

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL - 26 JULY 2012

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING
AND TRANSPORT

STRATEGIC LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (SLAA) – ROUND 2
– UPDATE REPORT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report seeks to update Members on the progress of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment and agree a district-wide interim SLAA Round 2 dwelling capacity figure to be used to inform on-going work in developing the District Plan: Part 1 - Preferred Strategy.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE
PANEL AND EXECUTIVE: That:**

(A)	the feedback received from stakeholders as part of Round 2: Stakeholder Engagement of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) be considered and amendments made as appropriate, before a final SLAA Round 2 report is published;
(B)	the use of the district-wide interim SLAA Round 2 capacity of 2,173 dwellings to inform ongoing work in developing the District Plan: Part 1 - Preferred Strategy, be supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL: That:

(A)	the feedback received from stakeholders as part of Round 2: Stakeholder Engagement of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) be considered and amendments made as appropriate, before a final SLAA Round 2 report is published.
(B)	the district-wide interim SLAA Round 2 capacity of 2,173

 dwellings be used to inform ongoing work in developing the District Plan: Part 1 - Preferred Strategy.
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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 has reiterated the requirement for local planning authorities to prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment '*to establish realistic assumptions about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of land to meet the identified need for housing over the plan period*' (NPPF paragraph 159).
- 1.2 Members will recall that East Herts Council has opted to prepare a Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) to look at land supply for all development, acknowledging the wider spatial objectives of the planning system.
- 1.3 The purpose of the SLAA is to identify potential sites for development in the district and give 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.
- 1.4 The SLAA 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.
- 1.5 The SLAA Next Steps, which set out the overall approach to the completion of the SLAA has been endorsed by Members at the LDF Executive Panels on 24 November 2011 and 29 March 2012. Due to the SLAA being an ongoing piece of work, it is being undertaken in rounds:
 - Round 1 (Autumn 2011) – *strategic context and site specific information gathering* [Completed September 2011]
 - Round 2 (Spring/Summer 2012) – *assessment of sites within settlement boundaries*
 - Round 3 - *assessment of sites outside settlement boundaries*
 - Round 4 – *annual review of SLAA (as part of Annual Monitoring Report)*

1.6 As the SLAA is a key piece of technical work that will inform the preparation of the District Plan, Round 2 of the SLAA needs to be completed in line with the timetable set out for agreement of the Preferred Strategy by Council, now anticipated in November 2012.

2.0 Report

Round 2 - Stage 1: Initial Assessment

2.1 As agreed in the SLAA Next Steps, Round 2 applied a site size and location threshold and only considered those sites where there is currently no in-principle objection to their development, i.e. those sites which are located within the development boundaries of the Six Main Settlements and Category 1 Villages. This schedule of 233 sites was agreed by Members at the LDF Executive Panel on 29 March 2012.

2.2 However, following publication of the NPPF it was considered appropriate to exclude sites comprising residential garden land where an intention to develop has not been made known. Given the tight timescales involved, it was also considered necessary to focus the initial assessment on those sites deemed to be available for development at this stage, i.e. those promoted through the Call for Sites, those with planning permission or where recent planning permission had been sought, and where pre-application enquiries had been made.

2.3 In addition, following further consideration, sites which fall within the Areas of Special Restraint and Special Countryside Area to the north of Bishop's Stortford were also removed from this round of the SLAA process. This area has a unique policy position within the district which means that although it is safeguarded land, it cannot be regarded as falling within the current settlement boundary for Bishop's Stortford. The suitability of this area for future development is currently being assessed through ongoing work on the preparation of the Preferred Strategy, and sites within this area will be assessed in Round 3 of the SLAA.

2.4 Irrespective of the above, sites with planning permission have been included in Round 2 as the purpose of the SLAA is to assess the likelihood of sites being brought forward for development and it should not be assumed that all sites with planning permission will be developed within the permitted three year timescale.

- 2.5 As such, given that the SLAA is an ongoing piece of work, there are a number of further sites that will be assessed as part of the annual review of the SLAA, which will be carried out as part of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). This will also enable officers to identify further sites within the settlement boundaries which it would be appropriate to assess as part of Round 2.
- 2.6 An updated schedule of sites that were assessed as part of this round of the SLAA is attached at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.

Round 2 - Stage 2: Stakeholder Engagement

- 2.7 A pack of documents, including assessment criteria, site maps and photos, for each site was uploaded onto a restricted access area of the Council's website, and stakeholders were invited to access the information and provide comment from Wednesday 16th May to Friday 15th June. In addition to members of the SLAA Partnership, stakeholders included EHDC Members, town and parish councils and civic societies. For each site, Officers sought to set out what they considered to be a realistic dwelling capacity based on an assessment of each site's individual constraints, characteristics and the general condition of the housing market. Owing to technical difficulties, there was a slight delay in some of the site information being made available on the website. As such, the Council accepted comments received after the deadline.
- 2.8 25 stakeholders responded to the period of stakeholder engagement, making both general comments and comments on individual sites. A full list of respondents is attached as **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**. Officer's initial site assessments and the stakeholder comments received are publicly available on the Council's website at www.eastherts.gov.uk/slaa.
- 2.9 It is appropriate at this point to address some general concerns and queries which have been raised through the stakeholder engagement. Some stakeholders have requested that sites be removed from the SLAA process. However, it should be noted that sites will not be removed from the SLAA even if they are currently considered to be unavailable, unsuitable or if development has been deemed to be unachievable. As the SLAA is a technical study which aims to assess the overall deliverability of sites for development, sites will continue to be re-assessed on an annual basis as part of the annual review of the SLAA.

- 2.10 Concern has also been raised regarding the assessment criteria endorsed by Members at the LDF Executive Panel on 24 November 2011; particularly with regard to accessibility and the lack of assessment of the impact that development of each site would have on local infrastructure. As has previously been stated the SLAA is a strategic assessment that seeks to assess the likelihood of a site coming forward for development. It is an initial assessment being used to inform the preparation of the District Plan and as such a detailed assessment of the accessibility and infrastructure requirements/impacts of individual sites has not been undertaken. Instead, accessibility and infrastructure requirements are key considerations in the plan-making process and are being assessed at a number of different points through work on the district-wide strategy selection.
- 2.11 It is important to note that the inclusion of a site in the SLAA is an assessment of whether a site could be developed; it does not make decisions about which sites should be developed. Sites would still need to come forward for development through the planning application process where any constraints on development would be considered in greater detail. It should also be noted that sites not included in the SLAA assessment process may also still come forward for development through the planning application route.

Round 2 - Stage 3: Publication of Final Report

- 2.12 All comments received will be considered and amendments made, as appropriate, before a final SLAA Round 2 report is published. It is proposed that this report will then be considered and endorsed by the Council later this year.

Round 2 - Findings and District Plan: Part 1-Preferred Strategy

- 2.13 The initial SLAA Round 2 assessments identified capacity within the development boundaries of the Six Main Settlements and Category 1 Villages, of 2,173 dwellings district-wide over a 15 year period. Separate dwelling figures are also available for each town and Category 1 Villages and these are:
- Bishop's Stortford – 708 dwellings
 - Buntingford – 67 dwellings
 - Hertford – 875 dwellings
 - Sawbridgeworth – 111 dwellings
 - Stanstead Abbots & St Margarets – 37 dwellings
 - Ware – 147 dwellings

- Category 1 Villages – 228 dwellings

For the purposes of plan making, these interim dwelling figures exclude capacity identified on sites within designated employment areas.

- 2.14 A preliminary assessment of the feedback received to the stakeholder engagement indicates that it does not materially affect the emerging interim Round 2 total dwelling capacity for the district. It is, therefore, intended that this interim SLAA figure be used to inform ongoing work in developing the District Plan: Part 1- Preferred Strategy (see Agenda Item 10 on this Agenda).

Round 3

- 2.15 It is currently anticipated that Round 3 of the SLAA will be undertaken during Spring/Summer 2013. Round 3 considers those sites which are located outside the current settlement boundaries of the Six Main Settlements and Category 1 Villages, and will be informed by the broad locations identified for development in the Preferred Strategy.

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

- Officer's initial site assessments and comments received to stakeholder engagement
www.eastherts.gov.uk/sl原因
- National Planning Policy Framework, March 2012
- Strategic Land Availability Assessments Practice Guidance, CLG, July 2007

LDF Executive Panel Reports:

- Report to LDF Executive Panel – 29 March 2012 Agenda Item 8: Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) Progress
<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CID=151&MId=2024&Ver=4>
- Report to LDF Executive Panel – 24 November 2011 Agenda Item 5: Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) Next Steps

<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cd=151&MId=1928&Ver=4>

- Report to LDF Executive Panel – 7 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?Cd=151&MId=1708&Ver=4>

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