Wealden District Council

Site Selection Conclusions

Wealden Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18)

March 2024

Wealden
District Council

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1. Introduction

1.1 Wealden District Council (WDC), in line with the requirements of both the planning regulations and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December, 2023) is preparing a new Local Plan to replace the existing statutory development plan for the District that includes the 'saved' policies of the Wealden Local Plan (1998)[1], the Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan (February, 2013)[2] and the Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan (2016)[3]. The new Local Plan will determine the overall strategy for future development across the District to 2040, including the location of both residential and employment development to address housing and employment needs.

1.2 As well as identifying how much development the District needs over the plan period, the new Local Plan must endeavour to 'allocate' sufficient land in appropriate locations to meet housing (all types) and employment needs over the plan period. These sites (known as 'allocations') will need to be sustainable, deliverable and justified through an extensive evidence base.

1.3 In order to decide which sites will be allocated for development in the Regulation 18 Local Plan, the Council has undertaken a robust assessment process to identify and assess the potential sites. The first stage of this process was to update the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)[4] published in February 2023. The SHELAA sets out the sites which will be considered through the Site Selection Process. The sites included within the SHELAA have then been assessed against the Site Selection Methodology (SSM). This assessment process resulted in a shortlist of sites which were also tested primarily through the Sustainability Appraisal (SA), but also the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and early transport modelling work to confirm their suitability for draft allocation at this stage for the draft Regulation 18 Local Plan.

1.4 This report provides an overview of the SSM which determines the shortlist of sites which were tested within the emerging Regulation 18 Local Plan. This document also provides a summary of the Site Selection Process results, with a more detailed summary of each site on a Parish-by-Parish basis, the stage at which sites were rejected or selected, and the primary reason(s) for this. A list of the selected sites is set out separately at **Appendix B** of this report.

[1] Wealden Local Plan (1998)
[2] Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan (February, 2013)
[3] Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan (May, 2016)
[4] Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (February 2024)

2. Site Selection Process

Methodology

2.1 A Site Selection Methodology (SSM) has been developed in preparation for the publication of the Regulation 18 Local Plan. This methodology provides a robust and transparent site selection process to determine the most sustainable and developable sites in accordance with the NPPF, which will ensure that the selection of sites is consistent with the principles of sustainable development. This process helps to eliminate sites at an earlier stage than the SA, where it is known that there are specific reasons why sites should not be considered a 'reasonable alternative' in the SA.

2.2 The SSM will be subject to consultation with stakeholders as part of the Regulation 18 Local Plan, which will include neighbouring local planning authorities, developers, land agents and planning consultants. The comments received during this consultation process will be reflected in SSM moving forward to the Regulation 19 stage.

2.3 The Site Selecetion Process is a five-stage process, which is summarised below (further detail is provided in the SSM):

Stage 1: Site Identification

2.4 The SHELAA is an evidence-based document, which lists all possible housing and economic development sites put forward for development and provides a high-level assessment of the potential of sites for development.

2.5 As part of the process of producing the new Local Plan, a new SHELAA was produced in February 2024, which has been published to support the Draft Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation. The most recent version of the SHELAA includes all sites submitted to the Council up to 31st March 2023.

2.6 A total of 954 live SHELAA sites have been promoted for development and have also been provided with high-level assessments of their development potential. All these sites have been put forward through the Site Selection Process.

2.7 Stage 1 of the Site Selection Process eliminates a number of sites from further testing, which includes all those sites unable to either deliver 5 or more dwellings or economic development on sites of over 0.25 hectares (or 500 square metres of floorspace). This stage in the Site Selection process also eliminates sites that have an extant planning permission (for entirety of the site) for residential or economic development.

2.8 The Site Selection Process will be revisited at the Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan and if a planning permission has lapsed, the Council will reconsider the site (particularly the reasons for the lapse of the planning permission) and reassess the site through the SSM at that stage.

Stage 2: Contribution to the Delivery of the Spatial Strategy

2.9 Stage 2 of the Site Selection Process sought to identify those sites that will not contribute to a sustainable pattern of development. Sites that are disconnected from existing settlements and/or are of a size which means that they cannot provide significant on-site facilities/services (and are therefore not likely to represent sustainable development as set out in the NPPF) were rejected at this stage. The assessment was based on the consideration of:

- The proximity of the site to a 'sustainable settlement';
- The physical separation from the site from the existing built-up area of settlements in Wealden District, such as ancient woodland, major roads and watercourses;
- The ability to safely access the site, on foot or through cycling, via an existing footpath from the nearest settlement;
- The ability of the site to provide safe pedestrian access for potential occupiers of the site to the nearest settlement through new footpaths (including on existing highways); and
- The ability of the site to provide new bus stops or links to other sustainable modes of transport (i.e. railway) or village/town centres.

2.10 The sites rejected at this stage were not subject to the detailed assessment at stages 4 and 5, as they do not represent sustainable development.

Stage 3: Absolute Constraints

2.11 All sites that are considered to have 'absolute constraints' have been sifted out of the site selection process at stage 3, as they are not considered to be 'reasonable alternatives' for the SA.

2.12 This approach is supported by the NPPF which is clear that development in the most environmentally sensitive locations (i.e. ancient woodland, flood risk zone 3a/3b and international/national ecological designations) should be avoided. Sites with the greatest constraints, or where a significant proportion of the site is affected by those designations have been excluded from further assessment at this stage. This enabled the detailed assessment (Stages 4 and 5) to focus on those sites most likely to be considered 'reasonable alternatives' in the SA.

Stages 4 and 5: Overall Assessment against Detailed Physical and Planning Constraints as well as Availability and Achievability

2.13 The sites that have not been eliminated following the completion of the previous stages of the Site Selection Process have been subject to a more detailed assessment using the Site Selection Proforma (see Appendix A) that considered a number of constraints, which included:

- High Weald National Landscape and landscape impacts more generally;
- Flood risk;
- Heritage and historic assets;
- Ecological constraints;
- Agricultural land classification;
- Local green spaces and open space;
- Land type (brownfield/greenfield)
- Neighbouring land uses; and
- Arboricultural impacts.

2.14 For each site, all the above issues have been considered and the Council has provided a commentary on those constraints in a qualitative manner, using information from the local evidence base, which includes the SHELAA process. An element of planning judgment has been used to consider all the constraints and decide whether a site is suitable to move to the next stage of the SSM.

2.15 The Council has also considered the availability and achievability of individual sites. This includes the consideration of:

- Land ownership;
- Access to the road network (including whether the site can genuinely provide a new pedestrian and vehicular access/ransom strips etc);
- Key infrastructure requirements and any identified capacity issues;
- Lead-in times, delivery rates and market capacity;
- Barriers to delivery (including whether or not the proposed site will need to re-provide an existing use on site (i.e. playing pitch, or employment uses)) and whether an acceptable strategy is in place to do so;
- Dwelling or floorspace capacity taking into account constraints and other relevant factors;
- Is the site likely to be delivered during the plan period; and
- Legal constraints (i.e. known covenants or unwilling landowners).

2.16 Sites rejected at these stages were not subject to further assessment and were not included as 'reasonable alternatives' for the SA.

2.17 All sites that have progressed past Stages 4 and 5 of the Site Selection Process have been subject to further assessment through the SA. All sites considered to have potential for allocation at the end of stage 5 have been assessed against the Sustainability Framework as set out in the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) to consider the sustainability credentials of each site independently and cumulatively.

3. Site Selection Conclusions

3.1 Table 1 below shows the number of sites that were considered through the Site Selection Process, which totalled 954 SHELAA sites, and the number of sites that were discounted through the various stages of the Site Selection Process. Following the application of the Site Selection Methodology, the initial 954 sites were refined to 316 that were to be further tested through the SA process.

Table 1: Site Selection Process – Conclusions by Parish

Parish	SHELAA Sites	Discounted Sites	Sites Assessed in SA
Arlington	46	25	21
Berwick	5	1	4
Buxted	40	22	18
Chalvington with Ripe	7	6	1
Chiddingly	20	10	10
Crowborough	67	42	25
Danehill	7	7	0
East Hoathly with Halland	26	17	9
Fletching	9	7	2
Forest Row	11	11	0
Framfield	27	16	11
Frant	45	30	15
Hadlow Down	7	6	1
Hailsham	82	43	39
Hartfield	12	9	3
Heathfield and Waldron	93	72	21
Hellingly	49	27	22
Herstmonceux	20	14	6
Hooe	1	1	0
Horam	50	33	17
Isfield	31	23	8
Laughton	10	10	0
Little Horsted	4	3	1
Long Man	2	1	1
Maresfield	30	18	12

Parish	SHELAA Sites	Discounted Sites	Sites Assessed in SA
Mayfield and Five Ashes	27	26	1
Ninfield	18	15	3
Pevensey	7	6	1
Polegate	35	16	19
Rotherfield	26	20	6
Selmeston	4	4	0
Uckfield	26	14	12
Wadhurst	29	22	7
Warbleton	10	8	2
Wartling	6	6	0
Westham	45	29	16
Willingdon and Jevington	4	4	0
Withyham	16	14	2
Total	**954**	**638**	**316**

3.2 **Appendix B** sets out the conclusions for each site in the Site Selection Process on a Parish-by-Parish basis, the stage in the Site Selection Process it was rejected or selected, and the primary reason or reasons for this.

4. Next Steps

4.1 The Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18), including its supporting evidence base is to be consulted upon between March and May of 2024. It is expected that during the Regulation 18 consultation process that a number of new sites will be submitted to the Council to be considered for housing and economic development. The Council will also receive responses from site promoters whose site has been taken or has not been taken forward as an allocation within the Local Plan. The comments received will be fed into an updated SHELAA as relevant, alongside the assessment of new sites. The assessment of newly submitted sites to the Council and the reassessment of existing sites where relevant will be reported in a new Site Selection Process for the Regulation 19 Local Plan that will build upon the outcomes presented herein.

4.2 At this stage, the Council supports site promoters/developers/land agents to fact check the existing Site Selection Conclusion Report on their sites (as well as the SHELAA document). Any feedback received during the Regulation 18 consultation, or as part of the SHELAA process will be reviewed and amended where factual inaccuracies are found. This will be reported as part of Site Selection Process undertaken for the Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan.

Appendices

Appendix A – Site Selection Proforma

Site Details						
SHELAA Reference	**Site Address**	**Post Code**	**Size (ha)**	**Easting**	**Northing**	**Parish**

Site Plan

Site Characteristics	**Commentary**
Current Land Use	
Proposed Land Use	
Land Type (Brownfield/Greenfield)	
Neighbouring Land Uses	
Type of Site (Urban, Rural and Peripheral)	

Designations	**Commentary**
EA Flood Zone Classification	
SFRA Flood Zones	
Ancient Woodland	
AONB	
Landscape Sensitivity	
SSSI	

Designations	Commentary
SAC	
SPA	
Ramsar	
National Nature Reserve (NNR)	
Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	
Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)/Local Geological Site (LGS)	
Wildlife Corridors/Stepping Stones	
Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA)	
Priority Habitats	
Woodlands, Trees and Hedgerows	
Conservation Area/ Listed Building/ other Heritage Assets	
Agricultural Land Classification	
Waste or Minerals Safeguarding	

Planning Designations	Commentary
Within Proposed Settlement Boundary	
Outside of Proposed Settlement Boundary	
Proposed Town Centre Boundary	
Proposed Designated Employment Areas	
Local Green Space	

Transport	Commentary
Access to Highway	
Access to Pedestrian/ Cycle Infrastructure	
Access to Public Transport (Buses or Rail)	
Public Right of Way	

Physical Constraints	Commentary
Vehicular/Pedestrian Access	
Groundwater Protection Zone	
Drainage	
Water Courses	
Topography	
Contamination	
Pylons	
Noise	
Utilities	
Adjacent Land Uses (noise, air pollution)	

Availability/ Achievability	Commentary
Single/ Multiple Landowners	
Known Legal Constraints	
Viability Constraints	

Planning Permission	Commentary
Site has Planning Permission	

Planning Permission	Commentary
Site has a Resolution to Grant Planning Permission	
Site has a Lapsed Planning Permission	
Site has no Planning Permission	

Delivery of Spatial Strategy
Summary

Recommendation

Appendix B – Site Selection Conclusion by Parish (see separate document)

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