

# **South Oxfordshire Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)**

**January 2019**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The South Oxfordshire Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) identifies the potential future supply of land which is suitable, available and achievable for housing and economic development uses. The Council has prepared this SHELAA to support the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan, which covers the period from 2011 to 2034.
- 1.2. The SHELAA does not allocate land for development, nor does it grant planning permission for the sites we have identified. The assessment's purpose is primarily to help the Council in identifying (a) whether it has sufficient land to meet its development needs in the district, and (b) where the most suitable locations for development are.
- 1.3. This SHELAA 2019 updates previous iterations of the document that we have prepared in the past. It draws on the evidence and approach taken by previous assessments, but we have made minor changes to our methodology to ensure our approach is consistent with national guidance.
- 1.4. Through the SHELAA, we have identified a potential development capacity of around 127,000 homes in South Oxfordshire. It is now for the emerging Local Plan to identify an appropriate housing requirement for the district.

### IMPORTANT NOTE

- 1.5. This SHELAA update does not contain site plans. Please use the guidance note at appendix one to locate site plans on the Council's website.

## 2. Methodology

- 2.1. The National Planning Policy Framework and Practice Guidance require Councils to prepare a SHELAA, and set out detailed guidance for what this assessment should cover. The Council has had regard to this guidance when developing the SHELAA. This section explains how we have undertaken the SHELAA.

### Step one: Area the SHELAA Covers

- 2.2. The Council has prepared its SHELAA based on the administrative area of South Oxfordshire. The guidance states that the assessment should cover the entire housing market area (HMA), which for us, is Oxfordshire. This assessment does not do so. Each of the Councils in Oxfordshire are at various stages of preparing their Local Plans and required a SHELAA at different times. This meant that some Councils would have been held up in preparing their plan waiting for a joint SHELAA.
- 2.3. Each of the local planning authorities agreed in November 2014 that the district Local Plans are sovereign, and all strategic work should feed into Local Plans for them to determine the spatial future of the districts<sup>1</sup>.

### Step two: Identifying potential development sites

- 2.4. The Council has published numerous iterations of its SHELAA under different names since at least 2010. We have continued to build on the earlier iterations of this document, adding to it and critically assessing each of the sites within our database with each publication. Through this process, the Council has maintained an “open call for sites” allowing developers, landowners, parish councils and members of the public to submit sites for the Council to consider in its SHELAA.
- 2.5. **Table 1** overleaf provides a breakdown of the data sources that our SHELAA has used to identify potential development sites.
- 2.6. The Council has not identified any further sites in this iteration of the SHELAA since the October 2017 version. This SHELAA assesses 793 sites, but has updated how the assessment of each of these sites has been undertaken.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 3 of the Post SHMA Strategic work Programme – Final Report, available to view here:  
[http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s34709/OGB\\_SEP2616R03%20Appendix%20One%20Post%20SHMA%20Strategic%20Work%20Programme%20Final%20Report.pdf](http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s34709/OGB_SEP2616R03%20Appendix%20One%20Post%20SHMA%20Strategic%20Work%20Programme%20Final%20Report.pdf)

Table 1: Data sources for potential development sites in South Oxfordshire	
Data source reviewed	Potential development opportunities identified:
Formal call for sites responses, site submissions and consultation responses	Sites submitted to the council by developers/landowners/agents, including existing businesses
Sites submitted directly to the Council	
Responses to consultations that identify potential development sites	
Planning application records	Unimplemented planning permissions, undetermined planning permissions and applications that have been refused or withdrawn, and pre-application enquiries (where not confidential)
Five-year housing land supply statement	
Local authority records	Land in the ownership of the local authority
Duty to co-operate discussions with Oxfordshire County Council	Surplus of public sector land
National register of public sector land	
Local authority empty property register	Vacant and derelict land and buildings
Employment land review	Land allocated (or with permission) for employment or other land uses which are no longer required for those uses
Ordnance Survey maps, aerial photography and site surveys	Broad areas, potential urban extensions and new free standing settlements that might potentially be suitable for development, including sites where more productive use of under-utilised facilities might be envisaged

### Step three: Initial screening of sites - size threshold

*Criteria: Capable of delivering 5 homes or more, or 0.25ha for employment land*

- 2.7. The planning practice guidance advises that the SHELAA should consider all sites and broad locations for growth capable of delivering 5 or more dwellings, or for economic land proposals, sites of 0.25ha or more<sup>2</sup>.
- 2.8. Given that South Oxfordshire is an extensive rural district covering some 250 square miles, it would be unwieldy and disproportionate to assess every small parcel of land in the district. Consequently, the Council has adopted the planning practice guidance approach to exclude all sites below this threshold.
- 2.9. To assess whether sites are capable of delivering 5 or more homes, we have applied the Council's emerging density policy STRAT12 in the proposed submission Local Plan 2034. This applies a minimum density based on the site that the settlement sits in or adjacent. More sustainable locations have higher density thresholds, while less sustainable locations have lower density thresholds. Table 2 below shows the density assumptions we have applied to identify a site's initial development capacity:

Table 2: Density assumptions	
Site location	Density assumptions based on emerging Local Plan 2034 Policy STRAT 12 (dwellings per hectare)
Adjacent to Didcot, Oxford or Reading	70
Market towns	50
Larger village	45
Smaller village	40
Other locations	35

- 2.10. Based on these density assumptions, all the sites that the Council considered were capable of delivering at least five homes and 0.25ha of employment land. Consequently, we did not remove any sites based on this screening criteria.
- 2.11. The Council therefore had 793 sites to carry forward to the next stage of the assessment.

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<sup>2</sup>National Planning Practice Guidance: Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, Paragraph 010  
Reference ID: 3-010-20140306

#### Step four: Initial site survey– assessment of intrinsic constraints

*Criteria: Degree to which the site is affected by “intrinsic constraints”*

- 2.12. The next step for the Council was to source a set of evidence relating to each of the 793 sites to inform our assessment of their suitability, availability, and achievability for development. The planning practice guidance<sup>3</sup> advises that this initial evidence survey should include several types of information. Table 3 below shows how the South Oxfordshire SHELAA has responded to this.

Table 3: Site survey data	
1	Site name or reference
2	Nearest settlement and its location in the settlement hierarchy (e.g. market town, larger village etc.)
3	Current land use
4	Site size
5	Number of homes capable of being delivered on the site using the density assumptions of emerging policy STRAT12 of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2034
6	Percentage of the site in flood zone 2 or 3
7	Percentage of the site in a Site of Special Scientific Interest
8	Percentage of the site in a Special Area of Conservation
9	Percentage of the site in an area of Ancient Woodland
10	Percentage of the site in a Registered Park or Garden
11	Percentage of the site in the Green Belt
12	Percentage of the site in the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
13	Percentage of the site in a Local Wildlife Site
14	Percentage of the site affected by Tree Preservation Orders
15	Record of any designated heritage assets, including listed buildings, conservation areas, archaeological areas of constraint and scheduled monuments.
16	Percentage of the site covered by Grades 1 to 3 agricultural land
17	Record of any utilities infrastructure, including gas and electricity transmission pipes and their safeguarding area, as well as any above ground infrastructure such as pylons or substations.
18	Potential access to the site

<sup>3</sup> National Planning Practice Guidance: Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, Paragraph 016  
Reference ID: 3-010-20140306



- 2.13. The planning practice guidance advises that this site survey should also include an “initial assessment” of whether each site is suitable for a particular type of use. To conduct this assessment, the Council has identified a list of “intrinsic constraints” that we used to remove sites that are protected by national designations and policies that restrict development.
- 2.14. The guidance supports such an approach, stating that sites *“should be assessed against national policies and designations to establish which have reasonable potential for development and should be included in the survey”*.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.15. These “intrinsic constraints” are identified on Table 4 below:

Table 4: Intrinsic constraints		
	Constraint	Reason for using a screening criterion to exclude sites
1	Sites lying wholly or mostly (>50%) within flood zones 2 and 3	The functional flood zone is not developable as set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance: Flood Risk and Coastal Change <sup>5</sup> .
2	Sites wholly or mostly (>50%) containing a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Given legislative protection, no significant adverse effects could be tolerated.  A conservative approach is applied, which assumes that sites intersecting by <50% could conceivably be designed to avoid effects.
3	Sites wholly or mostly (>50%) containing a Special Area of Conservation	Given legislative protection, no significant adverse effects could be tolerated.
4	Sites wholly or mostly (>50%) containing Ancient Woodland	Given legislative and policy protection, no significant adverse effects could be tolerated.
5	Sites wholly or mostly (>50%) containing a Registered Park or Garden	Given legislative and policy protection, no significant adverse effects could be tolerated.

<sup>4</sup> National Planning Practice Guidance: Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, Paragraph 014 Reference ID: 3-014-20140306

<sup>5</sup> Flood zones are designated by the Environment Agency, and published in the form of flood maps showing flood zones 2 and 3; however, information is not readily available on which parts of flood zone 3 are zone 3b (functional floodplain) as opposed to 3a. The decision was therefore taken to exclude sites entirely or mostly within in flood zone 2 and 3 (incorporating both flood zones 3a and 3b).

- 2.16. The NPPF states that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk. Having regard to this, the council also discounts sites where they are significantly constrained by Flood Zones 2 and 3.
- 2.17. The NPPF places a strong emphasis on conserving and enhancing biodiversity. It states that where proposed development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is likely to have an adverse effect on a SSSI, then this should not normally be permitted<sup>6</sup>. The council therefore considers it appropriate to protect these sites at the earliest level of plan making. The council discounts sites where they predominantly or wholly contain land designated as a SSSI.
- 2.18. Sites of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI) relate to land designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and are protected by law to conserve their wildlife or geology<sup>7</sup>.
- 2.19. “European Sites” such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are designated under the Habitats Directive<sup>8</sup>, which protects habitat types and species considered to be most in need of conservation at the European level. The council considers it appropriate to discount sites where they predominantly or wholly contain land designated as a “European Site”.
- 2.20. The NPPF identifies ancient woodland as an irreplaceable habitat. It states that substantial harm to or loss of such assets “should be wholly exceptional”<sup>9</sup>. For this reason, the council discounts sites where they predominantly or wholly contain ancient woodland.
- 2.21. The NPPF also places significant protection on registered parks and gardens, stating that substantial harm or loss of such assets should be “exceptional”. The Council therefore discounts sites where they predominantly or wholly contain ancient a registered park and garden.
- 2.22. Using these “intrinsic constraints” we were able to undertake an initial assessment of the site’s suitability. This resulted in the following **55 sites** being removed from further assessment in the SHELAA:

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<sup>6</sup> NPPF, Paragraph 175

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/protected-areas-sites-of-special-scientific-interest>

<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm)

<sup>9</sup> NPPF, Paragraph 175

Table 5: Site removed after considering “intrinsic constraints”		
SHELAA Reference	Site Name	Reason for removal
32	Land south of Kennet Close, Berinsfield	More than 50% of the site is located in Flood Zone 2 or 3
47	Land to the west of the Street, South Stoke	
52	Redwood Barn, Wallingford Road, Shillingford	
53	Land at Henley Railway Station Car Park	
72	Land adjoining High Street, Long Wittenham	
90	Land south of Riverside Park and Pools, Wallingford	
91	Culham Lock Carpark, Culham	
98	Land near Beaulieu Mews, Didcot	
101	Land east of Torridge Drive, Didcot	
106	Land south of Wensum Drive, Didcot	
116	Mobray Fields Local Nature Reserve, Didcot	
121	Land near Mersey Way, Didcot	
322	Henley Four Oaks Caravan Club, Henley	
333	CPM (UK), Thame	
354	Wilder’s Yard, Crowmarsh Gifford	
379	Waterfront, Benson	
398	Sydney Harrison House, Mill Road, Lower Shiplake	
426	Land at Wallingford Castle, Wallingford	
429	Riverside Park and Pools, Wallingford	
432	Land north and south of Wallingford Bridge, Wallingford	
846	Queensford Lakes, Burcot Lane, Berinsfield	
879	Land west of Manor Road, Goring	
907	Land at rear of Watcombe Manor, Watlington	
922	Land north of A4130, Wallingford	

923	Land east of Reading Road, Wallingford	More than 50% of the site is located in Flood Zone 2 or 3
925	Land east of Didcot Road, Long Wittenham	
927	Land west of Aylesbury Road, Thame	
940	Mogewell Park, Crowmarsh	
961	Land east of A4155, Henley	
962	Land south of Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch	
977	Land at Churchfield Lane, Benson	
980	Land at Foxhill Close, Play Hatch	
981	Land west of B478, Sonning Eye	
995	Land west of Manor Road, Goring	
1045	Land bounded by Henley Road and Rock Farm Lane, Sandford on Thames	
1082	Manor Farm Bungalow, 14 Mill Lane, Chalgrove	
1109	Land south of Henley Road, Play Hatch	
1120	Play Hatch Garden Centre, Play Hatch	
1141	Land at Benson Materials Store, St Helen's Avenue, Benson	
1155	Land south of Wimplestraw Road, Berinsfield	
1272	Land west of Lower Farm, Sandford on Thames	
1278	Land south west of Watlington Road and north east of Baldon Brook (2)	
1310	Land at Lane End Farm and Bayswater Brook	More than 50% of the site is located in a site of special scientific interest
1311	Land to north east of Cherwell Farm	
1312	Land at Marston Common	
1313	Land between A40 and Bayswater Brook	
1287	Land south of Horspath Common	
1291	Land South of Old Road, Forest Hill with Shotover	More than 50% of the site is located in a site of special scientific interest
1297	Land north of Shotover Country Park, Forest Hill with Shotover	

894	Land east of Kidmore Road, Emmer Green	More than 50% of the site contains ancient woodland
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#### Step six: Assessment of suitability, availability, and achievability

- 2.23. Following this initial assessment of suitability, the Council then undertook a further assessment of suitability, availability, and achievability taking account of the full results of the site surveys.
- 2.24. This allowed the Council to establish whether a site was suitable in principle for further consideration through the plan making process. Plan makers of either the Local Plan or emerging Neighbourhood Plans can then understand the basic characteristics of potential development sites in their area, and build on these in their evidence base with more locally specific knowledge on these sites.
- 2.25. The site assessment considered the results of the site surveys, and drew conclusions on suitability, availability, and achievability to inform the Local Plan process. The conclusions drawn in the SHELAA will warrant further investigation through the plan making, or planning application process, where more detailed evidence can be collated and analysed.
- 2.26. The SHELAA assesses a site as “suitable for further consideration” if the site is not covered by more than 50% of an intrinsic constraint.
- 2.27. The SHELAA assesses a site available if, in the previous five years, the land owner or site promoter has notified us that the site is still available for development.
- 2.28. The SHELAA considers most sites in South Oxfordshire to be achievable. The evidence supporting our emerging Local Plan South Oxfordshire is a viable location for residential development.
- 2.29. The results of these assessments are given in the proformas of the sites in Appendix One.

#### Step seven: conclusions on land availability

- 2.30. After considering the “intrinsic constraints” ‘effect on suitability, and after assessing the availability and achievability of the sites, **we have concluded that there is potentially suitable land available for 127,721 homes in South Oxfordshire.**
- 2.31. This does not mean that all the sites assessed by the SHELAA are considered acceptable in planning terms. As we have highlighted in this report, the SHELAA is the starting point for the assessing whether a site could be allocated in the plan making process. A site’s inclusion in the SHELAA does not represent planning permission, nor an allocation.
- 2.32. The next stage is therefore for plan makers to consider those sites that are suitable, available, and achievable for development. For the Local Plan 2034, the next steps of this process are set out in the Site Selection Background Paper.