

# Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

Publication of Draft Evidence: Ends 11 February 2010

## Frequently Asked Questions

The Draft Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for West Northamptonshire has been published by the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit. The purpose of doing this is to check whether there is any further information or evidence available about sites assessed with or without potential for housing development, in West Northamptonshire.

It is important to note that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is a technical evidence base and therefore a technical exercise aimed at informing planning policy making. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment cannot deal with issues for the plan making process, for example, where housing growth is located, infrastructure issues etc. It is very much a fact finding exercise aimed at people who are promoting sites.

The West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit has produced this 'Frequently Asked Questions' document to help explain what the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is and how to provide additional evidence. There is also an Executive Summary available which provides more detail; information on how to access this is at the end of this document.

### **1. What is a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment?**

The Government (through National Planning Guidance known as Planning Policy Statement 3 – Housing (PPS3)) requires each Local Planning Authority in England and Wales to undertake a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. The purpose of the Assessment is to identify where and how many new housing sites could be developed over a 5, 10 and 15 year period.

The Assessment covers West Northamptonshire, which consists of the areas of Daventry District, Northampton Borough and South Northamptonshire Councils.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment will be used to inform the preparation of the West Northamptonshire Local Development Framework (the plan making process), in particular the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy and the West Northamptonshire Site Allocations Development Plan Document.

### **2. What does a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment do?**

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment does three key things:

- It identifies sites that have the potential for new housing
- It assesses how much housing sites can provide
- It estimates when those sites that are deemed suitable, could, if approved, be brought forward for development

The Government Guidance on carrying out a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment states that it should assess the **suitability, availability and achievability** of a site.

- A site is *considered suitable* if it offers a suitable location for development and would contribute to the creation of sustainable, mixed communities i.e. a range of sizes, styles and tenures.
- A site is *considered available* for development when, on the best information available at the time, there are no legal or ownership problems to developing the site.
- A site is *considered achievable* for development where there is a reasonable prospect that housing will be developed at a particular point in time.

However it is important to note that it DOES NOT decide if these sites should be allocated for development.

### **3. How many housing sites do we need in West Northamptonshire?**

The East Midlands Regional Plan published in March 2009 identifies a requirement for 62,125 new homes to be built in West Northamptonshire between 2001 to 2026. As of the 1 April 2008, 13,781 of the 62,125 dwellings had already been built. That means the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment has to identify how and where the remaining 48,344 homes can be accommodated in order to meet the requirements. The study includes sites which have had development completed on them since April 2008.

### **4. Is it essential to produce a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment?**

Yes. The Department of Communities and Local Government sets out clear guidance for Local Authorities on how to carry out a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment provides the evidence to show that there are sufficient sites available to deliver the planning policy documents; in West Northamptonshire this is the Joint Core Strategy.

### **5. How were sites identified?**

Government Guidance advises that Local Authorities should use a wide variety of sources to identify sites for potential housing. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment has looked at sites currently in the planning process and sites that are not in the planning process. These include:

- Sites that have planning permission for housing, or other uses, that have not yet been built
- Outstanding planning applications for housing
- Sites that are allocated in existing Local Plans
- Sites that have been identified in the Urban Capacity Studies (these identified sites in urban or built up areas, like the centre of Northampton)
- Land that has been identified for employment and the public sector which is surplus
- Vacant and derelict land and buildings
- Urban extensions - development which extends onto existing built up areas (like those identified in the Emergent Joint Core Strategy); and
- Sites that are being promoted by developers and landowners

The West Northamptonshire sites that have been identified are located inside existing settlements, on the edge or boundary of existing settlements and outside existing settlements (in the rural / greenfield areas).

**6. How many and how big are the sites being considered?**

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is designed to identify larger sites. It has therefore assessed sites with a capacity for a minimum of 10 dwellings or sites of a minimum of 0.25 hectares.

A total of 885 specific sites have been identified and of these 781 have been assessed and inspected; these range from the small (10 dwelling capacity or 0.25 hectares) to the very large sites with the potential for many hundreds of houses. The remaining 104 sites have been discarded before being assessed. They were not assessed because they were too small, have been developed for other uses, have been built before the start date of the Assessment (1 April 2008); or are sites which overlap with other sites and so have been discounted to avoid duplication and double counting.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment only looks at larger sites, but it is important to note that smaller sites may still come forward for development. If and when these small sites are developed, the number of dwellings provided will be deducted from the overall target of 48,344 new homes, through a process of continual monitoring and review.

**7. If a site has a positive assessment, will it definitely be built on in the future?**

No. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment provides information to assist in plan making by providing evidence about how much potential land for housing is available. It does not itself allocate land for housing nor make decisions over land use.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment has assessed the sites identified and recommended that sites be either:

- **Retained** – as they currently appear to be suitable, available and achievable for development and can go forward for **further consideration** in the plan making process.
- **Have potential** – sites that currently have some problems or challenges in terms of their suitability, availability and achievability for which mitigation measures may be required.
- **Discarded** – sites that are not currently considered suitable, available and achievable.

It is important to note that this assessment is 'current'. Those sites that have been assessed as currently 'having potential' will be included in the future, and those that have currently been 'discarded' may also be included in the future Housing Land Availability Assessments as conditions or circumstances change.

Sites that have been identified to be 'retained' indicate that a site may be suitable for housing, but this then has to be tested through the plan making process, full public consultation and then a planning application process.

**8. Why are “greenfield” sites included in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment?**

Government Guidance through Planning Policy Statement 3 and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment guidance state that a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment should include the assessment of both previously developed (brownfield) and greenfield land. Greenfield sites are included in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to provide a full and rounded assessment of all the potential sites available.

The housing numbers provided in the East Midlands Regional Plan (62,125) are significant and therefore it is known that some greenfield urban extensions will be required.

However, it remains a key objective to maximise and prioritise the development of previously developed land, alongside the objective of meeting housing requirements.

**9. There is currently a recession and houses are not being built – do we still have to find sites?**

Yes. The Government advice is that Local Authorities must plan for normal market conditions. Plan making is for the long term. Over the 20 year life of a policy plan there will be several peaks and troughs in the market. The data for this draft Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is based from 1 April 2008 which is pre-recession. Therefore, we have sought to provide a realistic evidence base in identifying the phasing of sites, i.e. when they may be available for development. Some of this information is known from developers and agents who are promoting current sites. As the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is based on ‘current’ evidence, as and when the market changes it will be reflected in a subsequent review.

**10. Does the publication of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment mean that decisions have already been made on the location of housing sites?**

No. The Draft Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment has been published as evidence to enable any further information about the suitability and deliverability of potential sites to be gathered. The inclusion of a site in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment does not indicate that a site will definitely be developed or allocated for housing in the future plan making process.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment provides actual evidence alongside lots of other information. It does not outweigh any existing policies that may exist, for example, in the Local Plans. A site that has been assessed in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment as being retained for housing development gains no added benefits or favour in determining any planning applications that may be made.

The appropriateness of, and the need for a site will be determined through the plan making process. The West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit recently published the Emergent Core Strategy for public consultation. This document set out the initial view of the preferred locations for growth in order to meet the regional housing targets. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment will help to inform this document as it evolves into policy by providing the necessary evidence base, to take identified sites forward, or to suggest alternative sites.

**11. Can errors in the site assessment be amended or further information on sites provided?**

Yes. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is a “live” process. The site information on which the Assessment is based comes from 1 April 2008. The Assessment will be reviewed annually as part of the Annual Housing Monitoring which is reported on each year. This will allow any changes, additions or amendments to be accommodated as they are identified, for example, sites that are already developed, new roads that may be built, or revised flood risk advice or other environmental information. A full review is intended to take place every 5 years to coincide with the review of the Local Development Framework documents.

**12. Is it still possible to submit sites for consideration?**

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment shows that there are sufficient sites to deliver the 48,344 dwellings, therefore further submission of sites are not encouraged at this stage. Any new sites will be considered when the annual review of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is carried out in the summer of 2010.

**13. Who has been involved in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment process so far?**

The methodology for carrying out the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (which has also been published) was consulted upon in 2008. Key stakeholders and infrastructure providers have been consulted throughout the process so that they could highlight any potential issues with sites from their perspectives.

A Panel has also been set up and has assisted in the preparation of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment methodology. The Panel consists of Local Authorities, industry experts and public agencies. They have also provided additional technical expertise when required, as well as helping to shape the approach taken.

**14. How can I make comments?**

**The draft documents have been published to receive further evidence until 11 February 2010.** We have extended the period of availability beyond the normal 6-week period to account for the Christmas holiday period.

It is important to note that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is an evidenced based document and cannot consider subjective or anecdotal evidence. Its initial publication in a draft form is to gather information about the sites that have been identified to ensure that the evidence base is as robust as it can be.

It is not possible to reproduce in paper form all of the information in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment as it is considered cost and resource prohibitive. However there is site information and associated maps for all the sites identified, as well as the Executive Summary, Main Report and Methodology. It is important to note that this is an evidence study of sites and subjective views cannot be taken into account.

- **Access Via the Website**

We recommend that, if possible, you use the website to access the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment information. The draft Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Executive Summary, Main Report, Site Assessment Schedule, Maps and

Methodology are available to view on the WNJPU website at:  
[www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/SHLAA](http://www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/SHLAA)

On the website you will find a link to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. You can search by settlement (village or town, or Ward for Northampton) to identify sites within an area. You then need to note the number of the site you are interested in and insert it into the 'search' field. This will then search for the map and site information for this location. It will also provide a form for entering any technical evidence that you may wish to add.

- **Council Offices**

We will be supplying the published materials for the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to each of the Local Authority Offices for public viewing.

- *Northampton Borough Council – Cliftonville House, Bedford Road, Northampton, NN4 7NR*
  - *Open Monday to Thursday 08.30 – 17.00 / Friday 08.30-16.30*
  - *Closed bank holidays*
- *Daventry District Council - Lodge Road, Daventry, NN11 4FP*
  - *Open Monday to Thursday 08.30–17.00 / Friday 08.30-16.30*
  - *Closed bank holidays and also closing at 12.30 on 24 December 2009*
- *South Northamptonshire Council – Springfield, Towcester, Northants, NN12 6AE*
  - *Monday to Thursday 08.45-17.15 / Friday 08.45-16.45*
  - *Closed bank holiday and Thursday 31 December 2009*

You will be able to photocopy any of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment information available at the Council Offices for a copying charge.

- **On Request**

We can provide information on a CD-ROM and we will also provide CD-ROMs for reference in all local libraries, but again suggest that the website is used in the first instance.

We are also able to offer, on request, to send printed copies of specific sections or sites within the schedule, but we ask that you try to access the website or Council Offices in the first instance. The schedule of sites will provide sufficient information if the sites are known to you, but the map will help if you do not know the site.

### **15. What happens after this publication exercise?**

Following this publication exercise, additional evidence received on sites will be taken into account which may result in changes to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. A final Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment will then be published. Annual Monitoring Reports will be published following this draft and also published on the website.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment will form part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework or plan making process. All of the Plans and evidence will be available for independent scrutiny by a Planning Inspector when they are submitted to the Secretary of State for approval.

We will need to make a charge for supplying the final Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment in paper form or on CD Rom, however all of the information will be available on our website: [www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/SHLAA](http://www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/SHLAA)

**16. Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment**

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**17. Contact us:**

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