

***Towards a more efficient and
effective use of Strategic
Environmental Assessment and
Sustainability Appraisal
in spatial planning***

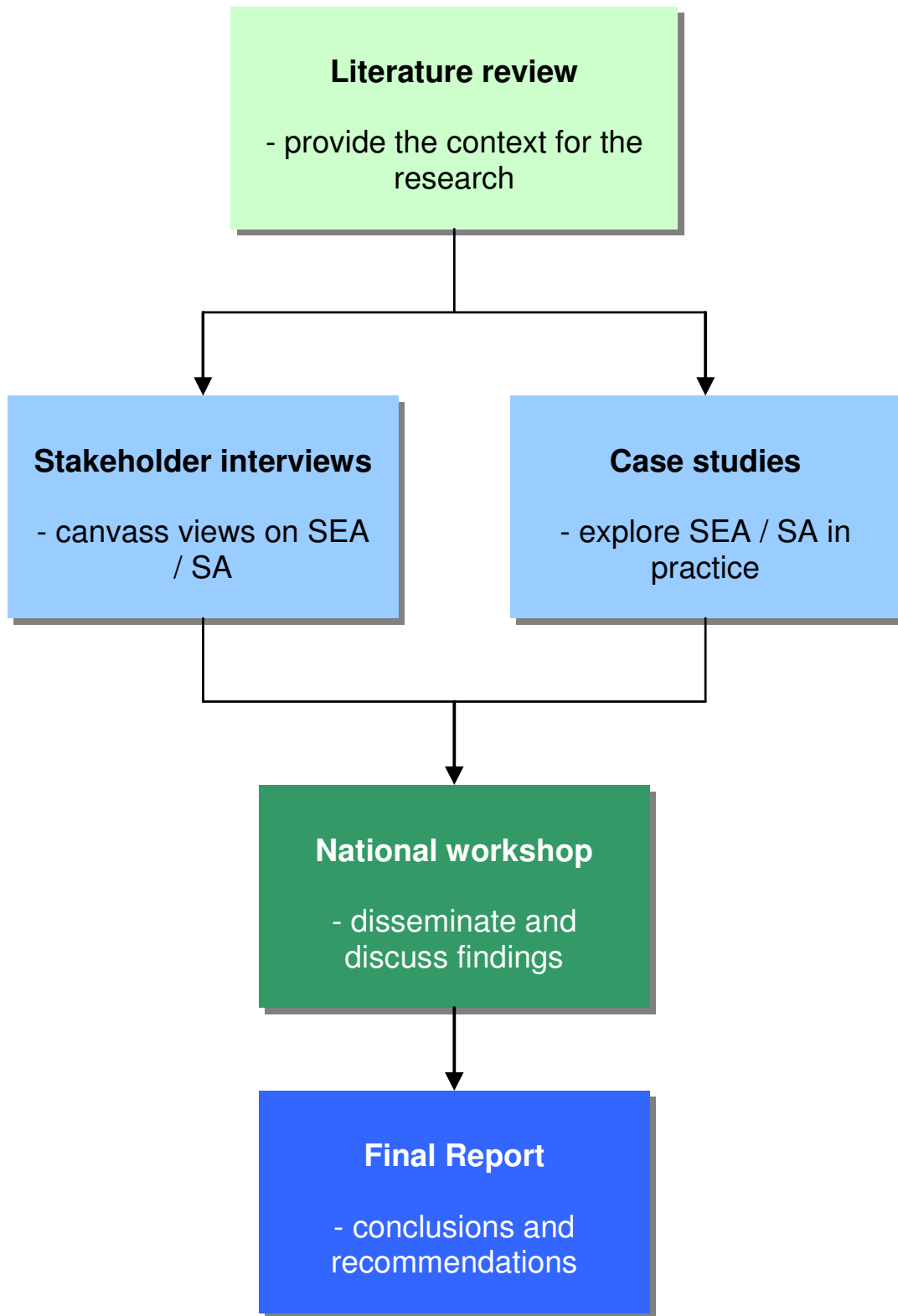
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Research questions

- **Is SEA / SA being implemented and undertaken in an **efficient** way?**
- **How **effective** is SEA / SA?**
- **How effectively are economic, environmental and social considerations compared and contrasted through SEA / SA?**



Methodology

A widely held view?

- ***“the SA/SEA process is... overly prescriptive and complex and adds little to the process of assessing and evaluating options and developing the most appropriate strategy, policies and sites for inclusion in the LDF. It creates an additional cost burden to the process for very little value”***

Planning officer

But...

- ***“In principle a brilliant idea and something needed for a long time”*** (interviewee)
- ***“One needs to allow sufficient time for the process to embed itself and become a natural adjunct to the plan-making process... I don’t think it’s something that’s going to happen overnight. But I think there’s some promise there and probably some individual examples of things that made an effect”*** (interviewee)

Key recommendations

- **Plan-making and SEA / SA should be much better integrated at the early, evidence gathering stages**
 - **Tendency to view plan-making and SEA / SA as two parallel processes**
 - **The SEA Directive's requirements to establish the policy context, determine the current and future baseline and identify problems are all elements of sound planning**

- **The combined plan and SEA / SA evidence base should be more spatial**
 - ***“Beginning with the idea that evidence provides a means of generating alternatives and will be needed to test alternatives remains the exception in the way that the assembly of evidence is thought out”***

Communities and Local Government (2008). Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the reform of local planning
 - **Lack of spatial data at the scoping stage led to *“thematic appraisal being undertaken of a spatial plan”* (interviewee)**
 - **Area-by-area approach to assembling evidence**

- **Scoping reports should document the evidence base and outline the alternatives to be considered**
 - **Scoping involves judging what evidence will be required to inform the assessment and this, in turn, means you need to know about the nature of the alternatives to be considered (interviewee)**

- **A more baseline-led approach to SEA / SA would yield significant benefits**
 - **Recommend a shift away from an objectives-led approach**
 - **In practice, performance is assessed primarily in relation to objectives and baseline information may or may not be used explicitly**
 - **Objectives and baseline-led approaches can yield quite different appraisal findings**
 - **Would signal a shift away from a matrix approach**

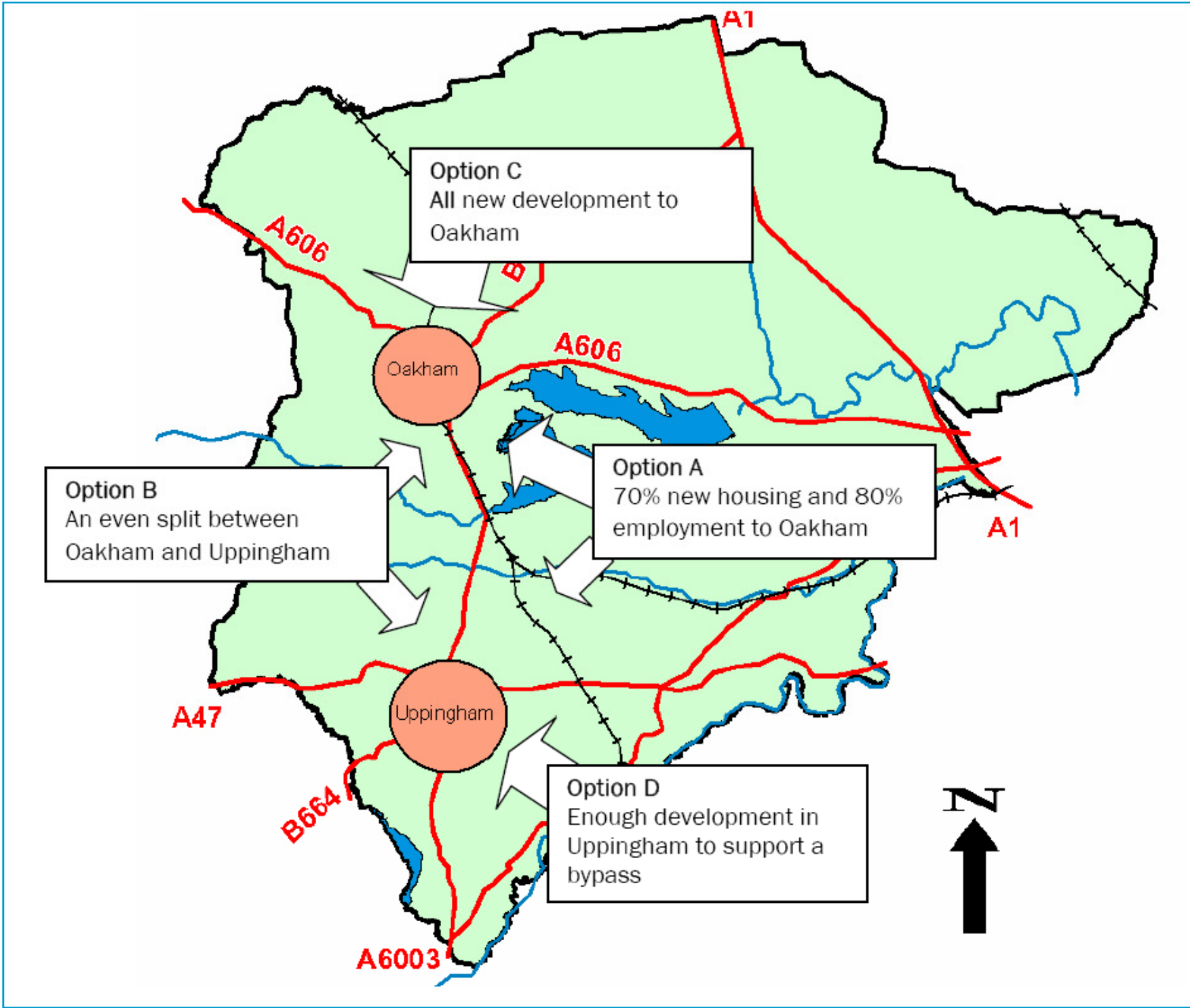
Objectives vs. baseline-led

Objectives led significance findings:	Effects led significance findings:
<p>Option H1 is likely to demonstrate minor negative effects potentially detracting from the achievement of SEA Objective 1 (conserve and enhance biodiversity)</p>	<p>Option H1 will lead to new development in the east of town, which is likely to reduce connectivity between 6 locally important wildlife sites. This has the potential to affect the viability of a population of water voles (a BAP species) that are present across these sites</p>

- **Practitioners should be braver scoping out issues**
 - *“Scoping takes longer than it should because practitioners cast the net too wide and avoid scoping out evidence”* (interviewee)
 - *“It can take a bit of courage to scope things out”* (interviewee)
 - **However, scoping should be done transparently with a clear explanation**

- **The focus should be on fewer, better alternatives**
 - ***“While SAs should evaluate alternative strategies, in some of the case studies this has been severely hampered by the lack of detail about options within some DPDs...”***

Communities and Local Government (2008). *Spatial Plans in Practice: Supporting the reform of local planning*
 - **Interviewees described alternatives as ‘forced’, ‘retrofitted’, ‘bogus’, ‘manufactured rather than meaningful’**
 - ***“it is a difficult job to come up with distinct and realistic alternatives”*** (interviewee)



Ambitious ■ Collaborative ■ Diverse ■ Professional ■ Responsive

- **After the scoping stage, it could be best for plan-making and SEA / SA to diverge**
 - **Enables an independent critique of the emerging plan to be undertaken**
 - **Should involve people other than those writing the plan**
 - **Provides plan authors with explicit recommendations to which they can respond (thus demonstrating that the SA has had an influence)**

Other recommendations

- **SEA / SA benefits from a workshop approach**
- **Demonstrating compliance with the SEA Directive is important**
 - Requirements of Annex I must be met; this is *“how you will be judged”*
- **EqIA, Rural Proofing etc. should be integrated into SEA / SA; HRA should not**
- **SA should play more of a role in relation to ‘environmental limits’**

- **SEA / SA should consider deliverability**
 - *“although SAs often consider the deliverability of policies, and assess how they will be implemented, some do not, leading to naïve and over-positive assessment results”*

Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants (2007). Environmental Sustainability and English Regional Strategies
- **Plan policies with insignificant effects should be screened out of appraisal**
- **Further research on the links between development and socio-economic outcomes**

Some way to go?

- ***“[SA is] a highly necessary process but a process that it is not yet fully developed; there needs to be better integration with other assessments, options development and planning process. Attention is also needed with regards to the documentation, multiple uses of evidence and proportionality testing / impact based analysis”***
- ***“Definitely a work in progress”***

Thank you

The logo for Scott Wilson, featuring the name "Scott" on the top line and "Wilson" on the bottom line, both in white text on a red background that is shaped like a right-angled triangle pointing to the right.

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