



Harborough District

Site Selection Methodology

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1. Introduction

1.1 This document sets out the methodology which Harborough District Council will follow to assess and compare the suitability of potential development sites. It will be used to assess sites that have been submitted to the Council for inclusion within the Local Plan for Harborough District for housing, employment and other uses up to 2041. It is intended to help to identify those proposed development sites that have the greatest potential to deliver environmental, economic and social benefits for the local community. This document should be read in conjunction with the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) report and Sustainability Appraisal (SA).

2. Policy context

2.1 The preparation of the Council's site selection approach reflects the guidance as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, September 2023) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

(a) NPPF

2.2 Local Plans should be prepared in accordance with the NPPF to provide a positive vision for the future to facilitate sustainable development to include an overarching framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities that should align with infrastructure. Within the Local Plan, strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development, which includes making adequate provision for housing and employment.

2.3 Paragraph 23 of the NPPF states that Local Plans should indicate broad locations for strategic development. In paragraph 119, it is stated that planning policies should promote an effective use of land in meeting the needs for homes, with strategic policies setting out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously developed land. One of the tests of soundness for Local Plans as set out in paragraph 35 of the NPPF is that to be justified they should be based on an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives and based on proportionate evidence. As such, the assessment of sites and how they compare against one another will be important to demonstrate reasonable alternatives have been considered.

- 2.4 In support of the government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes the NPPF reiterates the importance of identifying a sufficient amount and variety of land that can come forward, to meet local housing needs. It requires that the Council should have a 'clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment'.
- 2.5 Paragraph 81 of the NPPF also states that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.
- 2.6 Local planning authorities should use a robust and up-to-date evidence base to ensure that their Plan meets the identified local housing need for market and affordable housing, using the minimum standard method outlined in PPG as a starting point. Planning policies should identify 'specific, deliverable sites for years 1- 5 of the plan period, specific developable sites or broad locations for growth for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15 of the plan'.
- 2.7 The NPPF also supports the supply of large numbers of new housing through settlement extensions or new settlements. Paragraph 73 outlines the key considerations to identify well located, sustainable proposals, supported by the necessary infrastructure and services. There is an important role for the Local Plan to ensure delivery of sufficient homes across the District, identifying the most suitable locations whilst considering the key constraints to development, such as environmental and heritage designations.
- 2.8 Additionally, the NPPF introduces the requirement to 'identify through the development plan and brownfield registers, land to accommodate at least 10% of their housing requirement on sites no larger than 1 hectare' (paragraph 69). This will help ensure that a good mix of small and medium size sites are available to deliver housing over the plan period.
- 2.9 In terms of employment land the NPPF states that the Local Plan 'should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for clusters or networks of knowledge and data driven, creative or high technology industries; and for storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations' (paragraph 83).

(b) Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

2.10 PPG on the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment sets out the approach to identify land that is suitable, available and achievable for housing and economic use over the plan period.

2.11 The assessment is a key part of the evidence base to inform the site selection process. However, it is important to note that it does not determine whether a site should be allocated for development. Rather it assesses and identifies a catalogue of sites that are potentially suitable for further consideration. In Harborough this document is the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA).

2.12 This site selection methodology uses the SHELAA as the starting point to identify which new sites should be allocated in the Local Plan.

3. Sources of supply

3.1 Several sources of supply will ensure that there is a continuous supply of land for development across the plan period, and these include:

- Allocations from the currently adopted Local Plan
- Existing planning commitments on unallocated sites
- Small residential site windfall allowance
- New sites allocated within the New Local Plan (to be identified)
- New sites to be allocated within Neighbourhood Plans

3.2 This Site Selection Methodology Paper focuses specifically on how the new sites to be allocated within the Local Plan will be identified. Information on the other sources of supply is set out in further detail in Background Papers.

4. Site Selection Methodology

4.1 The methodology will be used to assess all potential development sites, irrespective of their proposed use, including:

- Sites that have been suggested by members of the public, landowners, developers, and planning agents through the 'Call for Sites'
- Sites that are allocated in the existing adopted Harborough Local Plan (2019) which do not have a current planning permission;
- Sites that have been identified through other studies such as the Strategic Housing & Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA).
- Other sites the Council believes merit consideration.

4.2 In order to be considered for allocation, sites need to be large enough to accommodate 5 dwellings or more, or be a minimum size of 0.25 ha. Smaller sites will be excluded from further consideration.

4.3 The methodology will also be useful to help assess the merits of potential development sites which may be brought to the Council's attention during the preparation of the new Local Plan.

4.4 It will assist the District Council and Town and Parish Councils in assessing the suitability of sites for inclusion within Neighbourhood Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders. Such plans will need to be in general conformity with the policies of the Local Plan, and be subject to local referendum and independent examination.

Stage 1 – Identification of sites

Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)

4.5 The site selection process will consider sites that are developable (or part developable where it meets the site size threshold below) as assessed through the [Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment \(SHELAA\)](#). It includes sites:

- Submitted through the 'Call for Sites' (the most recent being March-June 2021)
- Additional sites promoted through Local Plan consultations and outside of official 'Call for Sites' exercises*
- Sites with expired, refused or withdrawn planning applications*

*These sites will be included at the next point where an assessment can take place

4.6 A developable site is one that is in a suitable location for housing, employment or other development and there is a reasonable prospect that the site is available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.

4.7 The SHELAA uses the following site size thresholds:

- Housing sites: capable of accommodating at least 5 dwellings; and
- Economic sites: capable of delivering at least 0.25ha (or at least 500sqm of floorspace)

4.8 The SHELAA was published in 2021 and will be updated following the submission of further sites.

Stage 2 – Sustainability Appraisal

4.9 For each developable site, the sustainability appraisal will consider a range of social, environmental and economic factors which reflect the objectives of the Sustainability Appraisal Framework.

4.10 The following are the sustainability appraisal framework objectives against which sites will be tested:

- Minimise greenhouse gas emissions and develop a managed response to the effects of climate change
- Protect, enhance and manage biodiversity and geodiversity
- To support efficient use of resources, including soils
- To conserve and enhance the historic environment including the setting of heritage features
- Protect and improve air quality
- Safeguard and improve health, safety and wellbeing
- Achieve social inclusion and equality for all
- To provide access to services, facilities and education
- Provide affordable, sustainable, good-quality housing for all
- Support the sustainable growth of the economy and provide employment opportunities
- Reduce waste generation and increase levels of reuse and recycling
- To manage and reduce flood risk from all sources and to protect the quality and quantity of water resources
- Promote sustainable transport use and active travel

- To conserve and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the landscape

4.11 Further details, including the site assessment of all the developable sites in the SHELAA will be set out in the Sustainability Appraisal Report, including how objectives were considered. The outcomes of the sustainability appraisal will be used to determine which sites progress through the site selection process.

Stage 3 – Assessment of sites against the preferred strategy

4.12 Following consultation on the regulation 18 local plan, a preferred strategy will be selected. Sites will be assessed to determine whether or not they could contribute to meeting the preferred strategy. Sites that fall outside of the preferred spatial strategy will not be taken further forward in the site selection process.

Stage 4 – Technical Assessment and Deliverability of Sites

4.13 At this stage numerous technical details will be examined and assessment of the delivery of the sites will be carried out. Factors that will be considered are set out in the table below.

Factor/technical detail	Expectation in order to be considered further
Constraints	
Flood risk/Assessment against SFRA	All sites in flood zone 3 will not be considered further.
Topography	Visual impact to and from the site can be mitigated through design and layout and does not significantly impact on the capacity.
Visual impact	Visual impact of the site from the surrounding area does not harm significant views or landscapes and can be mitigated.
Heritage	Any impact on heritage assets can be mitigated
Ecology	Any impact on ecology assets can be mitigated
Significant land contamination	Land contamination that would not prevent the site being delivered viably and could present a remediation opportunity.

Underground or overground utility pipes or cables	Deliverability of the site would not be compromised by the pipes or their buffer zones
Infrastructure	
Safe (or ability to make safe) access to the road network	In consultation with LCC Highways
Transport implications known and package of proposed mitigation measures (including active travel and public transport, as appropriate)	In consultation with LCC Highways
Understanding of key infrastructure requirements and capacity issues, including education	In consultation with infrastructure providers
Deliverability and viability	
Market capacity	There is market capacity in this area
Lead in times and delivery rates	The site enables delivery across the plan period and ability to maintain a 5 year housing supply
Barriers to delivery	Barriers can be overcome while maintaining viability
Capacity of the site (that is likely to be delivered in the plan period)	Sufficient capacity to enable delivery over the plan period.
Place making	
Proximity to services and facilities as set out in the settlement hierarchy	Site within (or ability to be within) safe walking distance to a reasonable level of services and facilities
Compatibility with neighbouring uses	There are no neighbouring uses that would not be compatible with proposed use.
Relationship of the site with the existing settlement	Considering the form and character of the existing settlement, the site could compliment the settlement. Consideration of national model design code
Preventing coalescence of settlements	Ensuring the site would not result in physical or visual coalescence

In addition, for strategic sites an important factor in the technical assessment would be that the site could support a sustainable community. It would need to be well located and able to support the services and infrastructure required.

Stage 5 - Emerging new local plan policies and neighbourhood plan policies

This stage will likely be twin tracked at the same time as stage 4. Any sites taken forward must be supported by emerging local plan policies. At this stage regard will be had to all neighbourhood plans when assessing sites.

Stage 6 – Site Appraisal Conclusions and Recommendations

4.14 The final stage of the process is to draw conclusions and to make recommendations about the suitability of the site for inclusion in the New Local Plan.

4.15 These will be based on professional judgement and take account of:

- Sustainability Appraisal
- Draft New Local Plan Policies
- Deliverability of Sites
- Any other relevant factors.

4.16 Conclusions to the site selection assessment will be published as an appendix to this document when they are complete. The conclusions will set out whether or not a site is recommended for inclusion as a site allocation in the New Local Plan. It will also set out the main reasons to explain why a site is included or not.

4.17 In order to assess sites for their allocation potential, promoters may be required to provide the local planning authority with site specific evidence.

5. Next steps

5.1 The Site selection methodology is subject to public consultation alongside the regulation 18 Issues and Options consultation.

5.2 We welcome views on the methodology as set out in this document and also the approaches to completing the technical assessment.