Uttlesford District Council

Local Plan to 2040

Draft Site Selection Methodology for Housing and Employment Options

November 2022

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Introduction

Uttlesford District Council is preparing a new Local Plan to replace the Local Plan adopted in 2005.

One element of the Local Plan will be to identify site allocations for housing, employment, retail and other development uses. This report sets out the methodology for assessing sites for inclusion in the Local Plan.

The selection of sites to be recommended for inclusion, (i.e. included in the Local Plan), will be an iterative process. Initially, sites will be assessed through a primarily desk-based approach to identify the development potential of sites using information that the Council has researched and collated.

There are five stages to the site assessment:

Stage 1: Initial Site Identification

Stage 2: Sustainability Appraisal Stage

Stage 3: Compliance with New Local Plan Policies Stage

Stage 4: Deliverability of Sites Stage

Stage 5: Site Appraisal Conclusions and Recommendations

It is likely that this initial process will result in a list of 'reasonable alternatives' or provisional sites at Draft Local Plan stage. As the process progresses, further detailed studies (for example, in terms of transport, flood risk, landscape, historic environment, deliverability and viability issues) will help inform the final consideration of sites. This additional information will result in the assessments for relevant sites being refined to take account of the new information as the Local Plan progresses towards plan submission stage and examination.

Further sites may be submitted to the Council for consideration as potential allocations in the Local Plan in the future during the plan making process. However, there will need to be a cut-off point in order that the plan can be completed as soon as possible. The submitted sites will be assessed for inclusion in the Local Plan and included in future Local Plan consultations.

Stage 1 – Initial Site Identification
The site assessment process considers sites that are developable (or part developable where it meets the site size threshold below) as assessed through the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA). It includes sites:

- Submitted through the 'Call for Sites' (the most recent being January - April 2021)
- Previously included in the SLAA and / or Employment Land Review

- Additional sites promoted through Local Plan consultations and outside of official 'Call for Sites' exercises (sites will be included at the next point where an assessment can take place).

A developable site is one that is in a suitable location for housing, employment or other development and there is a reasonable prospect that the site is available and deliverable i.e. could be viably developed at the point envisaged within the plan period.

The SLAA uses the following site size thresholds:

- 0.2 hectares (or 5 dwellings) for housing sites.
- 0.25 hectares (or 500m² floorspace) for employment sites.

Stage 2 – Sustainability Appraisal

For each developable site, the sustainability appraisal considers a range of environmental, economic and social factors which reflect the objectives of the Sustainability Appraisal Framework.

For employment and retail sites, different factors are included to take account of specific elements for employment uses and the locational requirements of different economic sectors.

The following are the sustainability appraisal framework factors against which sites will be tested:

- Communities
- Health and wellbeing
- Economy and employment
- Equalities, diversity and social inclusion
- Transport, air quality and noise
- Climate change (adaptation and mitigation)
- Impact on biodiversity
- Land and water resources
- Landscape sensitivity
- Historic Environment
- Biodiversity and geodiversity
- Minerals and Waste
- Agricultural land classification
- Water protection
- Employment land
- Access to strategic transport routes
- Regeneration and brownfield site opportunities
- Access to public transport
- Access to community infrastructure

A summary of the Sustainability Appraisal for each site is included on the site assessment sheet. This will ensure that the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal and the site assessment process will inform the selection of the most appropriate sites for inclusion in the Local Plan.

Stage 3 – Compliance with New Local Plan Policies

The emerging Local Plan will propose a number of policies that give locational or other guidance in terms of housing, employment land or other development. These are used to filter out sites that do not comply with the policies.

The emerging Local Plan policies are to be refined throughout 2022/23, once developed sites are assessed against the policy compliance criteria. As an example, criteria are set out in Table 1, however this is not a closed list and will be further refined. The approach will be different depending on whether the site is being considered for housing, employment or retail uses. This section will need to be updated once these policy areas are finalised. For example, a reassessment of the settlement hierarchy may impact on the site assessments.

Table 1 – Consistency with Emerging Strategy

Criteria	Comment
What is the site's position in the emerging settlement hierarchy?	Identifies whether the site is within or adjoining a settlement and where this aligns with the Local Plan Settlement Hierarchy, e.g main settlement or village.
Areas of Protection:	Is the site in Green Belt, Countryside Protection Zone or Open Countryside. Identifies whether the site is located in an area of land currently designated.
Flood risk:	Is the site affected by Flood Zone 2 or 3? Yes / No, and a statement of the percentage of site within Flood Zone 3 based on Environment Agency data.

Stage 4 – Deliverability of Sites

This stage considers whether or not the site is deliverable and the timescales and phasing of delivery. This includes consideration of:

- Land ownership
- Access to the road network
- Key infrastructure requirements and capacity issues
- Lead-in times, delivery rates and market capacity
- Barriers to delivery
- Delivery approaches
- Dwelling or floorspace capacity taking into account constraints and other relevant factors (that is likely to be delivered during the Plan period)

Stage 5 – Site Appraisal Conclusions and Recommendations

The final stage of the process is to draw conclusions and to make recommendations about the suitability of the site for inclusion in the Draft Local Plan. These will be based on professional planning judgement and take account of:

- Sustainability Appraisal
- New Local Plan Policies
- National planning policies (e.g. NPPF)
- Deliverability of Sites
- Any other relevant factors

In practice, this is a complex and ongoing two (or more)-way process. The choice of any one site will depend on the availability and comparative merits of others in the locality. The number of allocations (or more specifically the amount of homes or employment provision they could provide) needed in any one settlement will be dependent on the quantum available in other settlements, the balance between existing settlements and new communities, the spatial distribution across the District, and how facilities and infrastructure upgrades can best be delivered. Thus, the spatial strategy will be developed based on the emerging quantum and qualities of the potential allocations, and vice-versa.

A site assessment sheet, as set out in Appendix 1, will be prepared for each potential site. The conclusions will set out whether or not a site is recommended for inclusion as a site allocation in the Draft Local Plan. It will also set out the main reasons to explain why a site is included or not, and the pros, cons, and considerations if site the site is developed and final conclusions.

A site specific policy will be included in the Plan for each site allocated, indicating the type and amount of development to be encouraged, together with any site or locality specific conditions to be met and considerations to be addressed.

The recommendation of potential allocations will then be included within the Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) to be consulted in Summer 2023. The justification and officer recommendation for the potential allocations will be considered by Local Plan Leadership Group and then Council in deciding the potential allocations within the Local Plan.

Appendix 1 – Site Assessment Form

Stage 1	Initial Site Identification
Criteria	**Comment**
Site reference	Site reference, taken from SLAA
Site Name (Parish)	Site address, taken from SLAA (parish in brackets)
Proposed use	Housing / Employment / Mixed Use/ Other use
Size in hectares (developable area and reason)	Size in ha (Developable area in ha, justification)
Size in dwellings (density, dwelling per hectare)	Number of dwellings (density as dwellings per hectare, e.g. 35dph based on the Council's evidence, taking account of site promoter's information.
Grid Reference	E Eastings N Northings
Current use (previously developed?)	Description of current use (Yes, No, Mixed)
Stage 2	**Sustainability Appraisal Summary**
Criteria	**Comment**
Positive Scores	Summary of positive scores taken from the Sustainability Appraisal
Negative Scores	Summary of negative scores taken from the Sustainability Appraisal
Stage 3	**Consistency with Emerging Strategy**
Criteria	**Comment**
What is the site's position in the emerging settlement hierarchy?	Refinement of the Settlement Hierarchy will determine the sites position in the settlement hierarchy.
Area of Protection is the site in Green Belt, Countryside Protection Zone or Countryside? Identifies whether the site is located in an area of land currently designated.	Yes (if so, state which) / No, information taken from Local Plan Policies Map 2005
Flood risk: is the site affected by Flood Zone 2 or 3?	Yes / No, and statement of percentage of site within Flood Zone 3 based on Environment Agency data, taken from SLAA
Stage 4	**Deliverability of Sites**
Criteria	**Comment**
Land ownership	Identification of who owns the site, presence of any covenants and land agreements. Informed by Call for Sites submissions and any required Land Registry/Site Survey responses.
Access to the road network	Does the site have access to the road network and are there significant concerns about access; informed

	by ECC Highways comments in SLAA and Site Survey's undertaken by officers.
Key infrastructure requirements and capacity issues	Identification of any key infrastructure requirements and whether there are infrastructure capacity issues in the vicinity
Lead-in times, delivery rates and market capacity	Estimated lead-in times and delivery rates provided by site promoters and Council assessment of achievability. Informed by Call for Sites submissions, Site Survey responses and Council data.
Barriers to delivery	Identification of any physical constraints to delivery or covenants. Informed by SLAA assessments and Site Survey responses.
Delivery approach	Who owns the site and how it could be developed. Informed by Call for Sites submissions and Site Survey responses.
Net dwelling (or floorspace) capacity within plan period	Information taken from SLAA and informed by site promoter's estimate, conclusions from above criteria based on previous completions data held by the Council.
Stage 5	**Conclusion and Recommendation**
Criteria	**Comment**
Positive Attributes	+ Summary of positive attributes +
Negative Attributes	- Summary of negative attributes and areas where further investigation is required -
Recommendation	Reasonable option that requires further assessment / not a reasonable option due to significant concerns about sustainability and / or deliverability.