

Do's and Don'ts Guide to generating and developing alternatives

Alternatives are at the heart of the SEA process. The development and assessment of alternatives (or options) is a legal requirement under the SEA Directive.

Under the Directive, plan and programme proponents should ensure that:

- 'reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated' (Article 5.1)
- the Environmental Report includes 'an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with' (Annex 1(h))
- a statement is prepared summarising '... the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the reasonable alternatives dealt with.' (Article 9.1(b))

There are no right or wrong answers to developing alternatives. The following do's and don'ts list suggests some good practice in developing alternatives which may be helpful to plan and programme makers and SEA practitioners, but further good practice is likely to emerge. Some case study examples of current practice in developing alternatives are available at www.levett-therivel.fsworld.co.uk/.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
DO identify the main issues being dealt with as part of the plan-making process, and develop alternative approaches to dealing with these early on.	DON'T make up alternatives just to satisfy legal SEA requirements.
DO propose alternative ways to (a) deliver the plan's objectives and / or (b) deal with issues / problems identified during the scoping stage	DON'T define plan objectives so narrowly as to preclude reasonable alternatives.
DO use end of spectrum options to 'flush out' issues and tensions which should be addressed as the preferred options are refined (e.g. use an environmentally focused option to highlight economic implications and an economically focused option to highlight environmental implications).	DON'T simply produce end of spectrum alternatives that cannot realistically be delivered in order to support a preferred middle option (e.g. avoid options for targets for affordable housing simply based on (a) market driven levels, (b) 35% of housing (preferred option), or (c) 100% of housing).
DO recognise that there are alternatives within the plan. (e.g. alternatives for housing, employment, transport etc.)	DON'T suggest only one high level plan wide alternative (e.g. the plan is either socially or environmentally or economically orientated).
DO consider options that may be politically unpalatable or that contradict higher-level policies if you can prove that doing so would clearly lead to a more sustainable solution.	DON'T suggest options that are clearly unrealistic or infeasible (e.g. technically, financially). Stakeholders should be presented with genuine options.
DO document how the alternatives have been developed and identify constraints to generating alternatives... but...	DON'T ... just accept constraints on alternatives as a given. Query how much room for manoeuvre there may be.

 DO	 DON'T
<p>DO consider, where appropriate, both:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broad scenarios (which provide the underlying strategy for the plan) and options for detailed measures; and • area wide strategic options and site specific options. <p>When considering detailed alternatives focus on those that are consistent with the underlying strategy (e.g. sites which are consistent with the broad scenario).</p>	<p>DON'T unnecessarily produce alternatives for every minor issue; every permutation of every option; or alternatives that are difficult to distinguish from each other. Each alternative should be reasonably distinct</p>
<p>DO consider the alternatives hierarchy, by asking:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Is development necessary? If so, How should it be done? Then, Where should it go? And finally, Timing and detail of implementation (ODPM, 2005¹). <p>For high level strategic plans, need may be more important than for lower level plans where options for type, location or implementation may be addressed in more detail.</p>	<p>DON'T confuse mutually exclusive options (e.g. build X v. don't build X) with mix-and-match alternatives (build X, build Y next door). The former need to be compared in SEA; the latter individually tested for their sustainability. If using both approaches for different topics make this clear to consultees.</p>
<p>DO include details of the likely range of alternatives that will be considered in the scoping report, so that consultees can comment on them.</p>	<p>DON'T leave the identification and assessment of alternatives too late in the assessment process.</p>
<p>DO inform key decision makers, including elected members, of the legal requirement to consider and appraise alternatives.</p>	<p>DON'T just assume key decision makers know or understand what is meant by alternatives or options.</p>
<p>DO proactively engage with the community and stakeholders (including those from neighbouring authorities) in generating and developing alternatives and be willing to consider new options as they emerge through the plan-making process.</p>	<p>DON'T necessarily favour alternatives that perpetuate the status quo; sustainable development involves pursuing new and innovative approaches to future development.</p>

¹ Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, November 2005.