

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: New Communities Portfolio Holder

8 March 2011

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director (Operational Services) / Corporate Manager (Planning and New Communities)

STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT

Purpose

1. To agree the start of work on a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) as a key part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework review, including the methodology for the SHLAA, setting up a Housing Market Partnership and issuing a 'call for sites'.
2. This is a key decision because:
 - it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area of the District, potentially affecting all wards.
 - it is made in the course of developing proposals to amend the policy framework.

The review of the Core Strategy was first included in the Council's Local Development Scheme March 2009.

Recommendations

3. That the Portfolio Holder agrees:
 - (a) The methodology for the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (as included at Appendix 1)
 - (b) Setting up of a Housing Market Partnership
 - (c) Issuing of a 'call for sites'

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The recommended approach is considered to be the only reasonable approach to preparing the SHLAA as a fundamental part of the evidence base for the LDF review. It provides a consistent and robust approach to the assessment of sites that is similar to the approach undertaken for the housing shortfall work during the last round of LDF making and found sound by independent Inspectors.

Executive Summary

5. SCDC needs to prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) as a key part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy review. The South Cambs Local Development Framework (LDF) review will plan to 2031 without the context of a regional plan, and the housing target for the district is not yet determined. This will be a key issue for the review and will be informed by economic and population forecasting. The SHLAA will take on a particularly important role in helping the Council determine the appropriate development strategy for the district period to 2031, but it is important to note that the SHLAA is a technical assessment process and any policy decisions on the appropriate package of sites will be for the plan making process.

6. The SHLAA will assess the deliverability of the existing housing allocations in the plan period, including the major sites and in particular Northstowe, NIAB2 and Cambridge Airport. This will help identify whether these sites can be relied on during the plan period and whether current factors affect the availability of the sites during the plan period or whether they are more about the timing that they will come forward. Given the level of contribution from the major sites, this will have significant implications for the level of housing needed on new sites at different times during the plan period and overall.
7. The SHLAA will identify new sites that are suitable for housing now, or may be suitable for housing if planning policies were changed, eg. framework boundaries. Given the scale of housing growth in the district and the uncertainty over some key sites, the SHLAA will need to consider possible new strategic sites, including urban extensions to Cambridge and new settlements.
8. An early part of the process will be the setting up of a Housing Market Partnership with key stakeholders including housing builders, registered housing providers and parish councils to help with the assessment process. There will also be a 'call for sites' so that the Council will be aware at the beginning of the plan making process of the sites where there is an interest in bringing forward housing development. This means that they can be assessed on a consistent basis and the Council can determine which, if any, are potentially suitable for development. The SHLAA will inform the options stage of the LDF review, in particular the consideration of potential new housing allocations. In addition it will form part of the Council's response to the lack of a 5-year land supply identified in the AMR, which remains a requirement on the Council under the Government's latest proposals. The SHLAA will also be partially updated on an annual basis as part of the preparation of the housing trajectory to be included in the LDF Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

Considerations

What is a SHLAA?

9. A SHLAA is a technical assessment of the suitability or potential suitability of land in the Council's area for housing development. It follows a consistent methodology applied to all sites. It does not reach a view whether sites should be allocated for development: that is the role of the statutory plan making process. The Department of Communities and Local Government provides Practice Guidance on how to produce a SHLAA ¹.

The need for a SHLAA

10. The SHLAA will form part of the evidence base for the LDF review as required in current Government guidance. There is currently no indication that the requirement to produce a SHLAA will change, but even if this were the case, the Council would need an evidence base regarding the consideration of alternative sites.
11. It will also respond to the findings in the latest LDF Annual Monitoring Report that the Council cannot identify a 5-year land supply, which remains a requirement on the Council under the Government's latest proposals.

Key issues for the South Cambridgeshire SHLAA

¹ Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment: Practice Guidance (July 2007)
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/landavailabilityassessment>

12. Typically in Cambridgeshire, SHLAAs tend to have been prepared within the framework of the currently agreed development strategy contained in the East of England Plan or a Core Strategy and where the role of the SHLAA has been to focus on suitable housing sites that are consistent with current planning policies. Sometimes they refer to separate consideration of new directions for growth through Core Strategy work. Guidance is that SHLAAs should be prepared jointly for housing market areas if possible and if not that methodologies are consistent. Other Cambridgeshire Councils have prepared their SHLAAs and South Cambs will need to tailor the methodology of its SHLAA to reflect its own circumstances.
13. The South Cambs LDF review will plan to 2031 without the context of a regional plan, and the housing target for the district is not yet determined. This will be a key issue for the LDF review and will be informed by economic and population forecasting. The contribution from some of the major developments identified in the current development strategy during that period is not certain at the present time. In particular Northstowe and NIAB 2 are affected by issues around the A14 capacity, and at Cambridge East, there are uncertainties of what land will come forward given Marshall's announcement that the Airport will remain during the next plan period but they are considering development north of Newmarket Road and north of Cherry Hinton. The SHLAA will therefore need to perform a wider function than similar assessments have done for other Councils in the Cambridge area and will be one of the first to be prepared in the context that regional strategies are intended to be abolished. It will therefore have the dual role of identifying strategic scale potential locations for growth as well as more local scale suitable housing sites.
14. The Core Strategy 2006 housing figure to 2016 remains the appropriate figure to use for assessing the 5-year supply. However, as the housing target has not yet been determined in the LDF review, the overall housing figure to be met to 2031 is not clear as a framework for the SHLAA work. It is suggested that the most reasonable provisional guide figure to use is the Option 1 figure for the district identified in the CRESPP work that informed the Cambridgeshire authorities submission to EERA as part of the early stages of the review of the East of England Plan, now halted, which was 1,050 dwellings per annum, giving a provisional target of 21,000 for the period 2011-2031.
15. In view of the current shortfall in 5-year supply of housing land (AMR 2010, 2.7 years based on Core Strategy, or 3.4 years based on the soon to be revoked East of England Plan) and the uncertainties over some of the strategic sites, it is proposed that the SHLAA looks at various different types of potential housing sites, so that it can provide an evidence base for policy decisions on sites that should be allocated for housing development through the LDF plan making process. It is important to emphasise that the SHLAA does not make decisions on sites to be allocated for housing. This needs to be made clear at the outset of the process and at the 'call for sites' stage to manage speculation.
16. It is proposed that the SHLAA distinguishes between suitable sites that are consistent with current planning policies, eg. within development frameworks, and those that may potentially be suitable for housing if additional sites need to be identified to meet the housing target but that require a change in policy, eg. greenfield sites outside of development frameworks.
17. A significant decision for the Council is whether it is appropriate to consider sites that lie within the Green Belt, and where a review of the Green Belt boundary would be required in order to identify sites for housing development. This would be relevant for

any further greenfield sites on the edge of Cambridge to be identified and also for any greenfield allocations on the edge of four of the five Rural Centres in the district. The City Council's SHLAA rules out Green Belt land in principle. Locations on the edge of Cambridge and at the Rural Centres are the most sustainable locations available for housing development in South Cambridgeshire. It is therefore proposed that the South Cambs SHLAA should include an assessment of Green Belt land.

The Assessment

- 18. It is proposed that the Council follows the stages recommended in the CLG Practice Guidance, with parameters to reflect local South Cambs circumstances. Whilst it is possible that Government guidance could change, this approach is also broadly consistent with the Housing Shortfall assessment that the Council undertook as part of the Site Specific Policies DPD and which was found to be sound and supported by the examination Inspectors. An outline of the methodology for the South Cambs SHLAA is attached as Appendix 1.
- 19. An early part of the process will be the setting up of a Housing Market Partnership with key stakeholders including housing builders, registered housing providers and parish councils to help with the assessment process. This will draw as appropriate on existing partnerships that the Council has with stakeholders. The Partnership will have the opportunity to comment on the methodology before the assessment begins to ensure there is broad agreement to the approach being undertaken.
- 20. The 'call for sites' will follow, anticipated to take place in May/June and will be accompanied by the agreed methodology and clear guidance to those who may wish to put forward sites of the information the Council expects to be submitted, including information on the deliverability and viability of the proposed site, which is a key consideration in the assessment, and is fundamental to the subsequent plan making process.
- 21. As a technical assessment, it is not proposed that public consultation takes place. The SHLAA will not reach a conclusion on whether sites should be allocated; that is for the plan making process. It is proposed that consultation on the suitability of sites for allocation for housing is best undertaken as part of public participation on the Issues and Options for the LDF review.

Options

- 22. PPS3 requires the Council to prepare a SHLAA as part of the evidence base for the LDF. The SHLAA approach is also broadly consistent with the approach taken by the Council in addressing the housing shortfall identified by Inspectors through the last LDF process, which was found to be sound. No reasonable alternative options have been identified.

Implications

23.	Financial	Within existing budgets
	Legal	A key part of the evidence base required to support the LDF.
	Staffing	Within existing resources.

Risk Management	The SHLAA is likely to result in a wide variety of sites being put forward for consideration by developers and landowners. This will enable the Council to assess such sites at the beginning of the plan making process and should reduce the risk of unexpected sites coming forward later in the plan making process.
Equality and Diversity	The SHLAA is a technical assessment that will inform the LDF process, which will then make policy decisions taking account of impacts on equality and diversity and be subject to assessment.
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No. The SHLAA is a technical assessment that will inform the LDF process, which will make policy decisions and will be subject to EQIA.
Climate Change	Impacts on climate change will be taken account in the SHLAA.

Consultations

24. The SHLAA is a technical exercise following Practice Guidance. No consultations have been taken on the methodology. A wide range of consultations will take place with key stakeholders as the site assessments are undertaken, including with the proposed Housing Market Partnership.

Effect on Strategic Aims

25. **We are committed to being a listening Council, providing first class services accessible to all** – The SHLAA will give an opportunity for anyone to put forward potential land for housing development for assessment by the Council at an early stage in the plan making process.
26. **We are committed to ensuring the South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for you and your family** – The site assessments will include testing of sites to identify whether they would provide safe and healthy locations for housing development.
27. **We are committed to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live** – The assessments will include testing of sites to identify whether they would have an acceptable impact on the environment with a view to identifying through the plan making process sites that will provide high quality housing developments that residents can be proud of.
28. **We are committed to assisting provision for local jobs for you and our family** – the development strategy for South Cambs is to provide jobs to support the continued success of the local economy, with appropriate levels of new housing to support those jobs. The SHLAA will help identify site for new housing.
29. **We are committed to providing a voice for rural life** – The SHLAA will consider sites in different types of locations with a view to the LDF review providing a continuous supply of housing land through policies and allocations, including in appropriate rural locations.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (June 2010)

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments Practice Guidance – CLG
(July 2007)
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment: Frequently Asked Questions –
Planning Advisory Service (Jan/Feb 2008)
Implementing Your Local Development Framework – Strategic Housing Land
Availability – Planning Advisory Service (April 2008)
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and Development Plan Documents
Preparation – Planning Advisory Service (July 2008)

Contact Officer: Caroline Hunt – Local Development Framework Team Leader
Telephone: (01954) 713196