

Appendix J

Highley Place Plan Area Site Assessments

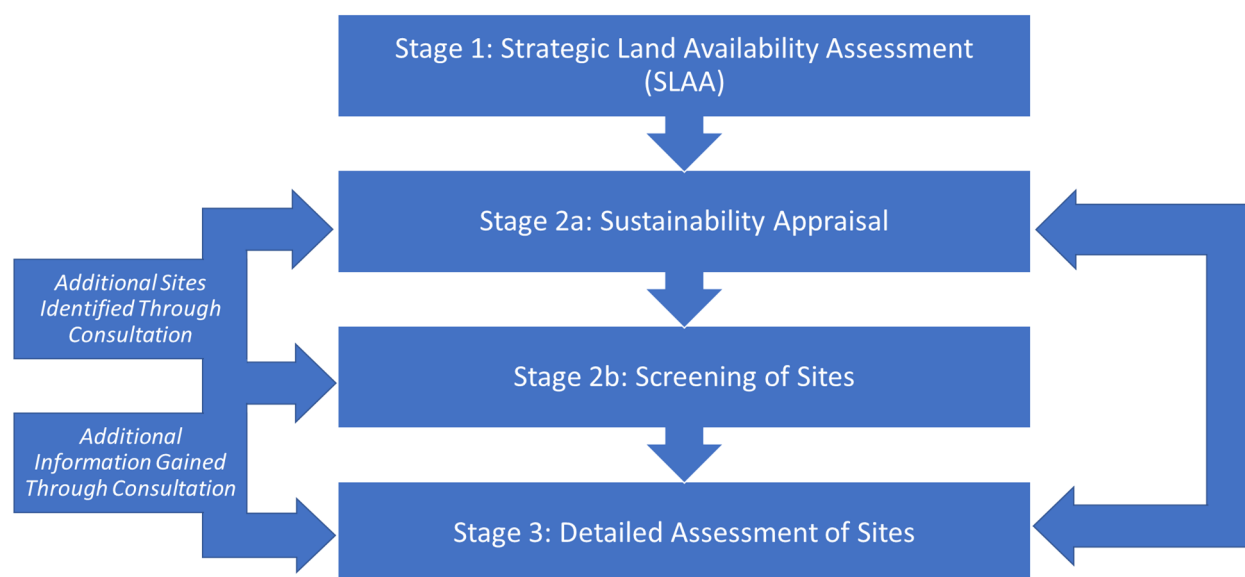
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Site Assessment Process Overview

1. Introduction

- 1.1. To inform the identification of proposed site allocations within the Local Plan Review, Shropshire Council has undertaken a comprehensive Site Assessment process. This site assessment process incorporates the assessment of sites undertaken within the Sustainability Appraisal of the Local Plan, recognising that the Sustainability Appraisal is an integral part of plan making, informing the development of vision, objectives and policies and site allocations.
- 1.2. Figure 1 summarises the key stages of the Site Assessment process undertaken, more detail on each of these stages is then provided:

Figure 1: Site Assessment Process



Site Assessment Process

Stage 1: The Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA)

Stage 1 consisted of a strategic screen and review of sites.

Following the completion of the SLAA, further sites were promoted for consideration through the consultation and engagement process. Where possible these sites have been included within Stages 2a, 2b and 3 of the Sustainability Appraisal: Site Assessment process.

Following the completion of the SLAA, further information was achieved through the consultation and engagement process. Where possible this information has been considered within Stages 2a, 2b and 3 of the Sustainability Appraisal: Site Assessment process.

Stage 2a: Sustainability Appraisal

Stage 2a consisted of the assessment of the performance of sites against the objectives identified within the Sustainability Appraisal.

Stage 2b: Screening of Sites

Stage 2b consisted of a screening exercise informed by consideration of a sites availability; size and whether there were obvious physical, heritage or environmental constraints present, based on the strategic assessment undertaken within the SLAA.

Stage 3: Detailed site review

Stage 3 consisted of a proportional and comprehensive assessment of sites informed by the sustainability appraisal and assessments undertaken by Highways; Heritage; Ecology; Trees; and Public Protection Officers; various technical studies, including a Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Study, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Green Belt Assessment/Review where appropriate; consideration of infrastructure requirements and opportunities; consideration of other strategic considerations; and professional judgement.

This stage of assessment was an iterative process.

2. The Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA)

- 2.1. Stage 1 of the Site Assessment process was undertaken within the SLAA. This involved a technical and very strategic assessment of the suitability; availability; and achievability (including viability) of land for housing and employment development. It represents a key component of the evidence base supporting the Shropshire Council Local Plan Review.
- 2.2. Please Note: Whilst the SLAA is an important technical document, it does not allocate land for development or include all locations where future housing and employment growth will occur. The SLAA ultimately provides information which will be investigated further through the plan-making process.

Assessing Suitability:

- 2.3. Suitability is the consideration of the appropriateness of a use or mix of uses on a site. However, it is not an assessment of what should or will be allocated / developed on a site. The SLAA includes a very strategic assessment of a site's suitability.
- 2.4. Determination of a sites strategic suitability was undertaken through consideration of numerous factors, including:
 - The sites consistency with the Local Plan.
 - The sites location and surroundings, including proximity to the development boundary/built form.
 - The sites boundaries and the extent to which these boundaries are defensible.
 - Site specific factors, including physical limitations to development, such as:
 - The topography of the site;
 - The sites ground conditions;
 - The ability to access the site;
 - Flood risk to the site or its immediate access;
 - The agricultural land quality of the site;
 - Hazardous risks, pollution or contamination of the site;
 - Whether the site has overhead or underground infrastructure, such as pylons, water/gas pipes and electricity cables which may impact on development/levels of development;
 - Other physical constraints, which may impact on development/levels of development.
 - The potential impact on natural environment assets; heritage assets and geological features on and in proximity of the site*. Including consideration of factors such as:
 - The impact on internationally and nationally designated sites and assets;
 - The impact on important trees and woodland, including ancient woodland; and
 - The impact on public open spaces.
 - Whether the site is located within the Green Belt.
 - Legal covenants affecting the site.
 - Market/industry and community requirements in the area.

**Historic environment assets considered for the purpose of this exercise were: Conservation Areas, Registered Battlefields; World Heritage Sites and their buffers; Scheduled Monuments; Registered Parks and Gardens; and Listed Buildings. Sites were considered to be in proximity of an asset where they were within 300m of the site.*

**Natural environment assets considered for the purpose of this exercise and the distance used to determine where a site was in proximity of an asset were: Trees subject to TPO Protection; (30m); Veteran Trees (30m); Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (50m); Local Nature Reserves (100m); Local Wildlife Sites (250m); National Nature Reserves (500m); Sites of Special Scientific Interest (500m); Ancient Woodland (500m); Special Areas of Conservation (1km); Special Protection Areas (1km); and Ramsar Sites (1km).*

It is accepted that the identification of these key historic and natural environment assets within a set distance of a site is only a useful starting point for consideration of potential impacts resulting from the development/redevelopment of a site and that a more holistic process is required when determining preferred site allocations. However, the SLAA represents a very strategic site assessment and only the first phase of a wider site assessment process. The selection of proposed allocations will be informed by a more holistic process by which sites are reviewed by relevant service areas to consider potential impacts on all assets.

It should also be noted that as the SLAA is a strategic assessment of individual sites it cannot include sequential/exception considerations and as such sites predominantly in Flood Zones 2 and/or 3 or directly accessed through Flood Zones 2 and/or 3 are not suitable. This applies precautionary principle as detailed information on extent of impact of flood risk on access is not available, the site would only be suitable for development if it is considered necessary (through the sequential and/or exception test), the risk can be mitigated and will not increase risk elsewhere. This consideration cannot be undertaken at the high level and individual site assessment stage.

2.5. Reflecting upon the above factors:

- If following the very strategic assessment of the suitability of a site it was concluded that it has no known constraints or restrictions that would prevent development for a particular use or mix of uses, or these constraints could potentially be suitably overcome through mitigation*, then it was viewed as being **currently suitable – subject to further detailed assessment** for the particular use or mix of uses.
- If following the very strategic assessment of the suitability of a site it was concluded that a site did not currently comply with the Local Plan*, but was located within or in proximity of a settlement potentially considered an appropriate location for sustainable development and was not known to have other constraints or restrictions that would prevent development for a particular use or mix of uses, or any known constraints could potentially be suitably overcome through mitigation**, then it was viewed as being **not currently suitable but future potential – subject to further detailed assessment**.
- If following the very strategic assessment of the suitability of a site it was concluded that a site was subject to known constraints and it was considered that such constraints cannot be suitably overcome through mitigation, then it was viewed as being **not suitable**.
- If following the very strategic assessment of the suitability of a site it was concluded that a site did not currently comply with the Local Plan, and was not located within or in proximity of a settlement potentially considered an appropriate location for sustainable development, then it was viewed as being **not suitable**.

**As this is a very strategic assessment, where sites are currently contrary to Local Plan policy but are located within or in proximity of a settlement potentially considered an appropriate location for sustainable development, no judgement is made about whether such a change to policy would be appropriate, this is the role of the Local Plan Review.*

***As this is a very strategic assessment, where sites are subject to known constraints and it is considered that the constraints present could potentially be suitably overcome through mitigation, further detailed assessment will be required to confirm if such mitigation is effective and the impact of this mitigation on the developable area.*

Assessing Availability:

- 2.6. Availability is the consideration of whether a site is considered available for a particular form of development. National Guidance defines availability as follows: “A site is considered available for development, when, on the best information available (confirmed by the call for sites and information from land owners and legal searches where appropriate), there is confidence that there are no legal or ownership problems, such as unresolved multiple ownerships, ransom strips, tenancies or operational

requirements of landowners. This will often mean that the land is controlled by a developer or landowner who has expressed an intention to develop, or the landowner has expressed an intention to sell”¹.

- 2.7. Within the SLAA, sites were generally considered to be available where they had been actively promoted for the relevant use during:
- The ‘Call for Sites’ exercise;
 - The Local Plan Review; or
 - Preparation of the current Local Plan (Core Strategy and SAMDev Plan).
- 2.8. Or where:
- There has been a recent Planning Application (whether successful or not) for the relevant use; or
 - Officers have particular knowledge about a site’s availability.

Assessing Achievability (including Viability)

- 2.9. As this SLAA is a very strategic assessment, Shropshire Council has used very general assumptions to inform its assessment of the achievability and viability of a site. A more detailed assessment of viability and deliverability will be undertaken to inform the Local Plan Review.

Conclusion

- 2.10. Once the assessment of a site’s development potential; suitability; availability; and achievability (including viability) was undertaken and conclusions reached on each of these categories, an overall conclusion was reached.
- 2.11. Sites were effectively divided into three categories, these were:
- **Rejected sites:**
 - The site is considered unsuitable; and/or
 - The site is considered to be unavailable; and/or
 - The site is considered unachievable/unviable.
 - **Long Term Potential - Subject to Further Detailed Assessment:**
 - The site is considered to be not currently suitable but may have future potential - subject to further detailed assessment; and/or
 - There is uncertainty about the sites availability; and/or
 - There is uncertainty about the sites achievability/viability.
 - **Accepted - Subject to Further Detailed Assessment:**
 - The site is considered currently suitable – subject to further detailed assessment; and
 - The site is considered available; and
 - The site is considered achievable/viable.
- 2.12. Various data sources were used to identify sites for consideration within the SLAA, including existing Local Plan Allocations (including proposals within adopted and emerging Neighbourhood Plans); Planning Application records; Local Authority land ownership records; a ‘Call for Sites’; and sites identified within previous Strategic Housing Land Availability (SHLAA) exercises. Ultimately, around 2,000 sites were considered within the SLAA process.

3. Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

- 3.1. Stage 2a of the Site Assessment process consisted of the analysis of the performance of sites against the Sustainability Objectives identified within the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report. The Sustainability Appraisal and Site Assessment Environmental Report illustrates how these Sustainability Objectives relate to the SEA Directive and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

¹ CLG, NPPG – HELAA, Paragraph 020, Reference ID 3-020-20140306, Last updated 06/03/2014

- 3.2. The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report describes how the Sustainability Objectives have been adapted to allow for the sustainability appraisal of sites. Information on implementation and further adaptations in response to practical issues and comments received during the Local Plan preparation process is given in the Sustainability Appraisal and Site Assessment Environmental Report. The aim throughout was to ensure the allocation of the most sustainable sites and where a less sustainable option was chosen for valid and justifiable planning reasons, to suggest mitigation measures to offset any identified significant negative impact.
- 3.3. The Sustainability Appraisal scoring system was adapted for the Stage 2a Sustainability Appraisal to allow for clear comparisons between the sustainability of several sites in the same vicinity. The scoring system also needed to provide a relatively straightforward result. Accordingly, it used the same positive, neutral and negative nomenclature as that for the Sustainability Appraisal of the options and policies. It differed however, in that each criterion is scored from only two options. These options varied between criteria to better reflect the purpose of Sustainability Appraisal.
- 3.4. The identified criteria and scoring system were translated into a matrix, to assess sites. The scoring was then colour coded to assist with interpretation as follows:

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-	
0	
+	

- 2.23 Sites were assessed on a settlement by settlement basis e.g. all sites in Albrighton were assessed against each other. This was felt to be the best way of using the Sustainability Appraisal as it is intended – namely to evaluate options (in this case all the sites promoted for development in each settlement) and use the outcomes to inform the site selection process for the Local Plan. All sites from the SLAA were assessed for each settlement and most of the assessment was carried out using GIS to populate the excel spreadsheet. Manual recording was used for those few instances where data was not available e.g. when a site was promoted after the data had already been exported from the GIS.
- 2.24 Once the Sustainability Appraisal matrix was complete, the negative and positive marks for each site were combined to give a numerical value. The lowest and highest values for that settlement were then used to determine a range. The range was then divided into three equal parts. Where three equal parts were not possible (for instance in a range of -8 to +4 = 13 points) the largest part was assigned to the higher end of the range (for instance -8 to -5 = 4 points, then -4 to -1 = 4 points and lastly 0 to +4 = 5 points). This was based on the assumption that there are likely to be more negative than positive scores.
- 2.25 Those sites in the lowest third of the range were rated as Poor, those in the middle third as Fair and those in the upper third as Good. A Poor rating was deemed to be the equivalent of significantly negative.
- 2.26 Completed matrices for each settlement are provided within Stage 2a Sustainability Appraisal of this Appendix.

4. Screening of Sites

- 4.1. Stage 2b of the Site Assessment process involved screening of identified sites. This screen was informed by consideration of a sites availability, size and whether there were obvious physical, heritage or environmental constraints present, based on the strategic assessment undertaken within the SLAA.

4.2. Specifically, sites did not proceed to Stage 3 of the site assessment process where:

- **There is uncertainty about whether the site is available for relevant forms of development.** A site is generally considered to be available where they have been actively promoted for residential or mixed-use development during the preparation of the current Local Plan (Core Strategy and SAMDev Plan); during the most recent 'call for sites'; or during the ongoing Local Plan Review. It is also considered to be available for residential development where there has been a recent Planning Application for residential or mixed-use development on the site (whether successful or not); or where officers have particular knowledge about a sites availability.

Where relevant, a site is considered to be available for employment development where it has been actively promoted for employment or mixed-use development during the preparation of the current Local Plan (Core Strategy and SAMDev Plan); during the most recent 'call for sites'; or during the ongoing Local Plan Review. It is also considered to be available for employment development where there has been a recent Planning Application for employment or mixed-use development on the site (whether successful or not); or where officers have particular knowledge about a sites availability.

- **The site is less than a specified site size (unless there is potential for allocation as part of a wider site).** These site sizes are:
 - 0.2ha for Community Hubs (generally, sites of less than 0.2ha are unlikely to achieve 5 or more dwellings).
 - 0.2ha for Strategic/Principal/Key Centres within/partly within the Green Belt or Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (generally, sites of less than 0.2ha are unlikely to achieve 5 or more dwellings).
 - 0.5ha for other Strategic/Principal/Key Centres.
- **The strategic assessment of the site has identified a significant physical*, heritage** and/or environmental** constraint identified within the strategic assessment of sites undertaken within the SLAA.**

**Significant physical constraints:*

- 1. Where all or the majority of a site is located within Flood Zone 2 and/or 3 such that the site is considered undeliverable, it will not be 'screened out'. This is consistent with NPPF. Where a site can only be accessed through Flood Zones 2 and/or 3 this will be subject to detailed consideration within Stage 3 of the site assessment process. The preference would be to avoid (sequential approach) such site, however in circumstances where other constraints mean that a site with access through Flood Zones 2 and/or 3 is preferred for allocation, detailed assessment of the implications for an access through Flood Zone will be considered within Level 2 of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. This distinction recognises the different approach taken within the NPPF and NPPG with regard to site suitability when located within Flood Zone 2 and/or 3 and establishing safe access through Flood Zone 2 and/or 3.*
- 2. The majority of the site contains an identified open space.*
- 3. The site can only be accessed through an identified open space.*
- 4. The topography of the site is such that development could not occur (this has been very cautiously applied).*
- 5. The site is separated from the built form of the settlement (unless the land separating the site from the built form is also promoted and will progress through this screening).*
- 6. The site is landlocked/does not have a road frontage (unless another promoted site will progress through this screening and could provide the site a road frontage for this site).*
- 7. The site is more closely associated with the built form of an alternative settlement*

***Significant natural environment/heritage constraints:*

- 1. The majority of the site has been identified as a heritage asset. Historic environment assets considered for the purpose of this exercise were: Conservation Areas, Registered Battlefields; World Heritage Sites and their buffers; Scheduled Monuments; Registered Parks and Gardens; and Listed Buildings. We acknowledge that there is no distinction*

between direct impact on a heritage asset and impact on the setting of a heritage asset. However, this is an issue along with archaeological potential which requires specialist advice; this forms part of Stage 3 of the site assessment process.

2. The majority of the site has been identified as a natural environment asset. Natural environment assets considered for the purpose of this exercise were: Trees subject to TPO Protection; Veteran Trees; Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites; Local Nature Reserves; Local Wildlife Sites; National Nature Reserves; Sites of Special Scientific Interest; Ancient Woodland; Special Areas of Conservation; Special Protection Areas; and Ramsar Sites.

Please Note:

Within the assessment, commentary is provided about the sites strategic suitability where a site was rejected within the SLAA.

Where a site met one or more of these criteria, the relevant criteria is highlighted within the assessment.

5. Detailed Site Review

5.1. Stage 3 of the Site Assessment process considered those sites which were not 'screened out' of the assessment at Stage 2b. It involved a detailed review of sites and selection of proposed site allocations. This stage was informed by:

- The results of Stage 1 of the Site Assessment process (which informs the assessment of sites).
- The results of Stage 2a of the Site Assessment process (which informs the assessment of sites).
- The results of Stage 2b of the Site Assessment process (which informs the site assessed).
- Assessments undertaken by Highways*; Heritage; Ecology; Tree; and Public Protection Officers. In undertaking detailed reviews of sites within stage 3 of the Sustainability Appraisal: Site Assessment process, officers considered best available evidence**, where necessary undertook site visits and applied professional judgement in order to provide commentary on each site.

**The Highways Assessment included access to services for the Strategic, Principal and Key Centres, reflecting that these settlements are generally much larger than Community Hubs.*

***It should be noted that whilst the service area reviews were informed by the assessment of assets on and within proximity of the site undertaken within the SLAA process, they were not limited to consideration of these assets. The review was holistic in nature and in many instances identified additional assets which had not previously been identified. The commentary provided by the relevant service areas included a proportionate summary of:*

- *The value/significance of any identified assets.*
 - *The relationship between the site and any identified assets.*
 - *Potential impact on any identified assets resulting from development / redevelopment of the site.*
 - *If relevant, potential mechanisms for mitigating impact and/or recommendations on further assessment(s) required if the site is identified for allocation to inform the future development of the site.*
- Commissioned evidence base studies, including a Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Study; Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment; and Green Belt Review.
 - A Habitats Regulations Assessment.
 - Consideration of infrastructure requirements and opportunities.
 - Other strategic considerations* and professional judgement.

**Access through Flood Zones 2 and/or 3 was given due consideration within Stage 3 of the site assessment. In circumstances where consideration of other constraints resulted in the identification of a preferred site which relies on access through Flood Zone 2 and/or 3, the ability to achieve safe access and egress was considered through a Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Only where the Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment indicated that safe access and egress could be established has such a site been identified as a proposed site allocation.*

5.2. This stage of assessment was an iterative process.

- 5.3. Once initial conclusions are reached within Stage 3 of the Site Assessment process, these were evaluated through Stage 2a of the site assessment process before proposals were finalised.

Highley Place Plan Area
Stage 2a Sustainability Appraisal:
Site Assessments

