

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK EXECUTIVE PANEL – 24  
NOVEMBER 2011

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING POLICY AND  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGIC LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SLAA) NEXT  
STEPS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

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**Purpose/Summary of Report**

- This report sets out the next steps in the ongoing Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) technical work that will inform the East Herts Local Development Framework (LDF) and housing trajectory.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR EXECUTIVE: to commend to Council that:**

(A)	<b>the information received in respect of the SLAA sites, attached at Essential Reference Papers B and C be noted; and,</b>
(B)	<b>the SLAA Next Steps, Assessment Criteria and Fact Sheet, attached at Essential Reference Paper D, E and F, respectively, be agreed.</b>

1.0 Background

1.1 The Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) identifies potential sites for development in the District and gives a technical assessment as to whether they are developable and when they could be developed. The SLAA does not make any decisions as to whether a site should be developed: that is the role of the planning system itself.

1.2 It is part of the proactive plan-making process and will help ensure that the Council meets its requirement to maintain a continuous five year supply of housing across the District.

1.3 The main output of the SLAA will be a list or database of sites that

could be developed in East Herts from which the Council can select the most sustainable and appropriate sites to be developed through the LDF and planning process.

- 1.4 At the LDF Executive Panel on 7 July 2011 Members endorsed the SLAA Project Plan and agreed to establish a SLAA Partnership made up of stakeholders including agents, developers, civic societies and town and parish council representatives. Following initial engagement in September 2011, this report seeks endorsement to progress with the next steps of the SLAA process.

## 2.0 Report

- 2.1 A series of eight Partnership meetings was arranged to discuss the SLAA sites across the District. Each meeting was chaired by the Director of Neighbourhood Services, and attended by members of the Planning Policy Team who led the discussions and took notes. In terms of format, discussion about the sites followed two presentations: the first setting the strategic context of East Herts and the second, looking at the bigger picture in terms of the deliverability of sites.
- 2.2 Known site information was made available to the Partnership prior to the meetings. Given the large number of sites the purpose of the meetings was to focus on those sites where there were issues rather than discuss the detail of every site (SLAA Project Plan, paragraph 3.13).
- 2.3 A Deliverability Assessment Template was made available for Partnership members to record and submit their comments on the deliverability of sites. 18 sets of comments have been received containing very useful information about the suitability of sites, including from town and parish councils. This was exactly the sort of information that the Council was seeking as part of this first round of the SLAA. This information is contained at **Essential Reference Paper B**. A discussion forum was also set up on the website to stimulate debate about sites although this medium has not proved fruitful.
- 2.4 The Council decided not to take an early view on the suitability of sites anticipating that the Partnership would assist with this initial process. However, at the first meeting of the Partnership on 7 September 2011, it became clear that some Partnership members

felt that further site information was necessary in order to give valuable feedback. As such, following the first meeting, the Council agreed to reconsider its approach and notify Partnership members of the way forward.

- 2.5 Following internal discussions, it was considered appropriate to continue with the SLAA process as set up, although the meetings would be refocused to consider those larger sites in their strategic context. To assist with this, one meeting was cancelled and its proposed agenda dealt with at other meetings. Members of the Partnership were advised of this approach and offered the opportunity to opt out if they were not satisfied.
- 2.6 The subsequent meetings provided very useful discussion and information about sites across East Herts and the suitability or otherwise of broad locations such as individual towns and villages. Notes from the SLAA meetings are attached at **Essential Reference Paper C**.
- 2.7 In terms of the process itself, landowners, developers and agents are valid stakeholders in the LDF plan-making process and it is right that their representatives are engaged alongside representatives of local communities, statutory undertakers and service providers. The SLAA has been the first time that the Council has engaged representatives of the development industry in this manner in the LDF.
- 2.8 However, it is acknowledged that there has been some disquiet in respect of the SLAA process, particularly regarding the absence of town and parish councillors at the meetings. The Council took this approach in good faith on the basis that it did not want to fetter the ability of town and parish councillors to comment at a later stage should a particular site come forward for development. However, in order to maintain transparency, town and parish clerks were invited to attend the meetings and represent their Councils.
- 2.9 Following feedback from town and parish councils, it is apparent that this approach was overly cautious and town and parish councillors would welcome the opportunity to actively engage in the SLAA.
- 2.10 As such, and in order to provide clarity, the Council has prepared a statement that sets out the next steps in the SLAA process. This is attached at **Essential Reference Paper D**. It is proposed that

following ratification by the LDF Executive Panel, SLAA Partnership members, town and parish councils and East Herts district councillors will be asked to comment on the initial site assessment undertaken by Officers. This information will then be taken on board before a SLAA Report is published. The criteria for undertaking the SLAA site assessment is set out in **Essential Reference Paper E**.

- 2.11 For information, to supplement the SLAA FAQ produced in July, a Project Factsheet has also been prepared that explains the purpose of the SLAA. This is attached at **Essential Reference Paper F**.
- 2.12 It should be reiterated that the SLAA is about providing a more realistic assessment as to whether a particular site could be developed. It is not about making a decision about whether a site should be developed.

### 3.0 Implications/Consultations

- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

### Background Papers

- Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3), CLG, June 2010
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments Practice Guidance, CLG, July 2007

### LDF Executive Panel Reports:

- Local Development Framework Executive Panel 7<sup>th</sup> July 2011 - Agenda Item 9: Strategic Land Availability assessment (SLAA) Project Plan and Establishment of SLAA Partnership  
<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=151&MId=1708&Ver=4>
- Local Development Framework Executive Panel 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2010 - Agenda Item 8: LDF Evidence Base - Technical Studies 2009/10 and 2010/11  
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=15160>
- Local Development Framework Executive Panel 27<sup>th</sup> August 2009 - Agenda Item 9: LDF Evidence Base - Technical Studies 2008/09 and 2009/10  
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=9284>

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## ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives (delete as appropriate):</p>	<p><b>Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities</b>  <i>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.</i></p> <p><b>Pride in East Herts</b>  <i>Improve standards of the built neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p><b>Shaping now, shaping the future</b>  <i>Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures.</i></p> <p><b>Leading the way, working together</b>  <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>Engagement with appropriate stakeholders as required.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>N/a</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>LDF technical work is being funded from the Planning Policy / LDF Upkeep Budgets.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>Existing Planning Policy staff resources will undertake this study.</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>In order to be found sound at examination, it is essential that the Core Strategy should be based on a robust evidence base.</p>