

Neighbourhood Planning Guidance Note 21

Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites

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One of the advantages of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan is to establish the principle that a suitable form of development can be located on a particular site. This process is known as allocating sites. The purpose of this guidance note is to explain the principles for allocating sites within your Neighbourhood Development Plan and the methods which can be used to justify their selection.

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Neighbourhood plans are development plans, and will be used for determining planning applications. They are therefore able to identify and allocate sites for new development including housing, employment, business use, leisure and other forms of development. They can also protect and safeguard land for future uses (for example open spaces) and define development boundaries or settlement limits for those places where some further growth may take place (also see guidance note 20: Guide to settlement boundaries).

If your Neighbourhood Development Plan were to allocate sites for uses other than housing, then this too can provide developers, service providers, Herefordshire Council and residents with a greater degree of certainty about what sites are likely to come forward in the future and for what purpose. In short, by identifying specific sites within your parish, decisions on planning applications can immediately be given a clear steer.

It is important to note that site allocations do not give permission to any particular proposal; this will still need to be secured through the planning application process.

Principles for allocating a site

The Local Plan - Core Strategy highlighted Neighbourhood Development Plans as being the principal documents to contain site allocations for future growth.

Any urban expansion to Hereford and the market towns (except Kington) are outlined within the Local Plan - Core Strategy and you will need to take these into account if the strategic locations are within your Neighbourhood Area. The Local Plan - Core Strategy does not, however, allocate sites for housing or any other use within the rural areas.

As such, it is down to Neighbourhood Development Plans to determine exactly where the proportional housing growth target will be distributed among named settlements. The named settlements are listed at Tables 4.20 and

4.21 of the plan respectively and it is at your discretion to determine the location of growth; if there is more than one named settlement within your Neighbourhood Area, then growth may take place in just one of them or perhaps a dispersed pattern will be the preferred option. But the bottom line is that sites should be allocated in accordance with Policy RA1. Otherwise your Neighbourhood Development Plan must demonstrate an alternative growth strategy is deliverable and can yield the number of dwellings required.

With regard to development other than housing, determining whether site specific allocations are necessary will also depend on the answers to the following questions:

- Is the site critical to the delivery of your strategy?
- What is the added value in defining clear site boundaries within your plan?
- Would you fail to meet your plan's objectives or its vision for the parish if the site was not delivered through your plan?
- Which of your objectives would the site help deliver?
- Is it required to deliver infrastructure which is central to the delivery of your Neighbourhood Development Plan and its objectives? For example, sites that include land for new transport corridors?
- Can you demonstrate sufficient robust evidence to be reasonably certain that the site is deliverable? For example, is the landowner willing to release the site and if so, does someone want to build on it?

Suggested approach to choosing sites

There are no hard and fast ways of choosing specific site allocations once you have determined that they are necessary, but the site selection process should be carried out in an **open and transparent way**, including **consultation with the community** and the production of a **full evidence base** to **support** and justify the conclusions reached.

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As part of the evidence base for the Local Plan (Core Strategy) a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) has been undertaken, a review has taken place in March 2012 and published on Herefordshire Council's website. The SHLAA provides a source of information about potential housing land for those engaged in neighbourhood planning to draw upon and covers most of Herefordshire's rural settlements. However, if your settlement is not currently included in the SHLAA or you consider that other pieces of land in one of the named settlements would be appropriate for housing development; such land can still be suggested through one of the SHLAA annual updates.

It is important to note that the SHLAA offers a very broad assessment of the potential availability of land for housing and consequently the data should only be used as a starting point - you ought to prepare a housing land study of your own and which looks at the deliverability of sites in greater detail. After all the purpose of SHLAA is to demonstrate that sufficient land is potentially available to meet the housing targets contained in the Local Plan - Core Strategy.

A site submission form is included at Appendix 1 and a site assessment form is included at Appendix 2 to this guidance note to assist you with the site surveys.

Call for sites

The most commonly used method of identifying potential housing land is undertaking a Call for Sites exercise. This is where the Parish Council or the NDP Steering Group invites developers, land owners and other interested parties to submit potential sites for future allocation in the plan, with the caveat that not all sites will be necessary or acceptable, taking into account the responses to previous consultations and an agreed list of sustainability criteria.

The proforma included in the appendices can be adapted for the purposes of your Call for Sites exercise.

To date, several Parish Councils in Herefordshire have gone through this process and your support officer will be able to put you in touch with them should you wish to draw on work already undertaken or compare examples.

Major criteria

All potential development sites should be assessed against a wide ranging and detailed list of criteria.

You may wish to develop your assessment criteria through consultation with relevant stakeholders and service providers to ensure that all relevant issues are addressed and the most appropriate and sustainable sites are selected.

To help eliminate clearly unsuitable sites, you ought to identify 'major criteria' or constraints as being:

Compliance with the Core Strategy -

Proposals must take account of and be in general conformity with the Local Plan - Core Strategy.

Flood risk - sequential tests must be carried out on all sites. Development within flood risk zones 3a and 3b (based on Environment Agency maps) should be rejected.

Proximity to and impact on national and international nature conservation designations

- suggested sites within areas protected for their international or national wildlife significance must be rejected. In addition, any sites where development is likely to have a significant negative effect on protected wildlife sites should also be rejected (refer to guidance notes 9 and 23 on conservation issues for further information).

Deliverability - sites should only be suggested for inclusion in your plan if they are deliverable, that is likely to be available, developed and built upon within the plan period.

Other criteria

Also of importance in terms of assessing the suitability of sites are the following issues:

- Contaminated land;
- Transport and highways access;
- Proximity to shops, schools, employment and public transport;
- Impact upon the landscape and the wider environment;

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- Visual impact;
- Connection and availability of utilities such as water supply and drainage.

Herefordshire Council's evidence base may provide some assistance with identifying constraints to delivery of certain sites within your parish. (Please refer to guidance note 10: Evidence base and information requirements for further details).

Inevitably, not all the shortlisted sites will be chosen and other sites may be considered. But in taking this approach you should be able to identify the most appropriate sites which can then be taken forward to the next, formal stage, of the process following consultation with the community and other stakeholders.

Consultation on proposed site allocations

Our guidance note on best practice in community engagement techniques (guidance note 12) provides comprehensive advice in respect of consultation methods, so it is not proposed that any of that information be repeated here. However, prior to submitting your final plan to Herefordshire Council, you need to check that residents, businesses and other stakeholders are happy with its content, including any site allocations.

You can produce brief concept statements as part of your consultation material, setting out how a proposed development may be achieved. These can seek views on the following:

Site assets - this includes any important features or attributes to the site, or nearby, which should be taken into consideration in planning for development on the site.

Concept - is the basic idea of how the site may be developed appropriate or is there a better way of doing it?

Other considerations - this relates to specific issues which may apply to individual sites. For example, the disposal of waste water could be a concern in parts of Herefordshire and may require non-standard solutions for development to progress. For larger sites provision may be sought for affordable housing, open space and contributions from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

Viability and timescales - sites should only be identified for development where it is believed that they are viable and achievable within a reasonable timescale. Site owners or developers would have to demonstrate that this is the case.

Next steps

In the submission Neighbourhood Development Plan make sure that each allocation is linked to the proposals map (by an inset map), and it specifies the criteria for the development of the site where appropriate. This could include:

- Links to other relevant plans (e.g. Local Plan);
- How the allocation will be delivered, by who, when and what infrastructure is required for delivery, or;
- How the allocation fits in with the delivery of your plan.

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3. Timescales

Awaiting relocation of existing use:

- Likely timeframe for development: 0-5 years
(Please tick the appropriate box)
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years

4. Site Details

Access to an adopted highway *(please describe)*:

Vegetation on the site (e.g. trees, hedgerows):

Hydrological features (e.g. streams, watercourses):

Other on-site features (e.g. particular landscape features, existing buildings, etc.):

Are you aware if there are any site contamination issues? Yes No *(Please Delete)*

If yes, please give details:

5. Site Accessibility

Within which settlement is the site located?

If the site is in a more rural location, name the nearest settlement:

Is the settlement served by public transport? Yes No *(Please Delete)*
If yes, how frequent is this service?

What key services/community facilities does this settlement have? (e.g. a shop, pub, village hall)

Distance from the settlement centre:

Does the site have access to utility services? (e.g. gas, electricity, water, sewerage)

Are you aware of any restrictive covenants within or adjacent to the site?

Please return this form along with a site plan to:

Address:

Tel:

Email:

SITE ASSESSMENT FORM

1. Site information

Settlement:.....
 Site name:.....
 Site address:.....

 Site area (hectares):.....

 Existing use:

 Previous use (If known):.....

 Greenfield or Brownfield or both (Please circle most appropriate).....

 Adjacent/surrounding land uses: (e.g. Housing, industrial, agricultural)

 Is the site covered by an existing UDP Policy? (Please see proposal maps e.g. protected open space HBA9)

 Is the site:
 - Within the settlement boundary or built form?.....
 - Adjacent to the settlement boundary or built form?.....
 - Open countryside?.....
 (If the site lies in open countryside there is no need to continue further with this form)

2. Brownfield capacity source (Tick appropriate)

Vacant and derelict land and buildings	Conversion of commercial buildings	
Intensification	Existing housing allocations in plans	
Redevelopment	Public Sector land	
Car parks	Vacant not previously developed	
Longstanding Employment site	Other, please state	

3. Greenfield capacity source (Tick appropriate)

Grassland	Fallow	
Arable	Open space	
Woodland	Agricultural buildings	
	Other, please state	

4. Landscaping

Topography:.....
.....
.....

Views into the site (*can the site be seen from a distance, are there gaps in the boundary?*)
.....
.....
.....

Views out of the site (*church spires etc*):.....
.....
.....

5. Other site features

Vegetation (*trees and hedgerows*)
.....
.....

Hydrological features (*streams, ponds, watercourses*).....
.....
.....

Other on site features (*particular features, existing buildings etc.*).....
.....
.....

Signs of contamination?.....
.....
.....

6. Site accessibility

Is the settlement served by a public transport service? Yes No

If so, how frequent is this service?:.....
.....
.....

Is there a Public Right of Way within or adjoining the site?.....
.....
.....

Does the site have access to an adopted Highway?.....
.....
.....

Does the site have access via a private road or ransom strip?
.....
.....

Awareness of a restrictive covenant?.....
.....
.....

7. General area description

Could the site be well integrated with the surrounding area?.....

.....

.....

Height and character of surrounding buildings?.....

.....

.....

Any other issues nearby? (*bad neighbours, odour, noise etc*).....

.....

.....

8. Policy constraints and local services

Do any of the following affect the site? (*Tick all that apply*)

Historic

- ❖ Archaeological sites.....
- ❖ Scheduled Ancient Monument.....
- ❖ Listed buildings.....
- ❖ Conservation area.....

Natural

- ❖ AONB.....
- ❖ Flood zone
- Zone 1
- Zone 2
- Zone 3a
- Zone 3b
- ❖ TPOs.....

Biodiversity

Sites of international importance

- ❖ Special Area of Conservation (SAC)...
- ❖ Special Protection Area (SPA)
- ❖ Ramsar sites
(March 2007, Herefordshire has no SPA or Ramsar sites)

Sites of national importance

- ❖ Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).....
- ❖ Natural Nature Reserves (NNRs).....

Other policy constraints:

.....

.....

Utility services available:

Gas.....

Electricity.....

Water.....

Sewerage.....

Additional comments

.....

.....

.....

9 Site appraisal

Is the site considered appropriate for development?

.....
.....

Can the entire site be developed?

.....
.....

Suitability

Which category does this site fall into? Please give reasons for your choice (what are the problems if any)

- 1. Totally inappropriate
- 2. Significant constraints
- 3. Minor constraints
- 4. Unconstrained

.....
.....
.....

Availability.

In which time frame could the site be developed?

(Subject to infrastructure requirements, e.g. Sewerage schemes, road improvements etc. This may be established later in consultation with other organisations)

- 1. 0 - 5 years
- 2. 6 -10 years
- 3. 11-15 years
- 4. 16 -20 years
- 5. Never

Potential housing capacity on the site

Other Comments

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Neighbourhood Planning guidance notes available:

Deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan

1. Which is the right tool for your parish
2. What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan
3. Getting started
4. A guide to procedures
5. Funding

Plan Production

6. Developing a Vision and Objectives
7. Generating options
8. Writing planning policies
9. Environmental Assessment
10. Evidence base and information requirements
11. Implementation and Monitoring
12. Best practice community engagement techniques
13. Statutory consultees
14. Writing a consultation statement
15. Planning and other legislation
16. Web enabling your plan
17. Using OS based mapping
18. Glossary of planning terms

Topics

19. Sustainable Water Management in Herefordshire
20. Guide to settlement boundaries
21. Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites
22. Meeting your housing requirements
23. Conservation issues
24. Recreational areas
25. Renewable energy
26. Transport issues
27. Community Infrastructure Levy

Additional Guidance

28. Setting up a steering group
29. Creating a questionnaire
30. Community facilities
31. Conformity with the Local Plan (Core Strategy)
32. Examinations of Neighbourhood Development Plans
33. Guide to Neighbourhood Development Plan Referendums
34. Tourism
35. Basic Conditions
36. Your plan - Contributing to sustainable development