

# Uttlesford Local Plan Spatial Strategy (including Garden Communities) Background Paper

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Uttlesford Local Plan (referred to hereafter as the Local Plan) responds to a national requirement that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) must set planning policies in a local authority area. Local plans must be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
- 1.2. Formulation of a development strategy requires a gradual process of testing and refinement, in an iterative way. The process starts with very high-level test assumptions and then gradually applies more evidence and more techniques to refine and amend strategy options, leading to one specific, chosen strategy.
- 1.3. The previous Uttlesford Local Plan was withdrawn in January 2015 following the Inspector's findings in December 2014. The principal concerns of the Inspector related to objectively assessed housing need (OAN) for the District and proposals for a major extension to the village of Elsenham. In addition, the Inspector raised concerns about the approach taken to the identification and appraisal of reasonable alternatives through the Sustainability Appraisal process.
- 1.4. In January 2015 the Council commenced the preparation of a new Local Plan. Since then the Council has followed a series of defined stages to reach the Pre-Submission stage. The Pre-Submission Local Plan, also known as the Regulation 19 Plan, has now been drafted for consideration by the Council's Cabinet for consultation. This Background Paper explains the approach that has been taken to the Spatial Strategy set out in the Regulation 19 Local Plan including the reasons for the selection of the Garden Communities. Each stage of the process followed, and the conclusions reached is summarised in this Paper. The Sustainability Appraisal is an iterative process in the development of the Spatial Strategy and the different stages of the Sustainability Appraisal and its conclusions are also incorporated into this Background Paper. Cross-references to the Local Plan evidence base are included where these are relevant.
- 1.5. For clarity this Background Paper will be published alongside the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Local Plan and will be submitted as part of the Submission documents to the Secretary of State for the independent Examination of the Local Plan.

## 2. National Planning Policy Context

### Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development

- 2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012) sets out guidance for local planning authorities and decision-takers both in drawing up plans and as a material consideration in determining applications. The NPPF states that a presumption in favour of sustainable development is a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking. Paragraph 14 of the NPPF states:

“For **plan-making** this means that:

- Local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area;
- Local plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change, unless:
  - Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
  - Specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted.”

- 2.2. The NPPF continues that all plans should be based upon and reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development, with clear policies that guide how the presumption should be applied locally. In relation specifically to the preparation of Local Plans the NPPF states that:

“Local Plans must be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. To this end, they should be consistent with the principles and policies set out in this Framework, including the presumption in favour of sustainable development.” (Paragraph 151)

- 2.3. Paragraph 152 of the NPPF continues:

“Local planning authorities should seek opportunities to achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across all three. Significant adverse impacts on any of these dimensions should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, measures to mitigate the impact should be considered. Where adequate mitigation measures are not possible, compensatory measures may be appropriate.”

### Tests of Soundness

2.4. The Local Plan will be examined by an independent inspector whose role is to assess whether the plan has been prepared in accordance with the duty to cooperate, legal and procedural requirements, and whether it is sound. There are four tests of soundness which are set out in Paragraph 182 of the NPPF as follows:

- **“Positively prepared** – the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- **Justified** – the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence;
- **Effective** – the plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities; and
- **Consistent with national policy** – the plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework.”

### Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

2.5. In accordance with Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 a local planning authority is required to carry out a sustainability appraisal of each of the proposals in a Local Plan during its preparation. Sustainability appraisals (SA) incorporate the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (commonly referred to as the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations) which implement the requirements of the European Directive 2001/42/EC (the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive) on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. Sustainability appraisal ensures that potential environmental effects are given full consideration alongside social and economic issues.

2.6. A sustainability appraisal is a systematic process that assesses the extent to which the emerging plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives. The SA is also a means of identifying and mitigating any potential adverse effects that the plan might otherwise have. By doing so, it can help make sure that the proposals in the plan are the most appropriate given the reasonable alternatives.

2.7. The SA process has the following five stages:

- Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope
- Stage B: Developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects
- Stage C: Prepare the sustainability appraisal report
- Stage D: Seek representations on the sustainability appraisal report from consultation bodies and the public
- Stage E: Post adoption reporting and monitoring

2.8. The key stages of Local Plan preparation and their relationship with the Sustainability Appraisal process are shown in Diagram 1 in Appendix 1 of this Background Paper.

2.9. The next section of this Background Paper sets out the Uttlesford Local Plan preparation stages and their relationship to the Sustainability Appraisal preparation stages.

### 3. The Uttlesford Local Plan Preparation Stages

3.1. The Uttlesford Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with the stages set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, as amended. These Regulations prescribe the form and content of plans and the procedure to be followed in their preparation. The Regulations set out the following statutory stages:

- Regulation 18 – Public Participation from Commencement to Proposed Submission
- Regulation 19 – Publication of the Proposed Submission Development Plan Document (also known as Pre-Submission Plan)
- Regulation 22 – Submission of the Development Plan Document
- Regulation 24 – Independent Examination of the Development Plan Document
- Regulation 25 – Publication of the Inspector’s Report
- Regulation 26 – Adoption of the Development Plan Document

3.2. The Local Plan has been the subject of a fully integrated Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment in line with the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004; the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; and the National Planning Policy Framework. The Council commissioned Place Services of Essex County Council to undertake an independent Sustainability Appraisal of the Local Plan throughout the key stages of Plan preparation. Place Services acted as consultants and the content of their SA work should not be interpreted or otherwise represented as the formal view of Essex County Council.

3.3. The specific stages of the Uttlesford Local Plan preparation process including the stages of the Sustainability Appraisal are set out below in chronological order.

- Commencement of the Uttlesford Local Plan – January 2015
- Call for Sites Exercise – April to June 2015
  - Over 300 submissions received which were considered in the Strategic Land Availability Assessment.
- Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology Consultation – 21 August to 2 October 2015

- Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report – September 2015
  - Sets the context and objectives of the Sustainability Appraisal, establishes the baseline and decides on the scope of the Environment Reports. The Scoping Report was subject to a five-week consultation in July 2015. A number of comments and recommendations were made, and the Scoping Report amended. The final version was published in September 2015
- Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios Sustainability Appraisal – September 2015
  - Sustainability Appraisal published to accompany the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation.
- Uttlesford Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation – 22 October – 4 December 2015
- Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology Finalised – December 2015
- Draft Strategic Land Availability Assessment Consultation – February 2016
- New Settlement(s) Option confirmed by Full Council – 21 March 2016
- Hybrid Strategy agreed by Full Council – 26 July 2016
- Strategic Land Availability Assessment published - July 2016
  - Responses received to the consultation in February 2016 were added to the site records and factual corrections made.
- Interim Appraisal of New Settlement Options – October 2016
- Interim Sustainability Appraisal – February 2017
 

In February 2017, a Sustainability Appraisal was provided to the Council for iterative purposes. This SA explored the progression of options explored in the Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios Plan consultation. It focused on appraising the following strategic elements of the Plan:

  - The appraisal of Housing Numbers for the Local Plan
  - The appraisal of New Settlement options
  - The appraisal of Housing Growth Scenarios

This work fed into the Plan making process and the findings were presented in the Sustainability Appraisal of the Regulation 18 Local Plan

- Identification & Assessment of Garden Community Reasonable Alternatives – December 2016 to April 2017
- Consideration of the Evidence Base and Preparation of Regulation 18 Local Plan – April to June 2017
- Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan Consultation – June – September 2017
- Sustainability Appraisal: Environmental Report of the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan – June 2017

## 4. Selection and Assessment of Development Strategy/ Scenarios

- 4.1. This section of the Background Paper explains the process and the conclusions reached for each stage of the preparation of the Local Plan in relation to the development of the spatial strategy including the reasons for the selection of the Garden Communities.

### **a) Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation**

- 4.2. In 2015 the District Council started work on a new Local Plan for the District, to guide development in the District to 2033. The first formal stage was the publication of an Issues and Options document for consultation.

- 4.3. Between 22 October and 4 December 2015, the District Council published the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document. The document set out a series of consultation questions:

- General Consultation Questions including questions about the vision and development strategy, settlement hierarchy, cross-boundary strategy planning, infrastructure planning, employment, housing tenure mix and affordability, leisure, recreation, and open space, and the natural and historic environment.
- Areas of Search Questions including questions about a range of locations which the Council was proposing to assess before reaching a view about the suitability of potential areas for development, as well as on the vision and development strategy. It also included a question about the sustainability appraisal of the areas of search.
- Scenarios Questions including questions about the overall level of development, and potential scenarios which illustrate different strategies for delivering development. It also included a question about the sustainability appraisal of the scenarios.

#### Settlement Hierarchy

- 4.4. In relation to the settlement hierarchy the Issues and Options document asked for views on the settlement hierarchy previously set out in the Local Plan submitted in 2014 which was Market Towns, Key Villages, Type A Villages and Type B Villages.

#### Areas of Search

- 4.5. At Planning Policy Working Group (13 July 2015), Members discussed five potential high-level criteria which could inform development of 'areas of search' or broad



spatial areas for further consideration and testing. These five assumptions were as follows:

- Potential to contribute to effective cross-boundary strategic planning priorities.
- Potential to minimise the need to travel by car, for example by locating residential development near to jobs, shops, leisure opportunities, and other facilities.
- Potential access to the strategic highways and rail network.
- Exclusion of areas with special protection, for example Registered Parks and Gardens and Sites of Specific Scientific Interest.
- Focus on key villages and “villages with a primary school and with some local services: e.g. village hall/pub/shop suitable for a scale of development that would reinforce its role as a local service centre” (known as Type A rural settlements in the 2014 submission Local Plan).

4.6. In relation to the Areas of Search, the Issues and Options document stated that as a first step towards identifying locations for development, a number of oval-shaped and coloured areas of search had been identified. It was stated that within the Areas of Search the Council will assess the potential for different types of development, including for housing and employment. The Areas of Search will gradually be narrowed down through a number of assessments.

4.7. The Issues and Options document noted that all local planning authorities are required to demonstrate that they have made every effort to meet their housing and other development needs in full, and that the Areas of Search are an important part of showing this has been done properly. It was stated that the majority of the areas shown on the maps will not be needed for development. Over the coming months technical studies on issues such as highways and flooding will be drawn up in relation to all these areas and this evidence will be reported to the public meetings of the Working Group. Consideration of which areas to take forward will be take place next year, and will need to be informed by the evidence base and national policy requirements.

4.8. The Issues and Options document also included reference to New Settlements. The document noted that in recent years the concept of Garden Cities had become popular. It was stated that those who support new settlements argue that they are more sustainable because they enable infrastructure to be planned in, and enable comprehensive masterplanning and design, including provision for landscaping and green infrastructure as well as provision of a range of facilities. They may also have the advantage of taking development pressure off otherwise constrained existing settlements.

4.9. The Issues and Options document also stated that the Council will assess the potential for new settlements in Uttlesford and emphasised that if the Council were to promote a new settlement as part of the Local Plan, robust evidence would be needed to

demonstrate that it could be delivered. A specific consultation question was included asking for views about the principle of a new settlement in providing for the future development needs of the District.

4.10. 16 potential broad Areas of Search were identified as follows:

**New Settlement Options**

- Area of Search 1: M11 Junction 9a – east
- Area of Search 2: M11 Junction 9b – west
- Area of Search 3: Elsenham area
- Area of Search 4: M11 Junction 8 – north-west
- Area of Search 5: M11 Junction 8 – south-east
- Area of Search 6: South of A120, North of Hatfield Forest
- Area of Search 7: North of A120, west of Great Dunmow
- Area of Search 8: South of A120
- Area of Search 9: West of Braintree

**Saffron Walden Options**

- Area of Search 10a – between Windmill Hill and Little Walden Road
- Area of Search 10b – between Little Walden Road and Ashdon Road
- Area of Search 10c – between Ashdon Road and Radwinter Road
- Area of Search 10d – between Radwinter Road and Thaxted Road
- Area of Search 10e – between Thaxted Road and Debden Road
- Area of Search 10f – between Debden Road and Newport Road
- Area of Search 10g – between Newport Road and Audley End Road

**Edge of Bishop’s Stortford (within Uttlesford District) Options**

- Area of Search 11a – between Stansted Road industrial estate in Bishop’s Stortford and the A120 town bypass
- Area of Search 11b – south of Beldams Lane in Bishop’s Stortford and north of the Sewage Treatment Works

**Great Dunmow Options**

- Area of Search 12a – between the A120/ Stortford Road/ Mill End
- Area of Search 12b – north of Great Dunmow to Church End
- Area of Search 12c – beyond St Edmunds Lane
- Area of Search 12d – between Braintree Road and the A120
- Area of Search 12e – south of Ongar Road and north of the A120
- Area of Search 12f – between the A120 and the B1256 Stortford Road

### **Villages Options**

- Area of Search 13: Key Villages (village extensions/ small sites) – Elsenham, Great Chesterford, Hatfield Heath, Newport, Stansted Mountfitchet, Takeley and Thaxted.
- Area of Search 14: Type 'A' Villages (small sites)

4.11. The Issues and Options document included Figure 1 – Areas of Search which showed all the Areas of Search and individual maps for Bishop's Stortford (Figure 2), Saffron Walden (Figure 3) and Great Dunmow (Figure 4) showing the options at each of these towns. Figures 1 – 4 are included at Appendix 2 of this Background Paper.

### Scenarios

4.12. In order to understand the implications of various different combinations of options, a number of scenarios were prepared and included in the Issues and Options document for comments. The scenarios were high-level at this stage as no assessment of the suitability of the areas of search had yet been undertaken. The scenarios were not the only possible combinations of options from amongst the areas of search but were limited in order to provide a focused and distinct set of alternatives, which were subject to sustainability appraisal.

### **Scenarios A to D (580 dwellings per year)**

4.13. The first set of scenarios was based on development of 580 dwellings per year which was based on the comments of the Uttlesford Local Plan Inspector in his report on the withdrawn) Submission Local Plan in December 2014. This number was also broadly consistent with the findings of recent technical work. Current or existing planning permissions granted for around 5,000 dwellings was common to all options. A windfall allowance<sup>1</sup> of 50 dwellings per year or 750 over 15 years was included in each scenario.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the Glossary in the National Planning Policy Framework, windfall means "Sites which have not been specifically identified as available in the Local Plan process. They normally comprise previously-developed sites that have unexpectedly become available."

**Table 1: Scenarios A to D (assuming District-wide provision of 580 per year or 8,700 over 15 years)**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Scenario A New Settlement</b>	<b>Scenario B Villages and Edge of Bishop's Stortford</b>	<b>Scenario C Towns</b>	<b>Scenario D Hybrid</b>
Existing planning permissions	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Windfall allowance	750	750	750	750
Edge of Bishop's Stortford	0	500	0	500
Great Dunmow	0	0	1,500	500
Saffron Walden	0	0	1,500	500
Key Villages	0	1,500	0	500
Type A Villages	0	1,000	0	500
New Settlement	3,000	0	0	500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,750</b>	<b>8,750</b>	<b>8,750</b>	<b>8,750</b>

*Scenario A: Focus on a new settlement (580 per year)*

- 4.14. For this scenario the Issues and Options document stated that all development focused on a single new settlement. The scale of the new settlement could ultimately reach 10,000 or more dwellings. However, applying reasonable assumptions of construction rates at around 300 dwellings per year, 3,000 dwellings could be completed by 2033, with the remainder of construction in the next 15 year plan period.

*Scenario B: Focus on Villages and the edge of Bishop's Stortford (580 per year)*

- 4.15. For this scenario the Issues and Options document stated that one possible method of distributing development amongst the villages would be to direct a higher level of development to the seven key villages and a lower level of development to the 20 'Type A' villages. This scenario also included about 500 dwellings at Bishop's Stortford but in Uttlesford District subject to assessment.

*Scenario C: Focus on Towns (580 per year)*

- 4.16. Under this scenario the Issues and Options document stated that the towns of Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow are the main centres of population and services in the district. Both towns have accommodated considerable levels of development in recent years and there are existing planning permissions for significant amounts of further development. It was also stated that careful consideration would need to be given to the character and setting of the towns, and also the capacity to expand existing services and facilities, such as schools and GP provision.

*Scenario D: Hybrid Option 1 (580 per year)*

- 4.17. Under this option development would be spread between towns and villages, as well as an assumption that a start could be made on delivery of housing at a new settlement towards the end of the plan period, with the majority of construction taking place after 2033. It was stated that this scenario may be considered reasonable if assessment of a new settlement show that there is no realistic prospect of early delivery.

**Scenarios E to G (750 dwellings per year)**

- 4.18. The second set of scenarios was based on development of 750 dwellings per year. It was considered that the Council needed to consider a higher level of development in order to test the implications for sustainable development. It was unknown at the time if the District needed to accommodate a higher level of growth or what that level might be. It was considered that a figure of 750 dwellings was a reasonable assumption for testing at the Issues and Options stage. The same common assumptions relating to current or existing planning permissions and the windfall allowance were applied to scenarios E to G as scenarios A to D.

**Table 2: Scenarios E to G (assuming 750 dwellings per year or 11,250 over 15 years)**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Scenario E Two New Settlements</b>	<b>Scenario F Towns and Villages</b>	<b>Scenario G Hybrid 2</b>
Existing planning permissions	5,000	5,000	5,000
Windfall allowance (50 per year)	750	750	750
Edge of Bishop's Stortford	0	500	500
Great Dunmow	0	1,500	1,000
Saffron Walden	0	1,500	1,000
Key Villages	0	1,500	1,000
Type A Villages	0	1,000	1,000
New Settlements	6,000	0	1,500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,750</b>	<b>11,750</b>	<b>11,750</b>

### Responses to the Issues and Options Consultation

- 4.19. In total 6,944 representations were received from 731 individuals and organisations to the Issues and Options consultation document. A summary of the representations received was considered by the Planning Policy Working Group at its meetings on 23 February 2016 and 23 March 2016. The representations received were used to inform the development of the preferred options which were set out in the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan.

### **b) Uttlesford Local Plan Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios Sustainability Appraisal – September 2015**

- 4.20. A Sustainability Appraisal of the Areas of Search and Scenarios<sup>2</sup> was carried out in September 2015 and published at the same time as the Issues and Options consultation document between October and December 2015. The Areas of Search and Scenarios were subject to Sustainability Appraisal in order to identify constraints, opportunities and to assist in the development of any additional, sustainable hybrid scenarios.
- 4.21. The appraisal was strategic in nature and scope. It was noted in the SA Environmental Report that it was not possible to appraise such broad areas and high-level scenarios in any more detail as specific site boundaries and the amount of development (i.e. housing numbers) in each broad location had not yet been determined. The appraisal of the 'areas of search' and scenarios take the form of a narrative exploring the sustainability of each and factoring in relevant opportunities and existing constraints to overcome in accordance with the general notion of the 15 identified Sustainability Objectives. Different areas and scenarios were as such only broadly comparable on the basis of their differences rather than each's respective suitability. A summary of the broad sustainability impacts for each of the areas of search and the scenarios is set out in the SA Environmental Report. The SA also included a section setting out conclusions and recommendations. These are summarised below.
- 4.22. Areas of Search
- Focusing development to one or more new settlements is likely to have comparatively less constraints than extensions of existing settlements and villages, or perhaps more specifically, new settlements have better scope to mitigate negative impacts on site. Less of a threat of secondary and cumulative impacts on existing settlements where multiple extensions to existing settlements may be required to meet housing targets.

---

<sup>2</sup> Essex Place Services - Uttlesford Local Plan Areas of Search (AoS) and Strategic Scenarios Consultation – Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment: Environmental Report (September 2015)

- Likely that capacity for expansion exists in the surrounding areas of each of the towns and such a focus, if proportionate to the existing settlement and in mind of identified constraints, would contribute to meeting the existing and identified housing needs of the District. This will be particularly important in the earlier stages of the plan period.
- Development of the Key Villages and Type A Villages will also meet this need, again if proportionate to each settlement and in mind of each's specific constraints. A number of villages contain rail links and this benefit, in a District that is not particularly well served by strategic roads or public transport due to its rural nature enhances the sustainability of development in these settlements pending other considerations. The development of one or more new settlements would contribute to meeting future needs, again in consideration of known constraints in specific areas; broadly summarised as predominantly transport implications and suitable access to the strategic road network. Should suitable additional junctions or access to these strategic roads be forthcoming, development of the surrounding villages may become more sustainable in turn. This would similarly be the case for any new rail infrastructure in the District.

#### 4.23. Strategic Scenarios

- The appraisals of the scenarios in this report highlight that no single scenario can be guaranteed to meet the current identified and future needs of the District in a wholly sustainable manner. It should be acknowledged that a large amount of potentially adverse environmental impacts are more accurately a result of the growth targets over the plan period, and that any forthcoming options should be developed that seek to minimise these where possible and also seek to maximise benefits.
- It is recommended that a suitable balance is sought between meeting existing needs in the District as well as future needs. This relates not only to an element of dispersal across the District, but also in exploring new settlement options in a way that could meet annual housing delivery rates in the latter stages of the plan period. The principle of a new settlement can be seen to be a positive one regarding a number of sustainability objectives and it may be possible to turn constraints into positive impacts through effective masterplans and a spatial strategy that is advanced with awareness of these opportunities.
- It is felt that the scenarios explored at this stage cover all reasonable options regarding the broad distribution of growth in the District. The sustainability implications of focusing development in any one tier of the settlement hierarchy, including one or more new settlements, have been explored fully within this sustainability appraisal. More refined distribution in any forthcoming spatial strategy will have been influenced by this sustainability appraisal and in response

to the highlighted impacts of directing growth to all reasonable broad locations in the District.

#### 4.24. Areas for Further Action

- At the time the below areas for further action were identified.
- Once the District Council receives the forthcoming Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for the wider housing market area, it can look at developing the strategic scenarios into more defined spatial strategy options. In line with the assessment of each broad area of search and strategic scenario as presented in this report, the Council should look to develop options that seek to maximise sustainability benefits. A number of high level constraints have also been identified, and these can be used to determine the suitability of sites in specific areas or highlight issues to overcome through proposals, and / or in any policy criteria.
- This Sustainability Appraisal concludes that a larger number of constraints can be expected within existing settlements, and that benefits are comparatively maximised in new settlement options, depending on specific location. Specific sites within the Areas of Search should be identified and assessed in line with garden settlement principles to maximise these benefits and in consideration of any wider sustainability gains they may offer. It is important that a more detailed and comparable level of evidence is collected for the assessment of any specific sites put forward in preferred areas.
- The assessment in this Sustainability Appraisal has been done at a very high level commensurate to the detail of the areas of search and strategic scenarios. The level of constraints explored has been consistent across all new settlement options, extensions to the Districts towns, and also in and around the District's villages. Similarly, the opportunities explored have been consistent. This Sustainability Appraisal identifies that, in order for housing delivery to meet existing and future needs (within the latter stages of the plan period and beyond), it is likely that some level of dispersal will be required. With this in mind it is important that the District develops a more detailed evidence base surrounding additional constraints at the local level, for the more detailed assessment of smaller scale options in subsequent iterations of the Local Plan.

### **c) New Settlement Option Confirmed – March 2016**

- 4.25. On 21 March 2016 Full Council confirmed that a new settlement (or new settlements) should continue to be investigated and analysed alongside all other possible options for housing and employment distribution and should not be dismissed at this stage from the potential options for inclusion in the Local Plan. The report provided an initial



justification for promoting the option of a new settlement or settlements in the draft Local Plan. It set out the background to new settlements, including reference to their advantages and disadvantages and the history of proposals in Uttlesford, specifically in relation to the withdrawn Local Plan.

- 4.26. The report noted that there are advantages and disadvantages associated with new settlements. The advantages were noted as including a comprehensive and cohesive strategic infrastructure package; a critical mass that will deliver social and community facilities; less drain on existing infrastructure; design coding etc. It was also stated that they can also form part of a longer term vision for the area beyond the lifetime of the current Plan and enable 'difficult' decisions to be made once.
- 4.27. It was considered that in the Uttlesford context opting to expand existing settlements could lead to a greater number of negative socio-economic and environmental impacts and highlights a difficulty of mitigating against these negative impacts. Development of a new settlement alleviates this issue as it allows facilities and infrastructure to be appropriately designed into the development plan from concept e.g. secondary education.
- 4.28. The disadvantages were stated as high upfront infrastructure costs which can affect initial viability and long lead it times and therefore a slower housing delivery rate. Deliverability is a major issue, given that effectiveness is one of the key soundness tests for the Local Plan. Further issues include the difficulties in achieving transport connectivity and genuine self- containment.
- 4.29. New settlements need to be of sufficient size to support the required range of social and physical infrastructure. In their comments to the Issues and Options consultation Essex County Council note that any new settlement would require its own secondary school as part of the provision. This would require a minimum of some 5,000 houses/flats to support this provision. Any new settlement(s) would therefore likely be in the range of 5,000 – 10,000 homes which would be developed over a 20 – 25 year period.
- 4.30. It was noted in the report that (at that time) the Council's objectively assessed housing need was 568 dwellings per annum. Taking into account existing commitments the Council would need to allocate over 4,500 dwellings during the lifetime of the Plan until 2033. The report stated that housing completions in the early stages of the development of new settlements are as low as 50 or fewer and it may be some years before significant supply comes on stream, probably up to 200 per year. This means that some 2,000 of the homes could be expected to be built within the plan period.

## d) Hybrid Strategy Agreed – July 2016

- 4.31. On 26 July 2016 Full Council considered the potential distribution strategies for the Local Plan as the basis for allocations in the Plan.
- 4.32. The Issues and Options consultation included seven different development scenarios. As there was some duplication of scenarios at the Issues and Options stage (i.e. the two options of new settlement or settlements and a hybrid were used for the lower and higher housing figure) for the purposes of analysing the evidence base this was simplified to five. The five scenarios were:
- 1) All development allocated in new settlement(s)
  - 2) All development pepper potted in villages
  - 3) All development in the two main towns (Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow)
  - 4) Combination of development in main towns and villages
  - 5) Hybrid involving new settlement(s), main towns and villages
- 4.33. The Council report noted that the Council needed to decide in principle the overall distribution strategy for the Plan. The Issues and Options consultation proposed seven distribution scenarios which were subject to detailed analysis by consultees. Officers had considered how the distribution scenarios could deliver the 4,600 dwellings that it was considered (at that time) were required and this was summarised in the Appendix to the Council report. The Appendix also set out a summary of the Issues and Options consultation responses and the Sustainability Appraisal summary for each scenario. The report also noted that a cross-party Member workshop had been held on 28 June 2016 which had considered the overall benefits and risk of the scenarios. These benefits and risks were summarised in the table below.

**Table 3: Five Development Scenarios**

<p><b>1) All development allocated in new settlement(s)</b>  <b>Conclusion - not a sound distribution strategy</b></p>	
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensively plan the provision of infrastructure</li> <li>• Critical mass to provide additional infrastructure</li> <li>• Reduces development pressure on the historic settlements</li> </ul>	<p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relying on only 1 or 2 large sites to deliver the housing</li> <li>• Deliverability within the Plan period</li> <li>• Deprives other settlements of sustainable growth</li> <li>• Negative impact on 5 year land supply</li> </ul>
<p><b>2) All development pepper potted in villages</b>  <b>Conclusion - not a sound distribution strategy</b></p>	
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustains village vitality</li> </ul>	<p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scale of development is likely to have a detrimental impact on their character, the countryside and the</li> </ul>

	<p>highway network in many circumstances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncertainty that the scale of individual developments would provide the infrastructure required - Infrastructure deficit</li> </ul>
<p><b>3) All development in the two main towns (Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow)</b>  <b>Conclusion - not a sound distribution strategy</b></p>	
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally sustainable locations for development</li> <li>• Supports existing services and facilities</li> <li>• Help improve infrastructure deficit</li> </ul>	<p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant impact on their historic character and landscape setting</li> <li>• Restriction of the pooling of S106 for infrastructure.</li> <li>• Insufficient deliverable sites</li> </ul>
<p><b>4) Combination of development in main towns and villages</b>  <b>Conclusion – potentially a sound option but not recommended</b></p>	
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towns are generally sustainable locations for development,</li> <li>• Sustains village vitality and diversity</li> </ul>	<p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some villages are more constrained than others – could result in disproportionate growth</li> <li>• Uncertainty that the scale of individual developments would provide the infrastructure required - Infrastructure deficit</li> </ul>
<p><b>5) Hybrid involving new settlement(s), main towns and villages</b>  <b>Conclusion – Preferred distribution strategy</b></p>	
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towns are generally sustainable locations for development,</li> <li>• Provides an opportunity for some growth to sustain village vitality in the most sustainable locations</li> <li>• New settlements allows us to provide for the highest level of infrastructure demands and comprehensively meet development needs</li> <li>• Reduces development pressure on the historic settlements</li> <li>• Helps to maintain a 5 year supply of housing</li> <li>• It can lessen the impact on the highway network</li> </ul>	<p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to scenarios 1-4 but to a lesser degree</li> <li>• Loss of countryside</li> <li>• Development may have detrimental impact on historic character of existing settlements</li> </ul>

- 4.34. It was agreed by Full Council that that the preferred strategy for the Local Plan should be Scenario 5 - the Hybrid Distribution Strategy – New Settlement(s), Main Towns and Villages.

### **e) Interim Appraisal of New Settlement Options – October 2016**

- 4.35. As part of the iterative process of SA and plan-making, Place Services provided the Council with an interim non-statutory Sustainability Appraisal of new settlement options that were submitted to the Council as part of the Local Plan's call-for-sites exercise. This SA individually appraised all those large, strategic sites that were submitted in order to assist the Council in their site selection process ahead of the Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation. It should be noted that this Interim Sustainability Appraisal was not subject to formal consultation.
- 4.36. The Interim Appraisal of New Settlement Options represented a necessary stage of appraisal and options assessment between the Areas of Search and Strategic Scenarios 2015 Local Plan and the Regulation 18 stage Plan and consultation. This SA looked at the sustainability effects of development within specific areas of land as they were submitted, and whether they were suitable in line with Garden City Principles using a sustainability framework developed relevant to proposals of such a scale.
- 4.37. Seven potential new settlement sites were submitted by promoters under the call for sites and these were all subject to assessment within the Interim Sustainability Appraisal. These were at (with SHLAA reference number):
- Easton Park (06LtEas15)
  - Great Chesterford (10Gte15)
  - West of Braintree (05Ste15 & 06Ste15)
  - Takeley (13Tak15 & 11Tak15)
  - Elsenham (07Els15)
  - Birchanger (05Bir15)
  - Chelmer Mead (03LtDun14)
- 4.38. As explained in Appendix 1: Spatial Strategy Options Assessment of the Sustainability Appraisal of the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan, the assessment of New Garden Settlement Options had explored 7 potential locations for development up until this stage in the plan preparation process. Upon review of the Interim Appraisal of New Settlement Options (2016) and associated evidence, two of the locations were not considered for further testing. These were Elsenham and Birchanger. The reasons were stated as follows:

- 4.39. **Elsenham** – Following the previous conclusions of the Inspector for the Withdrawn 2014 Uttlesford Local Plan and the recently dismissed Planning Appeal upon a portion of the site. Constraints to be overcome as part of a strategy to achieve sustainable development appear insurmountable within the plan period and the site does not warrant assessment beyond appraisal of the site-specific significant effects already explored.
- 4.40. **Birchanger** – The site is located within the Green Belt and would require separate conclusions on the ability of the Council to demonstrate exceptional circumstances. The strategic implications for development in this location are broadly assessed within the context of the voluntary Sustainability Appraisal process for the Housing Market Area. Discussion with Officers has indicated the scale of delivery in the first instance would comprise a potential ‘village extension’ of c.800 units, which is inconsistent with the functions of a ‘new settlement’ within the preferred ‘hybrid’ strategy. The site does not warrant assessment beyond appraisal of the site-specific significant effects already explored but this is without prejudice of the ability to revisit the site for different scales of growth.
- 4.41. This left five options- Great Chesterford, Easton Park, West of Braintree, Takeley and Chelmer Mead for which the following indicative details were adopted:

<b>‘Reasonable’ New Settlement</b>	<b>Best Case – All New Settlements</b>	<b>Alternative Case – c.50% Scenario</b>	<b>Total Site Capacity – Submitted Details</b>
	<b>What is the best case in terms of potential new settlements taking into consideration the known site constraints? ( ) = scenario ID</b>	<b>Assumes delivery of a lower proportion of the “Best Case” total for the site ( ) = scenario ID</b>	
1. Great Chesterford	2,250 (1a)	1,125 (1b)	5,000
2. Easton Park	2,300 (2a)	1,150 (2b)	10,000
3. West of Braintree	600 (3a)	N/A	12,000
4. Takeley	1,700 (4a)	850 (4b)	1,700
5. Chelmer Mead	2,700* (5a)	1,500 (5b)	2,700

## **f) Identification and Assessment of Garden Community Reasonable Alternatives – December 2016 to April 2017**

- 4.42. In order to identify suitable combinations of identified New Settlement sites it was necessary to identify scenarios for testing. In December 2016 eleven scenarios were identified to test the housing quanta option of 14,100, which represented the objectively assessed need (OAN) for the District at that time. A twelfth scenario was included that did not meet the OAN. This scenario was included within the SA for comparison purposes but it was not considered a 'reasonable alternative'. Another scenario (Option 5) was removed from consideration due to viability concerns surrounding any scenario that explored less than the fill proposal at Great Chesterford. As a result, the options below are referenced 1-4 and 6-13 in the table below, which is taken from the Sustainability Appraisal. These scenarios were subjected to sustainability appraisal in January 2017. Appendix 1: Spatial Strategy Options Assessment in the Regulation 18 Sustainability Appraisal sets out the Appraisal of the Garden Community Options in full (pages 225 – 232).

**Table 87 in Appendix 1 of the Sustainability Appraisal of the Regulation 18 Local Plan sets out the 12 scenarios.**

<b>Option/ Combination</b>	<b>Site A</b>	<b>Site B</b>	<b>Site C</b>	<b>Total (including 'constant' components (9,854))</b>
Option 1	1a – Great Chesterford (2,500)	2a – Easton Park (2,300)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	5,400 (15,254)
Option 2	1a – Great Chesterford (2,500)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	4a – Takeley (1,700)	4,800 (14,654)
Option 3	1a – Great Chesterford (2,500)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	5a – Chelmer Mead (2,700)	5,800 (15,654)
Option 4	1a – Great Chesterford (2,500)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	5b – Chelmer Mead (1,500)	4,600 (14,454)
Option 6	2a – Easton Park (2,300)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	4a – Takeley (1,700)	4,600 (14,454)
Option 7	2a – Easton Park (2,300)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	5a – Chelmer Mead (2,700)	5,600 (15,454)
Option 8	2a – Easton Park (2,300)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	5b – Chelmer Mead (1,500)	4,400 (14,254)
Option 9	2b – Easton Park (1,500)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	5a – Chelmer Mead (2,700)	4,450 (14,304)
Option 10	3a - West of Braintree (600)	4a – Takeley (1,700)	5a – Chelmer Mead (2,700)	5,000 (14,854)
Option 11	3a - West of Braintree (600)	4b – Takeley (850)	5a – Chelmer Mead (2,700)	4,150 (14,004)
Option 12	1a – Great Chesterford (2,500)	2b – Easton Park (1,150)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	4,250 (14,104)
Option 13	1a – Great Chesterford (2,500)	3a - West of Braintree (600)	4b – Takeley (850)	3,950 (13,804)

4.43. In February 2017 a workshop was held with members of the Planning Policy Working Group to brief them on the Interim appraisal of New Settlement Options and the appraisal of the above Settlement/ Garden Community reasonable alternatives in January 2017. The content of the workshop was summarised in a Topic Paper – Identification of Reasonable Alternatives for the Uttlesford Local Plan 2011-2033 that was considered by the Planning Policy Working Group on 6 April 2017. It was noted at the workshop that it was considered that there were very few options for only two

new settlements as the delivery rates required would present a significant challenge. Failure to meet these delivery rates could place additional pressure on the other, existing towns and villages in the district. Consequently, it was considered that it was necessary to consider combinations of three new settlements. This was considered to provide for the housing need whilst provision realistic assumptions for housing delivery. Three new settlements were considered to provide contingency and flexibility in terms of start dates and delivery rates. It was also noted at the workshop that the evidence base for the Local Plan provided limited grounds to increase allocations elsewhere, in particular at the other towns and villages. It was agreed at the workshop that it would be helpful to receive presentations from each of the new settlement site promoters to inform further consideration of the reasonable alternatives. Subsequently Developer Presentation Evenings were held for each site in March 2017.

## **g) Consideration of the Evidence Base and Preparation of the Regulation 18 Local Plan – April to June 2017**

### Local Plan Evidence Studies

4.44. The Uttlesford Local Plan preparation process includes the preparation of an extensive evidence base including a number of technical studies. These studies have informed the development of the Spatial Strategy and in particular the consideration of sites, both new settlement/ Garden Communities and site allocations. It is not possible to summarise the content of all of these studies in this Background Paper. However, of particular relevance to this Background Paper are the following:

- Strategic Land Availability Assessment (Uttlesford District Council, July 2016)
- Uttlesford Local Plan Transport Study and Addendum (WYG, December 2016 and June 2017)
- New Settlement Proposals: Landscape and Visual Impact (Uttlesford District Council, May 2017)
- Land at Easton Park – Landscape and Visual Appraisal (Chris Blandford Associates, June 2017)
- Land at North Uttlesford – Landscape and Visual Appraisal Chris Blandford Associates, June 2017)
- Land West of Braintree – Landscape and Visual Appraisal (Chris Blandford Associates, June 2017)
- Ecological Sites on and adjacent to New Settlement/ Neighbourhood proposals (Uttlesford District Council, May 2017)
- Brief Heritage Impact Assessments – Easton Park, Great Chesterford, Andrewsfield/ West of Braintree, Chelmer Mead, Priors Green at Takeley, Land North of Elsenham (Uttlesford District Council, 2017)



- Countryside Protection Zone Study (LUC, June 2016)
- Uttlesford Green Belt Review (Arup, March 2016)
- Employment Land Review Update (AECOM, May 2017)
- District Retail Study (Savills, July 2016)
- Uttlesford Water Cycle Study (Arcadis, January 2017)
- Hierarchy of Rural Settlements (Uttlesford District Council, September 2014)
- New Settlement Promoters Developers Presentations Evenings (March 2017)
- Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan including workshops with service providers (Troy Planning & Design, May 2017)
- Large Sites Delivery Rates review of published evidence including Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners – Start to Finish: How Quickly do Large-Scale Housing Sites Delivery (November 2016), and Homes & Communities Agency (ATLAS) – Notes on Build Rates from Strategic Sites (July 2013)

4.45. Between April and June 2017 Council officers carefully reviewed the evidence base for the Local Plan, the representations received to the Issues and Options consultation, the Sustainability Appraisal findings for the Issues and Options stage, the interim Sustainability Appraisals for the New Settlements and Site Allocations, and the Sustainability Appraisal findings for the Garden Communities Reasonable Alternatives. The criteria considered in determining the Garden Communities and Site Allocations to be recommended to Members for inclusion in the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan were as follows:

- Planning Constraints including physical limitations/ impacts and statutory designations
- Highway Access and Availability of Sustainable Forms of Transport
- Access to Services and Facilities
- Relationship to Existing Development/ Settlements
- Opportunities for Improvements/ Benefits, particularly infrastructure
- Scale of Development
- Delivery Rates and Existing Value Areas/ Markets

4.46. At the same time the Regulation 18 Local Plan was itself drafted and presented to Full Council on 11 July 2017 for approval for public consultation. Public consultation on the Regulation 18 Local Plan took place between 12 July and 4 September 2017.

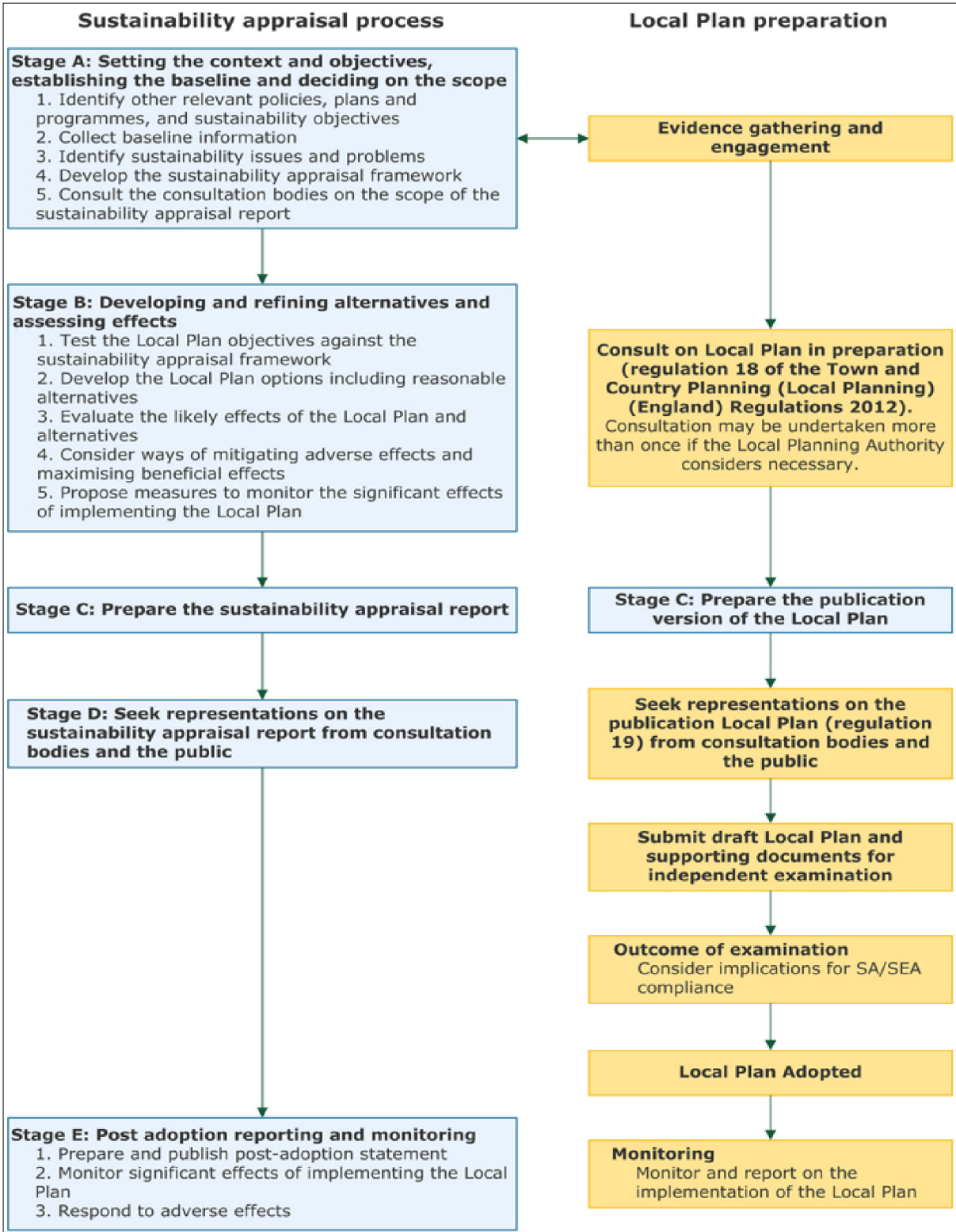
## **h) Regulation 18 Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal**

4.47. The Sustainability Appraisal of the Regulation 18 Local Plan contains a full appraisal of all the policies and allocations in the Regulation 18 Plan. It also sets out full details of the Sustainability Appraisal process and the different stages of appraisal undertaken as set out in this Background Paper.

- 4.48. Chapter 8 of the Sustainability Appraisal of the Regulation 18 Local Plan sets out the Comparative Options Appraisal of the New Garden Communities. The full findings of this appraisal can be found at Table 86 in the Regulation 18 Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal. Appendix 1 of the Regulation 18 Local Plan sets out the Spatial Strategy Options Assessment, i.e. the Garden Communities.
- 4.49. Appendix 2 of the Sustainability Appraisal of the Regulation 18 Local Plan sets out the appraisals of the site allocations proposed in the Regulation 18 Plan and the reasonable alternatives. The SA considered all the sites identified in the Council's Strategic Land Availability Assessment except for those sites that were considered not be reasonable alternatives in accordance with the following criteria (see Appendix 2 of the SA for further details):
- The position of the settlement within the Settlement Hierarchy. Housing sites within or adjoining settlements that do not fall within the District's Towns, Key Villages or Type A-B Villages (the Countryside as defined within the Plan) were not considered.
  - The yield or size of the site is too small to allocate in a strategic Plan (these sites can be considered more of a Development Management / Control matter). The threshold was set at under 10 dwellings. These sites are classified as windfall sites within the Plan, and have not been identified for specific allocation. Therefore, they were not considered within this SA.
  - Sites that have been identified as unsuitable, unachievable or undeliverable / undevelopable in the SHLAA. These can not be considered reasonable options for allocation.
- 4.50. The full findings of the appraisal of the Site Allocations and Alternative Sites can be found on Pages 235 – 357 of the Regulation 18 Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal.

## Appendix 1

Diagram 1 – Key Stages of Local Plan Preparation and their relationship with the Sustainability Appraisal process (Source: Planning Practice Guidance)



# Appendix 2

## Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation Document, October 2015 - Areas of Search Maps

Figure 1

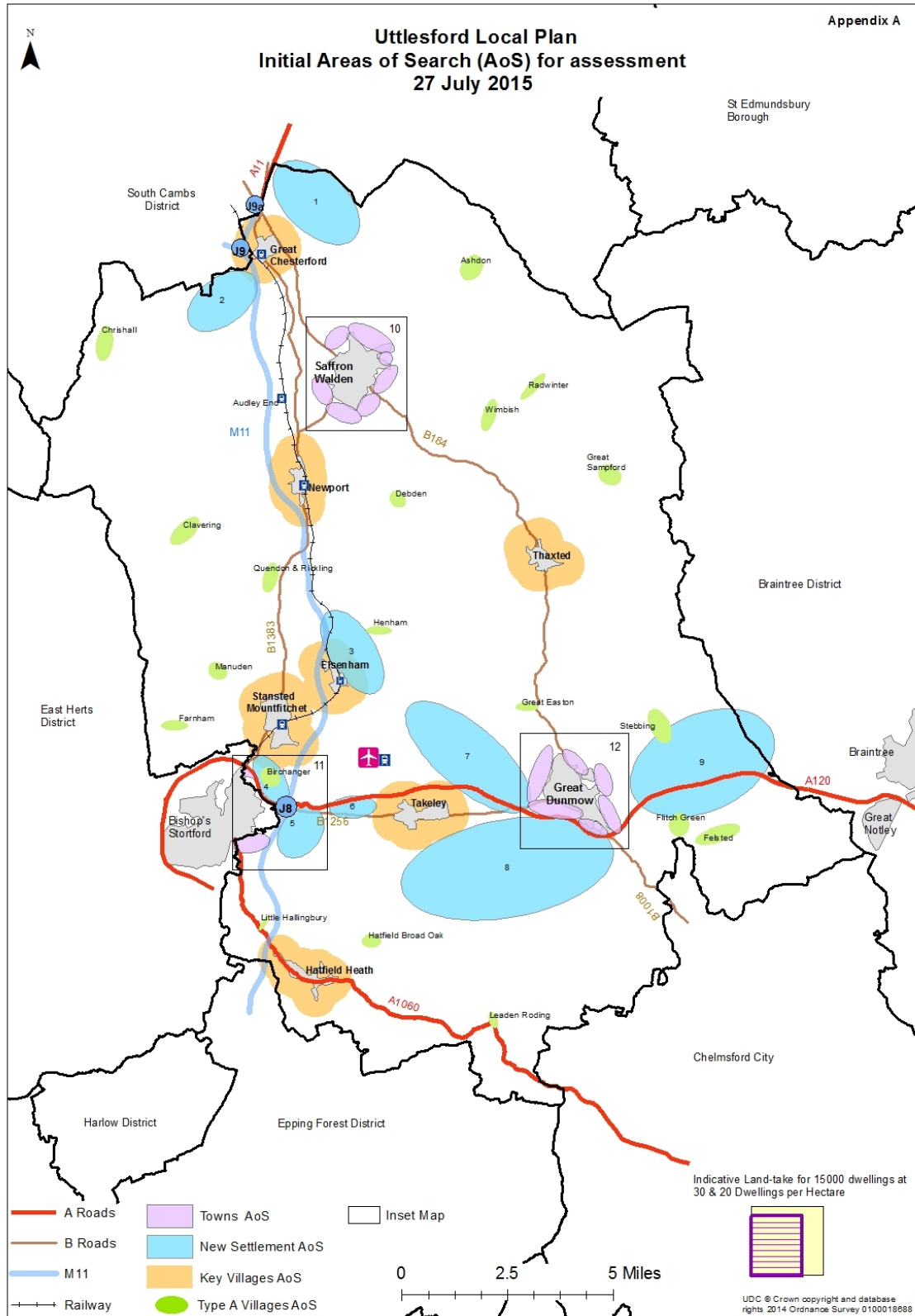


Figure 2

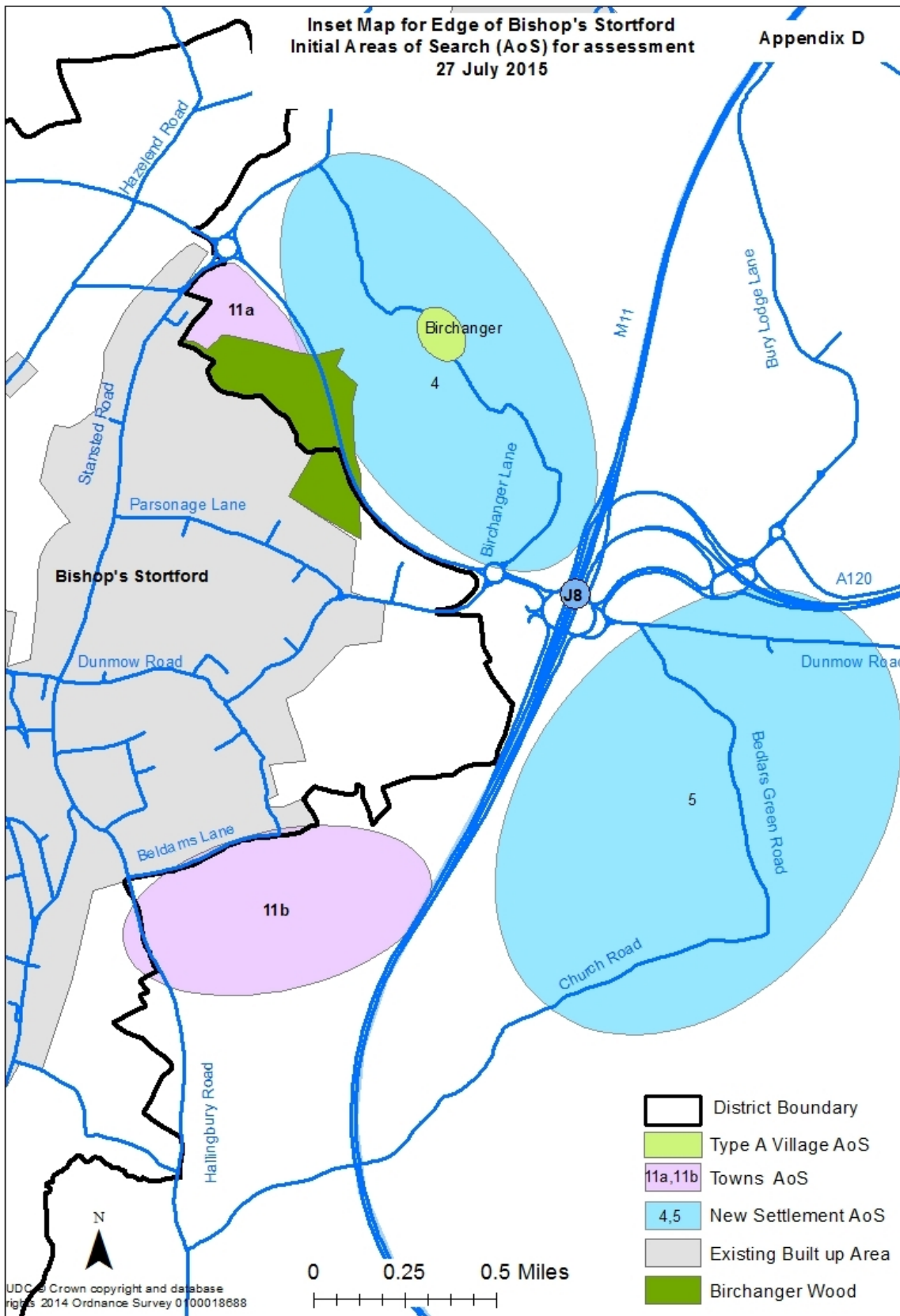


Figure 3

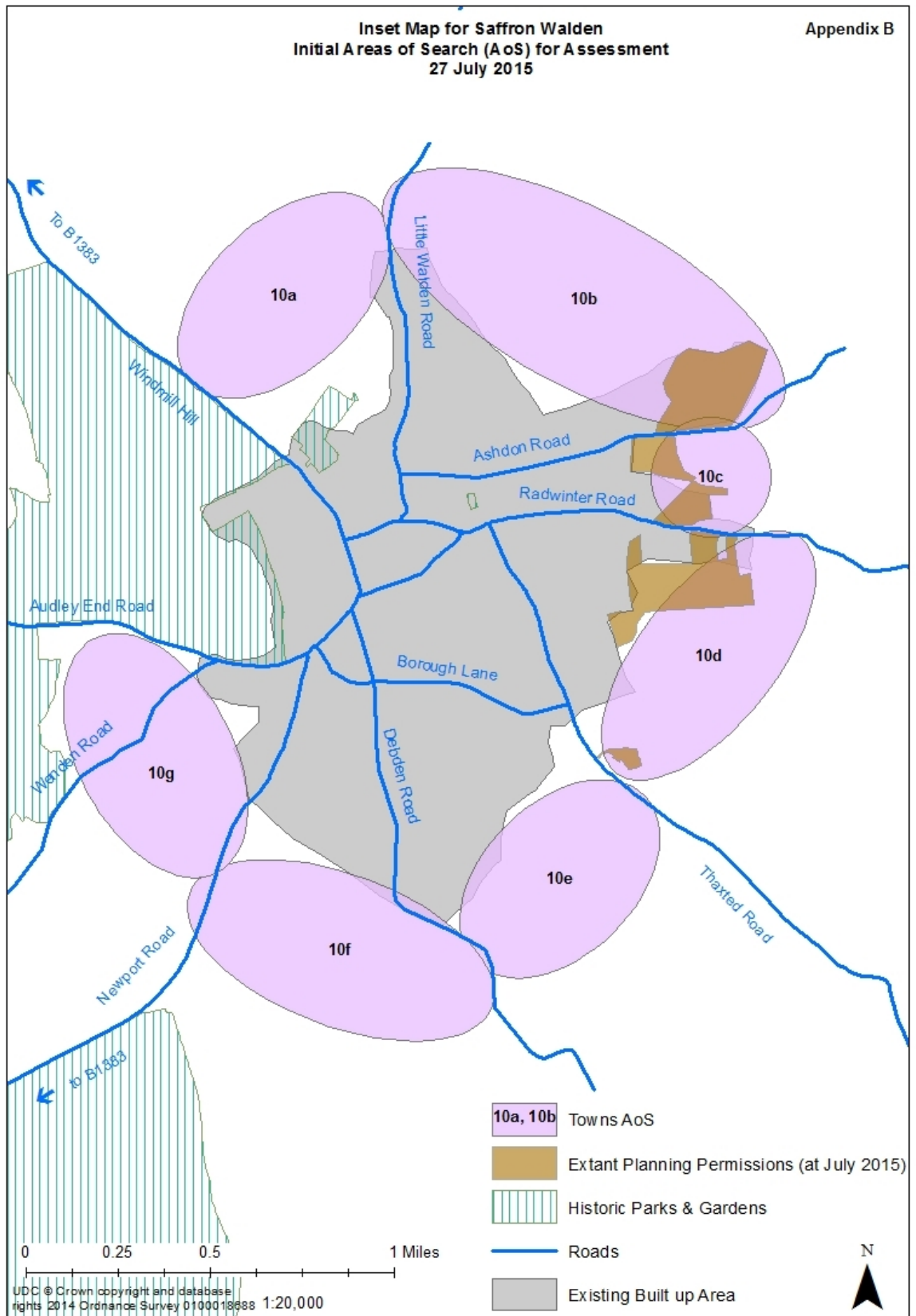




Figure 4

