

Why did the Council undertake the Call for Sites exercise?

The 'Call for Sites' exercise is a requirement of central Government planning policy and practice guidance to inform the preparation of a new Local Plan which will need to respond to assessed needs for housing, employment and other uses.

What was the purpose of the Call for Sites exercise?

The purpose of the 'Call for Sites' exercise was to provide an opportunity for land owners, developers, parish councils and others to promote sites to be assessed for their suitability and deliverability for development.

Please note: The 'Call for Sites' is not an assessment of whether sites will be allocated for future uses in the new Local Plan or developed either in whole or in part. It is a technical exercise that the local planning authority is required to do as part of their local plan evidence base.

How were the sites assessed?

The assessment formed a technical appraisal of all sites and broad locations capable of delivering five or more dwellings or sites of 0.25ha (or 500m² of floor space for employment land) and above. The sites were assessed against the requirements of the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance. This involved an assessment of the following:

- Suitability – This involved an assessment of the sites against policies in the NPPF, including an assessment of the sustainability credentials of each site, i.e. proximity to existing centres, services, community facilities and transport nodes/hubs. It also involved an assessment of specific site characteristics including physical limitations and high level constraints as identified in the NPPF
- Availability – This involved an assessment of whether or not the site is available for development. A site is considered available for development, when, on the best information available (confirmed by the call for sites and information from land owners), there is confidence that there are no legal or ownership problems, such as unresolved multiple ownerships, ransom strips tenancies or operational requirements of landowners.
- Achievability – This involved an assessment of whether or not there is a reasonable prospect of development taking place on the site. This was a judgement about the economic viability of the site, i.e. an assessment of whether there are any abnormal costs (e.g. infrastructure or remedial work) that would put at serious risk the delivery of development within the time frame of the local plan review.

The outcome of this assessment is an indication of the suitability and deliverability of each site.

Please note: Suitability does not necessarily imply the whole site is suitable. Deliverability was determined by the outputs of the availability and achievability assessments. The timeframe within which deliverability was assessed is the timeframe for the local plan review, i.e. 2037/38, which might mean that only part of a site might be deliverable within the plan period. For the assessment outcome, each site falls within one of the following categories:

- Suitable but deliverable
- Suitable but undeliverable

- Unsuitable

What are 'high-level constraints' and how did these affect the assessment?

The assessment took account of those issues which are beyond the control of the Borough Council but which preclude development, taking a lead from the NPPF. The high-level constraints that were factored into the assessments include Sites of Scientific Interest, Ancient Woodland, Local Green Spaces, Land at high risk of flooding (Flood zone 3) and Special Areas of Conservation, Ancient Monuments. The full list of high level constraints is contained in the report.

Those sites wholly covered by one or more of these high-level constraints were assessed as unsuitable. Parts of sites covered by high-level constraints were excluded from the developable area and the calculation of the potential yield (see below). The assessment took account of other high-level policies including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. However, according to the NPPF and the Government's Planning Practice Guidance, these do not preclude any development potential but instead affect the amount that could take place, i.e. minor as opposed to major.

Did the assessment take account of local planning policies?

The assessment is part of the evidence base for the Local Plan; it is not part of plan-making itself (that is the next stage in the process). The assessment is a technical exercise, primarily to clarify practical aspects of the sites, rather than to judge whether or not they should feature as future allocations for development in the Local Plan. For these reasons the assessment was effectively 'local planning policies switched off'. Locally policy considerations are addressed at the next stage which is when the local plan takes shape and responds to the evidence base.

What does 'potential yield' mean?

Potential yield is an initial assessment of what each suitable and deliverable site could accommodate in terms of different types of development, e.g. residential, employment. In many cases, the site promoter has provided an indicative figure. Where this has not been provided, a density multiplier is used based on the type of site. Developable area (site area (hectares) excluding high-level constraints) x 30 (average dwellings per hectare).

For non-residential purposes, the potential yield is simply the developable area (site area (hectares) excluding high-level constraints). The outcome of this calculation is by no means a final figure of what is acceptable in planning terms; if and when the sites are progressed through to the plan-making stage a more detailed assessment will be required. At that stage planning judgements about how much of a site is appropriate for development will need to be made which might well reduce the area and yield significantly. Again, at that stage it will be necessary to understand fully the land-take for supporting uses including schools, healthcare facilities, open space and roads. Potential yield at this stage is therefore very much a starting point for this exercise

What will happen to the outputs from the assessments?

After fact checking with the submitters of the sites, the assessments will provide important evidence for the preparation of the new Local Plan. The evidence will feed into the assessment of potential development strategies for the new Local Plan.

If a site is assessed as 'suitable and deliverable' does this mean it will be automatically allocated for development in the Local Plan?

No. The call for sites and the technical assessment of sites put forward is an important evidence source to inform plan-making but does not in itself determine whether a site should be allocated for development. Allocation of land for development will depend upon the extent of policy and practical constraints identified in the assessment and the choices ultimately made by the Borough Council on the strategy options available. The technical assessment provides information on the range of sites which are available to meet need, but it is for the local plan itself to determine which of those sites are the most suitable to meet those needs.

If a site is assessed as 'Unsuitable' does this mean it will automatically be discounted for allocation in the Local Plan?

No. The call for sites and the technical assessment of sites put forward is an important evidence source to inform plan-making but does not in itself determine whether a site should be allocated for development. Allocation of land for development will depend upon the extent of policy and practical constraints identified in the assessment and the choices ultimately made by the Borough Council on the strategy options available. The technical assessment provides information on the range of sites which are available to meet need, but it is for the local plan itself to determine which of those sites are the most suitable to meet those needs.

When can I comment on the sites?

The assessment is purely a technical exercise in accordance with Government policy and planning practice (see above), which means the first opportunity to comment will be during the consultation on the Local Plan Review in the early spring of 2021

Over the next few months Borough Council Members will be considering some potential options for the future development strategy and approach to site allocation. It is at this stage that people will be able to make a formal representation on what is contained in the draft local plan review.

How do I keep in touch with the progress of the Local Plan?

Register here for local plan updates <https://swale-consult.objective.co.uk/kse/auth> or view local plan pages on the Council's website <https://www.swale.gov.uk/planning-policy/>