

Report to the Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Report reference: **LDF-002-2010/11**
Date of meeting: **27 May 2010**

Portfolio: **Planning & Economic Development**

Subject: **Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) - Draft Methodology**

Responsible Officer: **Kevin Wright** (01992 564095).

Democratic Services Officer: **Gary Woodhall** (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Draft Methodology be approved for consultation with key local stakeholders and as the basis upon which to appoint external consultants.

Executive Summary:

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) requires that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) be carried out in consultation with key local stakeholders such as house builders, developers, social housing providers and town and parish councils. The draft methodology sets out how the SHLAA will be carried out and the criteria that will be used in making an assessment of sites. In accordance with PPS3 it is important that these stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on the draft methodology for the SHLAA.

The SHLAA will provide evidence for decisions to be made in the Core Strategy on the location of housing development in the District. The SHLAA is a technical document; it will not make decisions about the location of future housing development however it will give an indication of the available capacity.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To allow key local stakeholders to be consulted on the SHLAA Draft Methodology and to appoint external consultants to undertake the assessments.

Other Options for Action:

To not approve the Draft Methodology for consultation and the basis for appointing consultants. However, the SHLAA is a key part of the evidence for the LDF, and may cause the Core Strategy to be found unsound if not carried out correctly.

Report:

1. PPS3 requires local planning authorities to plan, monitor and manage the supply of housing. In planning for housing development local planning authorities are required to identify sufficient land for housing to cover the period of the Local Development Framework. For Epping Forest District this will be from 2011 to 2031.

2. The Core Strategy is the key document within the Local Development Framework, and it is this document which will identify the broad locations for future development. The primary role of the SHLAA is to identify sites with potential for housing, assess their housing capacity and assess when they could be developed. The SHLAA is a technical document that will assess the housing potential of identified sites. The information in the SHLAA is a key part of the Evidence Base and will support decisions that are made in the Core Strategy.

3. In carrying out the SHLAA the local planning authority needs to consult with house builders, developers, social housing providers and town and parish councils. By involving these stakeholders at this stage the aim is to ensure the assessment of housing capacity is thorough and realistic. Consultation on the methodology will ensure that the evidence provided by the SHLAA will stand up to scrutiny when the Core Strategy is subject to public examination by a Planning Inspector.

4. The SHLAA Practice Guidance allows local planning authorities some discretion in designing the methodology to suit the local authority area. The SHLAA Draft Methodology involves a desktop review to identify potential sources of sites for housing development in accordance with the SHLAA Practice Guidance. However for the desktop review discretion has been exercised in setting a site size threshold of 6 dwellings or 0.2 hectares for this District (see paragraphs 20 and 21 of the SHLAA Draft Methodology in Appendix 1 to this report). Based on previous experience in the District, sites below this threshold yield only a small number of dwellings. Therefore for the likely return it was felt the amount of effort involved to consider these smaller sites was not worthwhile. If the SHLAA does not identify sufficient land to meet the minimum housing target for the District these smaller sites could then be considered.

5. As part of the desktop review each identified site is assessed against a set of standard questions in a Site Appraisal Sheet. This draws out further information about each site and its potential suitability for housing development (see paragraph 22 of the SHLAA Draft Methodology in Appendix 1, and the Site Appraisal Sheet in Appendix 2 to this report). The questions in the Site Appraisal Sheet are divided into 3 stages. To be considered suitable for housing development a site must meet the minimum requirements of Stage 1. The aim of Stage 1 is to ensure that potential housing sites are located either within or adjoining an existing settlement, are not within the zone for the highest risk of flooding and would not impact on sites of European or national conservation or heritage importance. Provided a site meets these minimum requirements a further assessment is made in Stages 2 and 3 against a range of other constraints.

6. The Site Appraisal Sheet uses a traffic light scoring system for each question. Answers to questions will receive a score of 1 for green, 2 for amber and 3 for red. At the end of the assessment the scores for a site are added together. The lower the overall score the more suitable the site is likely to be for housing.

7. Before Stage 1 of the Site Appraisal Sheet all sites are included. After Stage 1, Greenfield sites located away from existing settlements within the Green Belt policy are discounted. These isolated sites covered by the Green Belt policy may only be considered if it is found that all the other types of sites fail to provide sufficient housing capacity to meet the minimum housing target for the District. However after Stage 1 Greenfield or brownfield sites adjoining existing settlement boundaries that are within the Green Belt policy will not be discounted. It is for the Core Strategy to decide whether the Green Belt policy around existing settlements will be reviewed such that some of these sites could be developed for housing. The reasoning for this approach is that brownfield sites within the main towns close to public transport are considered the most sustainable, whereas Greenfield sites located away from existing settlements, are considered the least sustainable.

8. All the sites identified by the desktop review will be visited with attention paid to particular considerations, for example current development hotspots that have been the focus of recent planning permissions and that give an indication of recent market demand (see paragraph 25 of the SHLAA Draft Methodology at Appendix 1).

9. The next steps would be to consult with the stakeholders identified in the Appendix of the SHLAA Draft Methodology. Following the consultation, changes would be made to the draft methodology as appropriate and a final methodology published. Consultants would then be appointed to carry out the SHLAA using the methodology. The SHLAA will involve continuous engagement with the development industry to ensure the assessments of capacity on each site are realistic. The output from the SHLAA will be a list of potential housing sites, their capacity and an assessment of when they could be developed. Members will receive the draft list of sites from the SHLAA at a future meeting of this Committee. It is anticipated that the work will take approximately 6 months from the appointment of consultants.

Resource Implications:

From LDF budget – estimated cost £30,000 as set out in report LDF-008-2009/10 (11/03/10).

Legal and Governance Implications:

No relevant implications.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

No relevant implications.

Consultation Undertaken:

None.

Background Papers:

Report to LDF Cabinet Committee LDF-008-2009/10 (11/03/10)
Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (2nd edition, January 2010)
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments Practice Guidance (July 2007)

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

Risk to the Core Strategy not being found “sound” by the Inspector at the public examination due to the procedures for carrying out the SHLAA not being correctly followed.

Equality and Diversity:

Preparation of the Local Development Framework as a whole will be subject to an on-going Equality Impact Assessment, as part of the Sustainability Appraisal.

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
None.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
None.