

The 2008 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

Item for Decision:	To approve the 2008 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
Contributors	Chief Executive
Contact Officer	Richard Henshaw, Forward Plans Team Leader
Financial Implications:	If the Assessment is agreed before the end of March, Housing and Planning Delivery Grant could be rewarded. On the basis of last year's grant allocation this would amount to approximately £25,000.
Council Priorities:	ENV1 H&H2
Recommendations:	It is RECOMMENDED that Members:- a) It is recommended that the 2008 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment should be approved as an evidence base for the preparation of the Local Development Framework, and in the consideration of housing supply issues in determining planning applications. b) The conclusions of the Assessment on the capacity within the urban areas should be drawn to the attention of the Regional Government Office in support of the Council's objection to the additional 1,000 dwellings proposed by the Secretary of State in her proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy.

1. Applicable Lead Member Area

1.1 Environment

2. Crime and Disorder – Section 17 Implications

2.1 There are no Section 17 implications.

3. Equality

3.1 There are no equality implications.

4. Risk Implications

4.1 If the 2008 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is not approved the Council will not be able to demonstrate a rolling five year land supply of suitable, available and achievable housing land. If this occurs planning applications on green field / green belt sites could be allowed on appeal.

5. Introduction

5.1 Preparation of a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is a requirement placed on all local planning authorities by Government. The Government's Planning Policy Statement 3 (Housing) requires that all planning authorities should identify a rolling five year supply of land that is 'suitable, available and achievable'.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is an important part of this assessment. This five year land supply relates to the housing requirement that will be set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

- 5.2 The requirement reflects the view of the Barker Report to the Government that planning restrictions on land supply lay behind the sharp rises in house prices in recent years.
- 5.3 Members will be aware that this Council has, under each succeeding structure plan, fully met and exceeded the housing targets set for it, while protecting the Green Belt and the environment of the District.
- 5.4 The primary role of the Assessment is to:
 - Identify sites with potential for housing.
 - Assess their housing potential.
 - Assess when they are likely to be developed.
- 5.5 Work has been ongoing for the past year on completing the 2008 Assessment. As issues of housing land demand and supply relate to housing market areas, and as East Dorset is part of the wider south east Dorset Housing Market Area, the Land Availability Assessment has been undertaken in partnership with other Dorset Councils. The work has also been scrutinised by a Panel of public and private housing and environmental organisations.

6. Aims and Summary Conclusions

- 6.1 The two main aims of the Assessment are to test whether there are:
 - a robust, continually-maintained, **deliverable** 5 year supply of housing land
 - a **potential** land supply for 15 years and beyondwhen measured against planning policy housing requirements.
- 6.2 **The conclusion of this Assessment is that an adequate land supply is available. If the Assessment had not been able to demonstrate these two land supply requirements were being met, the Council would have been vulnerable to additional housing land being released in response to planning applications, including on appeal. These sites would have been likely to include green field, Green Belt land. The results of the Assessment are therefore critical to ensuring the Council is able to provide continued protection to the Green Belt and it will provide valuable evidence in any planning appeal.**
- 6.3 The housing requirements against which the land supply has to be assessed are those set out in planning policy. While the Regional Spatial Strategy is still an emerging policy document, and some of its proposals – particularly green-field urban extensions in the District – are matters of contention, it is important that the Assessment is robust in terms of the potential requirements which the Regional Strategy may impose. This is particularly the case for the 15 year *potential* land supply.
- 6.4 The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy sets two distinct housing land requirements. One is for development within the existing urban areas. The originally-submitted draft Regional Spatial Strategy proposed a total of 2,800 dwellings under this heading. The Secretary of State's proposed Changes increase this – apparently arbitrarily and without sound evidence – to 3,800. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment suggests theoretical land

availability within the urban areas equal to this higher figure. However, there are serious doubts about whether, in practical terms, all this land could be brought forward. **The evidence provided by the Assessment should therefore be used in support of this Council's objection to the increased figure of 3,800 dwellings within existing urban boundaries.**

- 6.5 The second housing requirement proposed by the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy is for development of 2,400 dwellings in urban extensions on land to be taken out of the Green Belt within limited, named areas of search. The Council has opposed these urban extensions other than west of Wimborne Minster, at Cuthbury. **However, the Assessment demonstrates that if the Regional Spatial Strategy is adopted with the urban extensions included, there would be ample potential housing land at these named locations to meet the strategic housing land requirement that would then exist. There would therefore be no possible reason for other green-field, Green Belt sites to be called into question, even though the Assessment notes that they are physically capable of development.**

7. Purpose of the Study and Limitations

- 7.1 The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment will inform planning policy within the District. It will be used primarily to monitor and manage the supply of land for housing and its delivery. **The Council may need to take an active role in ensuring that sites come forward.**
- 7.2 The Assessment will form the basis of the Council's *housing trajectory*, illustrating the Council's delivery of housing compared to the strategic housing requirement as set out in the existing Local Plan, as well as the emerging requirement as set out in the draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy and the Council's future Core Strategy in its Local Development Framework.
- 7.3 While this Assessment provides evidence that will be used in the *production of the Core Strategy and future Site Allocations Development Plan Documents*, it does not itself recommend or decide the allocation of any specific site. It will however, be used as part of the evidence when the Council decides on the allocation of such land.
- 7.4 The Assessment will also be used to inform *decisions on planning applications* within the District. It will ensure that decisions are taken in the light of the existence of a rolling five year land supply and the need for this to be maintained.
- 7.5 However, the number and type of dwellings identified on individual sites through this Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment are not material considerations in the determination of planning applications. The determination of individual planning applications as detailed matters will require more information than available for this Assessment – for example, full tree surveys, information on protected species and a range of other information. All planning applications, whether on land identified in this Assessment or not, will be subject to detailed planning consideration and will be determined on their merits at the time. **The inclusion of a site within this Assessment, even where it has been considered 'suitable' for development, does not in any way guarantee that any planning permission will be granted on that land.**
- 7.6 Not all of the sites submitted to the Council in the production of this Assessment were found to be suitable for development. Even those sites considered acceptable may not be allocated for development within the Local Development Framework. This is because the immediate planning of the area will not require all

of the potential sites to be developed in the relevant plan period to meet the strategic housing needs of the District, as set out within the Regional Spatial Strategy (2006-2026).

- 7.7 Some sites adjacent or related to the defined development boundaries of towns or villages have been considered in this study. This includes sites that have been proposed to the Council by landowners and developers on Green Belt land outside the potential areas of search for urban extensions identified in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy. Some of these sites have been assessed as physically capable of development. **This does not, however, in any way imply that the Council envisages any change in policy to allow their development.** Any change to Green Belt boundaries must be justified by the demonstration of very special local circumstances. While this will need to be considered by the Local Development Framework, without prejudice, in respect of individual sites, **both the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and the Council intend that, except in specific, named cases (and the difference in views between the Council and the Secretary of State over the extent of these named areas has already been noted), the general extent of the Green Belt will remain unchanged. The Green Belt is not a policy which may be set aside arbitrarily; it protects environmental assets of great importance to the area both in the wedges and corridors of open land separating the individual settlements and the area of open countryside around the conurbation.**
- 7.8 As this assessment is part of the evidence base for the production of Local Development Framework documents, the results of the assessment will be the subject of consultation as part of that wider process. In preparing the Local Development Framework the Council will consult on any proposals for individual sites.

8. The Findings of the Assessment in detail

- 8.1 In total 838 different sites have been assessed throughout the District. The majority of these are within the existing main urban areas, but there are also a large number of sites outside the settlement boundaries on green field, and often Green Belt land that have been submitted by landowners for consideration. Clearly the position of the Council is to oppose Green Belt development.
- 8.2 The Assessment sets out seven potential scenarios for the housing requirement in East Dorset. This is because it will not be clear what will have to be provided until the Regional Spatial Strategy is approved. Nevertheless, if the worst case scenario has to be faced, i.e. 6,400 dwellings between 2006-2026, the Assessment confirms that there is sufficient deliverable land to provide housing over the first five years (2008-2013), and also physically developable land to meet the strategic requirements over the following ten years (2013-2023). This is shown within Tables 4 and 5 of the Appendix.
- 8.3 The highest requirement of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy is identified in Tables 6 and 7. These show that the Regional Spatial Strategy requirement for the first five years could be exceeded by 62 dwellings. For the following ten year period the Regional Spatial Strategy requirement could be met by the physically developable supply identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy Areas of Search. Many other sites have been put forward by landowners for consideration, which include a large number in the Green Belt. Although many other houses could be developed on such physically developable sites outside the Regional Spatial Strategy Areas of Search these would not be required to meet the Regional Spatial Strategy requirements. However, the Strategic Housing Land Availability

Assessment is a technical piece of evidence and this would have to be confirmed through the Local Development Framework process.

- 8.4 It should be noted that the assessments are based on an assumption of a steady rate of development throughout the period of the Regional Spatial Strategy. This is an unrealistic expectation and it will be the task of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy to consider the proper phasing of development, taking into consideration the need for any urban extensions to provide infrastructure pre-requisites before development can begin, and the possibility that there will be constraints on any urban extension development, and possibly on some sites within urban areas, as a result of the need for improvements to the Strategic Road Network in advance of development. The result of these constraints is that the weight of housing development will be transferred more towards the end of the Plan period, with a consequent reduction in the levels of housing land required in the early part of the period.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the 2008 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment should be approved as an evidence base for the preparation of the Local Development Framework, and in the consideration of housing supply issues in determining planning applications.
- 9.2 The conclusions of the Assessment on the capacity within the urban areas should be drawn to the attention of the Regional Government Office in support of the Council's objection to the additional 1,000 dwellings proposed by the Secretary of State in her proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy.

10. Appendices

- 10.1 Appendix 1 - The Draft 2008 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.
(Circulated separately)

11. Background Papers

- 11.1 None.