

Borough of Darlington Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

FINAL

February 2008

Darlington Local Development Framework

Assistant Chief Executives Department (Regeneration)

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Introduction

The Department for Communities and Local Government issued the final guidance on how to carry out a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) in August 2007. The guidance is quite clear about its expectations through 10 steps and it states in detail how to do all of these.

This initial draft is based on the agreed Tees Valley approach to carrying out SHLAAs, taking in guidance from all five authorities and key stakeholders in the sub-region. Key principles of the Darlington approach are as follows:

- The guide will be updated as the regional approach is developed to ensure that the Darlington approach is closely aligned with the regional and sub-regional approach.
- The approach is highly collaborative through collaboration between the Tees Valley authorities, engagement with the regional approach, engaging stakeholders in the development process such as the House Builders Federation, estate agents and housing associations.

The SHLAA is a “living” document. This means that it is not a snapshot study fixed at a particular base date but rather an integral part of the annual monitoring review (AMR).

This will provide the flexibility to achieve the following objectives:

- To relate the SHLAA to other related projects such as Open Space Surveys and Employment Land Reviews. Such projects may have different time frames to the initial SHLAA but the AMR will enable subsequent linkage.
- To relate the SHLAA to any plans or strategies that are produced after the initial SHLAA but which have implications for the SHLAA.
- To enable the guide to be a “living” document. The Darlington SHLAA working group will update the guide if operational experience may warrant modifications and/or if new examples of SHLAA best practice are identified.

The Planning Policy Requirements for SHLAAs

The policy context to SHLAA is provided by Planning Policy Statement 3 “Housing” (PPS3). PPS3 sets out a new policy approach for housing, including the identification of sufficient land for the plan period of 15 years, ensuring that the first 5 years of sites are allocated and developable and that the 5-year supply is maintained as sites are developed out. The key underlining message from the Government is that the system is now focussed on ensuring that housing is delivered.

To support the new policy approach to housing, the PPS3 “daughter document” *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments: Practice Guidance* requires a new approach to assessing housing land availability.

The fundamental aim of a SHLAA is to assess the potential of a borough to accommodate housing development over a period of 15 years from the date of adoption of core strategies. To achieve this it should aim to identify as many sites with housing potential as possible in and around as many settlements as possible in the study area.

The SHLAA will form part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) but it does not in itself determine whether a site should be allocated for housing development. The results of the study will also be used to inform work on the next review of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East and on sub-regional strategies.

Summary of what a SHLAA does:

- Informs Regional Spatial Strategy Planning.
- Informs Development Plan Documents.
- Should ideally identify sufficient specific sites for more than 15 years; but as a minimum:
 - Identify Specific Deliverable sites for years 1 to 5.
 - Identify Specific Developable sites for years 6 to 10.
 - Identify Broad locations (or where appropriate windfalls) for years 11 to 15.

It should be noted that the inclusion of particular sites and the nature of the comments made about them in the SHLAA exercise does not in any way infer that those sites will be granted planning consent or allocated for development.

Methodology Overview

The following sections of this Scoping Report will set out how Darlington proposes to undertake the SHLAA and ensure consistency with the Practice Guidance. Below are listed key milestones in Darlington's approach to undertaking a SHLAA:

Milestone	Timescale	Notes	Undertakers	Method
Establishing a Core Steering Group	September 2008	Inviting representation from relevant internal services and stakeholders.	DBC	Email Letters
Inviting Submission of Sites	September 2008	Invite submission of potential sites with some assessment already carried out.	DBC Stakeholders Landowners	Email Letters
Initial Site Assessments	September 2008	GIS desktop review of sites in the first instance.	DBC	GIS Database
	October 2008 to January 2009	Officer & Core Steering Group site visits.	DBC and Core Steering Group Members	Site Visits
Further Site Assessments	November 2008	Filter and discount sites.	DBC	Email
	November 2008 to January 2009	Assess housing potential of each site.	Stakeholders and Core Steering Group Members	Email
	November 2008 to January 2009	Assess suitability of site for housing.	Stakeholders and Core Steering Group Members	Email
	November 2008 to January 2009	Assess availability of site.	Core Steering Group Members	Email
	November 2008 to January 2009	Assess the when and whether the site will likely be developed.	Core Steering Group Members	Email
Final Site Assessments	February 2009	SHLAA Steering Group workshop to agree approach to sites.	DBC Core Steering Group Members	Meeting
Draft Final Report	March 2009	Consultation. Draft report includes summary report of potential housing sites out for consultation.	DBC Stakeholders SHLAA Steering Group	Email
Consideration of consultation responses	March 2009	SHLAA Steering Group to consider responses, and agree final changes to report.	SHLAA Steering Group	Meeting
Final SHLAA Report	March 2009	Publication of final report.	DBC	Email Website

Table 1: Milestones in undertaking the SHLAA

Stage 1: Planning the Assessment

Establishing a Steering Group

- A Steering Group will be established with developers, housebuilders, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and any other relevant agencies. It will comprise several Council officers from relevant departments (e.g. Planning Policy, Development Control, Housing and Estates) and representatives of local developers, the Home Builders Federation and a registered social landlord.

The Practice Guidance advocates carrying out the SHLAA at the sub-regional level by housing market partnerships where established. The view taken by the Tees Valley authorities is that a single Tees Valley SHLAA would be impracticable. However, this methodology represents a highly collaborative approach to which all the Tees valley authorities are committed, tailored, however, to the Borough of Darlington.

A working group has been established with the SHLAA lead officers from each of the Tees Valley authorities. The working group shaped the template of this document and will continue to collaborate to share best practice and to ensure that a common Tees Valley approach to implementing the national guidance is maintained.

Stage 2: Sources of Sites to Include and Sources of Information

The table at Appendix 1 shows the sources of sites to include and sources of information. It is useful to divide sources into two broad categories:

- Site Currently in the Planning Process
- Sites Not Currently in the Planning Process

There are types of sites in Darlington that may be discounted outright from any assessment, those sites that Government policy or law dictates are inappropriate for residential (or sometimes any) development. These are colloquially referred to as “showstoppers”.

Showstoppers

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Ramsar sites
- Special Protection Areas (SPA)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
- National Nature Reserve (NNR)
- Community Forests
- Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
- BAP Priority Habitat and Species Sites
- Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS)
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Ancient Woodland
- HSE inner zones
- Historic parks, gardens and sites
- Flood Risk Area – Zone 3b “Functional Floodplain”

Stage 3: Determining Which Sites and Areas will be Surveyed

With regard to the area that will be surveyed, the aim of the Darlington SHLAA will be to cover as many settlements and areas outside settlements as possible, with the aim that the full potential to deliver housing in the Borough can be fully assessed. However the resources available to the Council, stakeholders and specifically the project steering group are limited.

Therefore only sites that have a reasonable chance of coming forward and delivering houses should be included in the assessment. The project steering group, dominated by non-Council stakeholders, will decide upon the final sites that will go forward to the assessment.

This will be done via ongoing consultation between the members of the project steering group and other key stakeholders previous to a steering group meeting when the final list of sites will be decided upon. Determining which sites will be surveyed will be the decision of the project steering group and will definitely not be decided unilaterally by the Council.

Stage 4: Carrying Out the Survey

The guidance states that, while on site, the following characteristics should be recorded, or checked if they were previously identified by the desktop review:

- Site size.
- Site boundaries.
- Current use(s).
- Surrounding land uses(s).
- Character of surrounding area.
- Physical constraints, e.g. access, steep slopes, potential for flooding, natural features of significance and location of pylons.
- Development progress, e.g. ground works completed, number of homes started and number of homes completed.
- Initial assessment of whether the site is suitable for housing or housing as part of a mixed-use development.

Stage 5: Estimating Housing Potential of Each Site

The potential housing yield on each identified site will depend on the following factors:

- The gross site area, measured as the area of the site polygon by the GIS.
- The likely net developable area.
- Housing densities on the site.

The likely net developable area

On small sites, the whole of the site will usually be available for building houses, subject to general spacing and basic amenity requirements. On larger sites a part of the area will normally need to be set aside to accommodate access roads and amenity open space. On very large sites it may be necessary to allow for other uses such as open space, community facilities and neighbourhood centres. Table 2 provides an indicative Darlington specific guide for the likely net developable area in relation to site area thresholds:

Gross site area (ha)	Percentage net
Less than 0.4	100%
0.4 to 2	75 to 90%
More than 2	50 to 75 %

Table 2: Net developable area and site area thresholds

Identified site area threshold

It is impractical to identify all the sites where there may be opportunities for small scale development of additional housing from subdivision of larger houses or infill on back gardens or other small sites. A small site threshold will be set below which the capacity of individual sites will not be assessed. The site area threshold needs to be set low enough to ensure that significant identifiable site capacity is not subsumed in trend projections but not so low as to be impractical. The aim is to cover sites offering 5 dwellings or fewer in the small sites allowance. Where densities of around 30 dwellings per hectare apply this implies a site threshold of 0.17ha. This does not mean that all sites below this threshold are unsuitable for development, instead such sites will be considered as “small sites” and any subsequent planning application for residential development will be considered against the relevant development plan documents and national planning policy. Where a site has been submitted specifically for the purpose of providing affordable housing, a lower threshold may be used.

There are two approaches to estimating yields from identified sites:

- Density multipliers – using standard densities and multiplying them with the area of each site to obtain yields.
- Design based approaches – designing layouts on a varying sample of the sites and applying the results to the remaining sites.

The preferred approach of the Tees Valley authorities and Darlington.

The preferred approach is to apply density multipliers. It is recognized that a design-led approach would be ideal but this is not considered realistic in relation to the available time and resources. There is a need for care when applying density multipliers. It is not just a case of adding up the gross site area and multiplying it by density. The likely net developable area must be taken into account.

Densities below the 30dph minimum may be applied if considered justified having regard to paragraph 46 of PPS3.

This approach will produce an *initial estimate* of yield for each site. However, it is acknowledged that absolute reliance upon a prescriptive approach would be unsatisfactory given the number of variables possible with individual sites. The initial estimate for each site will therefore be subject to the following further assessment:

In THE Darlington SHLAA, to provide further guidance and differentiation between sites in different types of locations, the mid range of the suggested density that is set out for different zones within Darlington in the Draft Design of New Development SPD has been used to produce an initial estimate of site yield, based on the net developable area.

Consultation with the SHLAA steering group.

The SHLAA Steering Group will give their views on the indicative yield, taking into account any comments made by other stakeholders in their site assessment returns.

These views will take the following factors into account:

- Any known physical constraints to determine whether the site is likely to be costly to develop.
- The strength/weakness of the housing market in that particular area.
- The optimum dwelling mix for the current housing market.

The further assessment may result in a *revised estimate* of yield for each site that will take all of the known physical and political constraints into account.

Stage 6: Assessing When and Whether Sites are Likely to be Developed

The report will now have arrived at a database of sites and opportunities that will be classed as the 'unconstrained potential'.

The next stage will involve identifying whether the sites are genuinely available for development and are realistically deliverable in the short, medium and long term.

It is necessary to undertake an assessment of deliverability and developability in order to arrive at a realistic assessment of likely future supply also known as the 'constrained potential'. To be considered:

- Deliverable – a site is available now, offers a suitable location for housing development now and there is a reasonable prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within 5 years from the date of adoption of the relevant development plan document.
- Developable – a site should be in a suitable location for housing development, and there should be a reasonable prospect that it will be available for and could be developed at a specific point in time.

In assessing the potential developability of sites, we intend to consider the three key contributing factors as recommended by the Practice Guidance. They are:

- Assessing suitability for housing.

- Assessing availability for housing.
- Assessing achievability for housing.

Suitability

The Practice Guidance states that a site is suitable for housing development if it offers a suitable location for development and would contribute to the creation of sustainable mixed, communities. Sites allocated in existing plans for housing or with planning permission will generally be suitable though it may be necessary to assess whether circumstances have changed to alter their suitability. For other sites, the following factors should be assessed.

- Policy restrictions.
- Physical problems or limitations.
- Potential impacts.
- The environmental conditions.

Availability

A site is considered to be available for development, when, on the best information available, there is confidence that there are no legal or ownership problems.

Achievability

A site is considered to be achievable for development where there is a reasonable prospect that housing will be developed on the site at a particular point in time. It will be affected by:

Market Factors

Such as adjacent uses, economic viability of existing, proposed and alternative uses in terms of land values, attractiveness of the locality, level of potential market demand and projected rate of sales (particularly important for larger sites).

Cost Factors

Including site preparation costs relating to any physical constraints, any exceptional works necessary, relevant planning standards or obligations, prospect of funding or investment to address identified constraints or assist development.

Overcoming Constraints

Where constraints have been identified, ongoing consultation with stakeholder with particular importance placed on the project steering group should consider whether it would be appropriate to mitigate against them and assess whether the site is ultimately deliverable or developable and in what timeframe.

Delivery Factors

Including the developer's own phasing, the realistic build-out rates on larger sites (including likely earliest and latest start and completion dates), whether there is a single developer or several developers offering different housing products, and the size and capacity of the developer. Market capacity in the Borough must also be taken into account, whereby the historic maximum new build rates since the 1980's are marginally in excess of 500 dwellings per year. Years where build rates were around 500 additional dwellings per year, proved to be the recent "boom" years, when the housing market was at it's healthiest. However, despite these statistics, it remains to be established with stakeholders what the actual capacity of the market is today.

The Practice Guidance states that a number of residual valuation models are available to help determine whether housing is an economically viable prospect for a particular site. In theory, new housing will only be built where the residual value for housing exceeds the value of the site remaining in its existing use. However, whilst a more technical approach may be ideal it is considered unrealistic that the time and resources will be available to undertake this in-depth analysis.

Ongoing surveying, assessment and consultation between stakeholders, with particular importance placed upon the SHLAA project steering group, will go forward to decide upon the assessment of each site. This will culminate in a SHLAA Steering Group . Each site will be presented with a map showing the location and completed site survey sheets in an electronic format where possible. Representatives will then be invited to give their views regarding:

- Whether, and when, each site might be expected to come forward for development given its location, characteristics and any potential constraints.

- The estimated number of dwellings that could be accommodated on the site, taking account of the appropriate mix of house types that the site could accommodate..

Considering each site against suitability, achievability and availability indicators

The SHLAA is not the site allocations Development Plan Document. It is part of the evidence base for it and it is important to maintain a clear distinction. This distinction provides the context for the framework of suitability, availability, achievability and infrastructure capacity indicators.

The framework is not designed as a scoring system or as a means of comparison between sites. The framework has been structured so that key site-specific facts can be identified that will inform an overall view of suitability, availability, achievability and infrastructure capacity.

As previously stated, site assessments will be done and final decisions made on the sites, by the stakeholders, with particular importance placed upon the SHLAA project steering group.

Site Groupings Based on Timeframe

Following the assessment of suitability, availability and achievability, sites will be grouped into draft portfolios according to the timeframe for their expected delivery if they have been assessed as either deliverable or developable within 15 years of the Assessment. If they have been assessed as currently non-deliverable and non-developable, they will be allocated to a portfolio of currently non-deliverable and non-developable sites. If any site fails any of the tests of suitability, availability and achievability it will automatically be classed as currently non-deliverable.

If a site has failed the suitability test on policy grounds, it will also be classed as currently non-developable. As explained previously, this does not necessarily preclude a site from coming forward within the 15-year time frame. It will be for the relevant document in the LDF and the community/stakeholder consultation which that embodies, drawing on the housing trajectory evidence provided by the SHLAA, to determine the appropriateness or otherwise of amending policy restrictions in order to deliver the housing objectives. If a site fails the availability test but there is robust evidence that it will become available within the 15-year time frame, then it may still be classed as developable (assuming it has been assessed as suitable). It will be made explicit in the report as to the reasons as to why each site has been allocated to whatever draft portfolio or portfolios it has been allocated to. The timeframes for the draft portfolios are as follows:

Portfolio Category	Timeframe
Deliverable Sites	0 to 5 Years
Medium Term Developable Sites	6 to 10 Years
Long Term Developable Sites	11 to 15 Years
Non Deliverable and Developable Sites	> 15 Years

Table 3: Timeframe Portfolio

As the timeframes above are taken from the anticipated date of adoption of the LDF Core Strategy (2010/11), there may be sites included in the assessment that are considered deliverable in full or in part prior to LDF adoption. These are identified as deliverable in years (i) and (ii) for 2009/10 and 2010/11 respectively.

Site Groupings Based on Location

Once the sites to be included in the assessment are identified, agreed upon and assessed by stakeholders and the project steering group they will be grouped by their geography. Table 4 shows how the urban sites will be classified into 3 categories, bearing in mind sustainable development.

Type	Description	Definition
UPD	Urban Area Previously Developed	Suitable previously developed sites and buildings within the defined development limits of urban areas, particularly around public transport nodes.
UGF	Urban Area Greenfield	Land that is located within the development limits of the conurbation listed above but has not previously been developed.

UE	Urban Area Extensions	Sites that adjoin the conurbation or a main settlement on at least one side but are outside development limits, with preference given to previously developed sites.
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Table 4: Urban Housing Categories

Table 5 shows the same approach applied to rural categories.

Type	Description	Definition
RS	Rural Settlement	Sites in or adjacent to Heighington, Middleton St George or Hurworth villages, with preference given to previously developed sites.
RC	Rural Countryside	Sites in or adjacent to other, smaller settlements or in open countryside.

Table 5: Rural Housing Categories

Stage 7: Reviewing the Assessment

The SHLAA will include a housing trajectory showing which sites are expected to come forward at particular times. This will also include a risk assessment as to whether sites will come forward as anticipated.

In accordance with the Practice Guidance, the assessment will be kept up-to-date on an annual basis as part of the Annual Monitoring Report. The following information will be recorded:

- The development status of identified sites e.g. have planning applications been submitted.
 - The progress which has been made on removing constraints to development.
 - Assessment and suitability, availability and deliverability of any further potential housing sites.
- Add in criteria set out in para 17 of CLG SHLAA Practice Guidance.

Where the updating includes the assessment of further sites, a SHLAA Steering Group meeting will be convened to agree the update material.

Stage 8: Identifying and Assessing the Housing Potential of Broad Locations

The Practice Guidance states that broad locations are areas where housing development is considered feasible and will be encouraged, but where specific sites cannot yet be identified.

Stage 9: Determining the Housing Potential of Windfall

PPS3 states that a windfall allowance should only be included if there are genuine local circumstances to necessitate its inclusion. The rationale behind the discouragement of reliance upon windfall delivery is the need for as great a degree of certainty as possible in relation to housing delivery.

If any unforeseen windfalls occur, the SHLAA can take account of this in its subsequent review, therefore there will be no account, in this SHLAA, taken of windfalls.

The Final Assessment Report

The final assessment report will deliver a map and accompanying details of all sites in the SHLAA site database. It would also need to include the following outputs: -

- A list of sites considered deliverable.

- A list of sites considered developable.
- A list of sites considered not currently developable.
- A trajectory of when sites are expected to come forwards in the next: two years (prior to plan adoption) one to five years after LDF adoption, six to ten years after LDF adoption and eleven to fifteen years after LDF adoption.
- A list of excluded showstopper sites with the justification.
- A list of each site and its general performance in relation to the framework of suitability, availability, achievability and infrastructure capacity
- A list of sites with identified constraints and identified approaches to overcome these.

Appendix 1: Sources of Sites to Include and Sources of Information

Sites currently in the planning process

Sites	Data Source
Land allocated (or with permission) for employment or other land uses which are no longer required for those uses.	Employment land availability data Employment Land Review Open Space Audit
Existing housing allocations and site development briefs.	Housing land availability data Development briefs
Unimplemented/outstanding planning permissions for housing and permissions that under construction.	Housing land availability data

Sites not currently in the planning process

Vacant and derelict land and buildings	The National land Use Database (NLUD) Housing land availability data Local planning authority empty property register Valuation Office database English House Condition Survey Commercial property databases e.g. estate agents and property agents Aerial Photography DUCS
Surplus public sector land	NLUD The Council's Land and Property team Register of Surplus Public Sector Land
Land in non-residential use which may be suitable for re-development for housing, such as commercial buildings or car parks, including as part of mixed-use development.	NLUD Borough-wide car parking audit undertaken for the Council's Car Parking Strategy DUCS
Additional housing opportunities in established residential areas, such as under-used garage blocks	NLUD, DUCS
Large scale redevelopment and re-design of existing residential areas	The Council's Housing Regeneration team
Sites in rural settlements and rural exception sites	NLUD Sites submitted for consideration as part of the Regeneration DPD
Urban extensions	Sites submitted for consideration as part of the Regeneration DPD