

Methodology for the selection of draft site allocations

Background

The following outlines broadly how sites were selected for allocation.

A key decision was taken early on to consider only sites put forward for development, as the Council wished to be confident that the sites were genuinely available for development.

In most of the settlements where development was intended (following the Core Strategy, etc.) the total amount of land proposed by owners and others exceeded the amount of land needed to accommodate the planned amount of development (though there were a few exceptions to this).

Choosing between a wide range of different sites, each with different advantages, disadvantages, constraints and opportunities, became a significant task. In order to manage the scale of this task (over 800 sites had been put forward) and provide consistency the Sustainability Appraisal brought together a range of factors. The Sustainability Appraisal is the overall vehicle for presenting the relative attributes of sites, but this itself utilises analysis done for other purposes. For example in order to establish performance against biodiversity objectives in the SA we used information collected for previous SHLAA assessments.

The SA Report includes a summarised assessment of the sustainability of each of the sites considered (after elimination of a number of sites not considered 'reasonable options' for basic reasons) against 10 'site sustainability factors', which in turn are related to the long-standing LDF Sustainability Objectives. The assessments against these factors draw on the technical studies outlined below

The resulting tables enable a comparative assessment of the merits of the sites available within a settlement, and by comparison of the contents of different tables, across the Borough. These tables have three purposes, to

- 1) inform the political decision as to which site(s) to allocate;
- 2) provide a record to enable interested parties to understand and comment on the judgements and decisions made;
- 3) provides an assessment of the sustainability of the choices made.

Specific elements used to inform choices

Two particular elements lend themselves to an approach where a form of measurement is appropriate, the first is looking at the potential integration of sites within the settlement and the second looking at specific site issues. These are discussed below.

Proximity to village facilities

This element was used to understand how close sites were to a settlement's services and facilities that have potential to serve them on a day-to-day basis.

There are two parts to this; the first being to establish the number of services and facilities the settlement has to offer, and the second being to ascertain how many of those services and facilities are within walking distance of the sites being compared.

Services and Facilities

The types of facilities and services that were used in this part of the assessment were:

1. GP Surgery
2. School
3. Commutable bus route
4. Convenience store
5. Post Office counter
6. Pub
7. Restaurant / takeaway
8. Filling station
9. Other retail
10. Other employment

The exact location of these was then plotted onto a master map which contained all the potential site locations.

Distance from services and facilities

An appropriate walking distance from the services and facilities was considered to be 400 metres (which equates to a 5 minute walk at the average persons' walking speed of 3mph). A 400 metres buffer was created around all sites and this enabled electronic counting of all the services and facilities that fell within that buffer.

In the Joint Key Rural Service Centres that are within 400m of one another the scoring process will be carried out as if they are one settlement. Where they are further than 400m apart, their services and facilities are counted separately

Specific Site Issues

As all new sites put forward were subject to assessment through the technical process behind previous SHLAA documents it was considered appropriate to use this information to inform site choices. There were two stages to that process - any site failing fundamental constraints was automatically rejected (as these are constraints that could not be mitigated). Constraints identified in the second element were less fundamental and it was likely that suitable mitigation could be found to address some of these issues.

However what utilising the SHLAA second stage results does, is identify which sites have the most / least constraints to development. These factors below have been used to feed into the assessment against objectives in the SA matrix. They are shown below:

Site Assessment Criteria	
Brownfield / Greenfield	Is the site brownfield land (previously developed land)?
Height / Shape	Is the height and shape of the land suitable to develop upon?
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	Is the site within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

Major Utilities	Is there any major utility infrastructure on the site which could compromise housing development? (high pressure gas pipelines, electricity pylons, wind turbines)
Environmental Designations	Is the site within a designated environmental protection area? (Local Nature Reserve, County Wildlife Site, Roadside Nature Reserve)?
Biodiversity	Could development of the site impact negatively on local biodiversity?
HSE Hazard	Is the site within a designated 'Health and Safety Executive Hazard Area'?
Loss of Community Facilities/ Open Space	Would housing development on the site result in a loss of community facilities and/or publicly accessible open space (whether formal or informal)?
Loss of Employment Land	Would housing development on the site result in a loss of land for employment uses?
Loss of Agricultural Land	Is the site designated high quality agricultural land (Grade 1 – 3) and currently being used as such or capable of being returned to that use?

The other Stage 2 SHLAA criteria (there are 20 in all) were not utilised due to their subjective nature, and difficulty in quantifying results, but all the issues were taken into account during site visits and assessments to pick the preferred options.

The Sustainability Appraisal assessment (with example settlement assessment table).

The SA Report includes a summarised assessment of the sustainability of each of the hundreds of sites considered. This is in the form of a table for each settlement, where each site within it is scored against 10 'site sustainability factors' which indicate the sustainability of the site in relation to a particular factor.

These site sustainability factors can in turn be related to the LDF Sustainability Objectives. The reason for the additional layer of consideration of the site sustainability criteria was that trials demonstrated that assessing sites directly against the LDF Sustainability Appraisal objectives was difficult to undertake and unclear in outcome, because those Objectives are couched in very broad terms more readily applied to strategic decisions, and only some of the Objectives relate directly to the consideration of sites resulting in skewed or partial results.

It is important to note that the scoring of each site against each of the site sustainability criteria usually involves a significant element of judgement. This does not mean that such assessments are purely subjective. A technical, often quantitative, measurement of each site against objective criteria was undertaken (e.g. measured distance to defined local services; whether or not the site is in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). This then would be confirmed or moderated by the application of professional and political judgement (e.g. the measured distance to services may disguise the barrier to access in the form of a

major road or railway; the potential impact on the AONB may be or otherwise according to the landform and development around the site).

Example Site Assessment

Below is an example of a site assessment table for a village, showing the scoring for each site. It can be seen how each of the sites is judged to relate to each of the factors. The sites can also be compared one to another.

For instance it can be seen that one of the (allocated) sites, Site OP (the first in the site columns), scores notably better in terms of highways and transport than those sites which have not been allocated. On the other hand it does not score as well as most of the alternatives in terms of flood risk.

This tension illustrates that the SA has informed but not determined the choice of which site(s) to allocate. These choices necessarily involved a decision to prioritise some factors above others. (The nature of the specific choices made is further elaborated outside the SA in the summaries of the reasons for allocation (or non-allocation) included in the relevant settlement chapter of the Preferred Options document for the Plan.)

Factor No.	SITE SUSTAINABILITY FACTOR	VILLAGE X												
		Preferred Sites (i.e. Draft Allocations)			Non-preferred Sites (i.e. not allocated)									
		Site OP	Site ST	Site XY	Site AB	Site CD	Site EF	Site GH	Site IJ	Site KL	Site MN	Site QR	Site UV	Site ZA
A	Access to services	++	++	++	+	++	X	XX	++	+	++	++	+	+
B	Community & Social	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
C	Economy	?	?	#	?	?	X	X	#	?	X	X	?	?
D	Flood Risk	XX	X	0	0	0	#	X	0	0	0	0	0	0
E	Heritage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	X	X
F	Highways & Transport	++	XX	++	XX	+	XX	XX	++	X	++	?	XX	X
G	Landscape & Amenity	+	?	+	#	+	+	+	+	X	+	+	X	X
H	Natural Environment	X	X	X	?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
I	Infrastructure, Pollution and Waste	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
J	Other Factors													

Scoring:

- ++ very good
- + good
- 0 neutral
- X poor
- XX very poor

- ? unknown
- # depends on how done (e.g. design)

Overall comment

The SA process (including the individual elements outlined above) was used as an aid to the decision making process; setting a framework that is clear and transparent. It provides opportunities to balance site specific and proximity factors in a largely paper-based assessment.

It is important to reiterate that the process provided the basis on which to assess sites. However, planning decisions cannot be taken from a paper based exercise alone there needs to be an understanding of how they function **and** what the impact of development would be 'on-the-ground'. This meant that in some instances sites that appeared to be best on paper were not selected as the preferred option as there was some material reason that meant another site was preferable. The reasoned justification has been given in the individual chapters for favouring the preferred option and a summarised account of the more significant reasons for rejecting the alternatives. The SA sheets for each site give an expanded understanding of the summaries.

It was clearly appropriate to give consideration to the views expressed by the public and other bodies as part of the consultation but using this in any quantifiable way would have proved difficult. The comments are often individual expressing value judgements and need to be treated individually. They were very much a part of the process however and a summary is outlined in each chapter and is included for information and consideration when assessing the preferred options presented.