacity

To prepare a Neighbourhood Plan and Sustainability Appraisal requires specialist planning skills, including reading maps or plans and data analysis. It could also include knowledge of specific topic areas, such as urban design, retail, heritage-led regeneration, housing or other planning issues (Locality, 2012a). Because of its nature, planning skill capacity was hard to identifying in documents. Therefore, interviews were designed to address this indicator. As discussed before, this is an important indicator, relating to a prominent characteristic of Neighbourhood Planning – limited planning skill capacity. In this section, intrinsic planning skill capacity is focused, meaning the planning skills of members of steering groups and volunteers. Other planning skills inputs (e.g. Local Planning Authority, consultants, and guidance) are discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

As shown in Table 6.1, it is hard to judge the planning skill capacity of participants based on documents. Nine cases were interviewed and all provided information of the planning skill capacity. According to the interviews, only one Neighbourhood Planning steering group, Cringleford, is constituted with skilled members. The steering group members of Cringleford include a geographer ‘with some experience of planning in Southampton’ (Interview. 2), a professional planner who ‘had worked as a development management officer’ (Interview. 2), a retired local government officer with ‘expertise in environment and transport management at county level’ (Interview. 2), a retired accountant, and the parish clerk who ‘managed the finances and generally

served the group' (Interview. 2). Therefore even though none of them had specific Neighbourhood Plan skills they had had 'experience of planning and knew where to look for information'. Additionally all of them 'had experience in writing reports' (Interview. 2).

However the other eight interviewees believed that their cases were not so well endowed with planning skills. For instance, the members of Woodcote steering group 'don't have any planning capacity' and 'because Neighbourhood Planning was new, traditional planners didn't understand things...' so 'the steering group just had to learn' (Interview. 4). Also, in Kirdford 'because Neighbourhood Planning was a new planning form, so nobody has the experience of it, we learned as we went' (Interview. 5). The learning process for them seemed to be a significant task. An interviewee of Bembridge said 'It took me two years to learn and write. It was really tiring to learn' (Interview. 8).

Financial capacity

Financial capacity is vital for any planning activity. All activities including advertising, management, meeting, printing, hearings etc. are based on financial support. According to Table 6.1, the details of the financial situation related to Neighbourhood Planning were not recorded in documents. Again, the interview was designed to obtain such evidence. All the nine interviewees responded to the indicator. Lynton and Lynmouth, Cringleford, Kirdford, and Bembridge seem have sufficient financial support. In the case of Lynton and Lynmouth 'there was an initial £20,000 paid...' and 'the funding available was considered to be sufficient to cover the majority of costs' (Interview. 1). For Cringleford Neighbourhood Plan, the cost was £12,000, and much of this was spent on 'paying over-time for the clerk' but they did also 'spend on carrying out two questionnaire surveys, having the maps drawn professionally and getting the resulting document professionally designed and printed' (Interview. 2). Moreover, 'the money came from the national government, but indirectly through the

district council' (Interview. 2). Kirdford and Bembridge were also paid £12,000 each. The main financial sources were central government, their Local Planning Authority and other institutions (e.g. Locality). For instance, Bembridge 'received £4,000 from the isle of Wight, and £7,000 from Locality' (Interview. 8). To sum up, the average cost of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan was around £12,000. The main sources of money were central government, Local Authorities and the organisation 'Locality'.

Although some interviewees believed the money paid was sufficient, but they had to carefully use the money. Kirdford, for instance, 'had prepared everything in house' (Interview. 5), Cringleford 'kept careful control of the budget' (Interview. 2). And the interviewee in Cuckfield believed the financial support is enough only because they 'have a very small population' (Interview. 9). Moreover, it should be noted that central government only subsidised a limited number of frontrunners, while subsequent cases were unable to get such support.

Nonetheless, in some cases it was indicated that the Neighbourhood Plan did not cost any money, for example, Woburn Sands claimed their Neighbourhood Plan 'didn't cost anything, because they didn't employ consultants and did it all in house' (Interview. 6). Some did not spend money on Sustainability Appraisal, for example, in the case of Woodcote, interviewee said 'we spent around £10,000 to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan but to prepare the SA, we spent nothing' (Interview. 4).

Time arrangement

According to Table 6.1, the information of time arrangement can be found in both Sustainability Appraisal report and examiner's report of all the 15 cases. However, they always mention it separate parts of report, and do not include particular time arrangement part. There are only two prominent Neighbourhood Planning cases which provide specific time arrangement tables in their Sustainability Appraisal Reports. Bembridge was an important exception as it included a 'full story schedule'

(Bembridge SA Report, p. 11), which clearly set out progress made and problems faced in each stage from 30th October 2012 to 27th March 2014. Also in the Sustainability Appraisal report of Kirdford, a time arrangement table – ‘Steps in the Neighbourhood Plan Process’ was included (Kirdford SA Report, p. 34).

6.2.2 Processes

Proactive

It has been acknowledged in literature that Sustainability Appraisal should be carried out early in planning to effectively influence the decision-making process (Fischer, 2012; Gibson, 2005; Therivel & Minas, 2002). This consensus was also accepted in Neighbourhood Planning.

The information of proactive can be identified via time arrangement records in both Sustainability Appraisal reports and examiner’s reports. Thame and Bembridge are two prominent cases clearly explained how they considered the issue of proactive in their documents. Thame believes that ‘it is important that the SA process is not simply bolted on to the end of the process of producing the Thame Town Plan...’ and in practice, when the Neighbourhood plan was at an early stage, a review of baseline information had been undertaken; public consultation had been carried out to identify issues and needs; these issues and ideas had been developed into a draft vision and objectives; and public consultation is about to take place on the vision, objectives and strategic approaches (Thame SA Report, p. 45).

Also in the case of Bembridge, the Sustainability Appraisal Report contains a schedule setting out the progress made in respect of the Sustainability Appraisal preparation and problems faced (Bembridge SA Report, pp. 10-13). There were some very crucial stages which should be mentioned: at an initial stage, during October and November 2012, public meetings were held to raise awareness of the issues. In

December 2012 the steps and contents for the Sustainability Appraisal were discussed, and a sub group was established. In January 2013 it was confirmed that a Sustainability Appraisal was needed. In April 2013, a Sustainability Appraisal Framework process was established. In May 2013 the scoping report was submitted; in September 2013 the full Sustainability Appraisal report was produced. It was submitted in April 2014. This schedule gave a very clear clue about the preparation process of the Sustainability Appraisal alongside the Neighbourhood plan. It was obvious that in this case, Sustainability Appraisal was carried out from the very beginning.

In interviews, seven out of the nine cases believed that they considered Sustainability Appraisal of Neighbourhood Planning at early stages. For instance, the interviewee of Kirdford believed that ‘we considered carrying out Sustainability Appraisal as early as possible’. However, there are two cases admitted that the Sustainability Appraisal preparation lagged behind the Neighbourhood Plan. The interviewee of Woburn Sands said ‘actually we did it in the wrong way. We did it a lot later than the plan’ (Interview. 6), and ‘The Local Planning Authority told us that we probably need Sustainability Appraisal, so we went back to re-write the story of Sustainability Appraisal’ (Interview. 6). And also in the case of Woodcote, the interviewee said ‘because we didn’t scope the report at the beginning, so we didn’t have a chance to do anything to amend the policies’ (Interview. 4).

Integrative

Sustainability Appraisal could influence the plan-making process from beginning to end if Sustainability Appraisal is appropriately integrated into the plan-making process (Therivel, 2010). Therivel also argued that although it is impossible to accurately predict what will be actual ‘decision windows’ (ANSEA, 2002) – times in which key decisions are made – in the plan-making process, it will still be valuable mapping out any formally required stages of decision-making and deciding how to

best integrate it in the Sustainability Appraisal. The possible integration methods are discussed in three, following the guidance prepared by Therivel (2011).

According to Table 6.1, the evidence of integrative is hard to be identified. Only Thame, Kirdford, and Bembridge included clear descriptions of integration methods in different stages of the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. The rest cases seemed ignored to demonstrate the integration between Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning.

Thame developed a 'Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Plan process diagram' (Thame SA Report, p. 6), including descriptions on how to integrate each Sustainability Appraisal stage to the Neighbourhood Planning process. Also in the case of Kirdford, the stages of Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning are listed in the Sustainability Appraisal report (Kirdford SA Report, P. 9).

Also in the case of Bembridge, the document describes '... Which aligns the SA process with that of the general NP development stages and identifies the tasks undertaken and the associated overlap between the Bembridge Neighbourhood Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal production and development...' (Bembridge SA Report, p. 8).

Public involvement

Involving the public in decision-making and Sustainability Appraisal takes advantage of local skills, knowledge and resources, leads to more socially and politically acceptable decisions, improves 'ownership' of decisions, makes the strategic action more likely to be implanted, can resolve conflict between stakeholder groups, and improves democracy by ensuring that community views are taken into account in decision-making (Therivel, 2010).

Recorded in the examiner's report of Thame, 'effective public consultation should encourage the views of as wide a range of people affected by the proposals as possible. In this regard, it was clearly appropriate for consultation on the plan to focus on people living with the neighbourhood area' (Thame Examiner's Report, p. 10).

In addition to statutory consultation, the invitation to developers and/or landowners to exhibit their proposals was highly commendable, this 'provided an additional opportunity for those parties to have their say - and for people to consider, understand and comment on any proposals' (Thame Examiner's Report, p. 10).

Normally, there could be four stages of public consultation in Neighbourhood Planning:

1. an initial consultation;
2. a second consultation around objectives and initial approaches to the Plan;
3. an option development and testing period; and
4. final consultation on the preferred options.

The evidence of public involvement is very abundant in documents, especially in examiner's reports. It seems a main issue needs to be discussed. All the 15 cases contain relevant information of public involvement. Some cases did try best in public involvement, including Thame, Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, Kirdford, Chaddesley Corbett, Cuckfield, Lynton and Lynmouth, and Strumpshaw. For instance, Thame Town Council 'did as much as they reasonably could to raise local awareness and to encourage as many local people as possible to get involved' (Thame Examiner's Report, p. 10). And '... there was input from the earliest stage from the other interested parties including the police, local organisations, and landowners and developers' (Thame Examiner's Report, p. 10).

And for another good case Cuckfield, 'It is evident that a thorough and concerted effort

has been made to ensure that the neighbourhood planning process has captured engagement and opinion from a wide variety of participants and that all parties with an interest in the Neighbourhood Planning have had opportunity to input to the process’ (Cuckfield Examiner’s Report, p. 9).

Additionally, various methods were used to obtain the views from a wide range of people. For instance, the Strumpshaw Parish Clerk ‘... contacted non-resident landowners by telephone and posted CDs of the submission documents to them during this consultation. Residents who are landowners were able to respond to plan proposals through the local consultation, the advertising for which is described in the Consultation Statement, on the basis of this I conclude they can reasonably be expected to have been both aware of the consultations, and had the opportunity to participate’ (Strumpshaw Examiner’s Report, p. 5).

Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale also applied multiple methods to involve people. The steering group updated a dedicated website, which was held to be ‘pivotal’ to communication, meanwhile other methods also played very important roles, ‘posters and other printed material, together with the development of a 600-strong email mailing list and social media pages’, ‘surveys were returned following the launch event...’ and ‘a total of 550 completed questionnaires were received...’ (Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale Examiner’s Report, p. 11).

And the views of Kirdford residents were sought via various approaches, including ‘survey questionnaires, public events, seminars and written contributions. Local organisations and businesses were consulted and invited to respond to questionnaires and/or provide submissions in writing or by way of discussion groups and meetings’ (CHEC, 2014, p. 4). Furthermore, rather than using website, other communication measures included email, a parish magazine, and notices and posters displayed on the four parish notice boards.

Nevertheless, the attendance for public meetings was generally low in the case of Bembridge. The examiner of Bembridge set out that on June 2013, two public meetings were held. However with very low numbers recorded as commenting on proposals; in autumn 2012 public meetings, 100 participants attended; and 446 people responded to a 2013 housing needs survey out of a total recorded population of 3,682 (ONS, June 2013) (Bembridge Examiner's Report, p. 11). Reasons for this limited engagement may include general contentedness with the Neighbourhood Plan proposals, disinterest and apathy with the process, too many other things to do, as well as an occasional occupancy of around 20% of Bembridge properties. In the case of Thame, 'around 400 people attended the first weekend and 479 people attended the second. These are impressive numbers and indicate a high degree of public awareness' (Thame Examiner's Report, p. 9). Following Neighbourhood Planning cases could learn the experience of Thame in terms of attracting public involvement.

Fairness

The views of minorities should also be considered. The main issue mentioned by the 15 Neighbourhood Planning cases is young people's involvement in planning. This is an important part of fairness, but not all documents contained such information. According to Table 6.1, main data is from examiner's reports of Bembridge, Thame, Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, and Lynton and Lynmouth. Additionally, it is far from enough to consider only youth involvement, and other minorities also need to be taken into account. Such as the disabled, low income group, and minor race. However, no any case mentioned these issues.

According to the evidence, the constitution of people who participated is very simple, for most participants were the older and younger people were not sufficiently involved. For example, Bembridge set out 'no explicit mention of younger people and their needs' (Bembridge Examiner's Report, p. 6). The youth seemed not to have much interest in planning, or they are not actively participating in the housing market. For

instance, the Bembridge housing market is ‘characterised by very few youth’ (Bembridge Examiner’s Report, p. 6). And according to the examiners’ report it is highlighted that there is ‘no specific/explicit mention of younger people and their needs? I suggest this is an omission given repeated mentions across Bembridge Neighbourhood Planning reports that a key problem relates to the impact of an ageing population’ (Bembridge Examiner’s Report, p. 6).

Nevertheless, there were many cases that had tried to involve youth via different methods. ‘There was a concerted effort to gain the views of younger people, through consultation events held at Charters School, local youth clubs and at Ascot United FC’ (Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale Examiner’s Report, p. 12). And in the case of Lynton and Lynmouth, ‘a number of Neighbourhood Representatives have come forward to work together with small sections of the local community or work with groups such as businesses, services, clubs and societies, or young people’ (Lynton and Lynmouth SA Report, p. 5). Also in Thame, ‘the views of younger and older people were also actively sought, with two small focus groups being set up’ (Thame Examiner’s Report, p. 10).

The important point is that ‘opportunity was provided for young people to give their opinions but participation in consultation is not compulsory’ (Thame Examiner’s Report, p. 10). However, there was no any evidence found within all the documents reviewed that other fairness issues were present or noted in relation to other groups, such as the poor, women and minority ethnic groups.

Statutory consultation

Normally, there are three main statutory consultation bodies, namely: Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency. Each Neighbourhood plan is required to consult these institutions on relevant issues. If there were significant impacts, they would send comments and suggest modification.

As statutory consultation is legally required in Neighbourhood Planning, all the 15 cases include relevant data. Statutory consultees did not suggest any changes for some cases, e.g. in the case of Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, ‘none of the statutory environmental bodies, English Heritage, Natural England and the Environment Agency, raised any concerns with the SEA’ (Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale Examiner’s Report, p. 7). In the Bembridge case, they do ‘not consider that this plan poses any likely significant risk to internationally or nationally designated nature conservation or landscape sites’ and ‘that no further assessment is required’ (Bembridge SA Report, p. 8). For some Neighbourhood Planning cases, not all consultees responded, such as Cuckfield, only Natural England replied but no modification suggestions were given. The response indicated that ‘the process as a whole will provide an excellent opportunity for protecting and safeguarding locally valued environmental assets’ (Cuckfield Examiner’s Report, p. 5).

Some did receive comments, For example, Historic England recommend to Lynton and Lynmouth that ‘further thought should be given to three aspects...’ (Lynton and Lynmouth Examiner’s Report, p. 4) and most significantly Natural England provides contradictory comments on the plan. ‘Natural England supports parts of the plan and expresses concerns about other parts, specifically the possible effects on nature conservation interests of policies E7, E8, E9 and H4’ (Lynton and Lynmouth Examiner’s Report, p. 4). However, according to the Consultation Statement, at the pre-submission stage of the plan Natural England were satisfied that the draft plan ‘does not appear likely to result in significant adverse effects on designated landscapes or on national or European protected sites’ (Lynton and Lynmouth Examiner’s Report, p. 4). The plan did not materially change between then and July 2013, but in their letter of 23 July 2013, Natural England raised a number of new criticisms and disagreement with some conclusions of the Habitats Regulations Assessment.

According to the examiner’s report these criticisms had been fully considered. In the

Sustainability Appraisal report, detailed explanations are given. In fact potential conflicts were minor, and they concluded that ‘the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan’ (Lynton and Lynmouth Examiner’s Report, p. 4). Therefore, the criticisms from Natural England do not justify making any changes to Neighbourhood Plan policies.

Another case that received comments is Thame. The Environment Agency highlighted that a number of documents needed to be considered in the ongoing Sustainability Appraisal work. Following those comments, amendments had been made: Objective 10 had been amended to include a statement about mitigating climate change through provision of high quality and diverse natural habitats. Objective 13 had been amended to ‘sustainable land use’ rather than ‘efficient land use’ so that the objective encompasses a broader range of issues (Thame SA Report, p. 6). The report does not include previous objectives, but present amended objectives as shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Amended Objectives of Thame’s Sustainability Framework

Objective 10	To seek to address the causes and effects of climate change by: a. securing sustainable building practices which conserve energy, water resources and materials; and b. maximising the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources. c. ensuring that the design and location of new development is resilient to the effects of climate change. d. provision of high quality and diverse natural habitats to enable biodiversity to adapt and become more resilient to the effects of climate change.
Objective 13	Land should be used sustainably so as to reduce development pressure on the countryside and natural resources/material assets, such as landscape, minerals, biodiversity and soil quality.

Source: Thame SA Report (p. 6)

Other neighbourhood level plans

Besides the constitution of steering group members, planning capacity also might be influenced by previous experience on other neighbourhood level plans (e.g. Parish

Plan). Previous experience could be helpful in terms of providing baseline data and policy familiarity.

According to Table 6.1, no documents contained such information. Therefore, there are only nine cases which have been interviewed have relevant evidence for this indicator. Lynton and Lynmouth, Cringleford, Woburn Sands, and Woodcote, have experience of other neighbourhood level planning. The interviewee of Cringleford indicated that ‘one of the reasons that South Norfolk District Council wanted us to prepared the Plan was because two parish plans had been prepared previously’, and ‘the previous experience of parish plans made us more confident in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan’ (Interview. 2). The Lynton & Lynmouth Town Council had previously produced a parish plan together with surrounding parishes under the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative, and the interviewee admitted that the previous experiences have ‘contributed lots of baseline data’ (Interview. 1).

However, not all interviewees believed previous parish plans or Village Design Statements could contribute to Neighbourhood Planning. Some plans were developed so long ago, such as Woburn Sound ‘We had town plan and Village Design Statements about ten years ago’ (Interview. 6) and Woodcote ‘so many years ago we had the parish plan’ (Interview. 4). Some said the ‘Parish plan and Neighbourhood Plan are totally two different things’ (Interview. 9) and ‘it [Parish Plan] could only influence [Neighbourhood Planning] in a psychological way’ (Interview. 4).

Consultant involvement

Some of the Neighbourhood Plans were prepared totally in-house, some with assistance from an external consultancy (see Table 5.1). Within these cases, there were five cases which commissioned a consultancy to write their Sustainability Appraisal Report, namely Thame, Lynton & Lynmouth, Ascot & Sunninghill & Sunningdale, Kirdford, and Tettenhall. For instance, Thame commissioned Tibbalds

Planning & Urban Design, and ‘Tibbalds worked in partnership with representatives of Residents Associations and Town Councillors to develop four options for the growth of Thame’. Kirdford commissioned a consultancy to ‘assist with the re-wording of the policy text to incorporate planning terminology’ (CHEC, 2014, p. 4). Other cases might have also employed consultancies in Neighbourhood Planning, but prepared Sustainability Appraisal Report in house. For example, Cuckfield Parish Council steered the planning process and wrote the main reports, whilst the consultancy was involved as ‘critical friend’ to provide an objective opinion (Cuckfield SA Report, p. 14). Winslow commissioned RCOH Ltd to provide professional support.

From interview data, it is possible to identify the benefits of commissioning a consultancy. These included: ‘the consultant had a good local knowledge of the area’ (Interview. 1), ‘they know how to write policies in formal planning language’ (Interview. 5), ‘having previous experience of Sustainability Appraisal’ (Interview. 1), and being able to ‘contribute technical planning skills’ (Interview. 9). In addition to ‘the additional costs incurred ...’ (Interview. 1), other disadvantages were mentioned, including ‘they did not change any thing about the policies, they just concentrated on writing language’ (Interview. 5), or the ‘consultancy tried to steer and control the planning process’ (Interview. 1), and ‘there was a danger to involve a consultant, for they might lead the plan and to present what they believed are important, but maybe not important for you’ (Interview. 2).

For those who prepared the Neighbourhood Plan in-house, advantages were frequently mentioned including, saving money (Interview. 6). And the community could control the planning by themselves to reflect what they really wanted. For example, in the case of Woburn Sands, an interviewee said ‘we deliberately chose not to use the consultant because ... we wanted to do it in our way’ (Interview. 6). Moreover, in Cringleford, ‘The main benefits of doing it ourselves are that the Plan was specific to our area and expressed the requirements of its inhabitants - it was not generic; we could control exactly what went into the Plan’ (Interview. 2). Finally, the benefits of learning were

also mentioned, as the interviewee in Bembridge confirmed that ‘it could be hard to learn everything by ourselves, but now I have learnt those planning skills and it could be easier in next turn of Sustainability Appraisal preparation’ (Interview. 8).

The main difficulties mentioned in interviews included ‘finding information, reading a great many planning documents...’ (Interview. 2) and most interviewees admitted that ‘to prepare the plan in-house was totally a disaster, for there was lots to consider, to do, and to learn ’ (Interview. 8). Especially at the initial stage of Neighbourhood Planning, an interviewee of Woodcote argued ‘there was no previous experience to learn from, so we didn’t know how to do it, we didn’t know what it should look like, we didn’t know what people expected’ (Interview. 4). Moreover, in the case of Thame, the Sustainability Appraisal was prepared by a consultancy, and as a result the steering group members seemed to know nothing about how the Sustainability Appraisal report had been prepared, and suggested I interview the consultancy.

6.2.3 Methods

Screening

One primary function of screening is to establish whether Sustainability Appraisal is required. According to Therivel (2010) once the basic aspects of the strategic action have been understood, it should be possible to determine whether the strategic action requires Sustainability Appraisal, this is the screening process. The faster and more definite the screening process is, the less uncertainty will result.

All the 15 cases mentioned why Sustainability Appraisal was prepared in screening part of their Sustainability Appraisal reports. Some cases prepared Sustainability Appraisal because it was legally required (at least they believed that). And some others prepared Sustainability Appraisal voluntarily to demonstrate the consideration of sustainability and prepare better Neighbourhood Plan (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Sustainability Appraisal Voluntary or Required For Each Case

Cases	TH	EX	LY	CR	SP	AS	W	KI	ST	WO	TE	WI	BE	CU	CH
Voluntary/ Required	R	V	R	R	V	R	V	R	R	V	R	R	R	R	V

Source: Author

Note: TH: Thame; EX: Exeter St James; LY: Lynton and Lynmouth; CR: Cringleford; SP: Sprowtson; AS: Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale; W: Woodcote; KI: Kirdford; ST: Strumpshaw; WO: Woburn Sands; TE: Tettenhall; WI: Winslow; BE: Bembridge; CU: Cuckfield; CH: Chaddesley Corbett;

According to Table 6.3, some cases legally required Environmental Assessment, e.g. Cringleford - ‘due to the level of development allocated in the Plan, there would be significant environmental effects and therefore an SEA would be required’ (Cringleford SA Report, p. 3). Nonetheless, as mentioned before if a Neighbourhood Plan will not lead to significant environmental impacts, Sustainability Appraisal or SEA is not required. Some cases discussed in their screening reports that although Sustainability Appraisal or SEA were not required, they still wish to produce a Sustainability Appraisal to demonstrate their consideration of sustainable development. In the case of Chaddesley Corbett, Sustainability Appraisal or SEA were not required since no potential significant environmental impacts were expected. However, Sustainability Appraisal had been prepared ‘on their behalf to ensure that the plan adheres to the principles of sustainable development’ (Chaddesley Corbett SA Report, p. 1). Exeter St James also developed Sustainability Appraisal as an instrument to ‘ensure and demonstrate that the principles of sustainable development...’ (Exeter St James SA Report, p. 5).

As revealed by interviews, some cases prepared Sustainability Appraisal passively. Those cases are legally required to prepare Sustainability Appraisal. Such as Cringleford, Bembridge and Winslow. The interviewee in Winslow said ‘It is not a good idea to prepare Sustainability Appraisal, as it costs extra resources. To be honest, we do not want to prepare it’.

Even for those who prepared Sustainability Appraisal voluntarily, still not all felt positive. Some cases just did not know whether Sustainability Appraisal was legally required, but prepared it to be safe. For example, Woburn Sands seemed reluctant to prepare Sustainability Appraisal, for they believed that ‘Sustainability Appraisal had been prepared for the local plan covering relevant issues’ (Interview. 6), and ‘no significant environmental impacts were estimated in their Neighbourhood Area’ (Interview. 6). However, the Local Planning Authority pushed Woburn Sands to ‘prepare a Sustainability Appraisal Report to avoid any potential troubles (Interview. 6)’. In the case of Woodcote, ‘nobody told us whether we needed [Sustainability Appraisal] or what and how to do it. It was confusing at that time’ (Interview. 4).

Scoping

Scoping involves deciding on the ‘topics to be covered by the Sustainability Appraisal, the level of detail into which it will go, the methodology that will be used, and possibly the alternatives that will be considered and how stakeholders will be involved’ (Therivel, 2010, p. 124). All of the 15 cases prepared scoping report, and some integrated scoping issues into Sustainability Appraisal reports, for these issues are core elements of a Sustainability Appraisal. For instance, Thame attached an independent Scoping report, in which the chapters of ‘Methodology’, ‘Policy context’, ‘Sustainability context’ and ‘Sustainability framework’ were included. Therefore, the ‘scoping’ of Thame is very detailed and informative.

In the case of Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, the Council for consultation in November 2011 published a Scoping Report. This document had set out the evidence base for undertaking the Sustainability Appraisal of the Neighbourhood Plan. It is noted that in the response to the statutory consultees, the Council were clear in their approach to Scoping Reports for individual neighbourhood plans in that: ‘Each neighbourhood plan will require sustainability appraisal and the issues to be covered

in each SA are all contained within the overall Sustainability Appraisal scoping report...the council...does not intend to produce a refined Sustainability Appraisal scoping report for each Neighbourhood Plan' (Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale SA Report, p. 5).

Alternatives

The development, assessment and comparison of alternatives are a key stage in Sustainability Appraisal and it is inextricably linked to the decision-making process itself (Therivel, 2010). However, there are only five have prepared alternatives, including Bembridge, Thame, Cuckfield, Lynton and Lynmouth, and Tettenhall. The reminders did not demonstrate in the Sustainability Appraisal report that they have considered alternatives.

Thame, as a good example, developed four alternatives, including 'Walkable Thame', 'Public transport Thame', 'Dispersed Thame' and 'Contained Thame'. These sufficiently considered the processes of plan development and assessment, involving: 'understanding the technical spatial issues; feedback on four 'strategic approaches' displayed at the public consultation event in November 2011; developing four options based on feedback from local people and discussions with representatives of Thame's Residents Associations and Town Councillors' (Thame SA Report, p. 10). For each option a concept map had been given to indicate the sites, alongside brief explanations. However, the descriptions of the options were very broad and lacked detail. Furthermore, the options were mainly based on housing allocation in different sites, rather than incorporating other sustainability issues in this neighbourhood area.

In terms of alternatives selection, Thame also performed well. According to Thame 'the effects of different options can be understood, leading to informed choices about the preferred way forward' (Thame SA Report, p. 16). The appraised method for

alternatives was based on sustainability objectives (including both ‘non-spatial objectives’ and ‘spatial objectives’) (Thame SA Report, p. 16).

Another good case is Bembridge. The alternatives were derived from feedback from of public meetings and surveys and developed for each sustainability objective. Its Sustainability Appraisal Report clearly recorded the assessment method towards alternatives, but details for each option were not fully included. The preferred alternatives were selected in line with the results of the assessment. However, the descriptions for alternatives selection were recorded only briefly.

Cumulative impacts and mitigation measures

For each Neighbourhood Plan objective, both direct impacts and cumulative impacts should be considered. The SEA Directive requires decision makers to explain how environmental considerations have been factored in to decision-making, identification and documentation of mitigation measures is a key component of this (Therivel, 2010).

Only three cases include a particular chapter to discuss the cumulative impacts and mitigation measures, namely Thame, Bembridge, and Woodcote. According to Thame ‘A key role of Sustainability Appraisal is to highlight areas where there is a possibility to increase the sustainability of the Plan. Whether this is through maximising potential positive impacts or through highlighting areas where mitigation is needed against any negative effects’ (Thame SA Report, p. 28). However, very few cases considered the cumulative impacts and appropriate methods to deal with them.

Three prominent cases in terms of cumulative impacts and mitigation are Thame, Bembridge and Woodcote. Thame included an independent chapter to demonstrate the consideration of cumulative impacts and mitigation for the preferred option and non-spatial objectives. The negative environmental impacts of the preferred option had been mitigated by ‘improving pedestrian and cycle access to the town centre’ (Thame

SA Report, p. 30).

The Bembridge case encompassed a table to show the cumulative impacts, as well as impacts of each community objective against sustainability objectives (Bembridge SA Report, pp. 65-67). In mitigation, the assessment table was analysed by the sustainability sub group, and there were two issues highlighted within the assessment table: ‘the sustainability objective traffic congestion and car parking has attracted a high number of negative impacts cumulatively across the preferred alternatives’ (Bembridge SA Report, p. 68).

As a consequence of mitigation, the original objective ‘to provide a car park in the village centre’ had been altered to ‘improve public car parking facilities in the business centers’ (Bembridge SA Report, p. 68). The preferred alternative for this community objective was ‘to promote alternative uses to travel’ and subsequently contributes to a healthier lifestyle. This mitigation reduced the negative impacts against the sustainability objective (Bembridge SA Report, p. 68).

Woodcote discussed possible cumulative impacts for each alternative. The preferred option did permit the use of pre-developed sites and achieves significant mitigation of the impact on the local environment, countryside and rural look and feel of the village. ‘Furthermore, design appropriate density, and sensitive landscaping and the use of vegetation to screen new housing would achieve additional mitigation’ (Woodcote SA Report, p. 12). Mitigation of the impact on village services was achieved by ‘phasing the introduction of new housing such that the growth is less sudden and the service providers have time to plan and adapt’ (Woodcote SA Report, p. 13).

Monitoring

Although it may be too early to consider monitoring and review for these early cases, it is possible to examine the monitoring and review methods described in

Sustainability Appraisal reports. Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale confirmed that at the current stage, there is a need to present ‘measures envisaged concerning monitoring’ only (Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale SA Report, p. 9).

According to Therivel (2010, p. 233), monitoring is typically carried out ‘using the indicators used for describing the baseline environment and making Sustainability Appraisal predictions’ and ‘the choice of what to monitor is inextricably linked with the questions that the monitoring aims to answer’. Once a decision has been made on what to monitor and why, a monitoring framework will be set up, which specifies how to monitor, when to monitor, who is responsible, what the management response should be to any identified problems, and how the monitoring information should be communicated (Hanusch & Glasson, 2008).

In Neighbourhood Planning, although most of the monitoring for the neighbourhood plan will be carried out by the local authority or at the national level, ‘some impacts might warrant local-level monitoring and it is anticipated that the steering group may want to do this anyway to make sure that the Neighbourhood Plan works the way that it was intended to’ (Bembridge SA Report, p. 69).

Approximately half of the 15 cases discussed monitoring methods in their Sustainability Appraisal reports, including Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, Bembridge, Chaddesley Corbett, Cuckfield, Tettenhall, Woodcote and Thame.

For instance, the Sustainability Appraisal report of Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale set out two monitoring issues: ‘... The steering Group might wish to monitor the amount of affordable housing development... and to monitor the transport choices taken by those living and working in the area...’ (Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale SA Report, p. 32).

In the case of Bembridge, Table 6.4 below shows the programme and timescales set

to monitor and review the Neighbourhood Plan and associated documents over its lifespan.

Table 6.4 The Consideration of Monitoring in The Case of Bembridge

What needs to be monitored	Who will monitor	How often will this be monitored	What response should there be if monitoring shows problems
Delivery strategy and Neighbourhood action Plan	Village partnership	6 monthly	Review and decide if the strategy and plan need amending
Sustainability Appraisal	Village Partnership	Annually	Review and decide if the appraisal needs updating
Habitat Regulations	Village Partnership	Annually	Review and decide if the screening report needs updating
Equality impact assessment	Village Partnership	Annually	Review and decide if the assessment needs updating
Housing Needs Survey	Village Partnership	5 yearly	Complete a new housing needs survey, analysis and report

Source: (Bembridge SA Report, p. 69)

In the case of Thame, monitoring methods were included in the Sustainability Appraisal of Local Development Core Strategy. The Thame Neighbourhood Plan just adopted the Sustainability Framework to form a more local-level Sustainability Appraisal. In theory, the South Oxford District Council and Thame Town Council both had the duty to monitor and review the Plan, but South Oxford District Council should take a main responsibility. According to Thame, to ensure the plans are aligned with each other, monitoring will be undertaken by South Oxford District Council using the same monitoring methodology.

6.2.4 Documents

Style, format and contents

There is no uniform requirement for the style and format of Neighbourhood Plans and Sustainability Appraisal reports. Therefore, documents have been prepared in various manners for different cases. The pages of Sustainability Appraisal report presented in

Table 5.3 also shown the differences (The Sustainability Appraisal report of Thame has 68 pages, while Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale has only 11 pages). Some followed the advice from a consultancy if they commissioned one. Some, prepared Sustainability Appraisal in followed the guidance 'DIY Sustainability Appraisal' (Therivel, 2011) or suggestions from their Local Planning Authority.

Those cases which commissioned a consultancy have prepared better Sustainability Appraisal reports in terms of style and format than those in-house. Thame, Lynton & Lynmouth, Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, Kirdford, and Tettenhall (all commissioned consultancies) all prepared Sustainability Appraisal reports with attractive covers, clear structure, nice layout and appropriate typeface. However, Bembridge, who prepared the report in-house, had also elaborately designed the style and format for its report.

Informative

'Informative' is a very general criterion. There are few descriptions in documents related to how informative a Sustainability Appraisal report is, but such as reflected in table 6.1, the distribution of evidence could to some extent demonstrate the 'informative' circumstances in different cases.

Some cases prepared relatively well-informed Sustainability Appraisal Reports, including Thame, Kirdford, Bembridge, Tettenhall, Lynton and Lynmouth. Evidence to support indicators in their Sustainability Appraisal reports are abundant and easily obtained.

Although from the reports of some cases, such as Winslow and Cringleford, it was not possible to comprehensively extract all evidence for all indicators, however, they still clearly described relevant issues that they were concentrated on.

Description of the policy context

The policy context relates to the strategic actions linking with other plans, policies and environmental/sustainability objectives (Therivel, 2010). The policy context description should include: other ‘higher-tier’ policies and plans that influence the strategic action; ‘Lower-tier’ plans and projects that are influenced by the strategic action; and sustainability objectives that affect the strategic action (Therivel, 2010, p. 98).

The SEA Directive (European Commission, 2004) states that the Environmental Report should include: ‘an outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes’ and ‘the environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or Member State level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation’.

Because it is clearly required, all cases have included descriptions of the policy context, although some are very simple and general. Good cases, for example, Kirdford which explains, ‘this section provides a summary review of the policy context relevant for the Neighbourhood Plan. Starting at the international level and working down in scale this covers the key policies that the Neighbourhood Plan should adhere to or consider’ (Kirdford SA Report, p. 10). And ‘... Considered a range of relevant policies and plans for this assessment considering international, national, regional (South East England), and local (County and District) plans and policies’ (Kirdford SA Report, p. 10). And, prominently, it includes ‘key objectives’ ‘key targets/indicators’ and ‘key implications’ to discuss why those documents are relevant and what are the main influences on the Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal of it.

The context of Thame was also appropriately introduced in the Sustainability Appraisal report as a section, ‘Neighbourhood Planning and policy context’ (Thame

SA Report, p. 5). The South Oxfordshire Core Strategy was highlighted as a core policy context, which identified the housing need for Thame of 775 new homes and 2 hectares of employment space. A key function of the Thame Neighbourhood Plan will be to allocate sites for these uses. The summaries of other relevant policy documents are described in the Scoping Report. In this table, all relevant documents mentioned by the Sustainability Appraisal report of Thame are summarised. As there were not any ‘lower-tier’ documents, the report mainly discussed relevant documents on the regional and local levels (Thame SA Report, p. 8).

Description of assessment methodology

In the cases of Bembridge, Cuckfield, Kirdford, Lynton and Lynmouth, Sprowston, Tettenhall, Woodcote and Thame, the assessment methodology was described in the Sustainability Appraisal report.

Most of the cases discussed assessment methodology with different Sustainability Appraisal stages. The typical methodology follows a five Stage process of Sustainability Appraisal (ODPM, 2005) (see Table 6.5)

Table 6.5 Five-stage Method of Sustainability Appraisal

Stage A Pre-production, setting the context and objectives, evidence gathering to establish a baseline and deciding on the scope, culminating in production of scoping report
Stage B Developing and refining options and assessing effects and mitigation by testing plan objectives against the SA Framework
Stage C Documenting and appraising the effects of the plan and preparing the SA Report
Stage D Consulting on the plan and the SA Report Stage
Stage E Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the NP

Source: (ODPM, 2005, p. 13)

In the case of Thame, the proposed methodology for the Sustainability Appraisal set out in the Scoping Report (Thame SA Report, p. 6) rigidly followed the five stages. Also in the case of Kirdford, the assessment methodology in each stage was discussed in the Sustainability Appraisal report. Additionally, some cases, for example

Bembridge below, mentioned relevant methodology in a very general way, but still in line with the five stages (Bembridge SA Report, p.23):

Stage 1: Identifying what the neighbourhood plan must do and cannot do.

Stage 2: Identify the characteristics of your neighbourhood.

Stage 3: Identify possible things to include in the plan (options/alternatives).

Stage 4: Prepare an SA 'scoping report' and consulting.

Description of the current sustainability baseline

The environmental or sustainability baseline is ‘the current status of the environment or sustainability, plus its likely future status in the absence of the strategic action’ (Therivel, 2010, p. 102). Information about the sustainability baseline assists the identification of existing problems that the strategic action should seek to solve; sets a context for the impact prediction and evaluation stage; and provides a basis against which the strategic action’s impact can later be monitored (Therivel, 2010).

All of the cases selected in this research included a description of the current sustainability baseline in their Sustainability Appraisal reports. Most cases discussed three aspects of sustainability, such as Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, and Sprowston.

Some cases already had sustainability baseline statistics collected for the Local Plan or other previous neighbourhood-level plans. For those cases, baseline data collection could be easier since they could focus only on updating data. For instance, before collecting the baseline information for the Neighbourhood Plan of Thame, the Town Plan had encompassed a review of the sustainability baseline. Based on the previous data, current baseline statistics were collected from various sources, including the Local Core Strategy evidence baseline and studies provided by developers who were involved in potential development sites. According to Thame, the ‘Baseline

information’ section of the Sustainability Appraisal report outlined a summary baseline information (Thame SA Report, p. 11).

Description of the process

The Sustainability Appraisal report that accompanies the draft strategic action is not the important thing: what is important is the process that precedes it (Therivel, 2010).

There are no cases which specifically discussed their Sustainability Appraisal processes. However, the Sustainability Appraisal report itself provides a completed story of the implementation process. In good cases, such as Thame and Bembridge, the process of Sustainability Appraisal is clearly and systematically recorded in their reports. By contrast, some cases such as Woburn Sands, Exeter St James, and Strumpshaw are considered to omit some integral parts of the storyline, such as screening, alternatives, and monitoring.

Communication of results

Ideally, the Sustainability Appraisal report presents the results of the Sustainability Appraisal process in a clear manner, explains how the strategic action was changed as a result of the Sustainability Appraisal, includes a non-technical summary (Therivel, 2010).

The results of Sustainability Appraisal are included in Sustainability Appraisal reports of all documents. But only Bembridge and Tettenhall included an independent section to discuss all changed made. The Sustainability Appraisal report of Bembridge included a section, ‘how the summary table was analysed and what changes were made as a result’. In that section, two issues that attracted a high number of negative impacts had been changed and a detailed explained action provided (Bembridge SA Report, p. 68). As a result of this the community objective originally ‘to provide a car

park in the village centre' was changed to 'improve public car parking facilities in the business centers' (Bembridge SA Report, p. 68).

Tettenhall included a section 'Results of the Assessment' and prepared a non-technical summary, in which the main changes and recommendations were presented. Ascot Sunninghill and Sunningdale also discussed the assessment results in detail and recommendations were given.

6.3 Effectiveness Evidence of Sustainability Appraisal

6.3.1 Direct outputs

The direct outputs of Sustainability Appraisal relate to the influences on policies or decisions (Runhaar & Driessen 2007; Noble 2009; Stoeglehner et al. 2009; EPA 2012). These may be considered as more immediate effects of Sustainability Appraisal and its impact on the development, scope or implementation of a policy. Direct outputs are realised directly through Sustainability Appraisal implementation and policy development, modification and improvement (Buuren & Nooteboom 2009). The outcomes of direct effectiveness could reflect in the achievement of goals, the changes of policies and decisions.

Goals achievement

Sustainability Appraisal reports should discuss whether the sustainability objectives have been achieved. In this research, some interviewees believed that the sustainability goals had been achieved in their Neighbourhood Planning.

'Yes, our sustainability goals were achieved' (Interview. 5). 'All the objectives and their achievement situations are recorded in the Sustainability Appraisal Report, and there is no significant negative environmental influence' (Interview. 6). In the case of

Woodcote, they believe their objectives were achieved because ‘the examiner said it did’, and ‘in the referendum, most residents vote yes’ (Interview. 4).

Nevertheless, in fact, it is not easy to judge whether the objectives have been achieved, as some objectives might require long-term monitoring to make the judgement. Their answers seem to be very hasty. Lynton and Lynmouth admitted that: ‘The judgment over whether the SA objectives have been achieved can only be measured by monitoring processes usually over the longer term’ (Interview. 1), but there were ‘no indicators developed for the neighbourhood plan to monitor whether policies were having their intended effect’ (Interview. 1). Then ‘the Sustainability Appraisal objectives will be monitored by the Neighbourhood Planning Authority through the Authority Monitoring report for the National Park area as a whole’ (Interview. 1). Also in the case of Cringleford, ‘we are in the process of discovering whether the Neighbourhood Plan has achieved its objectives’ (Interview. 2).

A good example for instance is Cuckfield. The Sustainability Objectives for Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan were derived from a (Cuckfield SA Report, p. 11):

- . Review of the Policies and Documents
- . Review of Mid Sussex District Sustainability Objectives
- . Understanding of the key issues facing Cuckfield

‘These objectives were selected in a systematic way, including all potential environmental, economical and social issues’ (Interview. 9). Moreover, Cuckfield also produced ‘reasonable Sustainability Indicators that were used to gather data during the lifetime of the Neighbourhood Plan’ (Interview. 9) (see Appendix 7). Then, they compared the Neighbourhood Plan Objectives and Sustainability Objectives, indicating that there were no objectives that directly conflicted, but several sustainability objectives are not addressed by the objectives of the neighbourhood plan. It is concluded that there will be no net negative impact on the sustainability

objectives of the Parish, as long as the policies of the Plan are met. The overall effect of the implementation of the Plan will contribute to the objectives of sustainable development within the Parish.

Policies, plans and programmes

Another possible way to evaluate the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal is to analyse the changes to the strategic action. According to Therivel and Minas (2002) that there are three criteria required to get to such changes, as shown in Figure 6.1.

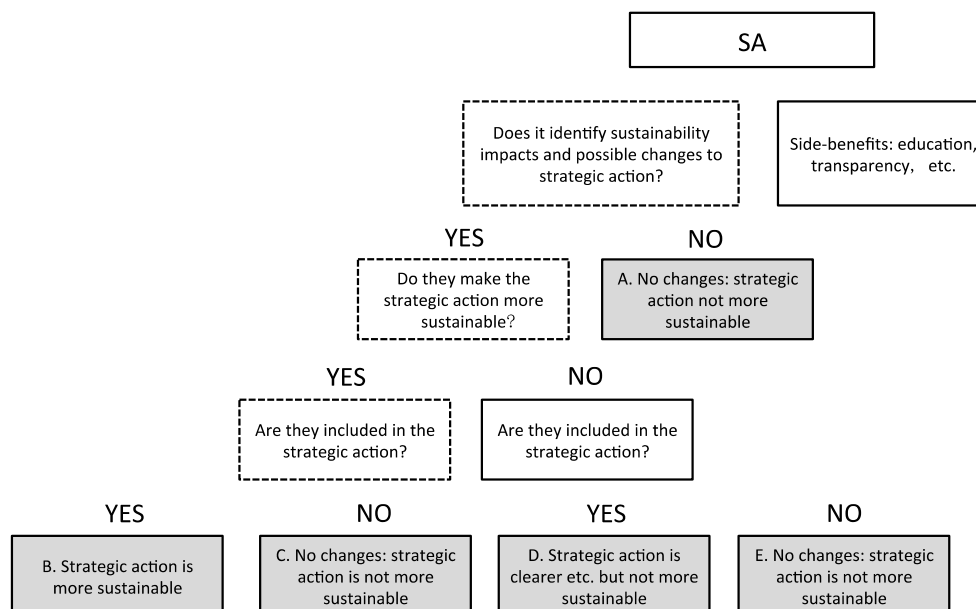


Figure 6.1 Getting to Improved Strategic Actions through SEA

Source: (Therivel and Minas 2002, p. 244)

First, Sustainability Appraisal must identify the strategic action's sustainability impacts, and recommend possible changes, which should be simple amendments, clearer wording or improvements to the internal consistency, or they could involve a

completely new method to the strategic action. Second, the changes should promote sustainability of strategic action. As Sustainability Appraisal highlights sustainability, subsequent changes to the strategic action could be expected to incorporate these concerns. However, a Sustainability Appraisal could only identify changes improving the strategic action rather than improving sustainability. Third, the changes might not be incorporated into the strategic action, if, for example, the Sustainability Appraisal is carried out too late or other factors outweigh sustainability considerations.

In documentary analysis, most of these Neighbourhood Planning cases selected have changed their policies to some extent, including the case of Cringleford, Kirdford, Lynton and Lynmouth, and Thame. In the interviews, most cases confirmed that changes had been made. An interviewee from Bembridge said that they ‘developed sufficient alternatives, and the analysis of alternatives allowed them change some policies to follow the sustainability objectives’ (Interview. 8).

Nonetheless, the main problem reflected in the interviews is that some of the Sustainability Appraisals were considered to happen too late to spawn any policy changes. For instance, Woodcote did not change any strategic action. One of the most important reasons is that they did not produce Sustainability Appraisal at the beginning of Neighbourhood Planning. They had not thought it was necessary to develop Sustainability Appraisal. However, when the Neighbourhood Plan was almost completed they realised that Sustainability Appraisal might be required. Therefore, ‘the decision to produce Sustainability Appraisal was made very late’ (Interview. 4). And also in the case of Woburn Sands, ‘actually we did it in a wrong way. We did it a lot later than the plan’ (Interview. 6), and ‘The Local Planning Authority told us that we probably need Sustainability Appraisal, so we went back to re-write the story of Sustainability Appraisal’ (Interview. 6).

Obviously it is easier to integrate Sustainability Appraisal outcomes into plan making when the Sustainability Appraisal process runs alongside the plan-making process:

changing a strategic action when it is almost completed will present larger barriers (Therivel, 2010). Previous surveys also indicated that approximately 80 per cent of the cases were not changed because Sustainability Appraisal was carried out very late (Therivel, 2010). In contrast, for those plans that were changed as a consequence of Sustainability Appraisal, 70 per cent of these were integral to the plan-making process at very early stages (Therivel, 2010).

Decision-making

Poorly informed decisions are supposed to be a significant factor in the generation of many problems (Therivel, 2010). Sustainability Appraisal 'could help to address this weakness by providing decision makers with timely and relevant information concerning the potential environmental impacts of the strategic actions that they are responsible for developing and implementing' (Jones et al., 2005, p. 38). These can then be considered alongside financial, technical, political and other concerns. Sustainability Appraisal thus 'adds an additional dimension to the decision-making process' (Therivel, 2010, p.19).

It is recognised that the linkages between Sustainability Appraisal and decision-making process are very complex and hard to evaluate, since decision-making characteristically includes multi-stakeholder deliberation and compromise (Therivel & Partidario, 1996). It is like dealing with systems that are characterised by complexity of a technical and multi-participatory nature (Herik, 1998). In this perspective, despite Sustainability Appraisal, there are various other factors which could influence the decision-making process, and it is hard to identify which decisions are made specifically because of Sustainability Appraisal. Moreover, some of the decisions are made or are alerted early and do not formally get recorded on paper, therefore, only the participants could describe how the decision changed or was influenced by Sustainability Appraisal.

In interviews, almost all cases in this research agreed that Sustainability Appraisal provided necessary information to influence the decision-making process. In the case of Lynton and Lynmouth, an interviewee agreed that ‘the Sustainability Appraisal helped to provide greater clarity in the neighbourhood plan regarding the intention of the policies and ensuring impacts of proposals do not have significant harmful impacts on the environment. This clarity helps decision-makers determining planning applications within the neighbourhood plan area’ (Interview. 1). Also, in the case of Woodcote, ‘the Sustainability Appraisal provided me with important information to make decision. Due to the requirements of Sustainability Appraisal, I paid more attention on environmental issues’ (Interview. 4).

However, they also emphasised the difficulty of identifying how specific decisions were influenced. Such as an interviewee of Cuckfield admitted that ‘the influence of Sustainability Appraisal towards the decision-making process was not obvious sometimes but indeed influenced decisions’ (Interview. 9). In the case of Woodcote, ‘it is hard to describe how our decisions had been influenced, but I believe when I was making decisions, Sustainability Appraisal provided valuable information’ (Interview. 4).

Some cases indicated that the decision changed because of Sustainability Appraisal, such as Bembridge: ‘some of the decisions changed, (as) we went through looking at different alternatives, and then we got the full analysis of those alternatives’ (Interview. 8). In the case of Cringleford, once the Plan was in draft two developers did modify their plans. ‘The number of dwellings were reduced considerably and much more attention was paid to the natural environment’ (Interview. 2).

6.3.2 Indirect outputs

It is recognised that Sustainability Appraisal can also have multiple and indirect,

long-term benefits beyond the immediate, visible effects on policies and decisions (Fischer, 2007; Schmidt, Joao, & Albrecht, 2005; Therivel & Minas, 2002). However, the indirect outputs are hard to identify - they are often unplanned and subtle, such as learning and longer-term transformations of individual, professional and organisational norms and practices (Cowell & Owens, 2006; Kørnø & Thissen, 2000).

Amongst the most important challenges to realizing the indirect outputs of Sustainability Appraisal is the lack of shared vision for Sustainability Appraisal by those responsible for implementation, and incongruences between the need for rapid outcomes versus the long-term commitment required to realize many of the benefits of Sustainability Appraisal (Acharibasam & Noble, 2014).

Understanding indirect outputs could only be achieved through interview (Sadler, 1998). Interviewees can provide individual thinking based on their own experiences. Although biases are inevitable, their opinions are still valuable. In this section, indicators of 'planning skill improvement', 'administrative level improvement' and 'Conceptual/ideological' will be discussed.

Planning skill improvement

The members of the Neighbourhood Planning steering group were the main participants who required professional planning skills. After the preparation of Sustainability Appraisal, interviewees in most cases believed that their planning skill capacity had been improved.

In the case of Bembridge, the interviewee said 'I learnt relevant policies and regulations, so I think my planning skills have improved a lot, and I am more confident now' (Interview. 8). Also in the case of Cuckfield 'I would say yes. My planning skill has been dramatically improved' (Interview. 9).

There is no doubt that preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is a learning process. Some cases explained that preparing Sustainability Appraisal could also contribute particular aspects of planning skills. In the case of Winslow, the interviewee admitted that ‘the Sustainability Appraisal process helped to improve the quality of the Neighbourhood Plan approach and helped to screen out any unintended consequences’ (Interview. 7). In Sprowtson, the interviewee explained ‘because of the Sustainability Appraisal, we would much better understand the local environment and all the sustainability issues’ (Interview. 3). Furthermore, in the case of Bembridge ‘we learnt baseline information from preparing the Sustainability Appraisal, which made us more familiar about the neighbourhood area. And we discussed alternatives and selected the preferred option, which also was a contribution of Sustainability Appraisal’ (Interview. 8).

The interviews also noted the distinction between preparing Sustainability Appraisal in house or by using a consultant. In the case of Woodcote, they prepared Sustainability Appraisal in-house, and believed that ‘certainly, if you could prepare the Sustainability Appraisal report in-house, you have to learn massive amount of data and planning skill. When you doing it in-house you really understand much more ’ (Interview. 4). In the case of Cringleford, they also prepared the report in-house, and ‘the benefit of the sustainability appraisal is that if it is done by ourselves, we could collect a lot of evidence and information through the Sustainability Appraisal, and I think it could be essential to understand the situation of our neighbourhood area’ (Interview. 5).

By contrast, Lynton and Lynmouth commissioned a consultant to prepare the Sustainability Appraisal report and the interviewee believed that ‘it (Sustainability Appraisal) is a technical document produced by a consultant, so the disadvantage could be that it did not necessarily improve the planning skill of the local community – it was seen as a necessary process to undertake in preparing the neighbourhood plan but it did

not provide any benefit to local planning skills' (Interview. 1). In addition, the interviewee in Kirdford also said that 'because of consultant involvement, we did not need to learn much relevant planning knowledge and skills' (Interview.5).

Finally, one problem could be that the improvement of planning skill capacity would not benefit further planning activities in some cases, for some of the key steering group members retired or left after preparing Neighbourhood Planning. For instance, in the case of Thame, the member who prepared the Sustainability Appraisal had retired. In Tettenhall, Cringleford, and Chaddesley Corbett, key steering group members left after the processes. For instance, in the case of Cringleford, 'group members have left the council over the last year and the clerk resigned. I am the only one left - and I have become chairman of the Parish Council, partly at least because of my role in making and delivering the Plan' (Interview. 2).

Administrative level improvement

Administrative capacity includes general skills, such as 'leadership, project management, an ability to engage a diverse range of members of the public and to listen, communication and negotiation, analytical skills, and ability to work in a team' (Locality, 2012a, p. 10).

Administrative capacity although not as prominent as planning capacity in Neighbourhood Planning, relates to fundamental issues. A good planning process can only be built on good administration. For instance, Sustainability Appraisal requires public involvement, which needs advertising and organising. This obviously links with the administrative level of Neighbourhood Planning steering group.

Compared to professional planning skills, administrative skills may not be in such shortage, especially, for those cases carried out by Town and Parish councillors. Most of the cases in this research have plenty of experiences of team working, public

involvement, communication, listening and negotiation. Therefore, in Neighbourhood Planning, they showed great confidence in administrative issues.

‘We have much experiences in involving residents and organising public meetings, so in terms of the administrative capacity, I believe, it was sufficient for Neighbourhood Planning’ (Interview. 2). And ‘We did not worry about administrative capacity, the Town Council steered Neighbourhood Planning’ (Interview. 4).

In the case of Cringleford, one interviewee said ‘I have experience of working for government. I had been involved indirectly in preparing the regional strategic plan for South Hampshire and then in developing the case for Southampton City Council. Therefore, I know how to organise meetings, involve residents, and negotiation with various stakeholders’ (Interview. 2).

Nevertheless, some also admitted that the administrative requirements of Neighbourhood Planning were different from previous experiences. Some challenges also were opportunities in Neighbourhood Planning, and after the Sustainability Appraisal, most cases agreed that their administrative capacity has improved.

New challenges were mentioned, such as ‘the steering group of Neighbourhood Planning was newly established, and the members may need to fit together’ (Interview. 3), and ‘Because residents have rights to vote ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ in the final referendum, to involve as many as residents would promote the possibility to pass the referendum. This was a challenge for us, but we tried our best’ (Interview. 9).

The cases that believed there was improvement of administrative capacity include Cringleford that ‘the administrative capacity of the plan-making group was improved. We learned to work together effectively’ (Interview. 2), and Bembridge ‘We organised residents meetings and focus groups to discuss relevant issues, and I think the administrative skills were improved through the process’ (Interview. 8). Furthermore,

some highlighted the role of Sustainability Appraisal, for example, in the case of Kirdford, the interviewee said ‘Sustainability Appraisal provided an opportunity for steering group members to review the whole planning process, which could help check the strengths and weaknesses of the administration level’ (Interview. 5). In the case of Lynton & Lynmouth ‘the Steering Group regarded the Sustainability Appraisal as a valuable and necessary process to ensure that the neighbourhood plan was robust and fit for purpose’ (Interview. 1).

Conceptual and ideological improvement

Conceptual and ideological improvement mainly relates to the improvement of the awareness of sustainability and planning issues for residents. It is a difficult task to evaluate the improvement of Sustainability Awareness on local residents. The optimal method might be a large-scale survey of residents, including interviews or questionnaires. In this research, we concentrated on the opinions of members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups, as they know a lot about public involvement situation and could to some extent represent residents’ opinions. Although it is hard to evaluate the ideological improvement as a result of Sustainability Appraisal, all cases in this research believed in some level of improvement.

In the case of Woburn Sands, the interviewee believed that ‘because of the public meetings and referendum, many residents took part in the decision-making process. It is really a very good opportunity for them to gain education’ (Interview. 6). In the case of Cringleford, ‘the awareness of planning issues among the residents has increased greatly and they know more about the constraints that operate on the planning system’ (Interview. 2). In the case of Cuckfield it was noted that, ‘they would much better understand the local environment and all relevant issues’ (Interview. 9).

The conceptual and ideological improvement of Sustainability Appraisal could spawn

profound influences for future planning. Only if Sustainability Appraisal is understood and supported by local residents, would it be well prepared and performed. Some interviewees specifically highlighted the improved awareness of Sustainability Appraisal.

An interviewee of Kirdford said that ‘Sustainability Appraisal required public participation, which provided opportunities for residents to understand planning policies and the principles of sustainability’ (Interview. 5). Also in the case of Bembridge, ‘the awareness of Sustainability Appraisal for common residents also might be improved’ (Interview. 8).

Nonetheless, some cases also admitted that most residents seemed uninterested in Sustainability Appraisal, for example, Woburn Sands argued that ‘the public is unlikely to be interested in planning and Sustainability Appraisal’ (Interview. 6) and also the interviewee of Lynton and Lynmouth admitted that ‘only those residents who positively participated the planning process, were able to learn something. I mean it is voluntary and hard to involve all residents’ (Interview. 1).

Moreover, in terms of the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members, all said that they now understand more about Sustainability Appraisal and if it is possible they will prepare Sustainability Appraisal for the next Neighbourhood Plan. For example, an interviewee in Bembridge said that ‘it was hard for me to learn Sustainability Appraisal, but next time it could be easier because I have learnt some skills’ (Interview.8).

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the evidence of quality and effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning based on the 15 cases. In terms of quality aspects, all the documentary evidence was accessible online. Most evidence was

collected from Sustainability Appraisal reports, and some from examiner's reports. Interviews were also considered to be very helpful as the members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group provided considerable additional information. However for different reasons there are only 9 cases accepted the interview request (see Table 5.7 in Section 5.6).

The main evidence of effectiveness aspects was collected via interviews. It is acknowledged that the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal is hard to evaluate, especially the indirect outputs. Firstly, most effectiveness effects require long-term monitoring, but in this research, as the plans were just completed, the further influence is still not clear. Secondly, evidence could only be collected from interviews, and so is hard to be quantitatively assessed. Finally, because of the uncontrollable factors evident in every Sustainability Appraisal, to isolate the effects of the Sustainability Appraisal on outcomes is very problematic (Jones et al., 2005). Almost all interviewees believed that there were appreciable effects of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. In some cases, Sustainability Appraisal might be more effective, while less effective in others. However, it is impossible to accurately judge or evaluate them because of the above difficulties. Another question reflected in effectiveness interviews is most of the answers were very simple, according to Table 6.1, the evidence distribution in effectiveness indicators tend to be weak. Moreover, most Neighbourhood Planning steering group members might also not be very familiar with Sustainability Appraisal issues as discussed in Section 6.2.1 that none of them have previous Sustainability Appraisal experience. However, the interviewees still provided valuable information of their opinions.

In this chapter, the evidence in both quality and effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning was presented alongside with the evaluation framework. And in the next chapter, prominent evidence will be put together to find a holistic picture of the implementation of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter relates to Objective 3 concentrating on identifying key factors influencing the performance of Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning. It analyses the evidence presented in Chapter 6 drawing in the opinions collected from relevant experts. As discussed in Chapter 5, three experts (two experts with a background in Neighbourhood Planning, and one with a background in Sustainability Appraisal) responded to my interview request and contributed their opinions to this study. These interviews were helpful in setting the findings in a wider context and in teasing out important messages from the research.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Sustainability Appraisal is a tool that is applied to promote sustainability and to optimise the planning process. We have discussed the benefits of preparing a Sustainability Appraisal in Local Planning, but the benefits are still unclear in Neighbourhood Planning. In Chapter 6, the evidence collected enabled investigation of the benefits and disadvantages of carrying out Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. Moreover, it discussed how the effectiveness indicators, which were designed to investigate the influence of Sustainability Appraisal on Neighbourhood Planning, were also somehow influenced by the quality of the Sustainability Appraisal itself. Therefore, it is possible that the Sustainability Appraisal indicators related to quality would also indirectly influence Neighbourhood Planning.

In terms of the quality of Sustainability Appraisal, based on the evidence collected in Chapter 6, all cases were evaluated non-conformance, partial-conformance or conformance to each indicator in the evaluation framework. However, as discussed previously it is hard to precisely mark individual cases, for most of the evidence is qualitative and inappropriate for conversion into quantitative data.

Table 7.1 Quality Evaluation Outcomes

		TH	EX	LY	CR	SP	AS	W	KI	ST	WO	TE	WI	BE	CU	CH
Institutional arrangements	Guidance															
	Tiering															
	Local planning authority															
	Organisational capacity															
	Planning skill capacity															
	Financial capacity															
	Time arrangement															
Processes	Proactive															
	Integrative															
	Public involvement															
	Fairness															
	Statutory Consultation															
	Other neighbourhood level plans															
	Consultant involvement															
Methods	Screening															
	Scoping															
	Alternatives															
	Cumulative impacts															
	Mitigation measures															
	Monitoring															
Documents	Style and format															
	Contents															
	Informative															
	Description of policy context															
	Description of assessment methodology															
	Description of current sustainability baseline															
	Description of process															
	Communications of results															

Source: Author

Note:

1. TH: Thame; EX: Exeter St James; LY: Lynton and Lynmouth; CR: Cringleford; SP: Sprowtson; AS: Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale; W: Woodcote; KI: Kirdford; ST: Strumpshaw; WO: Woburn Sands; TE: Tettenhall; WI: Winslow; BE: Bembridge; CU: Cuckfield; CH: Chaddesley Corbett;
2. TH,LY,AS,KI, and TE are five cases commissioned consultants

	Conformance		None conformance
	Partial conformance		No evidence

For methods and documents indicators, it is clear that if a Sustainability Appraisal report does not include certain indicators, it can be identified as 'none conformance' rather than 'no evidence', because they are parts of the sustainability appraisal report. Moreover, some documents indicators including style and format, contents, and informative are not mentioned in reports but can be judged based on holistic view of the reports.

There are still some blank blocks, including guidance, local planning authority, planning skill capacity, financial capacity, integrative, fairness, and other neighbourhood level plans. Most of these are institutional arrangements indicators and not required as components of sustainability Appraisal. It is hard to evaluate these without sufficient evidence. For instance, one case still might have followed some guidance even does not mention in report.

Those blank blocks to some extent could influence the assessment outcomes, so were eliminated in the analysis. Generally, comparing those cases, Thame, Kirdford, Tattenhall, Lynton and Lynmouth, and Bembridge seem have relatively more green colour blocks, meaning they might perform better than others; Woodcote, Cuckfield, Winslow, Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, Exeter St James, Strumpshaw, and Cringleford have more yellow colour blocks, meaning the performance may have some shortages but still better than Sprowtson, Woburn Sands, and Chaddesley Corbett – they have many red and yellow blocks. It is evident from this assessment that the quality of Sustainability Appraisal is variable between different cases. The question is what accounts for the differences between different cases?

In terms of the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal, all the nine responded interviewees believed that Sustainability Appraisal was effective in Neighbourhood Planning but that its influence was hard to evaluate. Firstly most effectiveness aspects need long-term monitoring, but in this research, as the plans were just completed, the

results are still not clear. Moreover, because of the uncontrollable factors evident in every Sustainability Appraisal, to isolate the effects of the Sustainability Appraisal on Neighbourhood Planning outcomes is very problematic. There are two main questions linked to this: how does the quality of a Sustainability Appraisal influence the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal and what influence Sustainability Appraisal taken as a whole has on Neighbourhood Planning?

To sum up, this chapter analysed the evidence collected in Chapter 6 and discuss the prominent findings. The findings will be presented to explore the relationships between the quality aspects of Sustainability Appraisal and the effectiveness aspects and finally the influence of Sustainability Appraisal on Neighbourhood Planning. In this way, this chapter is systematically presented in line with the ‘influence chain’ (see Figure 3.5 in Chapter 3).

7.2 Planning Skill Capacity Is a Vital Factor for Good Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning

Planning skill capacity played a fundamental role in terms of the quality of Sustainability Appraisal. This was acknowledged by almost all interviewees in the Neighbourhood Planning cases examined in this research (see Chapter 6). Furthermore, interviews with experts in Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal also agreed that planning skill capacity is significant for both Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning. For example, as one expert said, ‘compared with Local Planning, the Neighbourhood Planning steering group are in real need of planning skills’ (Interview. c). And another mentioned that ‘I am afraid about the relevant planning skills in preparing Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. Limited planning skills may not lead to high-quality reports’ (Interview. b).

Figure 7.1 illustrates the factors that are found to influence planning skill capacity. The Neighbourhood Planning steering group is the main body required preparing a Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning and their planning skills could directly influence the performance of Sustainability Appraisal. There are two factors which could be factored in when considering their intrinsic planning skill capacity –previous experience in planning or Sustainability Appraisal, especially in other community-led plans, and accessing relevant guidance. In addition, Local Planning Authorities and consultants could directly contribute to the planning skill capacity of Neighbourhood Planning if they positively participate in the planning process.

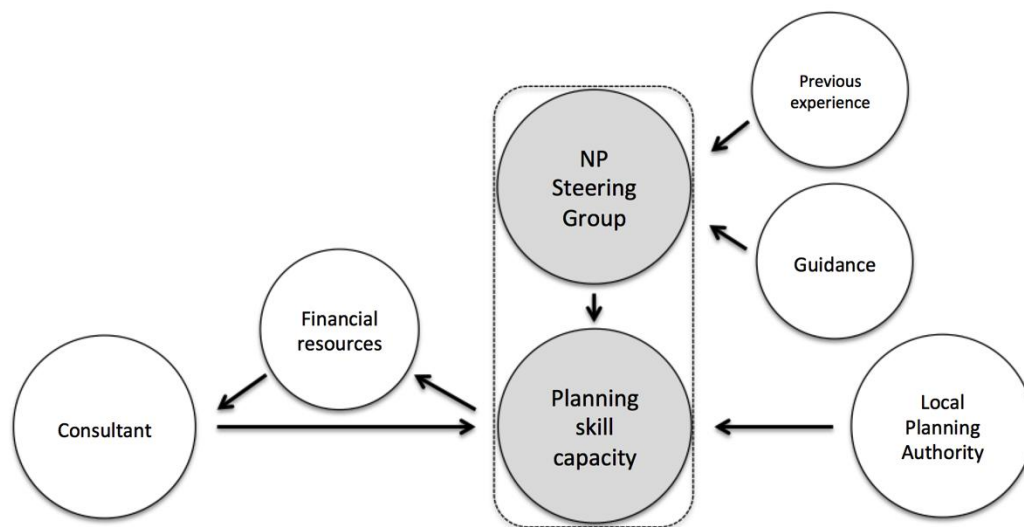


Figure 7.1 The Factors That Influence Planning Skill Capacity

Source: Author

One expert said ‘guidance could help a Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group lacking in experience to prepare a Sustainability Appraisal. This to some extent could make up for limited planning skills’ (Interview, a). Local Planning Authorities are supposed to play a key role in helping prepare Neighbourhood Plans. Local Planning Authority officers have planning skills and experience and can provide professional support. Consultants could be commissioned to help prepare a Neighbourhood Plan or Sustainability Appraisal report. However, to involve a consultant usually requires

extra financial support. This might be a challenge for some cases.

Specifically, the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group are the main body that need planning skills. Therefore, the planning skills of individual members of a steering group would somehow represent the planning capacity for each case. Evidence in Chapter 6 revealed that the intrinsic planning capacity was distinct in different cases. Some cases had skilful steering group members e.g. Cringleford, while most of the cases in this research were not so lucky (such as Bembridge, Kirdford, Woodcote, and Cuckfield).

These relative weaknesses in planning capacity, as the interviewee of Bembridge put it ‘I knew nothing about Sustainability Appraisal. It took me two years to learn and write the report. It was really tiring to learn almost everything’ (Interview. 8). Moreover, also investigated was the influence on planning capacity if a case had previous experiences of preparing other community-led plans (such as Town or Parish Plan or Village Development Statement). Some cases that had prepared previous community-led plans believed it could be helpful in baseline data preparation. However, they also argued that the contribution of specific planning skills was very limited, for ‘the Neighbourhood Plan and Parish Plan are two entirely different things’ (Interview. a). Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 6, none of the interviewees in this research had specific previous experience in Sustainability Appraisal.

In terms of other external sources of planning skill, it was revealed by the evidence that guidance was very limited for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning (see Section 6.2). Most cases in this research followed previous guidance that had been produced for Sustainability Appraisal of Local Development Plans. The problem could be this previous guidance may not fit the current Neighbourhood Planning circumstances. Especially for those who decided to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan in-house, without detailed guidance, they may face considerable difficulties. The guidance ‘DIY Sustainability Appraisal of Neighbourhood Plans’

(Therivel, 2011) so far is the only guidance specific to Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. However, only Bembridge, and Lynton and Lynmouth mentioned it in the Sustainability Appraisal report. An interviewee of Bembridge also explained that ‘the DIY guidance really had helped us a lot, when we decided to prepare Neighbourhood Plan in-house’ (Interview. 8).

To sum up, the guidance for Neighbourhood Planning is considered adequate, while the guidance for its Sustainability Appraisal is limited. Guidance is so important as it could to some extent offset the lack of planning skills, particularly for those who decide to prepare Sustainability Appraisal in-house.

The participation of the Local Planning Authority was distinct in different cases. For some cases, the Local Planning Authority had positively taken part to help deal with specific planning issues. As evidence indicated in Section 6.2, Winslow and Thame were two prominent cases that had been well supported by the Local Planning Authority. Especially, in the case of Thame, the Local Planning Authority had provided technical support in the retail issues. In contrast, for some cases, the planning skill support from the Local Planning Authority was very limited, for instance, an interviewee in Chichester District Planning Authority replied that ‘they did not undertake the work for Kirdford as the parish had front runner funding and undertook the process themselves’ (Interview. 5).

An expert noted that ‘the relations between Neighbourhood bodies and Local Planning Authorities are very important, and this might influence the planning skill capacity’ (Interview. c). For example, in the cases of Woodcote and Cringleford, the Local Planning Authorities did not trust Neighbourhood Planning, and regarded it as a distraction (see Section 5.2.1). It is interesting that some of the experts also revealed some concern about the quality of Neighbourhood Planning, for example, ‘I do not think plans could be well prepared by non-skilled residents, because planning is a very complicated activity’ (Interview. b). Another expert also noted potential

problems of ‘NIMBYism’ (Interview, a), meaning that a community’s attitudes are often anti-development. This characteristic of Neighbourhood Planning has been discussed in Section 2.4.4. This could lead to conflicts between Neighbourhood Planning and Local Planning, especially if a Local Planning Authority’s main objective is to develop rather than conserve. According to Turley (2014a, p. 15), ‘a significant number of emerging plans, especially those in rural locations, have been prepared with the aim of protecting neighbourhood areas from new development’.

Consultant involvement is a complex issue in this research. Within the 15 neighbourhood cases, 5 cases commissioned consultants to prepare the Sustainability Appraisal report, and the remainder prepared it in-house. In fact, previous to Neighbourhood Planning, the question about who should carry out Sustainability Appraisal for Local Planning was discussed. According to Fischer (2010), in the UK generally over half of Local Planning Authorities were carrying out Sustainability Appraisal in-house; about 20 per cent were delegating the work completely to consultants; about 20 per cent of cases prepared Sustainability Appraisal jointly with consultants; and, in a few cases, Sustainability Appraisal was carried out by a wider group of stakeholders.

Consultants could contribute independent opinions, less dominated by long-established institutional networks and mind-sets. They may be able to ‘cross-fertilize’ good practice between their client authorities (Therivel, 2010). On the other hand, Retief, Jones and Jay (2008) argue that consultants are unlikely to be fully cognisant of the real-life, value driven context within which plan-makers operate, and are more likely to promote an artificial (and thus ineffective) technical-rational approach to plan-making. Also highlighted by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Scottish Executive (2005) there is a possibility that Sustainability Appraisals carried out separately from the strategic action, for example, by remote consultants, may be less effective compared to those carried out in-group workshops involving the plan makers.

The evidence here reveals, there are three discernible arrangements for consultant involvement. In some cases, consultants are involved but with limited help. For example, in the case of Kirdford, the interviewee argued that they prepared all the policies of Sustainability Appraisal by themselves while ‘the consultant was just there to convert the informal language into the formal planning language, but the policies were not changed or improved’ (Interview. 5).

In some other cases, consultants completely led the preparation of Sustainability Appraisal, but somehow ignored the neighbourhood needs. For example, in the case of Cringleford, the interviewee said ‘there was a danger to involve a consultant, for they might lead the plan and present what they believed was important, but maybe not important for you’ (Interview. 2). The final situation was involving consultant as ‘critical friends’ to provide technical support to Neighborhood Planning Steering Group members but not in a leading role. For instance, in the case of Cuckfield, they involved a planning consultant as a ‘critical friend’ to provide objective opinions of the Appraisal. ‘Where external consultants are employed, then a close working partnership with the planners should be stressed, and how the authority takes on board the resulting formal recommendations should be documented. Experience is needed in terms of full coverage of relevant social, economic, environmental, health and public participation issues; understanding of the decision-making process; and a knowledge of the neighbourhood area’ (Therivel, 2010, p. 76).

Some of the cases prepared Sustainability Appraisal in-house for they unable to afford the fee on commissioning external consultants. As the interviewee in Woburn Sands argued, ‘we do not have enough money to involve external consultants, so we have to prepare the Sustainability Appraisal by ourselves’ (Interview. 6). According to the European Commission (2009b), a typical SEA takes roughly 50 person-days and costs about €20,000. However, usually only one person with limited planning skills and financial support prepares a Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

Although some of the frontrunners gained money from central government and their Local Planning Authority, most resources were spent on Neighbourhood Plan preparation while a very limited amount was spent on Sustainability Appraisal preparation (see Section 6.2.1).

Reviewing Table 7.1, it is felt that planning skill capacity generally corresponds with the position of each case. These cases suggest having access to planning skills or guidance is important for high quality Sustainability Appraisal. For instance, Thame, according to previous evidence, commissioned external consultants and was positively supported by the Local Planning Authority. Bembridge also prepared a good quality Sustainability Appraisal following the ‘DIY’ Sustainability Appraisal guidance produced by Therivel (2011). Some cases have limited planning skill capacity, such as Winslow, had good planning skill support from the Local Planning Authority, but did not have particularly skilful Neighbourhood Planning steering group members. In the case of Cringleford, although the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group had relatively skilled members, the Local Planning Authority support was limited. Moreover, some cases had Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups with limited planning skills, and little access to external planning skill support. For example, in the case of Woburn Sands, the financial support is very limited and no consultant or positive Local Planning Authority involvement, and very limited planning skill capacity in the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group.

To sum up, planning skills played an important role in Sustainability Appraisal. It could be influenced by many external factors – consultant involvement, Local Planning Authority support, financial support and guidance. Therefore, if one case cannot afford to commission a consultant, it also can get necessary supports from other sources. Those cases commissioned consultants, including Thame, Kirdford, Tettenhall, Lynton and Lynmouth, and Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, are generally performing well in quality aspects of Sustainability Appraisal. However, some cases which prepared Sustainability Appraisal in-house also prepared

high-standard reports, e.g. Bembridge.

7.3 Neighbourhood Contexts Can Influence The Quality of Sustainability Appraisal

Despite different planning capacity in each case, uneven neighbourhood context could also considerably influence the performance of Sustainability Appraisal. Parker (2012, p.14) argued that ‘the basis for designing the Neighbourhood Planning process appears to carry certain assumptions about the homogeneity of neighbourhoods and the receptiveness of communities to such schemes’. One of the experts said ‘not all neighbourhoods are the same, and this could significantly influence the performance of Neighbourhood Planning and also Sustainability Appraisal in it’ (Interview. c).

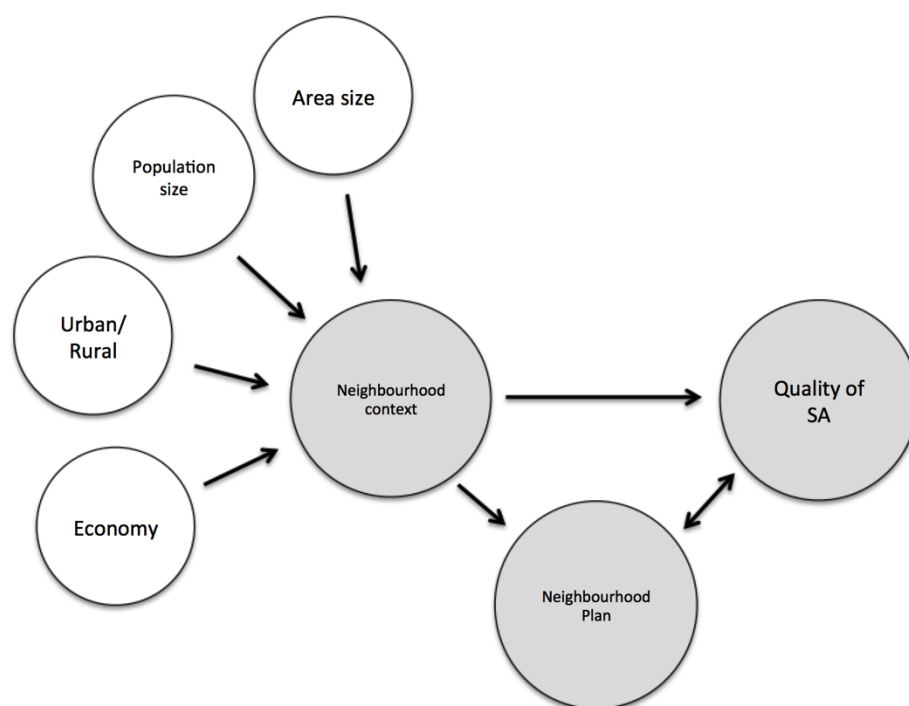


Figure 7.2 Selected Influences of Neighbourhood Context

Source: Author

Illustrated by Figure 7.2 the neighbourhood context is influenced by various factors, including area size, population size, rural or urban character, and the local economy. As an expert said ‘the planning context could directly influence the Neighbourhood Plan’ (Interview.a). Turley (2014a, p.13) also confirmed that ‘the variable characteristics in different cases means that the range and scope of policies included in a Neighbourhood Plan varies significantly. Some neighbourhood plans focus on strategic housing, whilst policy in others relates primarily to local issues only’. In this sense, the influence on a Neighbourhood Plan would inevitably influence the performance of Sustainability Appraisal. Moreover, the characteristics of the neighbourhood context also could directly influence the quality of Sustainability Appraisal.

Population size would significantly influence the preparation process of Sustainability Appraisal. Firstly, large population areas need more resources to involve a broad range of people. This is a challenge for some Neighbourhood Planning cases. Secondly, for neighbourhoods with large populations it is hard to fairly involve all residents and to build consensus for specific issues. Finally, the neighbourhood issues are likely to be more complex and comprehensive in neighbourhoods with large population area (e.g. housing issues). The area size of Neighbourhood may also influence the preparation of Sustainability Appraisal. In a large area it is harder to prepare baseline data since the plan covers a larger area and may require more data collection. Similarly the Neighbourhood Planning policies are more likely to have significant environmental impacts. As indicated in Table 5.1, neighbourhood areas vary significantly in various aspects. For example, the largest area is Lynton and Lynmouth (30.5 sq. km) and smallest is Exeter St James (0.95 sq. km); the largest population case is Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale (18,121) while the smallest is Strumpshaw (634).

In rural areas, Town or Parish Councils commonly steer Neighbourhood Planning, while in urban areas, Neighbourhood Fora are normally established to lead

Neighbourhood Planning. Bailey and Pill (2014) argue that the Neighbourhood Forum and Town/Parish Council are two different forms of Neighbourhood governance, and that 'Neighbourhood Planning does work better in rural areas ... (where there is) an existing parish council, a village with clear boundaries, many fewer applications, fewer people' (Bailey & Pill, 2014, p. 158). Within the 15 cases, only Exeter St James established a Neighbourhood Forum to prepare Neighbourhood Plan, and as indicated in Table 7.1, performed not very well in the quality aspects of Sustainability Appraisal. Moreover, Neighbourhood Planning in deprived areas was also a big challenge. Parker (2012, p. 14) argued that 'there is a real concern that deprived areas will not engage with Neighbourhood Planning through a combination of inertia, lack of resources and skills and a general cynicism about governmental programmes'.

The completeness of Sustainability Appraisal reports could directly influence the performance of the cases in Table 7.1 as the evidence on the methods were mainly based on evidence recorded in Sustainability Appraisal reports. Therefore, a comprehensive Sustainability Appraisal report could provide much information and so demonstrate higher performance. For instance, the Sustainability Appraisal report of Thame has around 33 pages, and it was prepared comprehensively and contained almost all necessary Sustainability Appraisal components. The Bembridge Sustainability Appraisal report has 68 pages, although it may be considered slightly long, the information is sufficient. In contrast, the Sustainability Appraisal report of Woburn Sands is only 15 pages, and most of the quality aspects are omitted. However, prepared long reports do not mean high quality, it also might omit some components of Sustainability Appraisal.

Nonetheless, Sustainability Appraisal of Neighbourhood Plan does not need to be comprehensive, or as formal as it is in local planning. It could be appropriate to emphasise a few significant points rather than considering all strategic issues. Especially, for some cases, the local level Sustainability Appraisal has already covered most of the sustainability issues, so the Sustainability Appraisal of

Neighbourhood Plan did not need to consider those again. However, that does not mean some of the key components of Sustainability Appraisal can be omitted, such as ‘alternatives’, which is one of the core elements of Sustainability Appraisal. Many Neighbourhood Planning cases did not demonstrate thinking about alternatives in the planning process, e.g. Winslow, Woburn Sands, Strumpshaw and Woodcote.

7.4 Quality of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning Can Influence Its Effectiveness

Understanding the quality inputs and processes is significant, but the outputs of Sustainability Appraisal are the ultimate measures of its added value (Acharibasam & Noble, 2014). Therefore, the quality of Sustainability Appraisal is meaningless, unless it improves its effectiveness. Opinions on the relationship between ‘quality’ and ‘effectiveness’ in Sustainability Appraisal are complex. Many scholars agree that good quality Sustainability Appraisal does not necessarily lead to effectiveness. Moreover, even a Sustainability Appraisal which is poorly conducted, may still have a positive influence on decision-making processes.

In terms of direct output indicators, ‘goals achievement’ is hard to investigate as it involves long-term monitoring. ‘Decision making’ is a very complicated indicator that might be influenced by many quality indicators. However, there is no direct evidence that could prove the links. In this sense, the focus is on the most important direct outputs indicator – ‘policy changes’, which is acknowledged as a very helpful approach to evaluate direct outputs of Sustainability Appraisal. Moreover, in this research, considerable evidence has been collected to emphasise the links between quality indicators and ‘policy changes’.

One prominent quality indicator, linking with policy changes, is ‘proactive’. On the basis of interviews, some cases recognise that their Neighbourhood Plans were not

changed by Sustainability Appraisal because it was prepared very late. Woburn Sands ‘actually we did it in a wrong way. We did it a lot later than the plan’ (Interview. 6), and ‘The Local Planning Authority told us that we probably need Sustainability Appraisal, so we went back to re-write the story of Sustainability Appraisal’ (Interview. 6). One expert said ‘obviously it is easier to integrate Sustainability Appraisal outcomes into plan making when the Sustainability Appraisal process runs alongside the plan-making process’ and he also argued that ‘changing a strategic action when it is almost completed will present larger barriers’ (Interview. b).

Another quality indicator, ‘alternatives’, also influenced direct output in terms of policy changes. ‘Identifying alternatives could allow decision makers to positively consider a policy from different perspectives’ (Interview. b). With the assistance of Sustainability Appraisal, alternatives are more likely to be prepared as ways of achieving a future vision at a strategic level rather than typically proposed in response to problems at the detailed project level (Therivel, 2010). In terms of specific case studies, the interviewee of Bembridge said that they ‘developed sufficient alternatives, and the analysis of alternatives allowed them change some policies to follow the sustainability objectives’ (Interview. 8). In the case of Thame, ‘the Sustainability Appraisal helps us to understand how each option could be changed in order to improve its performance in relation to the sustainability objectives’ (Thame SA Report, p. 28). In contrast, some did not include alternatives in their Sustainability Appraisal reports, such as, Winslow, Woburn Sands, Strumpshaw and Woodcote.

Furthermore, if alternatives are not positively taken into account, Sustainability Appraisal effectiveness could be reduced. In the case of Thame, four alternatives were prepared and evaluated. However, the preferred option is the one that got the lowest mark in promoting sustainability objectives (see Thame SA Report, p. 28). Considering the influence from other factors, trade-off and necessary compromise were inevitable. However, if decision makers fail to provide convincing evidence of preferred alternatives selection or pre-established the preference before identifying

alternatives, influence on decision-making processes will likely be reduced. Additionally, other quality indicators, such as ‘financial support’, ‘public involvement’ ‘consultant involvement’, and ‘Local Planning Authority’ were also found to influence the direct outputs of Sustainability Appraisal.

In terms of indirect outputs indicators of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning, according to Therivel (2010, p. 246) ‘even where the strategic action remains unchanged after the SEA (or Sustainability Appraisal), the SEA (or Sustainability Appraisal) may still be effective since it has indirect benefits’. As discussed in section 7.2, ‘planning skill improvement’ is crucial in preparing Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. However, in this section, the improvement of planning skills is concentrated, and relevant evidence indicates that it is closely links with some quality indicators. It is impossible to make a precise comparison before and after the preparation of Sustainability Appraisal. However, all interviewees in this research acknowledged that their planning skills improved as a result of preparing Sustainability Appraisal.

Consultant involvement is a very prominent quality indicator that could influence the improvement of planning skills. As discussed in Section 7.2, those cases which involved consultants generally performed well in relating to the quality of Sustainability Appraisal. However, to involve external consultants has great potential risks that could influence the learning effectiveness and skills development. The Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups in some cases released the leading position of Neighbourhood Planning or Sustainability Appraisal to external consultants. This has led to a consequence that though the Sustainability Appraisal was prepared to a high standard, the planning skills of the steering group members were hardly improved. Such as the case of Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale, they rejected interview request because ‘the Neighbourhood Plan was produced by external consultant, so they cannot answer the questions related to it’ (see Table 5.9). This could to some extent indicate that the improvement of planning skills in this case was

very limited, because the consultant had led the plan and done almost all the Sustainability Appraisal preparation works.

It is argued that a more effective sort of consultant involvement is as ‘critical friends’ to provide training, review of sustainability documents and other support to planning staff. Therivel (2010) argued that a consultant involved in this way could improve planning skills. However, an expert argued that it is very difficult to appropriately involve consultants as ‘critical friends’, and ‘in most Neighbourhood Planning cases consultants were either ineffective or in a dominant position’ (Interview. c).

In contrast, planning skill improvement is evident in those cases which prepared Sustainability Appraisal in-house (see Section 6.2). Especially, in the case of Bembridge, the interviewee said ‘there was lots to consider, to do, and to learn’ (Interview. 8), and after preparing Sustainability Appraisal in-house, he also believed that ‘I learnt relevant policies and regulations, so I think my planning skills have improved a lot, and I am more confident now’ (Interview. 8). Therivel (2010, p. 75) also argued that ‘the plan-making team should carry out SEA or Sustainability Appraisal, because of the importance of making it an integral part of decision-making and having full knowledge of all the judgements made within SEA or Sustainability Appraisal’. However, an expert said ‘if the Local Planning Authority is not effectively involved to guide the planning process, it is very hard for Neighbourhood Planning steering group members to prepare Sustainability Appraisal without commissioning any consultant’ (Interview. c).

According to Jha-Thakur et al. (2009, p. 141) ‘the use of consultants as well as advisory bodies may encourage double-loop learning, but equally may have the opposite effect, depending on how they are used’. The consultant involvement is also a controversial issue in Local Planning, but the influence of this indicator might be more profound in Neighbourhood Planning as revealed by evidence presented above. Additionally, the ‘guidance’ and ‘Local Planning Authority involvement’ indicators

would also to some degree help improve planning skills.

In terms of conceptual and ideological improvement, the more people involved in the Sustainability Appraisal preparation process, the concept of sustainability appraisal may be easier to accept. In this sense, ‘public involvement’ and ‘fairness’ are two indicators that could significantly influence ‘conceptual and ideological improvement’.

In conclusion, many quality indicators could strongly influence the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. These indicators are highlighted in the Table 7.2 to demonstrate the relationships between effectiveness indicators. According to the table, many institutional arrangements indicators are likely to influence the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal. Several indicators of process and method are also very prominent. However, few documentary indicators were found to be influential on the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Prominent Quality Indicators That Could Influence Sustainability Appraisal Outputs

Attributes	Criteria	Direct outputs			Indirect outputs		
		Goals achievement	Policy changes	Decision making	Planning skill improvement	Administrative level improvement	Conceptual and ideological improvement
Institutional arrangements	Guidance						
	Tiering						
	Local Planning Authority						
	Organisational capacity						
	Planning skill capacity						
	Financial capacity						
	Time arrangement						

Source: Author

Table 7.2 Prominent Quality Indicators That Could Influence Sustainability Appraisal Outputs (continued)

Attributes	Criteria	Direct outputs			Indirect outputs		
		Goals achievement	Policy changes	Decision making	Planning skill improvement	Administrative level improvement	Conceptual and ideological improvement
Processes	Proactive						
	Integrative						
	Public involvement						
	Statutory consultation						
	Fairness						
	Other neighbourhood level plans						
	Consultant involvement						
Methods	Screening						
	Scoping						
	Alternatives						
	Mitigation						
	Cumulative impact						
	Monitoring						
Documents	Style and format						
	Contents						
	Informative						
	Description of context						
	Description of assessment methodology						
	Description of the current sustainability baseline						
	Description of process measures						
	Communications of results						

Source: Author

The reason behind the distribution of indicators highlighted in this table is complex. Institutional arrangements encompass indicators related to fundamental issues, and these could be significant since Neighbourhood Planning is still a young process. Process and method indicators are also very important, but at this stage, the influence of them towards effectiveness is still very hard to identify. Documentary indicators are more concentrated on the writing of reports so they do not have obvious influences.

As discussed in Section 2.4.4, Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning does not need to be comprehensive, meaning some components of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning can be omitted to save resources. However, in this section, it is shown that some quality indicators could significantly influence the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. These prominent quality indicators therefore highlight some key issues for preparing Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. In this sense, omitting these issues in the decision-making process would inevitably reduce the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. Additionally, other indicators may also influence the effectiveness, but this section will focus on these indicators that are highlighted as important by the evidence collected in Chapter 6.

7.5 Sustainability Appraisal Can Benefit Neighbourhood Planning

This research began with the hypothesis that carrying out Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning might have benefits as in Local Planning. The evidence collected in Chapter 6 and from expert interviews not only support this hypothesis, but also indicate that some of the benefits might be more profound in Neighbourhood Planning than in Local Planning. In Section 2.4, the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning were discussed, which could be distinct from Local Planning. It was felt that those characteristics would somehow influence Sustainability Appraisal in

Neighbourhood Planning. In developing the evaluation framework for this research, some new indicators were introduced and some were highlighted to reflect these characteristics towards Sustainability Appraisal.

In terms of direct benefits, as the evidence indicated in Section 6.3.1 suggests, the achievement of assessment goals is not easy to evaluate at this stage, as most of the sustainability goals need long-term monitoring. However, some cases developed more rational sustainability goals and monitoring methods. It is acknowledged that the most important direct benefit is the change of policies. Only in two cases did respondents in this research say that their Neighbourhood Plan had not changed as a result of the Sustainability Appraisal process, typically because the Sustainability Appraisal was started when the plan was already near completion. Most respondents believed that the Sustainability Appraisal process had had an important effect on their plan. Moreover, most respondents also admitted the influence of Sustainability Appraisal towards the decision-making process, though not all decision changes were reflected in documents.

The significant contribution of Sustainability Appraisal towards Neighbourhood Planning is in indirect benefits - increased planning skills and awareness improvement (Interview. b). An expert highlighted the role of Sustainability Appraisal in promoting transparency of Neighbourhood Planning. Because the story behind planning activities and the participation of different stakeholders should be recorded by Sustainability Appraisal, this would to some extent reduce 'black-box operation' (Interview. c). Especially, as Neighbourhood Planning is a brand new planning form, and relevant legislation is still not sound and robust enough. The expert also mentioned some possible mistakes might be made if policies are not transparent enough.

Sustainability Appraisal reduced the potential risk for a Neighbourhood Plan to be rejected. As Neighbourhood Plans should be in conformity with higher policies,

Sustainability Appraisal includes some components related to check such conformities, such as ‘policy context’, ‘statutory consultation’ and ‘tiering’. Moreover, according to Therivel (2011, p. 4), ‘there is no harm in carrying out an Sustainability Appraisal where it is not legally required, but you can be legally challenged for not carrying out Sustainability Appraisal where one is required’. Therefore, it is a safer choice for Neighbourhood Planning to prepare Sustainability Appraisal.

Sustainability Appraisal acting like a ‘mind map’ could guide steering group members to consider a clear process to organise planning activities. Neighbourhood Planning involves various issues, which could be very hard for Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members to deal with. However, Sustainability Appraisal provides a relatively clear route, and following this the planning process of Neighbourhood Planning will be clearer and easier.

One prominent influence of Sustainability Appraisal towards Neighbourhood Planning is ‘learning’. Many scholars have emphasised the significance of learning in promoting the effectiveness of SEA (see Bond et al., 2012; Fischer, 2012; Jha-Thakur et al., 2009; Yamane, 2008). For example Jha-Thakur et al. (2009, p. 133) argued that ‘learning, particularly transformative learning, is an established feature of environmental planning, management and assessment’. In Neighbourhood Planning, as discussed before, Neighbourhood Planning steering groups are often very limited in their planning skills, and therefore the improvement of planning skills is then considered to be very significant.

Nonetheless, some disadvantages caused by the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning are also worth noting. The planning skill capacity, as discussed in Section 7.2, is a key factor in preparing high quality Sustainability Appraisal. Because most of the Neighbourhood Planning steering groups seemed lacking planning skills (see Section 6.2.1), to prepare Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning is considered to be harder than in Local Planning. Although there are external support

sources, such as the Local Planning Authority, guidance, and consultant, the effect of these for most cases was limited.

It is argued that resources for preparing Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning, especially money, can be in short supply. An expert argued that a Sustainability Appraisal process does not have to be long-winded and expensive to be effective (Interview. b). According to Therivel (2010, p. 254) ‘most of the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal comes from decision-makers taking on board the Sustainability Appraisal findings’. Therefore, ‘a short Sustainability Appraisal process can be effective, and in contrast even a huge commitment of time and energy can be wasted if decision-makers are unwilling to take account of the Sustainability Appraisal findings’ (Therivel, 2010, p. 254).

Therivel (2010) also illustrated three models of preparing one-day, ten-day and 100-day SEA. Each model needs different amounts of resources, including financial support, labour input and time, but all of them include fundamentals of good SEA practice. In this sense, Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups could prepare one-day or ten-day Sustainability Appraisals, if they do not have enough financial support. Furthermore, as revealed by evidence in Chapter 6, some Neighbourhood Planning cases did prepare Sustainability Appraisals in house. Woburn Sands, for instance, cost very little money. Moreover, according to Therivel (2011), to carry out a ‘DIY’ Sustainability Appraisal has the advantage of making sure that local residents develop an interest and understanding of the local area, as well as making sure that the plan is effectively put into action.

7.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has systematically analysed the story behind the evidence presented in Chapter 6. As discussed in the conclusion section of Chapter 3 (Table

3.5), the ‘influence chain’ contains three key components and four crucial questions related to the relationship between the quality and effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning. Based on the evidence presented in Chapter 6 and interviews with experts, the ‘influence chain’ can be updated to reflect the real performance situation of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning (see Figure 7.3).

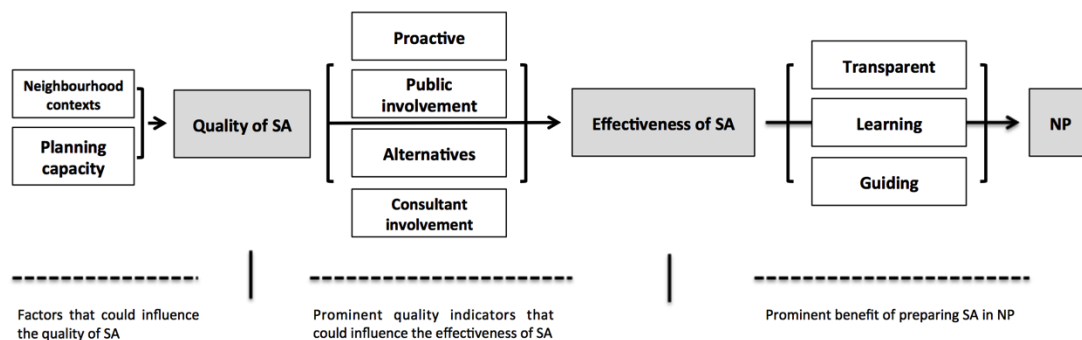


Figure 7.3 Updated ‘Influence Chain’ of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning

Source: Author

As illustrated by Figure 7.3, the quality of Sustainability Appraisal is mainly influenced by planning capacity (see Section 7.2) and neighbourhood context (see Section 7.3). Some prominent quality indicators were found to be closely linked with the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal, including ‘proactive’, ‘public involvement’, ‘alternatives’ and ‘consultant involvement’ (see Section 7.4). Finally the benefits of preparing Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning were discussed (see Section 7.5). And it has been revealed that Sustainability Appraisal can have significant benefits for Neighbourhood Planning in terms of transparency, guiding and learning. Finally, a completed ‘influence chain’ was established to provide an overview of the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter relates to the final objective of this research summing up the issues emerging and recommending possible ways to improve Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. Moreover, in the final chapter, it is confirmed that the main aim of this research has been achieved in a systematic way. This research followed the research structure presented in Chapter 1 and has fulfilled each objective under the main aim. In this chapter, the final conclusion will concentrate on describing a whole picture of the research, and some recommendations will be given to address the key issues which have emerged through analysis. Finally, the achievement of objectives, contribution and challenges of this research, as well as further questions raised will be discussed.

8.2 Recommendations

In the light of the analysis in Chapter 7, three significant issues about Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning were discussed in this section. Firstly, as discussed in Section 7.2, planning skill capacity is vital for Neighbourhood Planning, and whether or not to involve external consultants to support planning skills then becomes a significant question. Secondly, according to Table 6.1 that different Sustainability Appraisals always contain different contents, and some are simple and some are comprehensive. Because there is no requirement about the components of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning, this discrepancy becomes a normal phenomenon. However, as indicated in Table 7.2 (in Section 7.4), some components of Sustainability Appraisal are very significant in influencing its effectiveness, but some simple Sustainability Appraisal did not include those. Therefore, the second question is should Sustainability Appraisal be carried out simply or comprehensively? Finally, according to Table 6.3 that not all Sustainability Appraisals in Neighbourhood Planning are required, some are prepared voluntarily.

However, due to the voluntary nature, many Neighbourhood Plans do not want to prepare Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning if not required. In fact, within the 29 Neighbourhood Planning cases, there are only 15 cases prepared Sustainability Appraisal (according to Table 6.3 only four voluntary cases). In this sense, some scholars argue that if Sustainability Appraisal became compulsory, its benefits would be much available for more cases (Parker, Lynn, & Wargent, 2015). Then the question is which is a better model to carry out Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning, voluntary or compulsory? Recommendations for these three questions will be given in this section, although many issues are tangled together and it is hard to find ideal answers.

8.2.1 Consultant involvement or in-house in Sustainability Appraisal

Consultant involvement was found to be a very prominent issue in preparing Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. As discussed in Chapter 7, those cases that commissioned external consultants to prepare Sustainability Appraisal performed generally well (see Table 7.1). This indicated that involving external consultants could be helpful in promoting the quality of Sustainability Appraisal.

Nevertheless, there were still potential risks of involving consultants. As revealed by the investigation in this research, it was found that consultants were likely to either control the planning process or concentrate on minutiae (see Section 6.2.2). Some cases mentioned that consultants should perform the role of a ‘critical friend’ to provide the necessary planning skills instead of leading the planning process. However, one expert argued that ‘it was hard to maintain the balance with consultant involvement’ (Interview. b). Moreover, financial support is also vital for consultant involvement. Obviously, if a Neighbourhood Planning case does not have enough money, it unlikely to commission external consultants. There is no significant evidence that affluent areas are more positive, but according to the 2015 indices of deprivation (DCLG, 2015) and the ranking of multiple deprivation local authorities in

Table 5.1, only Tettenhall ranks a little lower (The lower the rank number the worse the deprivation is), and the reminders all rank very high (most local authorities rank more than 200). To the contrary, although generally no deprived areas involved in this research, Parker's (2014) survey demonstrated that the financial capacity becomes an obstacle for deprived areas if they wish to commission external consultants.

According to Table 7.1, those cases commissioned consultants usually performed well in quality aspects of Sustainability Appraisal, including Thame, Lynton and Lynmouth, Kirdford, Tettenhall, and Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale. However, these cases generally performed poorly in planning skill improvement of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members. As discussed in Section 6.3.2, Lynton and Lynmouth, and Kirdford as well were interviewed, but both the interviewees believed that their planning skill improvement was very limited. The reason could be that the consultant did most of the job and members of Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups did not positively involve in.

On the other hand, to prepare Sustainability Appraisal in-house could to some extent solve the problems of limited financial support. Another prominent benefit is the considerable improvement of planning skills for Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members. Those who were involved in the preparation process gained planning skills. Although the process was harder, Neighbourhood Planning participants were more likely to improve their planning skills in-house than when commissioning consultants. However, both Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal require efficient planning skill capacity at the initial stages, which could be from steering group members, the Local Planning Authority, and guidance. Some Neighbourhood Planning steering groups were fortunate to include skilled members e.g. Cringleford. However, many cases relied on external planning skill support. As discussed in Section 7.2, if consultants become unavailable, there is only the Local Planning Authority who can directly contribute to the neighbourhood planning skill capacity.

In conclusion, if financial support is sufficient for neighbourhoods, to involve external consultants is helpful in Sustainability Appraisal preparation. However, the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group should hold the leading position and be positively involved in the Sustainability Appraisal process. Consultants should ideally perform the role of ‘critical friends’ to support and teach steering group members. On the other hand, for those cases which do not have sufficient financial support to prepare Sustainability Appraisal in-house it is not necessary a disaster. Although it is not easy for some Neighbourhood Planning cases with limited planning skill capacity, there are some successful examples. Bembridge, for instance, which was not supported by steering group members with planning skills, they have still prepared a high-quality and effective Sustainability Appraisal in-house, following the ‘DIY’ Sustainability Appraisal guidance.

8.2.2 Simple or comprehensive Sustainability Appraisal

The evidence collected and analysed in this research highlights that the quality of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning is very uneven. In spite of the planning skill capacity, another factor, neighbourhood context, also dramatically influenced the quality of Sustainability Appraisal. As there is no prescribed format of how to carry out Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning, it could be comprehensive or simple, formal or informal to fit its implementation context. In this sense, some of the traditional components of Sustainability Appraisal might become less valuable and could be omitted. Following this model, the burden of preparing Sustainability Appraisal could be reduced.

Some scholars argue that poor quality Sustainability Appraisal could still be effective. According to Therivel (2010) Sustainability Appraisal works when decision makers positively consider the results of it. However, an expert said ‘good quality Sustainability Appraisal could absolutely improve effectiveness, and a simplified

Sustainability Appraisal process might reduce its effectiveness’ (Interview. b). In Section 7.4, some prominent indicators were also shown to significantly influence the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal. Therefore, as the linkages between quality and effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning has been established, to inappropriately simplify Sustainability Appraisal could reduce its quality and then influence the final outcomes.

One possible recommendation for this dilemma is to simplify some unimportant elements of Sustainability Appraisal as most cases are limited in relevant resources, but those indicators that could significantly influence the effectiveness should be emphasised, such as, ‘proactive’, ‘alternatives’, ‘Local Planning Authority’ and ‘consultant involvement’ (see Section 7.4). In addition, beyond the quality indicators mentioned in Chapter 7, some others also might be significant, but the limitation of evidence here might have failed to highlight them.

8.2.3 Voluntary or compulsory Sustainability Appraisal

As discussed in Chapter 3, it is not mandatory to prepare Sustainability Appraisal for a Neighbourhood Plan if no significant environmental impacts are identified. However, an expert believed that to optimise the benefits, Sustainability Appraisal should be a requirement in Neighbourhood Planning (Interview. c). For example, if some Neighbourhood Planning cases do not want their plan to be transparent for some reason, they could choose not to include Sustainability Appraisal. Then the benefits of it will not exist. Currently, many cases have chosen not to involve Sustainability Appraisal. Within the first 29 completed Neighbourhood Planning cases, only 15 prepared Sustainability Appraisal (see Table 6.3 only five cases were voluntary). In this sense, if Sustainability Appraisal is excluded in Neighbourhood Planning, none of its potential benefits will be realised.

This raises the question, why did some cases not conduct Sustainability Appraisal?

One expert explained that ‘because of the limitation of planning skills and financial support for Neighbourhood Planning, most of them might be reluctant to include Sustainability Appraisal’ (Interview. c). The evidence collected in this research also supports that explanation. According to the interviews from Neighbourhood Planning cases, many Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups were reluctant to prepare Sustainability Appraisal (see Section 6.2.3). For these cases, they admitted that if Sustainability Appraisal had not been required for their neighbourhood, they would not have prepared it. Moreover, the awareness and culture of preparing Sustainability Appraisal were not yet established in neighbourhood level planning. The reluctance, therefore, occurred because Neighbourhood Planning steering group members were not familiar with Sustainability Appraisal and regarded it as a burden.

In this sense, to require Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning would seem be a solution for such reluctance. However, this could lead to serious problems. Firstly, Neighbourhood Planning itself is not a requirement, meaning communities might give up the opportunity if they believe it is very difficult to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan and Sustainability Appraisal. Therefore, to strictly require Sustainability Appraisal could increase the perceived or actual difficulties of Neighbourhood Planning and some communities therefore might be reluctant to undertake Neighbourhood Plan preparation.

Secondly, the reluctance cannot be eliminated in this way. According to an expert if decision makers fail to positively consider the results of Sustainability Appraisal in the planning making process, the effectiveness becomes very limited (Interview. b). This means, to require the preparation of Sustainability Appraisal is considered unlikely to improve its effectiveness at all.

Therefore, it is necessary to seek other ways to tackle the reluctance to conduct Sustainability Appraisal. At first, to reduce the burden of Sustainability Appraisal, such as to simplify Sustainability Appraisal processes and reports to reduce resource

investment in Neighbourhood Planning (see Section 8.2.2). Also according to Therivel (2010), to prepare a simple Sustainability Appraisal does not need many resources. Simplified Sustainability Appraisal would be easier for Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups to carry out, and the enthusiasm could be improved in this way. Moreover, in comparison to external consultant, the planning skill support from Local Planning Authority is free. This means that if the Local Planning Authority could be involved, a Neighbourhood may not need to commission a consultant. This is a very efficient approach to cut costs.

Promoting the culture and awareness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning is also considered to be useful. Although it requires relatively long-term effort, it could have a profound influence. Once the culture of Sustainability Appraisal has been established in a Neighbourhood, the community might spontaneously prepare Sustainability Appraisal in future planning. In fact, as revealed by relevant evidence, some cases have positively involved Sustainability Appraisal (see Section 6.2.3).

In the case of Chaddesley Corbett, Sustainability Appraisal was not required since no potential significant environmental impacts were identified. However, Sustainability Appraisal had been prepared 'on their behalf to ensure that the plan adheres to the principles of sustainable development' (Chaddesley Corbett, 2014, p. 1). In Cuckfield, the steering group produced a Sustainability Appraisal desiring to pursue best practice and ensure that sustainability is thoroughly considered in the plan (Cuckfield, 2014). These cases had awareness of Sustainability Appraisal and positively prepared Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

Furthermore, this is also part of a learning process. At the beginning, preparing Sustainability Appraisal could be a big challenge for those participants; however, the relevant skills will be gradually increased, through the experience. Bembridge is a distinctive case, the interviewee said it was a struggle to learn everything about how

to prepare Sustainability Appraisal, but after the preparation he described an increase in relevant planning skills and felt confident to prepare Sustainability Appraisal in future Neighbourhood Plans.

8.3 Achievement of Research Objectives

At the end of this thesis, it is necessary to revisit the research objectives to consider if they have been achieved. As shown in the first chapter, the aim of the research is to evaluate the role of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning based in England, and there are four objectives to achieve this aim:

1 To investigate systematic approaches to establishing evaluation frameworks for environmental assessments, and develop an evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning (Chapter 4)

2 To evaluate the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning (Chapter 6)

3 To identify key factors influencing the performance of Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning (Chapter 7)

4 To recommend possible ways to improve Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning (Chapter 8)

Chapter 1 is introducing chapter, and Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are literature review chapters. As Neighbourhood Planning is a new planning form launched in 2012, the basic principles of it need to be presented at the initial stage of the thesis. Chapter 2 included three main components of Neighbourhood Planning, namely: Neighbourhood Planning Structure, Neighbourhood Planning Implementation, and Neighbourhood Planning Characteristics. In the chapter, the concept and legislation

arrangements of Neighbourhood Planning were clearly introduced, including its components, qualifying bodies and key stages. The Neighbourhood Planning implementation situation was also introduced to demonstrate an overall picture of its implementation. Finally, the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning were then discussed based on relevant published studies. These characteristics were considered to understand the potential significant influence they have upon Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

In Chapter 3, Sustainability Appraisal was introduced as a very important component of this research. Sustainability Appraisal is derived from the EU SEA Directive but combined with the principles of Sustainable Development. Chapter 3 also introduced the foundation principles of Sustainability and SEA focusing on previous Sustainability Appraisal implementation in the UK.

The first objective of this research relates to Chapter 4. Systematically discussed how to establishing evaluation frameworks for environmental assessments. To fulfil the goal of this research, an evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning was also established based on the 'quality - effectiveness' model and previous application experiences, combining with the consideration of characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning discussed in Chapter 2.

Detailed data collection methods were discussed in Chapter 5 as document review and interviews. The main sources of documentary evidence included Sustainability Appraisal reports and examiner's reports, while the main interview sources were Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group members and experts. Before data collection, ethical issues and a pilot were carefully considered. Additionally, NVivo as a helpful tool had been applied to arrange and analyse both the text and voice evidence collected.

Objective 2, the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning

was demonstrated in Chapter 6. Both the quality and effectiveness evidence of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning was presented. In total 30 documents, 10 Neighbourhood Planning case interviews, and three expert interviews were referenced as sources of evidence. In this chapter, detailed evidence for each indicator was discussed.

Chapter 7 relates to Objective 3, all the evidence collected in the Chapter 6 was analysed in a systematic way. This chapter concentrated on generic issues in terms of the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning rather than detailed specific issues for each indicator or case. The analysis discussed prominent factors related to the quality of Sustainability Appraisal, the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal, and Neighbourhood Planning. The analysis has enabled detailed discussion of the 'influence chain' (see Figure 7.4) of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

In the final chapter, Objective 4 was fulfilled as possible recommendations have been given in terms of improving the performance of Sustainability Appraisal and Neighbourhood Planning, and further research suggestions are also discussed.

8.4 Contribution of This Research

This research has established a possible evaluation framework for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. The evaluation framework combines traditional criteria of Sustainability Appraisal and new characteristics to reflect the particular characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning. This is the first evaluation framework established specifically for Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

With this evaluation framework, this research has contributed to the empirical study

of Neighbourhood Planning, as it employed 15 Neighbourhood Planning cases to investigate the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. Evidence was collected from 30 documents and 12 interviews. This research has analysed and summarised the generic performance situation of Sustainability Appraisal in the context of Neighbourhood Planning. As there had been no previous research published relating to this research scope, so this research is a pioneer.

Based on evidence, the concept of an ‘influence chain’ (see Figure 7.4) has been presented. It demonstrates the relations between the quality of Sustainability Appraisal, effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal, and the Neighbourhood Plan. This is a new idea relating to the investigation of the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. Furthermore, the ‘influence chain’ might also fit other Environmental Assessments e.g. EIA and SEA.

Finally, possible recommendations have been given to improve the performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. The recommendations concentrated on three dilemmas rarely discussed by other previous studies to avoid meaningless repeating.

8.5 Limitations and Further Research

One primary challenge for this research is the limited member of cases. As Neighbourhood Planning is still a relatively new process and still at the beginning of its application, a limited number cases could be used in this study. When the research began to seek possible cases in 2014, there were only 29 cases which had made considerable progress, and within these only 15 cases had prepared Sustainability Appraisal. Although at that time, more than one thousand cases were ongoing, most were just at the beginning. Limited cases restricted the investigation methodology of this research. It was only possible to investigate the 15 cases. Moreover, these cases

were unable to reflect all types of Neighbourhood Planning issues. For instance, Business Neighbourhood Planning, Neighbourhood Forum (only one case in this research), and Neighbourhood Planning in deprived areas. Finally, previous studies related to Neighbourhood Planning were also very limited. This research combined Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal, and no relevant study had been published previously. On the one hand, it was a great challenge to pioneer such study. On the other hand, it was also an opportunity to contribute primary empirical research in this area.

Secondly, this research relied considerably on documentary evidence, while interview evidence was relatively limited. It was very difficult to collect interview evidence in this research. Firstly, there was usually only one interviewee available in each case. Secondly, some cases had rejected the interview requests for various reasons. Finally, many of the Neighbourhood Planning interviewees gave very simple answers to interview questions perhaps reflecting their limited engagement in Sustainability Appraisal processes. The limitation of interview evidence is perhaps significant particularly in the influenced the evaluation of the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. However, Neighbourhood Planning and Sustainability Appraisal are both difficult research subjects, and it is acknowledged that the evidence is hard to acquire.

Thirdly, Neighbourhood Planning is still on going, and developing too quickly to include all new data in this research. As many communities are enthusiastic about Neighbourhood Planning, new cases are emerging every day. However, this research concentrated on the initial wave of Neighbourhood planning cases. For example, only the frontrunners were subsidised by the Central Government, and the situation could be different for later Neighbourhood planning cases in terms of financial support. Moreover, the research time period was also short, meaning it was not possible to wait for more cases to become available or long-term monitoring feedback.

In terms of further research, more Neighbourhood Planning cases will become available. Based on sufficient Neighbourhood Planning cases, various comparative studies could be carried out. For instance, to compare Sustainability Appraisal in business Neighbourhood Planning and resident Neighbourhood Planning. In further research, more accurate evaluation on effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal could be made based on long-term monitoring. Finally, further research also could concentrate on specific issues of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning. For instance, Sustainability Appraisal in deprived neighbourhoods.

8.6 Conclusion

The performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning has been evaluated in this research. As there were huge distinctions between different cases, it is very hard to make a generic conclusion. However, it was revealed in this research that Sustainability Appraisal generally followed the ‘influence chain’, which illustrated the relationship between the quality of Sustainability Appraisal, the effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal, and the performance of Neighbourhood Planning. This ‘influence chain’ comprehensively encompasses all aspects of Sustainability Appraisal performance rather than concentrating on only the quality or effectiveness performance of Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning.

In this research, it has been shown that Sustainability Appraisal could significantly influence Neighbourhood Planning. Also because of the characteristics of Neighbourhood Planning, some of the benefits of Sustainability Appraisal were even more profound than in Local Planning. Moreover, the linkages between the quality and effectiveness of Sustainability Appraisal were also demonstrated, meaning that although Sustainability Appraisal in Neighbourhood Planning does not need to be comprehensive, if some key quality indicators are considered. To sum up, this research has shown that although Sustainability Appraisal is a voluntary option for

many Neighbourhood Planning cases, to prepare it could improve the performance of Neighbourhood Planning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Detailed Criteria of Lawrence's Framework

Table 1. Institutional Arrangement Criteria

Sub- attributes	Criteria
Organizational structure and interactions	Roles and division of responsibility, interagency and public consultation mechanisms, time lines and schedules, financial controls, compliance and monitoring mechanisms, links to decision-making and to related planning and environmental management regimes
Organizational capacity	Institutional, technical and financial capacity, political commitment, implementation capacity, staffing and staff training, review constraints
Policies, legislation, regulations and guidelines	Policy and legal basis, scope of application, compliance and monitoring requirements, public scrutiny, participation and appeal procedures, harmonization provisions, procedural, methodological and administrative guidelines, guidelines for various proposal classes and for individual activities within the EIA planning process, such as scoping, impact prediction, significance determination and monitoring

Source: (Lawrence, 1997, p. 222)

Appendix 1. Detailed Criteria of Lawrence's Framework (continued)

Table 2. Process Assessment Criteria

Sub- attributes	Criteria
Evaluating the planning process	Overall design, the choice and sequences of activities, the opportunities for agency and public involvement, study-team management and integration procedures, timing and cost control procedures
The political process	Stakeholder representation, involvement of elected representatives, fairness of treatment, participant funding and access to compensation, connections to decision-making
The administrative procedures used to review the application	Logical, efficient, coordinated and comprehensive review procedures, the consistent application of explicit review criteria, clearly defined and substantiated acceptability thresholds, an independent review by technically qualified staff, clear rationale for the basis for interpretations and conclusions with direct links to policies, guidelines and terms of reference, responsiveness to issues and concerns raised by proponents, public and other agencies

Source: (Lawrence, 1997, p. 222)

Appendix 1. Detailed Criteria of Lawrence's Framework (continued)

Table 3. Documents Criteria

Sub- attributes	Criteria
Document style and format	Clear, coherent, decision-focused, succinct
Scientific rigor	Complete, explicit, unbiased, consistent, logical, reliable balanced, substantiated, fully referenced
Content	Executive summary, need, reasonable alternatives, description of baseline conditions, proposal description, direct, indirect and cumulative impact identification and prediction, mitigation, significance interpretation, knowledge gaps and uncertainties surveillance and monitoring, conclusions and recommendations, glossary, study team, technical appendices, terms of reference
The proposal description	Nature and purpose, status, design and implementation strategies, input requirements land, raw materials, energy, human resources, development characteristics size, layout, shape, access, capacity, employment, traffic generation, ancillary activities, outputs products, wastes, useful by-products, construction, operations, closure and post-closure characteristics
The planning process description	Sequence and interrelationships among activities, effective communications, distribution and availability of reports, agency and political involvement, provision for early and ongoing involvement by full range of stakeholders, provision for consensus building and dispute resolution, areas of agreement and disagreement among parties identified and clarified
Methods	Procedures used for scoping, collecting and analyzing impacts, characterizing baseline conditions, identifying impacts, analyzing risks and uncertainties, interpreting impacts, assessing interrelationships, cumulative effects and sustainability implications, generating and evaluating alternatives, mitigating, monitoring and managing impacts

Source: (Lawrence, 1997, p. 222)

Appendix 1. Detailed Criteria of Lawrence's Framework (continued)

Table 4. Direct outcomes criteria

The determination of whether identified goals were achieved
Whether impacts occurred as forecast, and impact management measures were as effective as anticipated
Whether high-quality proposals emerged from the process
Whether environmental quality was maintained
Whether impact management commitments were honored and whether there was compliance with applicable regulations and requirements

Source: (Lawrence, 1997, p. 222)

Appendix 1. Detailed Criteria of Lawrence's Framework (continued)

Table 5. Indirect Outcomes Criteria

Sub- attributes	Criteria
Environmental management contribution	As an environmental management tool, contribution to sustainability, integration with other environmental management instruments
Political administrative implications	Decision-making influence, internalization of environmental perspectives, changes in organizational structure and procedures, contribution to openness of decision-making, shifts in attitudes and in the distribution of power, public financial costs and benefits
Research contribution	EIA theory building, inter-disciplinary and disciplinary research, applied research, learning process for participants and practitioners, knowledge sharing and networking
Conceptual/ideological consistency	Links to contemporary environmental or social thought, extent complementary to an ecosystem- based approach, relationship to different theoretical orientations, extent complementary to other forms of interdisciplinary theory and practice
Contribution to the quality and effectiveness of SEA/EIA practice	Integration of quality assurance mechanisms, assessments of cost effectiveness, evaluation against EIA theory, evaluation against EIA principles, institutional assessments, assessments of EIA processes, documents and methods, proposal and system effectiveness analyses

Sources: (Lawrence, 1997, p. 222)

Appendix 2. Criteria for Evaluating the SEA of Land Use Plans

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators
System criteria	Legal basis	Are the clear legal provisions, defining broad objective, standards and terms of reference, to undertake the SEA of land use plans?
	Integration	Is there provision for the early integration of SEA and land use plan preparation?
	Guidance	Does guidance relating specifically to the SEA of land use plans exist?
	Coverage	Must the significant environmental effects of all land use plans be subjected to SEA?
	Tiering	Is the SEA undertaken within a tiered system of environmental assessment?
	Sustainable development	Is the concept of sustainable development integral to the SEA process?
Process criteria	Alternatives	Does the SEA process provide for the consideration of reasonable alternatives, and must reasons for the choice of the selected alternative be outlined?
	Screening	Must screening of land use plans for environmental significance take place?
	Scoping	Are the boundaries of SEAs determined using scoping procedures?
	Prediction/evaluation	Are the policies within land use plans assessed against environmental criteria, and is the significance of the potential impacts evaluated?
	Additional impacts	Does the SEA process explicitly require consideration of secondary, synergistic or cumulative impacts?
	Report preparation	Are the SEA procedures and their main findings record in publicly available SEA reports?
	Review	Is the information included in SEA reports subjected to a transparent review process to check that it is sufficient to inform decision-making?
	Monitoring	Do SEAs include monitoring strategies linked to the achievement of pre-defined objectives for land use plans?
	Mitigation	Does a mitigation strategy exist to promote environmental enhancement and the reduction of potentially negative environmental effects?
	Consultation and public participation	Does consultation and public participation take place within the SEA processes, and are the representations recorded and acted upon?

Source: (Jones et al., 2005, p. 40)

Appendix 2. Criteria for Evaluating the SEA of Land Use Plans (continued)

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators
Outcome criteria	Decision making	Do SEAs have any discernible influence on the content of land use plans or the treatment of environmental issues during decision-making?
	Costs and benefits	Are the discernible environmental benefits of the SEA process perceived to outweigh its costs?
	Environmental quality	Has the SEA process had any effect 'on the ground' in terms of improving the environmental quality of the area?
	System monitoring	Does any form of monitoring of the SEA process take place?

Source: (Jones et al., 2005, p. 40)

Appendix 3. Retief's Evaluation Framework

Table 1. Retief's Process Indicators

Key process principles	Key process objectives	Process KPAs	Process KPIs
There is not one SEA process to be used in all contexts. This requires a SEA process to be flexible and adaptable, in order to integrate with the decision making context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To integrate the SEA with the decision making context. . To avoid the duplication of processes 	Context specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Was the SEA fully integrated with the plan or programme formulation process, from conceptualization to implementation? . Did the SEA make provision for tiering with project EIA? . Did the SEA formulate actor and process configurations?
Development must be socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. SEA provides a practical means of integrating the concept of sustainability into plan and programme formulation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To integrate the concept of sustainability into plan and programme level decision making. . To facilitate the development of local definitions and understandings of sustainability. 	Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Did the SEA documentation provide a definition for sustainability, which is consistent with the way sustainability is understood in the local context? . Was sustainability included as a specific objective of the SEA? . Was an attempt made, as part of the SEA, to measure sustainability by means of parameters, objectives, criteria or indicators? . Did the SEA give equal consideration to the biophysical, social and economic aspects?

Source: (Retief, 2006, p. 108)

Appendix 3. Retief's Evaluation Framework (continued)

Table 1. Retief's Process Indicators (continued)

Key process principles	Key process objectives	Process KPAs	Process KPIs
Public participation forms an integral part of SEA because SEA puts people and their needs at the forefront of its concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To inform and involve IAPs throughout the SEA process. . To incorporate public inputs and concerns into decision-making processes. . To facilitate information sharing. 	Participative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Was a formal public participation process followed, which informed and involved the IAPs throughout the SEA process? . Were the IAPs satisfied with the public participation process? . Did the SEA explicitly address public inputs and concerns? . Were all key state departments and other governing bodies consulted during the SEA?
SEA provides a means of influencing decision making throughout its life cycle, from conceptualization to implementation in an incremental and iterative way while facilitating the concepts of pre-caution and continuous improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To ensure that the SEA is implemented early enough to influence decision-making . To facilitate continual improvement. 	Proactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Did the SEA ensure availability of the assessment results early enough to influence the decision making process? . Was commitment confirmed to ensure that the results of the SEA be considered in future decision- making?
The benefits of implementing SEA exceed the costs. SEA adds value to existing decision making by focusing on key strategic environmental issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To provide sufficient, reliable and usable information. . To optimise the use of time and resources. . To focus decision making on the key environmental issues. 	Efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Did the SEA provide sufficient information for decision-making according to the relevant decision-makers? . Were sufficient resources and time allocated to conduct the SEA according to the relevant SEA role players? . Did the SEA focus on key significant strategic issues?

Source: (Retief, 2006, p. 108)

Appendix 3. Retief's Evaluation Framework (continued)

Table 2. Retief's Methodology Indicators

Key methodology principles	Key methodology objectives	Methodology KPAs	Methodology KPIs
SEA has to justify why it needs to be applied and what it aims to achieve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To justify the need for the SEA. . To clearly define project objectives of the SEA. 	Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Was the purpose and/or objectives of the SEA clearly defined that could serve as reference for criteria applied? . Was the need for the SEA clearly defined?
SEA determines the opportunities and constraints that the environment places on development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To provide sufficient information on environmental attributes to identify opportunities and constraints 	Situation analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Was a resource inventory prepared which describes the social, economic and biophysical aspects in the area at the appropriate scale and level of detail? . Was the state of the environment (including economic, social and bio-physical) determined against set objectives, criteria or indicators? . Were environmental opportunities and constraints identified by means of a justified methodology?
SEA identifies the most significant key strategic environmental issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To ensure that key strategic environmental issues are identified. 	Scoping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Was a formal scoping method applied? . Did scoping assist in defining the scope and extent of the SEA? . Did the scoping method(s) focus the SEA on key significant strategic issues? . Were public inputs considered during scoping?

Source: (Retief, 2006, p. 108)

Appendix 3. Retief's Evaluation Framework (continued)

Table 4. Retief's Methodology Indicators (continued)

Key methodology principles	Key methodology objectives	Methodology KPAs	Methodology KPIs
SEA determines the implications of strategic decisions on the environment.	. To ensure that environmental mental implications of strategic decisions are considered.	Environmental assessment	<p>. Was an assessment conducted against a sustainability framework (it may include sustainability parameters / objectives / criteria and indicators)?</p> <p>. Were different scenarios and/or alternatives considered to identify the best option?</p> <p>. Were the assessment techniques appropriate in terms of the context, available resources as well as data quality and availability?</p> <p>. Were cumulative effects considered?</p>
SEA aims for continuous improvement, which relies on monitoring and review mechanisms.	. To ensure that the SEA is reviewed and the implementation of proposals monitored.	Monitoring and review	<p>. Did the SEA propose a plan for monitoring?</p> <p>. Has the SEA been independently reviewed?</p> <p>. Has environmental been conducted?</p>

Source: (Retief, 2006, p. 108)

Appendix 3. Retief's Evaluation Framework (continued)

Table 5. Retief's Documentation Indicators

Key documentation principles	Key documentation objectives	Documentation KPAs	Documentation KPIs
Information should be documented in a sound and justifiable manner.	. To provide sound and justifiable information, which allows for verification of results. . To contribute to existing environmental data and information.	Description of Context	. Were the purpose and objectives of the SEA described in the documentation? . Was the decision making contexts and linkages with other decision-making processes described? . Was a description provided of the SEA process followed? . Were those involved in consultation and participation indicated?
		Description of the state of the environment	. Was a description provided of the current state of the environment (either as a separate volume or integrated with the description of the baseline environment)? . Was the state of the environment described against clear thresholds and/or limits of acceptable change in a way that highlights relative significance?

Source: (Retief, 2006, p. 108)

Appendix 3. Retief's Evaluation Framework (continued)

Table 6. Retief's Documentation Indicators (continued)

Key documentation principles	Key documentation objectives	Documentation KPAs	Documentation KPIs
		Description of assessment methodology and results	<p>. Were the different methods applied in the SEA described (relating to for instance screening, scoping and environmental assessment)?</p> <p>. Was a description of key significant strategic environmental issues given?</p> <p>. Were different scenarios and/or alternatives described?</p> <p>. Were the recommendations and/or terms of approval described?</p> <p>. Was a summary provided of difficulties encountered and subsequent uncertainties in results?</p>
. SEA should be documented in a manner that ensures effective communication of results in order to optimise the possibility of it influencing decision making.	<p>. To communicate the results of the SEA to decision makers.</p> <p>. To communicate the results of the SEA to IAPs.</p>	Communication s of results	<p>. Were the contents clearly explained, justified and logically arranged in sections or chapters?</p> <p>. Were the specialist reports well referenced and integrated in a way that promotes a self-contained document?</p> <p>. Was a non-technical summary provided of the main results and conclusions?</p> <p>. Were the inputs received from IAPs incorporated in the report?</p>

Source: (Retief, 2006, p. 108)

Appendix 3. Retief's Evaluation Framework (continued)

Table 7. Retief's direct output indicators

Key direct outputs principles	Key direct outputs objectives	Direct outputs KPAs	Direct outputs KPIs
SEA influences the contents of plans and programmes	. To influence the contents of plans and programmes.	Policies, plans and programmes	. Were any plans or programmes amended based on the proposals of the SEA? . Did the SEA facilitate the incorporation of sustainability objectives into relevant plans or programmes?
SEA facilitates the achievement of sustainability objectives	. To achieve the SEA objectives. . To achieve the SEA sustainability	SEA objectives	. Were the SEA project objectives achieved (as described in the TOR)? . Were the sustainability / environmental objectives achieved (as might be described in relation to the vision)?
SEA influences decision making	. To influence decision-making	Decision making	. Were decisions changed or amended based on the outcomes and proposals of the SEA? . Was the SEA implemented as a decision-support guideline for future development proposals? . Did the SEA inform/guide subsequent project level decision-making (such as EIA or water licensing)?
SEA improves environmental quality	. To improve environmental quality	Environmental quality/sustainability	. Were changes to the environment observed since the completion of the SEA process, which could be attributed to the influence of the SEA? . Did the SEA accurately identify the key significant strategic environmental issues?

Source: (Retief, 2006, p. 108)

Appendix 4. Bond et al.'s Evaluation Framework

Table 1. Substantive Criteria

Has the SEA had any effect 'on the ground' in terms of improving the environmental quality of the area?
Has the SEA process informed decisions on the final version of the plan or programme?
Have the statutory consultation bodies had a fair opportunity to contribute and have their views and comments been taken on board?
Has the SEA had any dissemble influence on the content of land use plans or the treatment of environmental issues during decision-making?
Does any form of monitoring of the SEA process and outcomes take place?
Does the SEA help to ensure that development is within environmental limits?
Has the SEA process suggested sustainable new alternatives that were actively considered?
Are the mitigation measures proposed by the SEA commensurate with the type and scale of impacts of the plan?
Have the SEA's mitigation measures been incorporated into the plan?

Source: (Bond et al., 2013, p. 123)

Appendix 4. Bond et al.'s Evaluation Framework (continued)

Table 2. Transactive Criteria

Has the SEA been carried out within a reasonable time frame without undue delay?
Has carrying out the SEA entailed reasonable (as opposed to excessive) spending?
Has acquiring the requisite skills and personnel for the SEA constituted a big burden or were they easily accessible?
Were responsibilities clearly defined and allocated and tasks undertaken by the most appropriate subjects?

Source: (Bond et al., 2013, p. 123)

Appendix 5. Comparing Indicators of Jones et al.'s, Retief's and Bond et al.'s Framework

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators		
Institutional arrangements		Retief	Jones	Bond
	Guidance		Does guidance relating specifically to the SEA of land use plans exist?	
	Tiering	Did the SEA make provision for tiering with project EIA?	Is the SEA undertaken within a tiered system of environmental assessment?	
	Local planning authority	Were all key state departments and other governing bodies consulted during the SEA		
	Experience of SA			
	Organisation capacity			Were responsibilities clearly defined and allocated and tasks undertaken by the most appropriate subjects?
	Planning skill capacity	Were sufficient resources and time allocated to conduct the SEA according to the relevant SEA role players?		Has acquiring the requisite skills and personnel for the SEA constituted a big burden or were they easily accessible?
	Financial capacity			Has carrying out the SEA entailed reasonable (as opposed to excessive) spending?
	Time arrangement			Has the SEA been carried out within a reasonable time frame without undue delay?

Source: Author

Appendix 5. Comparing Indicators of Jones et al.'s, Retief's and Bond et al.'s Framework (continued)

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators		
		Retief	Jones	Bond
Processes	Proactive	Did the SEA ensure availability of the assessment results early enough to influence the decision making process?		
	Integrative	Was the SEA fully integrated with the plan or programme formulation process, from conceptualization to implementation?	Is there provision for the early integration of SEA and land use plan preparation?	Have the SEA's mitigation measures been incorporated into the plan?
	Key significant strategies	Did the SEA focus on key significant strategic issues?		
	Public involvement	Was a formal public participation process followed, which informed and involved the IAPs (interested and affected parties) throughout the SEA process?	Does consultation and public participation take place within the SEA processes, and are the representations recorded and acted upon?	
	Statutory Consultation		Have the statutory consultation bodies had a fair opportunity to contribute and have their views and comments been taken on board?	

Source: Author

Appendix 5. Comparing Indicators of Jones et al.'s, Retief's and Bond et al.'s Framework (continued)

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators		
		Retief	Jones	Bond
Processes	Fairness	Were the IAPs satisfied with the public participation process?		
	Other neighbourhood level plans			
	DIY Level			
Methods	Description of development			
	Environmental baseline	Was the state of the environment (including economic, social and bio-physical) determined against set objectives, criteria or indicators?	Has the SEA had any effect 'on the ground' in terms of improving the environmental quality of the area?	
	Screening	Was the need for the SEA clearly defined?	Must screening of land use plans for environmental significance take place?	
	Scoping	Was a formal scoping method applied? Did scoping assist in defining the scope and extent of the SEA?	Are the boundaries of SEAs determined using scoping procedures?	
	Alternatives	Were different scenarios and/or alternatives considered to identify the best option?	Does the SEA process provide for the consideration of reasonable alternatives, and must reasons for the choice of the selected alternative be outlined?	Has the SEA process suggested sustainable new alternatives that were actively considered?

Source: Author

Appendix 5. Comparing Indicators of Jones et al.'s, Retief's and Bond et al.'s Framework (continued)

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators		
		Retief	Jones	Bond
Methods	Cumulative impact	Were cumulative effects considered?	Does the SEA process explicitly require consideration of secondary, synergistic or cumulative impacts?	Does the SEA help to ensure that development is within environmental limits?
	Mitigation		Does a mitigation strategy exist to promote environmental enhancement and the reduction of potentially negative environmental effects?	Are the mitigation measures proposed by the SEA commensurate with the type and scale of impacts of the plan?
	Monitoring	Did the SEA propose a plan for monitoring?	Do SEAs include monitoring strategies linked to the achievement of pre-defined objectives for land use plans?	Does any form of monitoring of the SEA process and outcomes take place?
	Review	Has the SEA been independently reviewed?	Is the information included in SEA reports subjected to a transparent review process to check that it is sufficient to inform decision-making?	

Source: Author

Appendix 5. Comparing Indicators of Jones et al.'s, Retief's and Bond et al.'s Framework (continued)

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators		
		Retief	Jones	Bond
Documents	Style and format			
	Contents	Were the contents clearly explained, justified and logically arranged in sections or chapters?		
	Informative	Did the SEA provide sufficient information for decision-making according to the relevant decision-makers?	Are the SEA procedures and their main findings record in publicly available SEA reports?	
	Description of context	Was the decision making contexts and linkages with other decision-making processes described?		
	Description of assessment methodology	Were the different methods applied in the SEA described (relating to for instance screening, scoping and environmental assessment)? Were the recommendations and/or terms of approval described? Was a summary provided of difficulties encountered and subsequent uncertainties in results?		
	Description of the current environmental /sustainability baseline	Was a description provided of the current environmental/sustainability baseline?		
	Description of process	Was a description provided of the SEA process followed?		

Source: Author

Appendix 5. Comparing Indicators of Jones et al.'s, Retief's and Bond et al.'s Framework (continued)

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators		
		Retief	Jones	Bond
Documents	Communications of results	<p>Were the specialist reports well referenced and integrated in a way that promotes a self-contained document?</p> <p>Was a non-technical summary provided of the main results and conclusions?</p>		
Direct outputs	Goals achievement	Were the SEA project objectives achieved (as described in the TOR)?		
	Sustainability achievement	Were the sustainability / environmental objectives achieved (as might be described in relation to the vision)?	Has the SEA process had any effect 'on the ground' in terms of improving the environmental quality of the area?	
	Policies, plans and programmes	Were any plans or programmes amended based on the proposals of the SEA?		Has the SEA process informed decisions on the final version of the plan or programme?
	Decision making	Were decisions changed or amended based on the outcomes and proposals of the SEA?	Do SEAs have any discernible influence on the content of land use plans or the treatment of environmental issues during decision-making?	Has the SEA process informed decisions on the final version of the plan or programme?

Source: Author

Appendix 5. Comparing Indicators of Jones et al.'s, Retief's and Bond et al.'s Framework (continued)

Attributes	Criteria	Indicators		
		Retief	Jones	Bond
Indirect outputs	Planning skill improvement			
	Administrative level			
	Conceptual/ideo logical	Was the SEA implemented as a decision-support guideline for future development proposals?		

Source: Author

Appendix 6. The first 29 Neighbourhood Plans Approved by Referendum (to Sep 2014)

	Neighbourhood	Referendum date	Percentage Vote 'yes'	District Council
1	Upper Eden	7 March 2013	90.22	Eden District Council
2	<i>Thame</i>	2 May 2013	76.47	South Oxfordshire District Council
3	<i>Exeter St James</i>	2 May 2013	91.62	Exeter City Council
4	Tattenhall and District	24 October 2013	95.77	Cheshire West and Chester Council
5	<i>Lynton and Lynmouth</i>	21 November 2013	80.26	North Devon Council
6	Norland	5 December 2013	73.71	The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
7	Broughton Astley	16 January 2014	89.22	Harborough District Council
8	<i>Cringleford</i>	24 January 2014	92.74	South Norfolk Council
9	<i>Sprowtson</i>	20 March 2014	88.30	Broadland District Council
10	<i>Ascot, Sunninghill and Sunningdale</i>	27 March 2014	91.14	Royal Borough Council
11	<i>Woodcote</i>	3 April 2014	91.23	South Oxfordshire District Council
12	Edith Weston	3 April 2014	91.57	Rutland County Council
13	Arundel	8 April 2014	90.29	Arun District Council
14	<i>Kirdford</i>	1 May 2014	94.62	Chichester District Council
15	<i>Strumpshaw</i>	22 May 2014	66.20	Broadland District Council
16	Much Wenlock	22 May 2014	84.58	Shropshire Council
17	<i>Woburn Sands</i>	22 May 2014	89.05	Milton Keynes Council
18	Barnham and Eastergate	2 July 2014	95.04	Arun District Council
19	Felpham	2 July 2014	89.95	Arun District Council
20	Anslow	3 July 2014	93.95	East Staffordshire Borough Council
21	Uppingham	10 July 2014	91.82	Rutland County Council
22	<i>Tettenhall</i>	17 July 2014	92	Wolverhpton City Council
23	Heathfield Park	17 July 2014	91	Wolverhpton City Council
24	Cockermouth	17 July 2014	60.69	Allerdale Borough Council
25	<i>Winslow</i>	24 July 2014	98.18	Aylesbury Vale District Council
26	<i>Bembridge</i>	24 July 2014	91.88	Isle of Wight Council
27	<i>Cuckfield</i>	24 July 2014	94.02	Mid Sussex District Council
28	Loxwood	24 July 2014	93.95	Chichester District Council
29	<i>Chaddesley Corbett</i>	11 Sep 2014	80.79	Wyre Forest District Council

Source: DCLG (2014)

Note: only Italics cases prepared Sustainability Appraisal

Appendix 7. Cuckfield Sustainability Objectives and Indicators

Cuckfield Sustainability Objectives	Cuckfield Sustainability Indicators
1. To ensure that those in need of local housing have the opportunity to live in a, sustainably constructed and affordable home of the appropriate type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Number of new home completions . Number of affordable home completions . Type of dwellings constructed by type and tenure
2. To ensure development does not take place in areas of flood risk, or where it may cause flooding elsewhere.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Flood events recorded . Permissions granted contrary to Environment Agency advice
3. To maintain a safe environment with a high level of community wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Crime rates, by type . Number of incidents reported by residents
4. To ensure that the Parish has adequate amenities for local residents, including health, education, local shopping and leisure facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Number of convenience shops in the village . Record of social infrastructure provided (schools, health facilities, etc.) . Number of primary-age children enrolled at schools in the Parish
5. To ensure development in the Parish complements the character of the village, including the Conservation Areas and the village setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Planning conditions requiring use of local or vernacular materials in design.
6. To reduce the Parish's impact on climate change and prepare the community and environment for its impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Parish Council representations on planning applications, to encourage 'sustainable' design and layout of development
7. To conserve and enhance biodiversity within the Parish, as part of a wider landscape of biodiversity enhancement across the district and the South East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Condition of New England and Millennium Woods . Designated sites within and adjacent to Parish . Data from Sussex Biodiversity Records
8. To protect, enhance and make accessible for enjoyment, the high quality and sensitive landscape within the Parish and prevent the coalescence of settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Number of buildings developed outside the BUAB . Number of views from the BUAB affected by development . Footpath condition surveys . Number of footpath and bridle path routes across through Parish countryside into adjacent districts
9. To reduce the need to travel by car for local journeys, reduce road congestion and improve and promote travel by cycle and on foot within the Parish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Length of dedicated cycle or shared-surface paths within the parish . Number of parking spaces in the village . Traffic management undertaken

Source: (Cuckfield, 2014, p. 11)

Appendix 7. Cuckfield Sustainability Objectives and Indicators (continued)

Cuckfield Sustainability Objectives	Cuckfield Sustainability Indicators
10. To encourage lower production of waste to landfill	. Municipal waste collection data from black, blue and green bins
11. To maintain and improve the water quality of the Parish's watercourses and aquifers, and to achieve sustainable water resources management	. Water consumption data . Water quality in the New England Wood . EA water quality data
12. To increase energy efficiency and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources in the Parish and to utilise sustainably produced and local products in new developments where possible.	. Number of Photo Voltaic systems installed . Energy consumption of Parish buildings
13. To promote opportunities for employment within the Parish and support local businesses and tourism	. Number of new business start-ups in the village . Number of local enterprises . Rates and taxes for small businesses

Source: (Cuckfield, 2014, p. 11)

