Introduction
This non-technical summary aims to summarise the content and outcomes of the Sustainability Appraisal for the Forest of Dean District Council Core Strategy Second Preferred Options (CS).

What is the CORE STRATEGY?
The Core Strategy provides the root for all the policies in other Development Plan Documents that will follow. It is therefore one of the first LDF documents to be prepared. The Core Strategy provides a guide to the way in which the District will change over time. It considers the traditional subjects such as housing and employment but also the more general issues such as the overall approach to the way in which the area should develop. It proposes an approach that attempts to balance the needs of the district with the requirements of national guidance and the regional strategy.

Why is there a Sustainability Appraisal?
The new planning system set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act will result in the replacement of the present Structure and Local Plans. At the present local level the Local Plan will be replaced by a series of documents which will comprise a Local Development Framework (LDF). Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a required procedure which forms an integral part of the process of producing the Local LDF. In addition to the Government’s requirement for a Sustainability Appraisal (SA), European Legislation requires that an assessment of the environmental effects of planning documents is undertaken. This is through the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive 42/2001. There is a large amount of overlap between the European ‘Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)’ and the UK Sustainability Appraisal process, and they have therefore been combined into one process for the assessment of the Local Development Framework. For ease of reference this document will refer to both processes as a Sustainability Appraisal.

What is the Sustainability Assessment Process?
There are five stages to SA A-E which are summarised in the text below. This report is stage C of the process.

What will the Sustainability Appraisal do?
By undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal it is possible to look at the range of policies and plans contained in the Local Development Framework documents, and examine how they contribute to the aim of sustainable development. By looking at every policy or document in this manner it is possible to identify areas where policies may not contribute to sustainable development. By identifying these problems at an early stage, it is possible to change and amend policies or documents to ensure that they are as sustainable as possible.
Stage A
During stage A over 100 plans and strategies were reviewed to ensure the SA reflected International, National and Local guidance and objectives (appendix 2 of the report). During this stage the Key Sustainability issues (Table1 of the report) were also identified by looking at baseline information (Appendix 3 in the report) on environmental, social and economic characteristics of the district.

At the end of the stage a Sustainability Appraisal Framework was developed which identified 17 local sustainability objectives and future indicators (Appendix 4 of the report). This was then circulated to English Heritage, The Environment Agency, Natural England and Gloucestershire County Council for their comments (Appendix 8 of the report). The framework objectives were:

1. Improve health
2. Provide new housing to meet local need
3. Diversify the range of employment opportunities within the district
4. Reduce poverty and income inequality
5. Meet local needs locally
6. Reduce vulnerability of the economy to climate change and harness opportunities arising
7. Reduce the need/desire to travel by car
8. Help everyone access basic services easily, safely and affordably
9. Protect and enhance habitats and species (taking account of climate change)
10. Protect and enhance landscape and townscape
11. Maintain and enhance cultural and historical assets
12. Reduce vulnerability to flooding, sea level rise (taking account of climate change)
13. Reduce non-renewable energy consumption and 'greenhouse' emissions
14. Reduce the risks associated with unstable or contaminated land
15. Conserve water resources and protect water quality.
16. Minimise consumption and extraction of minerals
17. Minimise land, water, air, light, noise, and genetic pollution

Stage B
During this stage the SA appraised, in broad terms, a variety of options open to the CS. The SA then looked in greater detail at the predicted effects of the preferred option through the analysis of the core strategy policies.

The objectives of the SA (stage A) and the objectives of the CS Second Preferred Options document are reviewed and checked for compatibility. Where there is a conflict between 2 objectives one is prioritised over the other (Appendix 5 of the report summarises these).

The constraints imposed by the RSS and government policy must be taken account of when considering the range of possible options for the Core Strategy. This narrowed the process down to the following 5 options:

Option A: Development based on the hierarchy across the 4 towns as set out in the 2005 local plan and utilising existing identified sites.

Option B: Develop new portfolio of sites based on the hierarchy across the 4 towns set out in the 2005, Local Plan.

Option C: More even dispersal across 4 towns

Option D: Focus development in one town

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Option E: Tourism focus to employment development

Option F: Greater Dispersal to Towns and Villages

The sustainability implications of these options were tested against the SA framework (Stage A). The results of which can be found in appendix 6. Broadly options focusing development in one town or greater dispersal to the villages were considered less sustainable principally through potential impacts to local services and increase private car travel.

The preferred option is for the LDF is to continue the Local Plan approach whilst taking greater account of the needs and capabilities of individual settlements. The chosen option is therefore in part a continuation of the Local Plan strategy by focusing development in the towns of Lydney and Cinderford and to a lesser extent Coleford, with Newent receiving the smallest share of the 4 four towns.

19 policies have been developed in the CS to express this option these were tested against the sustainability objectives (Stage A above) to predict the effects of the option (Appendix 7). Broadly the policies are assessed as being positive or neutral depending on the policy intent. Policy 19 which relates to development in villages is seen as having a number of negative sustainability impacts. However the policy does support a number of social and cultural associations.

The SA principally made 8 recommendations:

1. Diversifying the range of employment opportunities (SA objective 3) is not easy to achieve. The SA assumes that the provision of a range of employment sites will stimulate diversification of the employment sector. The preferred strategy provides encouragement and opportunity for diversification. No further opportunities for market intervention have been identified.

2. Two rural based policies CS4 and CS19 are considered to have negative elements due to the dispersed nature of the likely developments and reliance on private car transport. These policies have been adapted to ensure access to reasonable standards of public transport are an important consideration of the policies.

3. The impacts on landscape (SA objective 10) have been identified as variable depending on the nature of proposals. The SA identifies that the implementation of the council's Landscape Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is vital in mitigating this variability.

4. The implementation of County Council's SPD on waste minimisation is seen an important mitigating factor in considering use of resources (SA Objective 16).

5. There is uncertainty in the effects of the policies on climate change. This is most probably due to the lack of evidence of the likely impacts and effects on community behaviour. The LDF needs to work with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to develop a risk based approach to improving assessment. Climate Change issues has been added to CS 1 to make provision for future local policy development (e.g. SPD) dependant on the LSP's work.

6. Flood risk. The outcomes of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment are awaited the SA evaluation has assumed that any policy implications will be adopted within the preferred options.

7. The impacts of the policies on habitats and species has been identified as variable. Through the assessment of the evidence base it is clear that the requirements of PPS 9
and circular 06/2005 provide assessment guidance that would mitigate this variability. It is not considered necessary to repeat this guidance in the Core Strategy.

8. Renewable energy and energy consumption (SA Objective 13) relies on the implementation of proposed standards in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). These standards are currently considered to be sufficient and do not need to be repeated in the Core Strategy. As highlighted above the lack of local evidence on climate change issues is a concern, in tandem with policy CS1 it is recommended that policy CS 10 should provide an opportunity for the development of local implementation criteria (most probably in the form of SPD).

Stage C
Preparing the SA Report (essentially this report).

Stage D
This SA is presented together with the CS Preferred Options document for public consultation for a period of 6 weeks. During that period comments are invited on both the CS Preferred Options and SA documents.

Copies of the Documents are available for viewing at local libraries, council offices or on the council’s web site www.fdean.gov.uk planning, local development framework. All comments should be sent in writing to the address below clearly stating if the comments relate the C/S Second Preferred Options or the SA.

Comments should be sent in writing to Forward Plans, CORE STRATEGY SECOND PREFERRED OPTIONS, Forest of Dean District Council, High Street, Coleford, Glos, GL16 8HG. Or via email: ld@fdean.gov.uk, marked CORE STRATEGY SECOND PREFERRED OPTIONS
The DEADLINE FOR COMMENTS IS 14th April 2008

Following the consultation of the C/S Second Preferred Options the SA will need to take account of any significant changes to the C/S Preferred Options.

Stage E
Monitoring the effects of the core strategy will be undertaken by using the key indicators identified in the SA Framework (appendix 4). These indicators will be reported on in the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) of the Local Development Framework produced by the council.