

Report to Local Plan Cabinet Committee

Report reference: **LPC-003-2012/13**

Date of meeting: **2 July 2012**



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: **Planning**

Subject: **Strategic Land Availability Assessment**

Responsible Officer: **Jennifer Cordell (01992 564481).**

Democratic Services Officer: **Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).**

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the completed Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) and its findings be approved for inclusion in the Council's Local Plan Evidence Base.

Executive Summary:

It is a policy requirement for Local Authorities to undertake a SHLAA (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment) or similar work to inform their Plan making process. This Council has taken this approach a stage further and also considered land which may be available for commercial purposes. The SLAA is a central document to the delivery of the Local Plan as it assesses land potentially available in the district for future development. The SLAA assessed 416 sites which were sourced from the call for sites exercise, the Council's land terrier and by identifying the boundaries of settlements not already included to ensure a full radius search was conducted around the main settlements. The study concluded that 335 sites could potentially be suitable for development in the next plan period. Of these, 32 sites could be deliverable within the parameters of existing policy.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

So that the results from the SLAA can be incorporated into the Evidence Base for the new Local Plan which will inform discussions on growth options for development over the next 20 year period.

Other Options for Action:

- Not to approve the inclusion of the SLAA into the Evidence Base. This would mean that the Local Plan would not benefit from the detailed work assessing a significant proportion of land in the District for suitability and availability for future development. Proceeding towards Issues and Options consultation without a SLAA or SHLAA (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment) would risk the Local Plan being found unsound.
- Carry out further SLAA or SHLAA work, resulting in delays to progressing the Evidence Base and in turn a delay to the Issues and Options consultation. This would significantly endanger the Council's current target of submitting the plan to the Planning Inspectorate by Autumn 2013.

Report:

1. Following a PFH decision in November 2011, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) were commissioned to carry out the SLAA assessment. This sought a combined review of land for housing, employment and retail purposes as opposed to commissioning three separate studies.

2. The SLAA carried out an assessment of land potentially available to meet demand in the District for future development in the next Local Plan period. The scope of the study was deliberately wide to ensure a range of development options was available. Future development need is assessed separately by the EPOA population studies. The SLAA is informed by, rather than driven by, existing local policy (adopted 1998 with alterations in 2006), so that, for example, the Green Belt status of a site did not automatically rule it out for development if it could otherwise be suitable for development. The importance of the Green belt is however acknowledged and as such will be a key consideration in deciding on land allocation for growth within this district.

3. The SLAA assesses whether a site is;

- (i) potentially 'suitable' or if there are physical constraints preventing development;
- (ii) potentially 'available' this looks at ownership issues and owner aspirations;
- (iii) potentially 'achievable' looking at overall economic viability;
- (iv) potentially 'deliverable' looking at all three of the above and when this may arise, in the immediate 5 years, 6-10 years or 11-15 years; and
- (v) potentially 'developable' whether the location generally is suitable and all the above are favourable.

4. In addition the SLAA study carried out additional work to identify a reasonable windfall allowance. Windfalls being sites up to 5 dwellings that come forward that have not been specifically identified in the Local Plan. This scale of development can represent significant growth in rural areas. The windfall provision can potentially be deducted from any potential future allocations made.

SLAA Findings

5. The final report is attached at Appendix 1. The SLAA assessed 416 sites, which were sourced from;

- (i) the Call for Sites exercise;
- (ii) the Council's land terrier (a digital database of the Council's land assets); and
- (iii) identifying the boundaries of settlements not already included to ensure a full radius search was conducted around every main settlement.

6. 44 sites were filtered from the main site list and not assessed further. These sites were filtered out as they were i) duplications, ii) too small to meet minimum thresholds, or iii) sites which have already achieved planning permission. This left 372 sites for assessment.

7. At stage one of the assessment 28 sites were identified as unsuitable due to strategic constraints (flood zone 3b, European sites of nature conservation or sites with listed buildings

or scheduled ancient monuments that would be unacceptably impacted). Further tests on the remaining 344 sites examined the physical suitability of the sites, the availability of the sites for marketing and the achievability of development on these sites.

8. The study concluded that 335 sites could be suitable for development in the next plan period. This is significantly more sites than would be needed in the future plan period. Of these 335 sites, 32 could be deliverable within the parameters of existing policy (albeit not without some significant issues on a few of the sites). This clearly shows there is a more than adequate supply of land in the District for future growth, and from the sites identified, a wide range of growth options can then be considered. For a full breakdown summary please see the table below.

Site Classification	No. of Sites	Dwelling Yield	Commercial Yield (m2)	Retail Yield (m2)
Suitable Within Current Policy, Available & Achievable	20	1,122	3,000	17,570
Suitable Outside Current Policy, Available & Achievable	199	40,071	887,894	6,000
Deliverable (0-5 Years) Sub Total:	219	41,193	890,894	23,570
Suitable Within Current Policy, Available in Future & Achievable	1	19	0	1,500
Suitable Outside Current Policy, Available in Future & Achievable	15	7,119	201,020	0
Suitable Within Current Policy, Available/Available in Future & Unknown/Marginal Achievability	3	49	2,200	3,800
Suitable Outside Current Policy, Available/Available in Future & Unknown/Marginal Achievability	11	1,783	142,320	0
Developable (5 Years Onwards) Sub Total:	30	8,970	345,540	5,300
Suitable Within Current Policy, Unknown Availability, Achievable	3	6	10,140	0
Suitable Outside Current Policy, Unknown Availability, Achievable	73	31,878	220,640	0
Suitable (Within/Outside Current Policy), Unknown Availability & Unknown/Marginal Achievability	8	1,182	129,120	2,000
Not Deliverable or Developable on Current Information Sub Total:	84	33,066	359,900	2,000
Suitable & Available but Not Achievable	1	20	0	0
Suitable but Not Available	1	0	4,000	2,000
Not Suitable - Local or Site Specific Constraints	9	~	~	~
Not Suitable - Strategic Constraints	28	~	~	~
Not Deliverable or Developable Sub Total:	39	~	~	~
Grand Total	372	~	~	~
Of Which Suitable	335	83,249	1,600,334	32,870
Of Which within current Planning Policy	32	1,216	50,860	24,870

9. In relation to the delivery of windfall sites, NLP found that the Council could demonstrate “compelling evidence that such sites have consistently become available in the local area and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply.” (NPPF para 48). The study therefore recommends that making an allowance for continued housing supply through windfall sites would be reasonable for the district.

Next Steps

10. The SLAA is not responsible for land allocations. It is one of a number of evidence base studies that together will contribute to the spatial options presented for consideration in the Issues and Options consultation. Any site deemed undeliverable or unsuitable as a result of the SLAA will not be brought forward as a potential allocation.

11. The SLAA included some sites where the owners and their aspirations are presently unknown. At this stage therefore, their deliverability also remains unknown.

12. Sites where deliverability is currently unknown will be involved in the Issues and Options exercise as potential development sites where appropriate. Land Registry details are being sought to contact site owners prior to the consultation starting. It is envisaged ownership details and aspirations will become clear as part of the public consultation. Site owners will also be approached to discuss potential deliverability. It is anticipated that during the Issues and Options exercise further sites will be put forward for consideration. The SLAA will need to be updated with these additional details also.

13. The SLAA will require annual monitoring to ensure the database remains up to date.

Resource Implications:

Budgetary provision for the SHLAA was agreed by LDF Cabinet in March 2010. The complete study including additional sites and additional windfall analysis cost £35,353.00. This was in accordance with the submitted tender.

To seek additional work or revision to the study would require additional funding.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Local Planning Authorities are required to carry out a SHLAA or similar study to inform plan making under Paragraph 159 of the NPPF.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The delivery of a Local Plan, informed by a robust Evidence Base, will contribute to Safer, Cleaner, Greener objectives, by planning for sustainable development.

Consultation Undertaken:

District Councillors, and representatives of Parish and Town Councils, were invited to a detailed briefing on the initial findings of the SLAA on 30 March 2012. Attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues surrounding the project and results. The resulting Local Plan Issues and Options will be issued for wide consultation

Background Papers:

Report to LDF Cabinet Committee LDF-008-2009/10 (11/03/2010)

Report to LDF Cabinet Committee LDF-002-2010/11 (27/05/2010)
Report to LDF Cabinet Committee LDF-002-2011/12 (01/08/2011)
Portfolio Holder Decision Report (30/11/2011)
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Practice Guidance (July 2007)
National Planning Policy Framework

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The NPPF published on 27 March provides a 12 month interim period for using existing Local Plan Policies. After this time Councils will be reliant on the NPPF when issuing decisions on applications unless emerging plans have been published. Should emerging plan documents have been published varying degrees of weight may be given to emerging policies. Any delay in adopting evidence studies will result in a delay progressing the Local Plan, which in turn may leave the District without locally based policies after the NPPF 12 month interim period.

Equality and Diversity

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
A EqIA is being prepared for Issues & Options

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
N/A.