

**Public
Key Decision - Yes**

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal for additional sites submitted between 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 15 April 2025

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Planning

Report by: Chief Planning Officer

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report presents the outcomes of Land Availability Assessments (LAA) and Sustainability Appraisals (SA) for additional sites submitted between 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025 via the 'Ongoing Call for Sites'. Sites submitted after 1 August were submitted too late to be included in the previous round of consultation that was undertaken on sites in the Autumn of 2024 so are being presented in their own LAA and SA document here.

For context, between 29 March to 7 June 2023 the Council issued a Call for Sites. This is a process where people could submit sites that could have the potential to be allocated in the next Local Plan for a variety of uses. After the close of the Call for Sites, an Ongoing Call for Sites was opened to allow those who missed the initial Call to still submit sites. Of those submitted to the Ongoing Call for Sites, 15 sites were assessed in addition to the 354 through the main Call for Sites event (a total of 369). These assessments were consulted upon in the Autumn of 2024.

Sites submitted after 1 August were too late to be considered in the consultation on sites held between September and November 2024. The Ongoing Call for Sites closed on the 31 January 2025. Between the 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025, a further 68 sites from across the district have been submitted and assessed.

These sites have been submitted for consideration as potential allocations through the Local Plan update. The Council has assessed the sites submitted through a Land Availability Assessment and a Sustainability Appraisal. The results of these assessments do not guarantee that a site will be allocated in the next local plan but instead provide a selection of sites that have potential.

It is now proposed that these additional assessments are consulted upon to allow members of the public, statutory consultees, landowners, developers and interested parties to see the results of the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal of these additional sites and provide comments. The consultation is proposed to be held over 6 weeks between 23 April and 4 June 2025. Comments will be sought only on these additional sites; this will not be an opportunity to comment on sites previously consulted upon.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet/Committee is

RECOMMENDED

- To approve the contents of the Land Availability Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal for additional sites submitted between 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025
- To agree that the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal for additional sites be published for public consultation for six weeks between 23 April and 4 June 2025
- To grant delegated authority to the Head of Planning, Infrastructure and Public Protection, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning to make any necessary typographical or other minor changes to the document prior to its publication for consultation.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents the outcomes of Land Availability Assessments (LAA) and Sustainability Appraisals (SA) for additional sites submitted between 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025 via the 'Ongoing Call for Sites'.
- 1.2 The purpose and content of the LAA and SA were discussed previously at Cabinet on 10 September 2024.
- 1.3 This report asks that Cabinet approve the contents of the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal for additional sites and agree that it can be published for public engagement for 6 weeks between 23 April and 4 June 2025. Comments will be sought only on these additional sites; this will not be an opportunity to comment on sites previously consulted upon.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY?

- 2.1 Between 29 March to 7 June 2023 the Council issued a Call for Sites. This is a process where people, including but not limited to, developers, landowners and agents could submit sites that could have the potential to be allocated in the next Local Plan. The sites submitted could be for a variety of uses such as housing, employment, renewable energy, biodiversity, and mixed uses. 354 sites were submitted during the initial Call and have been assessed and consulted upon.
- 2.2 After the close of the Call for Sites, following requests for consideration of extra sites, an Ongoing Call for Sites was opened. This allowed those who missed the initial Call to still submit sites to ensure their equitable consideration at this early stage of plan preparation rather than defer their receipt until the Preferred Options stage which would allow less scope for public scrutiny and comment on them. Of those submitted to the Ongoing Call for Sites, 15 sites were assessed in addition to the 354 through the main Call for Sites event (a total of 369). Any sites submitted after the 1 August were too late to be included in the consultation on sites held between September and November 2024.
- 2.3 The Ongoing Call for Sites closed on 31 January 2025.
- 2.4 Between 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025, a further 68 sites from across the district have been submitted and assessed. The sites submitted included a variety of uses:
 - 51 were for residential uses
 - 6 were for commercial uses
 - 7 were for mixed uses including, but not limited to, housing, employment and some infrastructure provision
 - 3 were for renewable energy
 - 1 for infrastructure
 - 25 of the above sites were 1 hectare or less in size

- 2.5 In total, 437 sites have been submitted to the Council for consideration as potential allocations through the Local Plan update. All of these sites are available to view online using the Call for Sites [spreadsheet](#) and [interactive map](#).
- 2.6 There were several submissions to the 'Ongoing Call for Sites' that amended previously submitted sites, these sites have not been reassessed in the additional sites LAA and SA but instead amended details will be reviewed and discussed within the 'Updates after Initial Assessment' section of the original site assessment.
- 2.7 A further 27 sites were submitted for consideration to be designated as green space by St Neots Town Council. These have been reviewed separately as most are small scale areas of land more appropriately designated as local green space, if evidence shows that they meet the national criteria, or as other green space through an update to the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan. Advice has previously been provided to St Neots Town Council on the process to undertake this.
- 2.8 The additional sites have been assessed using the Land Availability Assessment Methodology and Sustainability Appraisal used to assess the previous 369 sites. This methodology is published as a background document on the Local Plan Update [evidence library](#) webpages for transparency.
- 2.9 Each additional site assessment has been presented to the Local Plans Advisory Group, discussion of which took place on 24 March 2025.
- 2.10 These additional sites have been compiled into one LAA and one SA document ordered by parish and are now ready for public engagement ensuring that that all sites submitted have been subject to the same level of assessment, scrutiny and consultation.
- 2.11 The consultation will only seek comments on the additional sites; this will not be an opportunity to comment on sites previously consulted upon.

3. LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENTS – CONTENT

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that local plans should plan for and allocate sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area (paragraph 23). Paragraph 69 asks that:

“Strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability.”

- 3.2 In addition National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) sets out further detail on this within the [Housing and economic land availability assessment](#) section.

3.3 To adhere to the NPPF and NPPG the first stage for each site within the Land Availability Assessments was to see if they have any fundamental constraints which would render the site undeliverable, for example, if it is located within flood zone 3b. This information can be found within the site’s assessment under the title ‘Fundamental Constraints’. Any sites that do not pass the fundamental constraints are assessed no further.

3.4 Secondly if the site passes the fundamental constraints the site is more comprehensively assessed within the ‘Assessment of Site Potential Table’. The assessment is in line with the national requirements based on the following defined criteria:

- **Suitable** – a high-level assumption on whether a site would provide an appropriate location for development when considered against relevant constraints and their potential to be mitigated (*found under the heading ‘Context, constraints and potential suitability’*). This is a local plan ‘policy-off’ assessment meaning that the site is not assessed against the policies within Huntingdonshire’s Local Plan to 2036.
- **Available** – no legal or ownership impediments exist to inhibit development which can come forward in the short term (*found under the heading ‘Availability’*)
- **Achievable** - there is a reasonable prospect that viable development could be built on the site at a particular point in time (*found under the heading ‘Achievability’*)
- **Deliverable** – a housing site should be available, in a suitable location and have a realistic prospect of homes being built within 5 years (*found under the heading ‘Deliverability/ Developability’*)
- **Developable** – a housing site should be suitable and have a reasonable prospect of being built at a specified time (*found under the heading ‘Deliverability/ Developability’*)

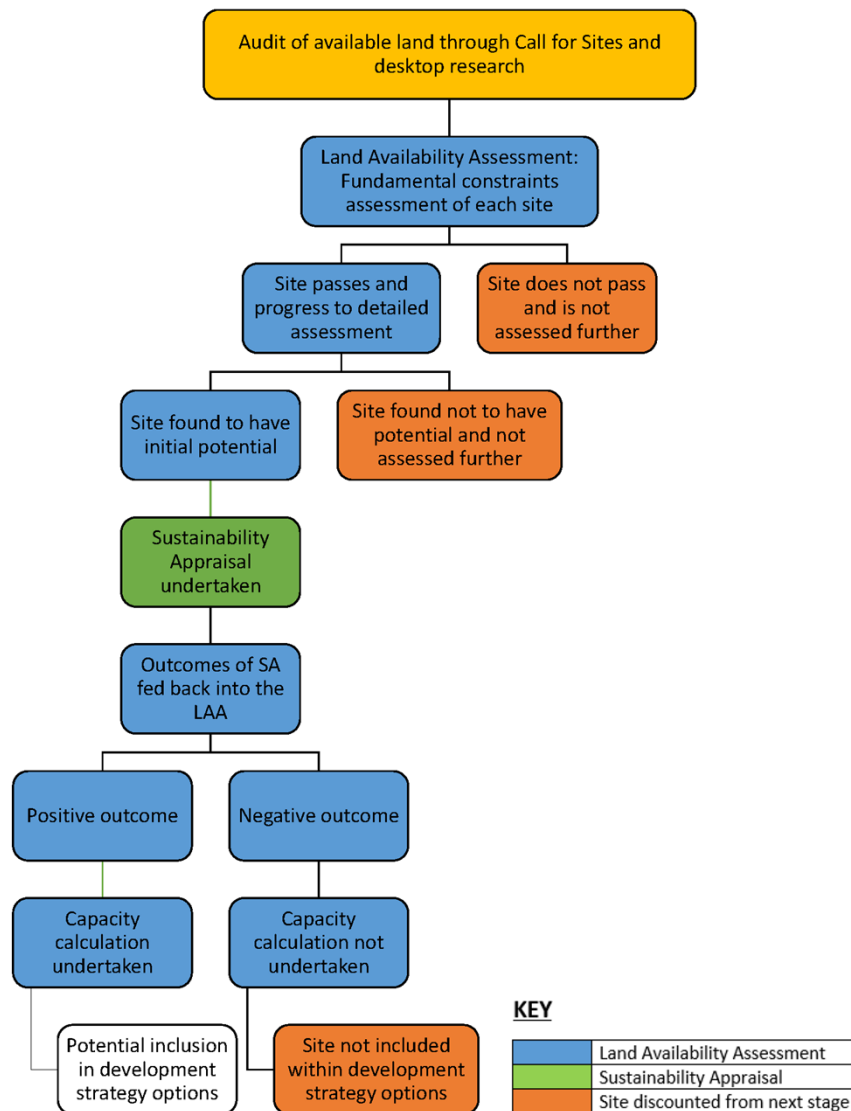
3.5 If the site passes this assessment a sustainability appraisal is conducted which can be found in the Sustainability Appraisal document (presented at [Cabinet 10 September 2024](#) and [Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance and Growth 4 September 2024](#)). The Council has an obligation through the [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#) to carry out a sustainability appraisal. This must look at how plans and programmes, and more specifically in this instance, our sites, contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. In combination with other regulatory requirements such as the [Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes 2004](#), this allows the sites to be assessed on their contribution towards environmental, social and economic issues.

3.6 Each sustainability objective is provided with both a commentary and a score which is based on the following chart indicating the effect of the approach on the objective.

Score	Effect of the approach
++	Contributes significantly to the achievement of the objective
+	Contributes to the achievement of the objective

N	No clear relationship to achieving the objective, the outcome is uncertain or the outcome may depend on delivery specific factors
	The objective is not relevant to the proposal
-	Detracts from achievement of the objective
--	Significantly detracts from achievement of the objective

- 3.7 To tie in this assessment with the Land Availability Assessments a summary box is provided within each site's assessment which reports on 'The impact of the Sustainability Appraisal on the Assessment'.
- 3.8 If the site is still considered potentially suitable after considering the sustainability appraisal a capacity calculation is undertaken to indicate the potential capacity of the site, for example the potential number of homes, commercial floorspace, when the site could be delivered and how long it may take to be delivered.
- 3.9 A diagram is provided below to illustrate the process which has been outlined above.



4. ADDITIONAL SITES - RESULTS AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Of the 68 additional sites assessed:
- 14 did not pass the fundamental constraints
 - 6 did not pass the detailed LAA assessment (found in the 'Assessment of Site Potential Table' in the LAA for each site) and therefore did not progress to a sustainability appraisal
 - 18 sites were considered unsuitable after the results of the sustainability appraisal were taken into account and therefore did not progress further
 - 30 were ultimately considered potentially suitable for development and a capacity calculation was undertaken
- 4.2 In combination, the sites considered potentially suitable for allocation would generate approximately a further:
- 2,262 homes (in addition several sites for gypsy and traveller pitches have been submitted but a capacity have not been calculated at this stage)
 - 9,611 sqm of commercial floorspace plus an additional 15ha of employment land with no floorspace capacity calculated.
 - 49.51 hectares of land for renewables
 - 3.64ha of land for infrastructure
 - 52.5 hectares of land for open space/biodiversity net gain
- 4.3 These provide further options which could be considered potentially suitable for allocation within the local plan, to allow us to choose the most sustainable growth strategy.
- 4.4 The results of these assessments do not guarantee that a site will be allocated in the next local plan, but instead provide a selection of sites that have potential. The final selection of sites will be based on additional factors such as a chosen growth strategy, a final settlement hierarchy and evidence-based documents.
- 4.5 It is now proposed that these additional assessments are consulted upon to allow members of the public, statutory consultees, landowners, developers and interested parties to see the results of the LAA and to provide comments. The consultation is proposed to be held over 6 weeks between 23 April and 4 June 2025.

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) discussed the report at its meeting on 2nd April 2025.
- 5.2 Councillor Chapman advised that several submissions had been made by St Neots Town Council for areas to be designated as green spaces and additionally a flood plain. The Panel heard that these submissions would be better suited to the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan and that the team had previously engaged with St Neots Town Council on numerous occasions as to how they could achieve this. In response to this, Councillor

Chapman stated that he felt conflicting information relating to which plan these designations would be best suited to had been given over the past few years and reiterated his concern that given climate change the importance of the identified flood plain would be ever more important in protecting St Neots homes and residents from future flooding. The Panel were assured that this area could be recognised but through a different mechanism than the Land Availability Assessments. It was noted that Councillor Chapman's concerns would be addressed and managed outside of the meeting.

- 5.3 Following a question from councillor Gardener, the Panel heard that work had been done to improve how parish councils could submit their responses. It was noted that following lessons learned in previous rounds, the latest round of responses had been a more manageable quantity of information and that there had been improved signposting alongside a mix of communication methods. It was also confirmed that parishes would have a point of contact should there be an issue in the submission of their responses.
- 5.4 The Panel were advised following questions from Councillor Catmur and Councillor Pitt, that a report detailing the communications plan as well as feedback from the consultation would be brought back to the Panel in due course.
- 5.5 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.

6. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN

- 6.1 Public engagement on the Land Availability Assessments is proposed to be held over 6 weeks between 23 April and 4 June 2025. Comments will be sought only on these additional sites; this will not be an opportunity to comment on sites previously consulted upon.
- 6.2 At the close of consultation, the comments made will be assessed and changes made, or further investigations undertaken where considered appropriate. Any changes made will be documented in the Land Availability Assessment documents for the appropriate site under the title 'Updates after the Initial Assessment'.
- 6.3 The results of these assessments do not guarantee that a site will be allocated in the next local plan, but instead provide a selection of sites that have potential. The final selection of sites will be based on a number of additional factors such as a chosen growth strategy, a final settlement hierarchy and evidence-based documents such as transport studies, strategic flood risk assessments, water cycle studies, employment land studies, climate change reports etc.

7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 7.1 The production of the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal for additional sites aligns with Priority 2: Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations set out in the Corporate Plan 2023 to 2028, a key action of which is:

“Continue the update to the Local plan, including updating evidence bases in line with National Planning Policy, particularly where it relates to Economy, Environment and Housing.”

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 To be effective Local Plans need to be kept up to date. As set out in Regulation 10a of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating. Approval was received from Cabinet on 24th January 2023:

‘To agree to the commencement of work to compile an updated local evidence base to inform and support preparation of the full update to the adopted Local Plan, working with partners and consultants as necessary’

- 8.2 The assessment of sites through the Land Availability Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal is part of this process.
- 8.3 Providing a comprehensive assessment of sites will also ensure that the Council can justify their decisions when the Local Plan is independently examined by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State.

9. HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Paragraph 9 of the NPPF requires that *‘planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.’* This includes ensuring that the Local Plan and its policies meet the principles of sustainable development; achieving net gains from an economic, social and environmental perspective defined in NPPF paragraph 8 as follows:
- a) ‘an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
 - b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect

current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

- c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.'

9.2 The review of the sites through the LAA and SA is part of this process. The choice of sites suitable for allocation (identified in combination with other evidence), will contribute towards identify the most sustainable and achievable way to plan development sustainably, creating positive impacts on health, the environment and climate change.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

10.1 Engagement on the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal of these additional sites is considered beneficial in meeting the Council's Corporate Plan objectives. In particular it meets the required key action "*Continue the update to the Local plan, including updating evidence bases in line with National Planning Policy, particularly where it relates to Economy, Environment and Housing.*"

10.2 It is a further step towards the development of an evidence base to support preparation of a full update to the Local Plan as approved at Cabinet on 24 January 2023.

10.3 Engagement on the additional sites also adheres to the Corporate Plan's central approach which notes that "*Our role is to help residents and businesses thrive, but that is not something we can do to people. Only by working with people can we make sure Huntingdonshire is a place where you and your family can have a good life and take advantage of the options that benefit you*" The consultation will allow people and organisations to feed into the site assessment process and provide comment and additional information which may be of benefit.

10.4 The choice of sites suitable for allocation (identified in combination with other evidence), will contribute towards realising the ambition to work towards the most sustainable and achievable way to plan development, creating positive impacts on health, the environment and climate change. This in turn will help the Local Plan to demonstrate that it can achieve the principles of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 8 of the NPPF by taking into account social, economic and environmental considerations.

10.5 The recommendations are therefore:

- To approve the contents of the Land Availability Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal for additional sites submitted between 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025
- To agree that the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal for additional sites be published for public consultation for six weeks between 23 April and 4 June 2025

- To grant delegated authority to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning to make any necessary typographical or other minor changes to the document prior to its publication for consultation.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- 1) Land Availability Assessment for additional sites submitted between 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025
- 2) Sustainability Appraisal appendix – additional sites submitted between 1 August 2024 and 31 January 2025

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Cabinet - Tuesday, 24 January 2023](#)
- [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)
- [Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes 2004](#)
- [National Planning Policy Framework](#)
- [National Planning Practice Guidance](#)
- [Land Availability Assessment Methodology](#)
- LAAs presented at [Cabinet 10 September 2024](#) and [Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance and Growth 4 September 2024](#)
- SA presented at [Cabinet 10 September 2024](#) and [Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance and Growth 4 September 2024](#)
- Statement of Consultation – to be published in the Local Plan's [Evidence Library](#) prior to consultation
- Call for Sites [spreadsheet](#) and [interactive map](#).

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