



**Dorset**  
Council

## **Methodology**

# **Land Availability Assessment**

**September 2019**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Paragraph 67 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) says that “Strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA).” A review of land available for economic development will be undertaken using a similar methodology.
- 1.2 Planning practice guidance explains “An assessment of land availability identifies a future supply of land which is suitable, available and achievable for housing and economic development uses over the plan period. The assessment is an important source of evidence to inform plan-making and decision-taking, and the identification of a 5-year supply of housing land. It can also inform as well as make use of sites in brownfield registers”
- 1.3 This is Dorset Council’s first SHLAA, the Council having formed on the 1 April 2019 as a consequence of local government reorganisation. This is a comprehensive assessment that will ensure that the understanding of housing land supply is brought up to date and uses a consistent approach across the plan area. It will also provide useful information to help identify potential sites for employment and other uses.

## 2. What area will the assessment cover?

- 2.1 The assessment will cover the whole of the administrative area of Dorset Council.



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### **3. What is a development land availability assessment?**

3.1 The primary role of the assessment is to:

- Identify sites and broad locations with potential for development
- Assess their development potential
- Assess their suitability for development and the likelihood of development coming forward (the availability and achievability)

3.2 This assessment is undertaken by planning officers from Dorset Council including advice from specialist officers (Highways, Flood Risk, Landscape, Urban Design and the Natural Environment) and other bodies where required.

3.3 While the assessments are an important evidence source to inform plan making, they do not determine whether a site should be allocated for development or granted planning permission. The information will be used to help in the formation of planning policy and to help us in updating the five year housing land supply information. It is for the development plan itself to set the policy context by which planning applications are determined.

### **4. Core Requirements and Outputs of a SHLAA**

4.1 The following outputs should be produced as part of this study:

- a list of all sites or broad locations considered, cross-referenced to their locations on maps;
- an assessment of each site or broad location, including:
  - where these have been discounted, evidence justifying reasons given;
  - where these are considered suitable, available and achievable, the potential type and quantity of development, including a reasonable estimate of build out rates, setting out how any barriers to delivery could be overcome and when;
- a housing trajectory will also be produced and updated on an annual basis in the Authority's monitoring report

### **5. The Methodology**

5.1 The most recent guidance on preparing SHLAAs is set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance 'Housing and economic land availability assessment'<sup>1</sup> and covers the identification of land suitable for both housing and economic development<sup>2</sup>. This methodology has followed this guidance where appropriate taking into account local circumstances and the practicalities of undertaking an assessment.

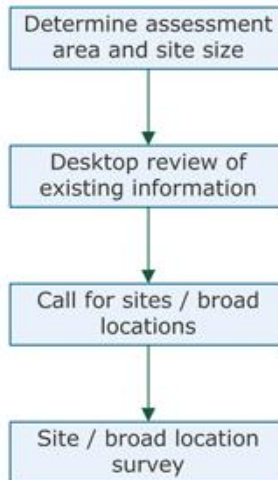
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment#Identification-of-sites-and-broad-locations>

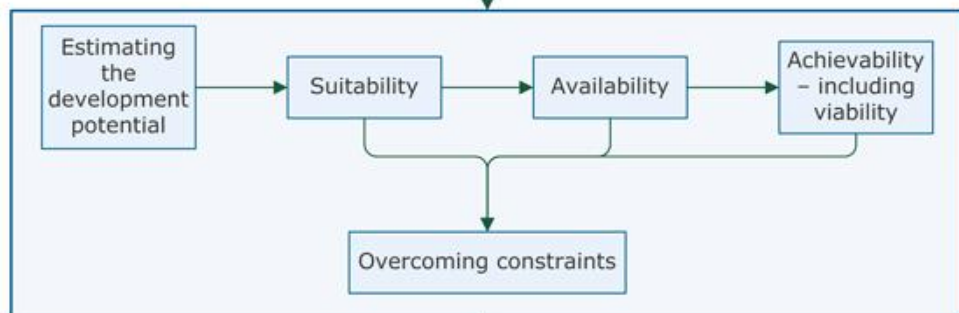
<sup>2</sup> The Council will prepare a separate methodology for assessing the suitability of land made available for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople.

# Method Flow Chart

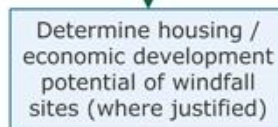
## Stage 1- Site / broad location identification



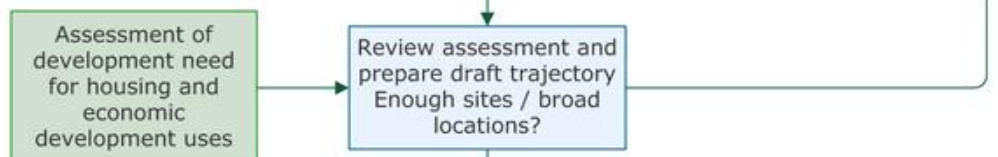
## Stage 2 - Site / broad location assessment



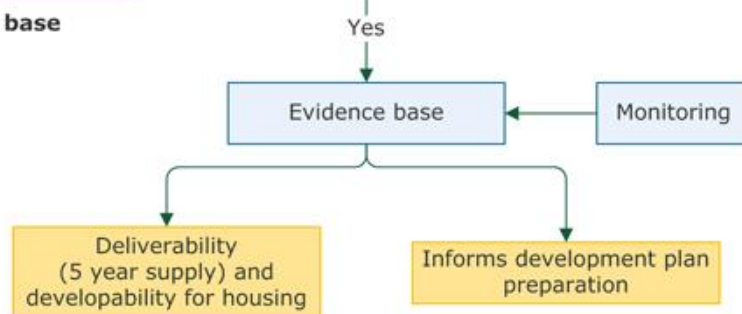
## Stage 3 - Windfall assessment



## Stage 4 - Assessment review



## Stage 5 - Final evidence base



## **Stage 1: Identification of sites and broad locations**

### **Should the assessment be constrained by the need for development?**

- 5.2 This assessment will identify sites and broad locations regardless of the amount of development needed to provide an audit of available land.

### **What site size should be considered for assessment?**

- 5.3 A range of different site sizes from small-scale sites to opportunities for large-scale developments such as village and town extensions and new settlements where appropriate.

- 5.4 Although planning practice guidance suggests all sites capable of delivering 5 or more dwellings or 0.25 hectares and above should be considered, the large Dorset Council area makes this threshold impractical. Conversely paragraph 68 of the NPPF expects a minimum proportion of the sites identified as suitable for housing to be no larger than one hectare.

- 5.5 The Council has decided to apply a threshold of 0.3 hectares or 10 dwellings or greater for considering the suitability of land submitted through the SHLAA. It considers that this is a reasonable approach which reflects the practicalities of preparing an appropriate development strategy across the Council area, whilst providing the opportunity to identify suitable small and medium sized housing sites.

### **How should sites be identified?**

- 5.6 The councils will identify sites through a new 'call for sites' and known opportunities such as the Brownfield Register.

### **How should plan makers issue a call for potential sites and broad locations for development?**

- 5.7 The council will undertake a consultation on new sites contacting town and parish councils, local landowners, their agents and developers as well as local interest groups and members of the public who have taken an interest in planning policy matters.

- 5.8 A call for sites will set out the information sought from respondents, which will include:

- site location;
- suggested potential type of development
- the scale of development; and
- constraints to development.

- 5.9 A press release will be sent to local newspapers and the call for sites will be advertised through social media.

## Stage 2: Site / broad location assessment

### What factors should be considered for when and whether sites are likely to be developed?

- 5.10 We will need to assess the suitability, availability and achievability of sites, including whether the site is economically viable. This will provide information on which a judgement can be made as to whether a site can be considered deliverable within the next five years, or developable over a longer period.

## Stage 2a: Estimating the Development Potential of Each Site/Broad Location.

### How should the development potential be calculated?

- 5.11 The estimation of the development potential of each identified site can be guided by the existing or emerging plan policy including locally determined policies on density. When assessing development potential, plan makers should seek to make the most efficient use of land in line with policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 5.12 Development potential is a significant factor that affects the economic viability of a site / broad location and its suitability for a particular use. Therefore, assessing achievability (including viability) and suitability can usefully be carried out in parallel with estimating the development potential.
- 5.13 Density calculations will take account of site constraints (e.g. access, slope etc.) and local characteristics identified through desktop reviews or site visits. If there are any existing dwellings on the site this should be documented to enable the net number of dwellings to be recorded.
- 5.14 Those sites which have been granted planning permission will not need to be surveyed, as the potential and constraints on these sites will have already been identified through the planning application process and the sites will be visited on an annual basis as part of the residential monitoring process.

## Stage 2b: Determining suitability

### What factors can be considered when assessing the suitability of sites / broad locations for developed?

- 5.15 A site or broad location can be considered suitable if it would provide an appropriate location for development when considered against relevant constraints and their potential to be mitigated.
- 5.16 When considering constraints, we will consider the information collected as part of the initial site survey, as well as other relevant information, such as:

- national policy;
  - appropriateness and likely market attractiveness for the type of development proposed;
  - contribution to regeneration priority areas;
  - potential impacts including the effect upon landscapes including landscape features, nature and heritage conservation.
- 5.17 Plan-makers need to assess the suitability of identified sites or broad locations for different forms of development where appropriate, taking into account the range of needs for housing, economic and other uses.
- 5.18 Planning practice guidance advises that development sites should be assessed against either adopted or emerging plans. Dorset Council are developing a new settlement hierarchy and spatial strategy. As no strategy has been agreed the Council will not rule out sites on the basis of settlement strategy. Access to existing infrastructure, facilities and services is however a consideration.
- 5.19 Sites in existing development plans or with planning permission can generally be considered suitable for development although it may be necessary to assess whether circumstances have changed which would alter their suitability. This can be informed by a range of factors including the suitability of the land for different uses and by market signals, which will be useful in identifying the most appropriate use.
- 5.20 As the Local Plan is at an early stage in preparation, sites will not be excluded simply on the basis of previous Local Plan settlement hierarchies however sites around main settlements will be a focus for development.

#### **What sites should be excluded at this stage?**

- 5.21 Some sites are highly unlikely to be suitable for development, due to the level of protection applied. These sites will be automatically excluded from further assessment work.
- 5.22 Plan-making bodies should consider constraints when assessing the suitability, availability and achievability of sites and broad locations. For example, assessments should take account of the policies referred to in footnote 6 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which sets out the areas where the Framework would provide strong reasons for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area (such as the Green Belt and other protected areas).
- 5.23 Footnote (6) The policies referred to are those in the Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 176 and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest); land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined



as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 63 in chapter 16); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

**Table 1: Constraints listed in the NPPF, Footnote 6**

<b>Constraint</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Habitats sites	Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites. Site of Special Scientific Interest: Sites designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
Green Belt	The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
Local Green Spaces	Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts.
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	An area of countryside which has been designated for conservation due to its significant landscape value. There are two AONBs in Dorset; the Dorset AONB and the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.
Heritage Coast	Areas of undeveloped coastline which are managed to conserve their natural beauty and, where appropriate, to improve accessibility for visitors.
Irreplaceable habitats	Habitats which would be technically very difficult (or take a very significant time) to restore, recreate or replace once destroyed, taking into account their age, uniqueness, species diversity or rarity. They include ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, blanket bog, limestone pavement, sand dunes, salt marsh and lowland fen.
Designated heritage assets	A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation. Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets.
Flood risk	Areas at risk of flooding from all sources
Coastal change	An area identified in plans as likely to be affected by physical change to the shoreline through erosion, coastal landslip, permanent inundation or coastal accretion. Land instability - Extensive site investigations have identified these areas as unsuitable for development because of land slipping and/or coastal erosion.



- 5.24 Where a site is not ruled out by a 'footnote 6' constraint, officers will undertake a desktop assessment and record other constraints. These other constraints are not necessarily reasons to rule out a site, unless the particular circumstances of the constraint are insurmountable.

#### **Approach to Green Belt, AONB & Heritage Coast**

- 5.25 The general extent of the Dorset Green Belt is already established. National policy explains that "Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans." The NPPF, paragraph 137 continues "Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development."
- 5.26 Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The NPPF, paragraph 172 states "Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues." National Policy is clear that the scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.
- 5.27 The NPPF, paragraph 173 continues "Within areas defined as Heritage Coast (and that do not already fall within one of the designated areas mentioned in paragraph 172), planning policies and decisions should be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation. Major development within a Heritage Coast is unlikely to be appropriate, unless it is compatible with its special character."
- 5.28 Large scale development within the AONB would be acceptable in exceptional circumstances as with development in the Green belt – subject to consideration through the local plan. Given that the Green Belt, AONB and Heritage Coast are not absolute constraints, the Council has not ruled out sites within these designations altogether at the initial sifting stage of the SHLAA.

#### **What level of assessment may be appropriate in the remaining sites?**

- 5.29 The assessment process will consider the following:
- Site size, boundaries and location
  - Current land use and character of the site and surrounding area

- Physical and environmental constraints (e.g. access, contamination, steep slopes, flooding, natural features of significance, location of infrastructure/facilities).
- Where relevant, development progress
- Whether the site is suitable for a particular type of use or mix of uses.

## Stage 2c: Assessing Availability

### What factors can be considered when assessing availability?

- 5.30 A site can be 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 impediments to development. For example, land controlled by a developer or landowner who has expressed an intention to develop may be considered available. Sites with extant planning consent are considered available for development.

## Stage 2d: Assessing Achievability (Including viability)

### What factors should be considered when assessing achievability including whether the development of the site is viable?

- 5.31 A site is considered achievable for development where there is a reasonable prospect that the particular type of development will be developed on the site at a particular point in time. This is essentially a judgement about the economic viability of a site, and the capacity of the developer to complete and let or sell the development over a certain period. When a site is considered in more detail for inclusion in a local plan, more detailed viability evidence will be considered.

## Stage 2e: Overcoming constraints

### What happens when constraints are identified that impact on the suitability, availability and achievability?

- 5.32 Where constraints have been identified, the assessment will need to consider what action could be taken to overcome them. Actions might include the need for investment in new infrastructure, dealing with fragmented land ownership, environmental improvement. In some circumstances the type of development (particularly open market housing) may be limited unless specifically enabled through neighbourhood planning, and where this is the case it should be noted in the assessment.

### How can the timescale and rate of development be assessed and presented?

- 5.33 Information on suitability, availability, achievability and constraints can be used to assess the timescale within which each site is capable of development. This may include indicative lead-in times and build-out rates for the development of different scales of sites. On the largest sites

allowance should be made for several developers to be involved. The advice of developers and local agents will be important in assessing lead-in times and build-out rates by year. In addition, the Council holds a large amount of data about the development of sites and this will be used to inform estimates of build-out rates.

- 5.34 The call for sites consultation will ask for details about the timeframe of delivery, asking specifically about the intended point in time at which the development would first become available for development, when it would commence, and when it would be completed. It will also collect information on any legal or ownership constraints. Clearly development and built-out would depend on the site gaining planning consent.

### **Stage 3: Windfall Assessment**

#### **How should a windfall allowance be determined in relation to housing?**

- 5.35 A windfall allowance may be justified in the anticipated supply if a local planning authority has compelling evidence as set out in paragraph 70 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

### **Stage 4: Assessment Findings**

- 5.36 The assessment process will enable the housing potential supply for the plan and each council's area to be calculated. The evidence of land supply will help to inform the strategic decisions about the distribution of development as part of the Local Plan production.