

Draft Methodology for the Northampton Land Availability Assessment (2016)

1 Introduction

The Northampton Land Availability Assessment (LAA) will identify a future supply of land which is suitable, available and achievable for housing and other uses over the plan period covered by the Local Plan (Part 2). This assessment is being carried out to provide evidence for the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2). The Local Plan (Part 2) will set out policies for development within Northampton and identify land for development for the provision of housing, jobs and other uses.

National planning guidance on producing Land Availability Assessments is provided in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) which accompanies the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Section 14 of the PPG relates to Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment.

<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/>

This guidance sets out a five stage methodology which is based on identifying sites and broad locations with potential for development, assessing their development potential and assessing their suitability for development and the likelihood that they will come forward. However, the LAA does not in itself determine whether a site should be allocated for development within the Local Plan.

The most recent Northampton LAA (at that time known as a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment or SHLAA) was published in 2009 with an update published in 2012.

The PPG recommends that the LAA should be regularly reviewed, with the involvement of developers, landowners, site promoters, agents and others. An updated LAA will provide more up-to-date information on the potential land supply within Northampton and will inform the preparation of the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2). It will also help to demonstrate that the proposed quantity and distribution of housing is both realistic and deliverable during the plan period. As part of the preparation for the Land Availability Assessment, the methodology is being reviewed and updated to reflect guidance in the PPG. In accordance with the PPG, the Borough Council is consulting with stakeholders on the proposed methodology, which will help to ensure that the process is robust and transparent.

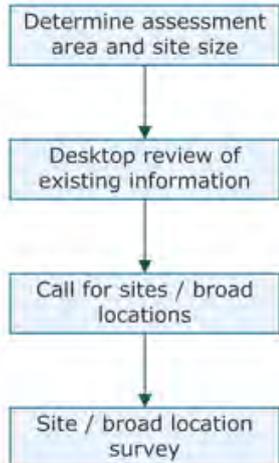
2 Proposed Methodology for the 2016 Land Availability Assessment

This section sets out the proposed methodology for the 2016 Northampton LAA and how it relates to the five stages in the PPG. The PPG states that plan makers

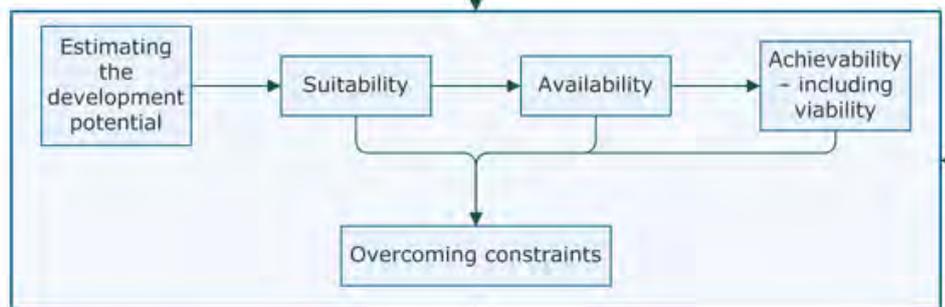
should have regard to this guidance in preparing their assessments and that where they depart from the guidance, the reasons for doing so should be set out. The Council proposes to closely follow the methodology as set out in the flow chart in the PPG.

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment Methodology – flow chart
 (PPG, paragraph 006 Ref ID 3-006-20140306)

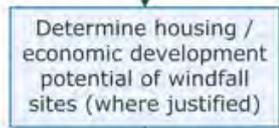
Stage 1- Site / broad location identification



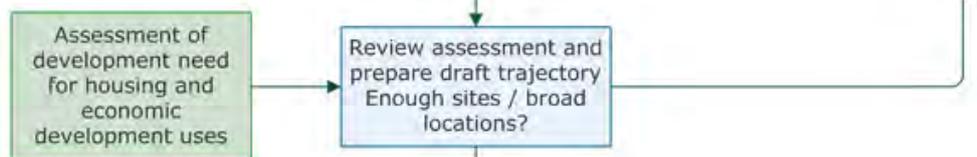
Stage 2 - Site / broad location assessment



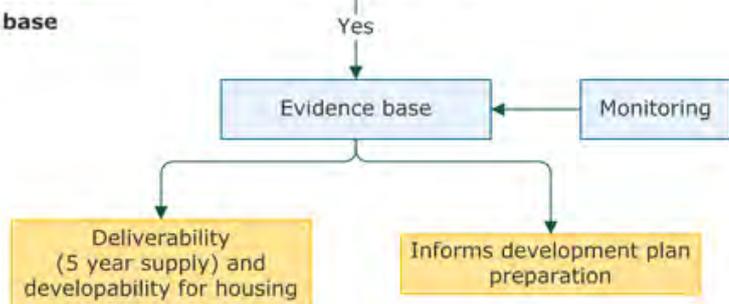
Stage 3 - Windfall assessment



Stage 4 - Assessment review



Stage 5 - Final evidence base



Stage 1 – Site / broad location identification

The PPG states that the area selected for the assessment should be the Housing Market Area. Northampton is part of a wider West Northamptonshire Housing Market Area identified in the 2009 SHMA that was prepared for the JCS. It is proposed that this LAA covers the Northampton Borough area only. This is because the other local authorities within the Housing Market Area are producing their own LAAs. It is therefore unnecessary for each individual LAA to duplicate the whole of the wider housing market area, although we have sought to ensure, as far as possible, that the methodology we use is consistent with those used across the Housing Market Area.

The PPG states that developers, landowners, promoters, local communities, businesses, town and parish councils and others should be involved in plan preparation, including evidence on land availability. The Council has undertaken a series of consultations between 2007 and 2014 on housing and other development, as part of the preparation of the Joint Core Strategy. This included a large number of evidence studies including the 2009 SHLAA and the 2012 SHLAA update. As part of this LAA consultation, the Council is consulting a range of stakeholders on the proposed updated LAA methodology, including locally active developers and agents, as well as nearby local authorities and Government Agencies, such as the Environment Agency and Natural England. All comments received will be taken into account in finalising the methodology.

The LAA will identify all sites promoted regardless of the amount of development needed, in accordance with the PPG.

In the 2009 SHLAA, which was produced to inform the strategic policies of the Joint Core Strategy, the minimum site size threshold for housing sites that were considered suitable for assessment was those sites capable of delivering 10 or more dwellings (net), or if this was not known an area of 0.25ha was used. For the LAA, the Council proposes to use a threshold of 5 dwellings (net) in line with guidance in the PPG.

The Council proposes a minimum site threshold for sites capable of delivering economic development of 0.25ha (or 500m² floorspace) and above, in line with guidance in the PPG.

Sites proposed for retail uses that are beyond 400m from the Town Centre would be excluded, and for other proposed main town centre uses (including leisure and community uses) sites located beyond 500m of the Town Centre boundary will be excluded, to take account of accessibility to these facilities and services.

The Council has been (and will continue to be) proactive in identifying as wide a range of sites as possible, including encouraging landowners and developers to

suggest potential future development land. Sites can be put forward at any time using the available form.

The LAA Call for Sites form sets out the key information required, such as:

- Site location
- Proposed type(s) of development
- Scale of development (yield)
- Timescales for the development and
- Constraints to development

The following additional types of sites will also be considered for inclusion in the LAA:

- Existing housing allocations, carried forward from the adopted Local Plan 1997.
- Existing employment (or other) allocations that are no longer required for those uses.
- Approved, refused, withdrawn and pending planning applications and Prior Approvals
- Sites that have been the subject of pre application discussions and where the party promoting the site has agreed for their pre application discussions to be included in the LAA
- Land in public ownership which is surplus to requirements
- Vacant and derelict land and buildings
- Under-used facilities such as garage blocks
- Sites promoted for development
- Sites previously included in the SHLAA
- Sites previously rejected in the SHLAA

The Council has been (and will continue to be) proactive in considering whether sites that are currently in non-housing use could be more appropriately used for

residential use. For example, where sites have been assessed in terms of their potential for employment use as part of the emerging Employment Land Assessment, and where those sites are assessed as having poor prospects for future employment use, they will be considered within the LAA for their potential for residential development.

A database will be maintained of all sites considered in the LAA and these will also be mapped on the Council's GIS system.

The PPG states that the comprehensive list of sites derived from the various data sources and the LAA Call for Sites should then be further assessed to establish which have reasonable potential for development. The Council will undertake a sieving process so that only sites that have realistic potential are assessed in more detail. This approach is in line with the PPG which states that site surveys should be proportionate to the detail required for a robust appraisal. Housing sites that are excluded at this initial stage are those that:

- Are completely within a Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Are completely within a Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Are completely within the functional floodplain (Flood Zone 3b)

Sites that remain after this sieve will be surveyed. This will enable the Council to ratify information gathered through the LAA Call for Sites (and through other sources), to gain a better understanding of the character of the site and its surroundings as well as physical constraints and barriers to deliverability.

Stage 2 – Sites/broad location assessment

This stage will comprise an assessment of the suitability, availability and achievability of sites, as well as an estimation of their development potential.

The constraints that will be considered in the assessment of the **suitability** of each site will include:

- Allocations or designations such as:
 - Employment allocations
 - Open space designations
 - Wildlife designations
 - Minerals and waste designations

- Other policy constraints
- Contribution to regeneration priority areas.
- Physical / environmental constraints such as:
 - Health and safety consultation zones
 - Flood risk
 - Contamination
 - Topography and poor ground conditions
- Physical limitations such as access and critical infrastructure,
- Environmental constraints, including proximity to designations such as:
 - Special Protection Areas
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
 - Ancient Woodlands
 - Nature Improvement Areas
 - Local Nature Reserves
 - Local Wildlife Sites
 - Local Geological Sites.
- Potential impacts on landscape and heritage designations, and historic assets and their setting, including:
 - Historic Battlefields
 - Scheduled Ancient Monuments
 - Listed Buildings
 - Conservation Areas
- Whether sites adjoin or relate well to the existing urban edge of Northampton.
- Potential impacts on neighbouring uses
- Potential environmental/amenity impacts that would be experienced by new occupiers such as amenity impacts from sites adjoining a sewage treatment works or landfill site.

Sites that are allocated in existing plans or which have planning permission will generally be considered as suitable, although it may be necessary to consider whether circumstances have changed which would alter their suitability. If a site is considered to be unsuitable in Years 1-5, consideration will be given as to whether the site has the potential to become suitable with appropriate mitigation. An example of potential mitigation would be the remediation of contaminated land.

The **availability** of the site will also be assessed. A site is considered to be available when, based on the best information available, there is confidence that there are no legal or ownership problems and that the land is controlled by a developer/landowner who has expressed an interest in developing the site. Sites recently submitted as a planning application, or the subject of pre-application discussions and where the party promoting the site has agreed for their pre application discussions to be disclosed in the LAA, will be assumed to be actively promoted. Where sites were suggested in a previous call for sites, or were identified through some other means, the promoter will be contacted to check whether they still have an intention to develop the land. They will also be asked to indicate when they expect the site to be available for development.

The existence of any known legal or ownership issues (for example, unresolved multiple ownerships) will be taken into account. This will include consideration of whether these could realistically be expected to be overcome within the timescale in which it is considered that the site could reasonably be developed.

The Council will also assess **achievability**, including whether the site can reasonably be expected to be a viable site for development. A site will be considered to be achievable where there is a reasonable prospect that it will come forward for development within the timescale being considered. The economic market for housing in Northampton is positive, although the SHMA Viability Appraisal 2010 noted that values were lower in the older urban area of Northampton. Therefore sites will be assumed to be achievable and viable unless the existence of particular constraints (such as contamination) is known. In cases where there are known unusual constraints, further information may be sought from the promoter on the likely impact on delivery.

Estimating the housing potential of each site

The development potential, or yield, of each site will be estimated. Where the promoters have suggested a yield for their sites, the Council will use this figure unless it appears to be unreasonably high or low, in which case an estimated yield will be used. In these cases, or where the promoter has not provided an estimated yield, the Council will provide an estimate for the site based on a range of factors. These will include:

- The nature of the area
- A consideration of historic development yields achieved on comparable schemes within the locality
- Local density policies in the current and emerging Development Plan
- Other factors, including the shape and access to the site and any likely on site infrastructure requirements.

In the SHLAA prepared for the JCS, where developer yields were not available or considered reasonable, residential densities were estimated on the following basis:

	Detached and linked houses	Terraced houses and flats	Mostly flats
Northampton Central	n/a	200 dph	295 dph
Northampton Urban	n/a	115 dph	220 dph
Northampton Suburban	40 dph	47 dph	100 dph

The residential densities across Northampton as set out within the West Northamptonshire Manual for Design Codes (WNDC, 2009) have been reviewed and, where residential density information is not available or considered reasonable, the Council proposes to estimate residential densities on the following basis for the purposes of density assessment in the LAA:

	Density assumption
Town Centre	50 dph
Rest of Borough	40 dph

Gross to net developable area ratios were estimated in the SHLAA on the following basis:

- 100% of the gross developable area for sites below 0.4 ha.
- 70% of the gross developable area for sites between and including 0.4ha and 2 ha.
- 50% of the gross developable area for sites over 2 ha.

The Council proposes to apply the following gross to net ratios for the purposes of the yield assessment in the LAA, where yield information is not available or considered reasonable:

- 100% of the gross developable area for sites below 0.4 ha, as these sites will typically make use of existing roads and facilities potentially enabling up to 100% of the site area to be developed.
- 80% of the gross developable area for sites between 0.5 ha and 5 ha.
- 50% for sites over 10 ha. This allows for the incorporation of additional infrastructure and other requirements.

The information on suitability, availability and achievability will be used to assess the deliverability of each site and the reasonable timescales in which each site could be delivered. Each site will be categorised as either:

- deliverable (ie. it is available now, at a suitable location and there is a reasonable prospect that housing could be delivered on the site within 1-5 years of the adoption of the plan),
- developable (ie. it is at a suitable location and there is a reasonable prospect that it will be available and could be delivered either in years 6-10 or in years 11-15)
- or not developable.

Factors such as reasonable lead in times and build out rates will be taken into consideration, based on experience of similar sites, along with developers' estimates to ensure that the assessment is realistic.

Stage 3 - Windfall assessment

Paragraph 48 of the NPPF advises that a windfall allowance may be justified in the five year supply if a local planning authority has compelling evidence that such sites have consistently become available in the local area and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply. It adds that such an allowance should be realistic, having regard to the SHLAA, historic delivery rates and expected future trends, and should not include residential gardens.

In accordance with this, the Council will assess historic windfall delivery since 2011. The total windfall contribution will be derived from two parts:

- completions on small sites that are below the LAA size threshold. This allowance would be for the whole plan period excluding the first three years to avoid double counting with existing planning permissions.
- completions on sites that meet or are above the LAA site size threshold. This allowance would be for years 11 onwards as the LAA identifies specific sites that could reasonably come forward in the first ten years.
- Residential gardens are excluded from the windfall analysis, in accordance with paragraph 58 of the NPPF.

Stage 4 – Assessment review

Once the sites have been surveyed and assessed, an indicative housing trajectory will be produced setting out how much housing supply can be provided during each part of the plan period.

The JCS indicates that at least 18,870 net additional houses need to be delivered within Northampton Borough by 2029.

If insufficient sites have been identified to meet the identified needs for housing as set out in the Joint Core Strategy, the Council will revisit the assessment, including the assumptions on yields, on individual sites. If, following this review, there are still not enough sites, then it will be necessary to investigate how this shortfall could be planned for, including whether some of this need could be met in/by adjoining areas under the Duty to Cooperate.

Stage 5 – Final evidence base

The LAA will be published as part of the evidence base alongside the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2). In line with the guidance in the PPG, it will include a set of standard outputs, including:

- A list of all sites considered, cross referenced to maps showing their locations / the location of all sites that have been assessed.
- A list of rejected sites and reason(s) as to why they were discounted.
- An assessment of each site assessed in terms of its suitability, availability and achievability to determine whether and when a site could realistically be developed.

- More detail provided for those sites that are considered to be realistic candidates for future development and reasons given as to why discounted sites have been discounted.
- The types and quantities of development that could reasonably be delivered on each site, including an estimate of build out rates, any barriers to delivery and whether these could be overcome.
- A list of sites and the potential housing land supply from those sites that are previously developed land.
- An indicative trajectory of anticipated housing and other development.

The NPPF identifies the advantages of carrying out land availability assessments for housing and economic development as part of the same exercise, in order that sites may be assessed for the use which is potentially most appropriate.

The LAA will be publicly available to view and download from the Council's website. The LAA will be regularly reviewed. As part of the Authorities Monitoring Report the Council will monitor the progress of allocated and permitted sites how many new homes (and other uses) are delivered.