

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

Frequently Asked Questions

The following summary of the SHLAA process, which is in the form of possible questions about the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), has been produced for the assistance of those wishing to either submit sites or comment on the methodology.

If you have any questions on this note please contact:

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1. What is a SHLAA?

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) is an essential part of the evidence base for the emerging Hart Development Framework (HDF) Core Strategy. The primary aim of the SHLAA is to assist a Local Authority in demonstrating that it can meet the requirements of the national planning guidance in Planning Policy Statement 3 (Housing).

PPS3 places considerable importance on identifying suitable sites. PPS3 also places an emphasis on establishing certainty in housing delivery by allocating sites rather than relying on 'windfall sites', which are those which unexpectedly emerge during the duration of a development plan. There is therefore going to be increasing scrutiny of sites considered to be 'windfalls' and far greater justification is going to be required by the applicant in support of a proposal if an adequate supply of identified allocated sites already exists.

PPS3 requires Local Authority's, via a SHLAA, to:

- identify specific, deliverable sites for the first five years of a plan that are ready for development
- identify specific, developable sites for years 6 to 10

- where it is not possible to identify specific sites for years 11 to 15 of the plan, indicate broad locations for future growth

The Planning Policy team are proposing to consult for six weeks (May to July 2008) with developers and other stakeholders to identify sites for inclusion in the SHLAA. It is proposed that the consultation will be between 29 May and 11 July. This will enable the Council to produce a robust document founded on good evidence which identifies where suitable development is likely to take place and enabling us and local infrastructure, service and community facility providers to examine the implications.

2. Is it essential to produce a SHLAA?

Any Local Planning Authority bringing forward a Core Strategy without meeting the core requirements set out in the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) SHLAA guidance is at high risk of the Core Strategy subsequently being found 'unsound' for a lack of robust evidence. For example, the lack of sufficient planning to address strategic housing requirements was one of the reasons that the Planning Inspectorate found the recent Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Core Strategy 'unsound'.

Additionally, the current consultation on the allocation mechanism for the Housing and Planning Delivery grant (HPDG) reinforces the importance of the SHLAA. It is proposed that up to 40% of the planning element of the grant will be payable where an authority can demonstrate a five-year supply of housing through a SHLAA.

3. Why should we consider sites in preparing a LDF Core Strategy?

The purpose of the SHLAA in relation to a Core Strategy is to provide evidence that sufficient housing land can be provided within the locations indicated by that document. Without that evidence it would be difficult to demonstrate the deliverability of the Core Strategy.

4. Should Hart continue with the existing Urban Capacity Study?

A Local Authority can use an existing Urban Capacity Study (UCS) as the basis for demonstrating the 1 to 5 year supply, but will need to develop it further to meet the key requirements set out in the national SHLAA guidance.

5. Why are 'greenfield' sites included in the SHLAA?

Greenfield sites are included in the SHLAA to provide a rounded assessment of all potential sources of supply, with consistent information on 'deliverability' and 'developability'. Strategic choices on the location of future housing development are more complex than simply intensifying existing urban areas – and then looking at greenfield sites. This highlights that the best solution may involve bringing forward some greenfield sites.

6. Why are broad locations included in the SHLAA?

When preparing core strategies, some Local Authority's will need to consider strategic urban extensions. The possible broad locations should be assessed in the same way as identifiable sites so as to provide a rounded assessment of potential sources of supply, with consistent information on deliverability and developability. Broad locations can also include areas within settlements where there is explicit policy to encourage housing development, e.g. residential infilling. This is about being proactive about meeting need rather than passively leaving it to market forces. By definition, development within such broad locations is not windfall development.

7. How does this affect the prioritisation of previously developed land for development?

The key objective of maximising the development potential of previously developed land – 'brownfield' sites – continues, alongside the objective of meeting housing requirements.

8. How can we involve local stakeholders in the SHLAA?

Key local stakeholders such as developers, Registered Social Landlords, land agents etc., will, as stated, be consulted in the summer of 2008 to register with the Council, any sites they consider could be included within the SHLAA. Stakeholders will also be invited to comment on the project brief and methodology.

Later in the year, it is currently envisaged that interested stakeholders will participate in 'Stakeholder Panels' where the suitability of sites for development will be discussed. It will be reiterated to stakeholders that the purpose of the Panel is to review all the identified sites in an objective manner, rather than as an opportunity to merely promote their own interests.

9. What happens if large numbers of sites are put forward?

The guidance outlines that subsequent to the consultation period, Officers are to sieve out obvious 'non-runners' such as isolated greenfield sites. However, there is no reason why sites should not be identified and included in the SHLAA, even if the cumulative housing potential on these sites is in excess of the RSS requirements.

10. What does 'suitable' mean in relation to deliverability and developability?

The answer depends on context. Where there is a limited range of possible sites, it will be all sites which are suitable for housing in the terms outlined in the national SHLAA guidance. Where there are a large number of possible sites, it may be necessary to think in terms of sites being potentially suitable for housing, on the understanding that decisions about strategy may rule out sites in some locations in favour of others.

11. Aren't small-sites just windfalls anyway?

The term 'windfall' is used differently by different people, and is often used loosely to mean any site which is not allocated in a development plan document. However, the relevant national planning guidance (PPS3: Housing) contains a definition of windfalls which practitioners need to take to heart. It makes it clear that windfalls are 'sites which have not been

specifically identified as available in the local plan process – they comprise previously developed land that has unexpectedly become available’.

This makes it clear that any site which is specifically identified in the development plan making process – such as the SHLAA – is not a windfall. Likewise, sites which come forward within an identified broad location within a settlement are not windfalls either because they are not unexpected. Accordingly, the more comprehensive the coverage of the SHLAA is, the less need, or scope, there is for windfall sites.