



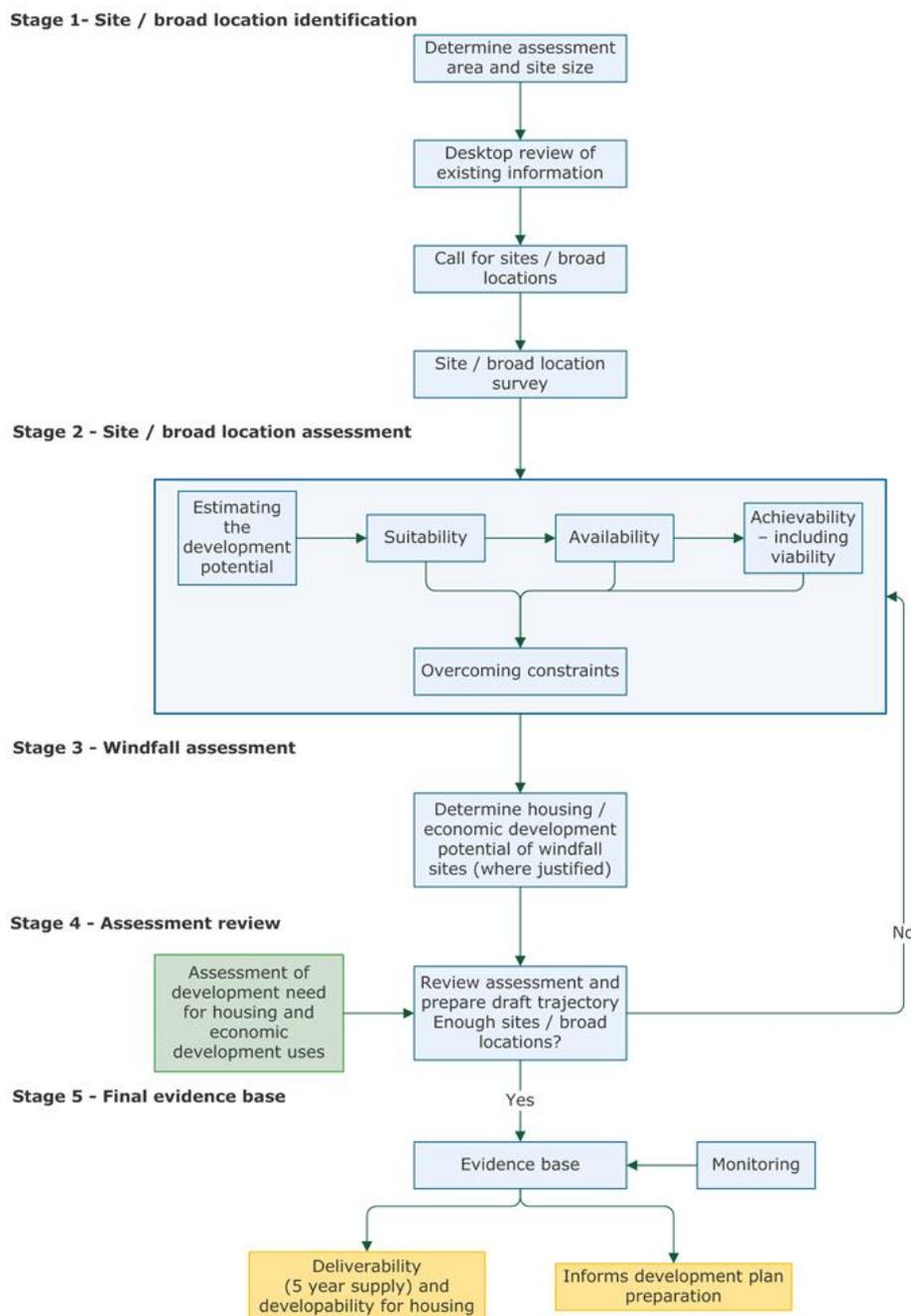
# **Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA)**

**Methodology**  
**April 2021**

# Introduction

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) describes how planning authorities should build a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment<sup>1</sup>. Detailed guidance is set out in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which clarifies that the process applies to economic land in addition to housing land. In issuing its call for sites, the Council made it clear that sites are sought for the full range of uses – including ‘green sites’ which may have benefits in terms of accessible open space, biodiversity gains and/or carbon absorption.

The land availability assessment methodology set out in the PPG is summarised in the flowchart reproduced below.



<sup>1</sup> NPPF paragraph 67

This document describes the Council's methodology, which is structured according to the guidance in the PPG. It may need to be adjusted and developed in more detail during the course of the site assessment process – for example, to take account of emerging strategies and policies. Any such adjustments will be fully documented in the final Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) report.

As explained in the NPPF, the SLAA does not in itself determine whether a site should be allocated for development. It is the role of the SLAA to provide information on the range of sites which are available to meet the local authority's requirements, but it is for the development plan to determine which of those sites are the most suitable to meet those requirements.

The SLAA will be completed in time to allow a six-week technical consultation on a draft version, commencing in September 2021. The focus of this consultation will be on fact-checking and quality control. A full public consultation on the final version will take place alongside the Preferred Options consultation on the draft Local Plan, in spring 2022.

## **Stakeholders**

The SLAA will be carried out with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, and in accordance with the statutory duty to cooperate<sup>2</sup>. The stakeholders will include but not necessarily be limited to the following:

- Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Civil Aviation Authority
- Homes England
- Primary Care Trust
- Office of Rail Regulation
- Integrated Transport Authority
- Highway authority
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Local planning authorities in the housing market area
- Local planning authorities in the functional economic market area
- Landowners and promoters
- Local property agents
- Developers
- Local communities
- Businesses and their local representative organisations
- Parish and town councils
- Neighbourhood forums preparing neighbourhood plans

All stakeholders will be invited to comment on the final SLAA, which will be published alongside the Preferred Options consultation. In addition, the following stakeholders will be invited to comment on an earlier draft version to assist with fact-checking and quality control:

- Parish and town councils
- Neighbourhood forums preparing neighbourhood plans
- Landowners and promoters

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<sup>2</sup> As set out in The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

## Stage 1 – Site / broad location identification

### Assessment area and site size

The area selected for assessment is the plan-making area – the district of Uttlesford.

The site size thresholds are as follows:

- Housing – 5 or more dwellings
- Economic development – 0.25 ha (or 500 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space) or larger
- Other development – no threshold

Unless otherwise stated, references to ‘sites’ should be taken to include broad locations which may be identified.

### Identifying sites

Sites will be identified from a wide range of sources, starting with the desktop review outlined in the below table.

Type of site	Potential data source
Existing housing and economic development allocations and site development briefs not yet with planning permission	Local and neighbourhood plans Planning applications records Development Briefs
Planning permissions for housing and economic development that are unimplemented or under construction	Planning application records Development starts and completions records
Planning applications that have been refused or withdrawn	Planning application records
Land in the local authority’s ownership	Local authority records
Surplus and likely to become surplus public sector land	National register of public sector land Engagement with strategic plans of other public sector bodies such as county councils, central government, National Health Service, police, fire services, utilities services, statutory undertakers
Sites with permission in principle, and identified brownfield land	Brownfield land registers (parts 1 and 2) National Land Use Database Valuation Office database Active engagement with sector
Vacant and derelict land and buildings (including empty homes, redundant and disused agricultural buildings, potential permitted development changes, eg offices to residential)	Local authority empty property register English Housing Survey National Land Use Database Commercial property databases (e.g. estate agents and property agents) Valuation Office database Active engagement with sector Brownfield land registers
Additional opportunities for un-established uses (eg making productive use of under-utilised facilities such as garage blocks)	Ordnance Survey maps Aerial photography Planning applications

	Site surveys
Business requirements and aspirations	Enquiries received by local planning authority Active engagement with sector
Sites in rural locations	Local and neighbourhood plans
Large scale redevelopment and redesign of existing residential or economic areas	Planning applications Ordnance Survey maps
Sites in adjoining villages and rural exceptions sites	Aerial photography Site surveys
Potential urban extensions and new free-standing settlement	

To ensure the process to identify land is transparent and identifies as many potential opportunities as possible, a call for sites was issued on 15 January 2021 with a submission deadline of 21 April 2021<sup>3</sup>. Details were published on the Council's website, circulated to those on the Local Plan contact database and publicised through adverts in the local press and social media posts.

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<sup>3</sup> Late submissions may still be considered to inform the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan, if received before critical tasks have been completed.

## Stage 2 – Site / broad location assessment

### Development potential

A site's development potential would typically be estimated using existing or emerging policies, including on density. However, the adopted Local Plan does not contain policies on density, while new policies are yet to emerge.

As a starting point, the site capacity provided in the data source will be used. If no capacity is indicated, the following assumptions will be applied to housing and economic development sites. To account for the varying nature of other types of site, a more tailored assessment is likely to be required.

### Housing

Informed by assumptions used for the withdrawn Submission Local Plan, the densities in the following table are considered to reflect existing local densities. To ensure that sufficient sites are identified to meet the Council's requirement, the lower figure in each range will be used.

Location	Density	Justification
Within Saffron Walden or Great Dunmow	35-67 dwellings per hectare	Allows a mix of housing types comprising houses, terraces and flats
Within any other settlement	30-50 dph	Respects the rural character of Uttlesford
Adjacent to any settlement	30-50 dph	Respects the rural character of Uttlesford
New settlement	30-67 dph	Allows a mix of housing types comprising houses, terraces and flats

The estimation of development potential will be based on the net developable area of a site. Smaller sites will typically make use of existing roads and facilities, potentially enabling up to 100% of the site area to be developed. However, larger sites will require space for internal access roads, strategic open space and landscaping so the developable area will be reduced. Informed by assumptions used for the withdrawn Submission Local Plan, the ratios identified in the following table will be used to calculate the net developable area of each site.

Site size	Gross to net ratio
Up to 0.4 hectares	100%
0.4 – 2 hectares	90%
2 – 15 hectares	75%
15 hectares and above	60%

### Economic development

Where the capacity of economic development sites is not provided, it will be estimated on the basis of the development density assumptions in *West Essex and East Hertfordshire Assessment of Employment Needs (Hardisty Jones Associates, 2017)*. The assumptions are as follows:

- Industrial development: 40% (4,000 m<sup>2</sup> per hectare)

- Office development (out-of-town): 40%
- Office development (in-town): 100%

### **Recalculating the development potential**

The above approach is merely intended to facilitate an initial estimate of development potential. Once new policies emerge, the development potential for each site will be recalculated.

## **Assessing whether sites are likely to be developed**

Plan-makers must assess the suitability, availability and achievability of sites, including whether the site is economically viable. A judgment can therefore be made as to whether a site is deliverable within the next five years, or developable over a longer period.

### **Suitability – Initial assessment**

A site can be considered suitable if it would provide an appropriate location for development when considered against relevant constraints and their potential to be mitigated.

A basic level of information will be recorded for all identified sites. Depending on the data source, some of this information may not be readily available so enquiries may need to be made. The information, as described in the PPG, is as follows:

- Site size, boundaries, and location
- Current land use and character
- Land uses and character of surrounding area
- Physical constraints (e.g. access, contamination, steep slopes, flood risk, natural features of significance, location of infrastructure/utilities)
- Potential environmental constraints
- Consistency with the development plan's policies<sup>4</sup>
- Proximity to services and other infrastructure, such as public transport
- Where relevant, development progress (e.g. ground works completed, number of units started, number of units completed)

An initial suitability assessment will be carried out to confirm whether there are any sites which, when taking into account national policy and designations, are clearly not suitable for development. Such sites will be assigned an 'E' classification (see 'Site classification' below) and excluded from further detailed assessment. The criteria for the initial assessment are as follows:

- Proximity to Green Belt
- Proximity to the Countryside Protection Zone
- Proximity to a Protected Open Space
- Proximity to a Poor Air Quality Zone
- Which Environment Agency flood zone applies to the site?
- Which Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) flood zone applies to the site?

The initial suitability assessment also provides the opportunity to:

- Ratify inconsistent information gathered through the call for sites and desk assessment

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<sup>4</sup> As the new Local Plan is at an early stage of preparation, it is likely that limited/no information on this topic will be available initially. Once available, emerging policies will inform an updated SLAA.

- Gain an up to date view on development progress (where sites have planning permission)
- Obtain a better understanding of what type and scale of development may be appropriate
- Gain a more detailed understanding of deliverability, any barriers and how they could be overcome
- Identify further sites with potential for development that were not identified through data sources or the call for sites

### **Suitability – Detailed assessment**

All sites that pass the initial suitability assessment will be subject to a detailed assessment, using the full list of criteria set out in Appendix A.

As parallel evidence-gathering and policy-writing work progresses, it is likely that criteria will need to be added, removed and/or amended. Even where criteria remain unchanged, the performance of certain sites may change. A couple of examples are described below:

- The call for sites submission form includes questions on the TCPA Garden City principles. These principles will eventually influence the vision, objectives and policies in the Local Plan, which are likely to result in additional suitability criteria. The questions were asked so that relevant information could be collected in readiness.
- In updating the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), the boundaries of flood zones across the District could change. The criteria would remain the same but the performance of certain sites would be altered according to the boundary changes.

### **Availability**

A site can be considered available for development when, on the best information available, there is confidence that there are no legal or ownership impediments to development. Call for sites submissions should include information to assist this assessment, although enquiries may need to be made by officers where details are lacking and for sites identified from other sources.

The following criteria will be used to assess availability:

#### **Ownership/control**

- Sole owner
- Multiple owners
- Availability confirmed by owner(s)
- Legal or ownership issues<sup>5</sup>

#### **Amount of development which could be delivered, by time period**

- Pre Year 1: Pre Apr 2024
- Year 1: Apr 2024-Mar 2025
- Year 2: Apr 2025-Mar 2026
- Year 3: Apr 2026-Mar 2027
- Year 4: Apr 2027-Mar 2028
- Year 5: Apr 2028-Mar 2029
- Years 6-10: Apr 2029-Mar 2034
- Years 11-15: Apr 2034-Mar 2039
- Post Year 15: Post Mar 2039

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<sup>5</sup> For example, whether formal agreements are in place to ensure that land outside of the direct control of the owner(s) is made available to support delivery.

## Achievability

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.

The following criteria will be used to assess achievability:

### Market factors

- What is the market strength of the locality?
- What is the attractiveness of the locality, potential market demand and projected rate of sales?

### Cost factors

- Are there any constraints – for example, flooding, noise or physical features – which need to be overcome, and where the cost of mitigation measures may prejudice viability?
- Are there any site preparation costs – for example, associated with topography, contamination or existing uses/buildings – which may prejudice viability?
- Are there any specific infrastructure requirements – for example, transport or utilities infrastructure – which may prejudice viability?

### Delivery factors

- Including the developer's own phasing, what are the realistic build-out rates on larger sites (including likely earliest and latest start and completion dates)?
- Is a single developer, or are several developers, offering different housing products?
- What is the size and capacity of the developer?

## Site classification

Once a site has been assessed against the suitability, availability and achievability criteria, it will be given a classification from A to E in accordance with the below table.

Classification	Description
A	These are sites which have planning permission and are generally considered deliverable within the first five years of the plan period.
B	These are sites that are considered deliverable/developable within the plan period but do not currently have planning permission. These sites are largely free from major physical and infrastructure constraints. The sites are broadly in line with national planning policy considerations and, once available, the development strategy of the emerging Local Plan.
C	These are sites where further work is needed to demonstrate the achievability or suitability of sites. This could include, for example, achieving a suitable access, mitigating impacts of noise or air pollution, mitigating against small parts of the site being subject to flooding, or minimising the impact on neighbouring uses or the landscape, historic or natural assets.
D	Sites in this category are likely to be broadly developable but not within the plan period. Sites may only become developable if others are built out so these sites represent future extensions, but this would require speculative consideration far beyond the 15 year plan period.
E	These sites are not considered developable and delivery is not considered suitable within 15 years for one or more of the following reasons:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Departure from national policy leading to development in unsustainable locations</li> <li>• Development in settlement extensions being of a vastly disproportionate scale to the existing settlement</li> <li>• Sites contrary to the emerging development strategy (when available)</li> <li>• Sites contrary to Green Belt or Countryside Protection Zone protections, subject to any emerging reviews</li> <li>• Sites with insurmountable physical constraints e.g. flood risk, noise pollution</li> <li>• Sites with insurmountable availability issues</li> <li>• Sites with insurmountable achievability issues</li> </ul>
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While the SLAA is merely a factual assessment, these site classifications will provide information to assist decisions on site allocations within the new Local Plan.

**Engagement with site owners and promoters**

It is likely that Council officers will need to liaise with some site owners and promoters to further their understanding of development potential. Any such engagement will take place in accordance with the approved *Local Plan Community Engagement Strategy 2021*<sup>6</sup>.

**Updating the site assessments**

As parallel work on the new Local Plan progresses, it will be necessary to update the site assessments – particularly in relation to the likely changes to the suitability criteria described above. It is therefore anticipated that the site classifications will also be subject to change.

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<sup>6</sup> In particular, paragraphs 5.20-5.22 and Appendix F

## Stage 3 – Windfall assessment

The most recent evidence on windfall allowance is contained within *Topic Paper: Consideration of a Windfall Allowance for Uttlesford (March 2017)*. The topic paper considers the delivery of windfall sites over the 10-year period from 2006/7 to 2015/16, concluding that there is evidence to justify a windfall allowance of **70 dwellings per year**.

If the Council identifies broad locations for development in years 6-15, this windfall allowance may be used.

Upcoming work will examine the windfall allowance so it is possible the figure will change. If this is the case, the SLAA methodology will be updated accordingly.

## **Stage 4 – Assessment review**

Once the sites have been assessed, the development potential of all sites can be collected to produce an indicative trajectory. This should set out the amount of housing and economic development that can be provided, and at what point in the future (i.e. within years 1 to 5, 6 to 10, and 11 onwards).

If there are insufficient sites to meet objectively assessed needs (including the identified local need), the Council will need to reconsider its assessment of sites. This could include, for example, issuing a further call for sites, or changing the assumptions about development potential to ensure the most efficient use of land.

While the scenario is considered highly unlikely for the district of Uttlesford, if insufficient land remains it will be necessary to investigate how this shortfall can be planned for. If there is clear evidence that the needs cannot be met locally, it will be necessary to consider how needs might be met in adjoining areas through the process of preparing statement of common ground, and in accordance with the duty to cooperate.

## Stage 5 – Final evidence base

The following outputs will be produced following the assessment:

- 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 the 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
  - An indicative trajectory of anticipated development based on the evidence available

The assessment will be made publicly available on the Council's website, accessible from the landing page at [www.uttlesford.gov.uk/new-local-plan](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/new-local-plan). The publication format will be designed for accessibility, and will include an interactive map.

The assessment will be used to inform plan-making, and to demonstrate whether there is a five-year housing land supply (for example, utilising sites in classifications A and B) for both plan-making and decision-taking.

# Appendix A

## Suitability criteria

Criteria marked with an asterisk (\*) form the basis of the initial suitability assessment, which will subsequently be absorbed into the detailed assessment.

### National policy constraints

- Does the site meet the definition of 'previously developed land'?
- Is the site within, adjoining or separate from a settlement?

### Local policy constraints<sup>7</sup>

- Proximity to Green Belt \*
- Proximity to the Countryside Protection Zone \*
- Proximity to a Public Safety Zone
- Proximity to Important Woodland
- Proximity to a Special Verge
- Proximity to a Historic Landscape
- Proximity to a Local Historic Park/Garden
- Proximity to a Protected Lane
- Proximity to a Protected Open Space \*
- Proximity to a Poor Air Quality Zone \*
- Is the site designated/allocated within a made Neighbourhood Plan?
- Consistency with the emerging Local Plan spatial strategy (when available)

### Flooding

- Which Environment Agency flood zone applies to the site? \*
- Which Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) flood zone applies to the site?<sup>8</sup> \*
- Which surface water flood zone applies to the site?
- Which groundwater flood zone applies to the site?

### Pollution

- Which aircraft noise contour applies to the site?
- Are there any potential noise issues?
- Is the site within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA)?
- Would development on the site increase movements through an AQMA?
- Which groundwater source protection zone applies to the site?
- If the site is  $\geq 5$  ha, is it within a Minerals Safeguarding Area for sand and gravel?
- If the site is  $\geq 3$  ha, is it within a Minerals Safeguarding Area for chalk?
- Is the site within a Minerals Safeguarding Area for brick earth or brick clay?
- Is the site within a Waste Consultation Area?

### Natural environment

- Proximity to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), including Impact Risk Zones (IRZs)
- Proximity to European sites (Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and/or Ramsar site)

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<sup>7</sup> Local policy designations will initially be based on the adopted Local Plan. It will be necessary to update the criteria and/or assessments as the new Local Plan progresses – for example, once the emerging spatial strategy is known.

<sup>8</sup> An updated SFRA will be completed for the new Local Plan, and will inform an updated SLAA

- Proximity to National Nature Reserves (NNRs)
- Proximity to Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs)
- Proximity to ancient woodland
- Proximity to Local Geological Sites
- Proximity to National Trails and public rights of way
- Is the site within an area noted for its high sensitivity to change, according to the Uttlesford Landscape Character Assessment?
- Is the site within an area noted in a Historic Settlement Character Assessment?
- Are there any Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) on the site?
- Which Agricultural Land Classification applies to the site?

### **Historic environment**

- Proximity to scheduled monuments
- Proximity to archaeological sites
- Proximity to listed buildings
- Proximity to locally listed heritage assets
- Proximity to conservation areas
- Proximity to registered parks and gardens

### **Accessibility<sup>9</sup>**

- Primary school walking catchment
- Secondary school accessibility catchments for:
  - Walking
  - Cycling
  - Public transport
- Sixth form accessibility catchments:
  - Walking
  - Cycling
  - Public transport
- College accessibility catchments:
  - Walking
  - Cycling
  - Public transport
- GP and health centre accessibility catchments:
  - Walking
  - Public transport
- Hospital accessibility catchments:
  - Walking
  - Public transport
- Fruit and vegetable retailer accessibility catchments:
  - Walking
  - Public transport
- Local centres accessibility catchments:
  - Walking
  - Cycling
  - Public transport
- Employment centres accessibility catchments:
  - Walking
  - Cycling
  - Public transport

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<sup>9</sup> Accessibility catchments calculated using *Uttlesford Accessibility Analysis: TRACC Outputs*. A judgement will also need to be made regarding the safety and suitability of routes, and whether new infrastructure may be required.

- Bus and rail network walking catchments:
  - 1 service per hour
  - 4 services per hour
- Rail station accessibility catchments:
  - Walking
  - Cycling
  - Public transport
- Is there a viable route from the site to the principal or strategic road network (B roads, A roads and motorways)?
- Are there any fundamental constraints affecting safe site access for road/path users?

**Other land uses**

- Would there be a net loss of open space, sports or recreational facilities?
- Would there be a net loss of employment land?
- Would there be a net loss of retail provision?
- Would there be a net loss of community facilities?
- If known, would any additional uses or infrastructure (including green infrastructure) be provided on site?