

# County Durham Plan Strategic Housing Land Availability Report 2019



*Altogether better*



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## 1 Introduction

### The purpose of this report

**1.1** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes clear the importance which Government attaches to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) as a fundamental transparent and comprehensive technical evidence base. Essentially the SHLAA is a 'library' of sites whose suitability, availability and achievability has been assessed using a consistent methodology. The findings of such an assessment are critical to informing the development of local housing policy and decision taking through the development management process in terms of whether a 5-year supply of suitable, deliverable and developable housing sites can be demonstrated. This is the fifth iteration of the County Durham SHLAA and has a base date of 30th September 2018.

**Please note that the identification of a site as having 'potential' for housing in the SHLAA does not necessarily imply that the council would grant planning permission for residential development. All planning applications for residential development will continue to be determined against current development plan policies and other material planning considerations.**

**1.2** The purpose of this report is twofold. Firstly, it sets out the methodology which has been used to undertake this assessment process (some refinements have been made to the methodology previously used and an indication of where this has occurred is provided within Section 2) and secondly it summarises the findings of the assessments undertaken.

**1.3** For this version of the SHLAA, to be referred as the SHLAA 2019, the review has focused on the representations that have been made to the public consultation on the Preferred Options of the County Durham Plan (the Plan). This has included the consideration of further information relating to existing sites, including requests to amend site boundaries and mitigation proposals. Any new sites submitted or which have subsequently come to our attention since the preparation of the previous SHLAA (2018) have also been assessed and added to the SHLAA database. Furthermore, all sites already contained within the previous iterations of the SHLAA have been reviewed to reflect any changes in circumstances. Such changes in circumstances include planning history, site availability, estimated yields, estimated time frames for delivery, new constraints becoming apparent or previously identified constraints being overcome. The SHLAA will continue to be updated periodically to correspond with key stages of plan making and to reflect any further future changes in circumstances.

**1.4** The methodology used for the County Durham SHLAA is in conformity with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), National Planning Practice Guidance <sup>(i)</sup>.

### Who has been involved in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment?

**1.5** MHCLG's guidance advises that a partnership approach is critical to ensuring that a SHLAA is 'fit for purpose'. Therefore, the County Durham SHLAA has been prepared by the council, in partnership with stakeholders with an interest in housebuilding within the county, through a SHLAA Partnership. This was established for the first version of the SHLAA published in 2009 and has continued to contribute to subsequent iterations of the SHLAA. The SHLAA Partnership also has an agreed constitution and terms of reference.

**1.6** The SHLAA Partnership ensures that the process is undertaken fairly and in accordance with national guidance. Whilst membership of the SHLAA Partnership has changed over time the council has ensured that representatives from the following are included:

- Durham County Council:
  - Spatial Policy Officers
  - Community Representative (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration)
- Members of The Home Builders Federation (HBF);
- Local Land Agents;
- Planning Consultants; and
- A Registered Providers.

**1.7** The SHLAA Partnership is involved in the SHLAA process through a series of meetings and workshops where the methodology is agreed and the council's assessments of individual sites, including suitability and deliverability matters are discussed. In the few instances where a consensus cannot be reached the council has reserved the right to make the final recommendation.

**Critically, members of the Partnership must declare an interest in sites they are involved in and they only comment on issues within their own specialism and area of expertise.**

i MHCLG, National Planning Practice Guidance can be accessed here: <http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment/>

## 2 Methodology

**2.1** County Durham's SHLAA Methodology including subsequent revisions have been discussed with the SHLAA Partnership and follow the most up to date guidance published by the MHCLG.

**2.2** The sites that have been included within the SHLAA (2019) have had their site boundaries and assessment outcome recorded within the council's Geographical Information System (GIS). This is available on the council's website<sup>(ii)</sup>.

### Step 1: Identification of Sites for Assessment and Reassessment

**2.3** As has been the case with previous iterations of the SHLAA, landowners, house builders, planning consultants and other interested parties have been invited to propose potential housing sites to be assessed through the SHLAA process. Due to the significant number of sites identified across County Durham and the available resources within the SHLAA Partnership, it was previously agreed that only sites of 0.4 ha (or with the potential to accommodate 12 dwellings or more) should be included within the SHLAA. However, in the interests of robustness and given the Governments support for the contribution that smaller sites can make to the housing land supply this version of the SHLAA has included sites with a lower threshold of 0.2 ha (or with the potential to accommodate 6 or more dwellings).

**2.4** In this regard, a 'call for sites' of over 0.2 ha in gross area was undertaken in summer 2015 and then again in summer 2016 and new sites submitted through this process and others that have subsequently come to our attention, including through public consultation on the CDP and through other means have been assessed and added to the SHLAA database. Further information relating to existing SHLAA sites, including site availability, estimated yields, estimated delivery time frames, new constraints becoming apparent and mitigation proposals to overcome previously identified site constraints were also submitted as well as requests to amend site boundaries. These have also been considered through the review process.

**2.5** In addition sites already contained within the previous iteration of the SHLAA (2018) have been reviewed to reflect any changes in circumstances that the council is aware of such as site constraints and planning history. Furthermore, any additional available sites made known to the council through other partnership working, the development management and site disposal processes have been included in the review.

### Step 2: Identification of Site Constraints Affecting Suitability

#### i. Identification of Category 1 Designations

**2.6** As well as identifying sites with housing potential it is equally important to identify areas where development should be avoided. National guidance advises that particular types of land or areas may be excluded from a SHLAA assessment, as long as the reasons for doing so are justified and agreed by the members of the Partnership. It has therefore been agreed that the following categories of site, known as Category 1 Designations are to be excluded from further consideration:

- Special Protection Area;

- Special Area of Conservation;
- Ramsar;
- Site of Special Scientific Interest;
- National Nature Reserve;
- Scheduled Ancient Monument;
- Historic Battlefields;
- Historic Parks and Gardens;
- Flood Zone 3B;
- Ancient Woodland;
- HSE Inner Zone; and
- Local Wildlife and Geological Sites.

**2.7** Sites affected by any of these designations were identified through an analysis of the council's GIS and subsequently discounted from a more detailed site assessment which is outlined in Step 3 below.

#### ii. Identification of Category 2 Designations

**2.8** A number of other constraints, referred to in this assessment process as Category 2 Designations, and as agreed by the SHLAA Partnership are listed below:

- 500m of Great Crested Newt Pond;
- Local Nature Reserves;
- Allotment;
- Flood Zone 2 or 3a;
- Mineral Safeguarding Area;
- Open Space;
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- Green Belt;
- Grade 3 agricultural land;

ii <http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/3280/Strategic-Housing-Land-Availability-Assessment-and-Brownfield-Site-Register>.

- Health & Safety (HSE) Middle or Outer Zone;
- Archaeological Site;
- Area of High Landscape Value
- Conservation Area;
- Grade I Listed;
- Grade II\* Listed;
- Grade II Listed;
- Woodland;
- Tree Preservation Orders;
- Definitive Public Rights of Way; and
- Surface Water Flooding.

**2.9** These designations act as an indicator that the site may have some significant constraints which would need to be addressed and/ or mitigated for the site is to be deemed potentially suitable for housing development. Therefore, unlike sites affected by Category 1 Designations, sites which are affected by a Category 2 Designation have not been discounted from the assessment process, rather, they have been the subject to a more detailed site assessment. For the purposes of the SHLAA (2019), the SHLAA Partnership continues to agreed that all Green Belt sites should be deemed unsuitable as they are in conflict with national planning policy.

### Step 3: Assessment of Sites

#### i. Consideration of Evidence

**2.10** This assessment process has drawn upon a range of technical evidence base including the Employment Land Review, the Open Space Needs Assessment and the Settlement Study. The SHLAA Partnership have previously agreed that the relationship between the SHLAA and the Settlement Study is as follows:

The Settlement Study and SHLAA will form part of the evidence base for the County Durham Plan. The Settlement Study's use with regard to the SHLAA is helpful as far as it is the best tool currently available to measure the relative sustainability of the settlement. The sustainability of a site forms part of the suitability assessment to ensure that sites *"offer a suitable location for development and would contribute to the creation of sustainable, mixed communities."* Larger settlements will logically be capable of accommodating larger scale development. Whereas SHLAA sites in smaller settlements will be more sensitive in terms of scale. The role of settlements

may have implications for development but it will be the role of planning policy to determine this role. The scale and form of development needs to be appropriate to a settlement. The SHLAA will try to identify where the scale of development is an issue.

**2.11** Each site assessment has drawn on the technical expertise and knowledge of council specialist disciplinary teams including ecology, sustainability, heritage, landscape, highways & public transport.

**2.12** For the SHLAA (2019) a site visit was undertaken for all new sites identified and those sites from previous iterations where there was a change in circumstances or where new evidence indicated that this was necessary.

**2.13** The following information is included in each assessment:

- Potential yield;
- Implications of any Category 2 Designations relating to the site;
- Relationship of site to existing settlement in terms of physical form and accessibility to services and facilities, including connectivity by public transport;
- Topographical constraints;
- Landscape impacts;
- Contamination potential;
- Fluvial and surface water flood risk potential;
- Compatibility with existing or proposed adjacent uses;
- Suitability of access and impact upon the local highway network;
- Archaeological and other designated and non designated heritage constraints;
- Ecological impacts;
- Impact upon open space provision;
- Site availability, and existence of any relocation requirements;
- Whether the site is being actively marketed/ promoted;
- Impact of known ownership or legal constraints on delivery;
- Relevant planning history;
- Market strength and attractiveness; and
- Mitigation requirements and their potential impact upon viability.

ii. **Precautionary Approach**

**2.14** In considering the achievability of a site (i.e. the likelihood of each potentially suitable site being delivered within the next 15 years) some sites have been identified as requiring mitigation to address an existing constraint. In these cases it needed to be demonstrated that there was a reasonable prospect that this mitigation could be secured without affecting the delivery of the site for it to be placed within a deliverable or developable time frame. A precautionary approach has been adopted to the assessment of a site's suitability where the cumulative impact and implications of the site coming forward for housing development needs to be assessed comprehensively through the plan making process (for example where the development of the site would result in the loss of open space or employment land). In these cases a site has been assessed as being potentially unsuitable (amber) for the purposes of the SHLAA.

**2.15** Furthermore, a precautionary approach has also been taken in respect to those sites which are not currently available because they rely upon the relocation of an existing use and the prospect for this to happen has not been demonstrated. Where such sites have been assessed as otherwise suitable they have been deemed undeliverable and therefore not currently achievable within a 15 year period. Such sites will be revisited in future iterations of the SHLAA.

**2.16** Where a site is affected by the Habitats Regulations (HRA), but is otherwise suitable it has been assessed as potentially suitable but in terms of delivery time frames it is considered to be 'not currently achievable'. These sites have been assessed comprehensively as part of the housing site allocation process.

**2.17** A site's general infrastructure requirements such as school places or the capacity of GP surgeries is not included in the SHLAA as it changes over time and has cumulative impacts across an area. It is therefore more appropriate to include this in the assessment of housing allocations in the preparation of the Plan.

iii. **Estimation of site capacity**

**2.18** To calculate an estimated figure for the number of houses which could be delivered on each site and where there is no layout a number of assumptions are applied.

**2.19** The SHLAA Partnership have agreed the following ratios for calculating the gross to net developable area of a site:

**Table 1 Table 1: Gross to Net Area Assumptions**

Gross site area (ha)	Percentage to be applied per site
0.4ha - 2ha	90%
> 2ha	75%

**2.20** The SHLAA Partnership have also agreed that 30 dwellings per hectare is a reasonable assumption for site density.

**2.21** Although the above assumptions are used to calculate yield on most sites, in some instances the estimated yield has been revised to take into account known site characteristics or constraints. Where a site benefits from planning permission or a pre-application discussion that yield has been used.

**Step 4: Confirming Assessment Outcome - Classification of Sites**

**2.22** The SHLAA uses a 'traffic light' system to distinguish between those sites that are potentially suitable and potentially unsuitable for housing development. The four agreed classifications and definitions are:

i. **Completed Sites (Blue)**

**2.23** The site has been completely built out (or is nearing completion) since the previous iteration of the SHLAA and therefore represents a historic record of a SHLAA site. It will then be removed completely from the next SHLAA.

ii. **Unsuitable (Red)**

**2.24** This relates to all sites which are affected by a significant physical site specific constraint (Category 1 designations) or parcels of land which are clearly physically disconnected from an existing settlement. Given the nature of these constraints it is highly unlikely that they can ever be overcome. As such in the very early stage of the process they have been deemed to have no housing potential and have not been subject to a more detailed site assessment.

iii. **Potentially Unsuitable (Amber)**

**2.25** This indicates that a site (or an element of the site) is considered potentially unsuitable for housing as it would not lead to the creation of sustainable, mixed communities and:

- It would have an unacceptable adverse impact as a result of a technical or financial constraint, which the landowner/agent/developer has been unable to resolve;
- There is a fundamental conflict with planning policy;
- By virtue of the size of the site the resulting development would not be appropriate to the role and function of the settlement to which it relates as indicated in the Settlement Study;
- Physical issues or limitations – such as ground conditions, flood risk, hazardous risks, pollution, contamination or an acceptable vehicular access is not currently evident;
- Potential impacts – including effect upon landscape, townscape or conservation; or
- Environmental conditions – which would be experienced by prospective residents (for example, noise, vibration etc.)

**2.26** Sites constrained by an unresolved financial constraint are those where there is a financial barrier to development, for example sites which are subject to a ransom strip or where the cost associated with undertaking any mitigation would prevent delivery.

#### iv. **Potentially Suitable (Green)**

**2.27** This indicates that the site is considered to be potentially suitable for housing and would contribute towards sustainable, mixed communities and:

- Accords with national planning policy;
- The scale of development that the site could accommodate is considered consistent with the role and function of the settlement as set out in the Settlement Study; and
- No unacceptable adverse environmental impacts have been identified.

#### **Step 5: Estimating delivery timescales of Potentially Suitable (Green) Sites**

**2.28** The Partnership's collective understanding and experience of market factors and the council's evidence relating to commencements and completions has informed the delivery time scales assigned to each potentially suitable site. However this can only be an estimate based upon the best available information.

**2.29** From a delivery perspective the potentially suitable sites have assigned to one of the following categories:

- **Deliverable (1-5 years)** – suitable sites in 'good' and 'moderate' market locations with or without planning permission where a willingness has been expressed by interested parties to promote the site. The build out rates determined through this process and shown in the Housing Trajectory reflect the strength of the market for that settlement. and accord with the NPPF.
- **Developable (6-10 years)**– suitable sites which are:
  - In 'strong' and 'moderate' market locations without planning permission but where the landowner has been unable to evidence to the satisfaction of the council that no harm would result from early promotion of the site;
  - With planning permission but where the council has reason to believe that the site will not be delivered within the first 5 year period;
  - In 'poor' market locations but which have a good prospect of coming forward due to known site specific circumstances e.g. part of wider master planning / grant funded priorities.
- **Developable (11-15 years)**– all suitable sites in 'weak' market areas, including sites:
  - Within areas of housing market renewal; or
  - Subject to fragmented land ownership and which do not have a reasonable prospect of being delivered within an earlier time frame.
- **Not Currently Achievable** - suitable sites that have been assessed as not being currently achievable because there is insufficient evidence available to suggest with certainty that these

will actually be delivered by the end of the 15 year period, for example because they are not currently available.

**2.30** In respect of the above time frames, for larger sites it is acknowledged that in reality the delivery of houses will extend beyond a single delivery time frame. However, for SHLAA purposes a single time frame is assigned as it has in earlier versions and is how it is displayed on the maps.

#### **Step 6: External Verification of Assessments**

**2.31** Upon completion of the initial site assessments, internal workshops were then undertaken with all relevant council officers involved to verify the findings and discuss any differing views. The resultant findings were then presented to the SHLAA Partnership a workshop held in October 2018 and debated before reaching consensus in the vast majority of cases. Where there was no consensus the council's view was final.

#### **Step 7: Future Monitoring and Review**

**2.32** The SHLAA forms a fundamental part of the Plan's monitoring framework and will help determine whether the Plan's policies are being delivered. The SHLAA Partnership has agreed that the SHLAA will continue to be updated periodically to correspond with key stages of plan making and to reflect any further future changes in circumstances including updated housing completion and commitment data, as well as new sites being put forward.

**2.33** The suitability and delivery of a site will be reassessed through subsequent SHLAA reviews where any significant changes in circumstances regarding a site come to the council's attention. A site is capable of being reclassified where clear, credible evidence is provided and agreed as overcoming previous concerns. Examples of this include the availability of new evidence confirming:

- A site has been granted planning permission;
- Potential mitigation of site specific concerns is possible;
- Greater certainty in delivery of the site given it is now the subject of advanced negotiations with a house builder; or
- Site viability.

### 3 Summary of Findings of Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2019)

**3.1** There are a total of **1,836 sites** of 0.2 hectares or more included in the 2019 version of the County Durham SHLAA. Of these, **68 sites** have been added to the SHLAA since the 2018 version was published. A consistent assessment has been carried out across all SHLAA sites in accordance with the methodology set out in Section 2 of this report in order to determine their housing potential and are classified as: unsuitable (red); potentially unsuitable (amber) or potentially suitable (green). In addition to the sites and units referred to in the summary of findings below there are **195 sites** which are classified as nearing completion (blue).

#### Unsuitable Sites (Red)

**3.2** **340 sites** with an estimated capacity of **72,397 houses** have been deemed as unsuitable (red).

**Table 2 Capacity of unsuitable (Red) Sites**

Monitoring Area	Number of Unsuitable Red Sites	Estimated Yield of Unsuitable Red Sites
Durham City	26	2,863
Central Durham	69	25,635
North Durham	29	2,624
North West Durham	45	5,443
Mid Durham	32	4,794
South Durham	45	5,871
South East Durham	7	942
East Durham	49	21,269
West Durham	38	2,956
County-wide Total	340	72,397

#### Potentially Unsuitable Sites (Amber)

**3.3** The SHLAA identifies capacity for **94,268 houses** across **926 sites** which are potentially unsuitable (amber).

**Table 3 Capacity of Potentially Unsuitable Amber Sites**

Monitoring Area	Number of Potentially Unsuitable Amber Sites	Estimated Yield of Potentially Unsuitable Amber Sites
Durham City	50	7,518
Central Durham	155	18,052
North Durham	91	8,826
North West Durham	131	12,713
Mid Durham	110	11,846
South Durham	127	15,142
South East Durham	25	3,768



Monitoring Area	Number of Potentially Unsuitable Amber Sites	Estimated Yield of Potentially Unsuitable Amber Sites
East Durham	123	12,139
West Durham	114	4274
County-wide Total	<b>926</b>	<b>94,268</b>

### Potentially Suitable Sites (Green)

**3.4** The assessment confirms that there is capacity for **32,388 houses** over **375 sites** across the county identified as potentially suitable (green) regardless of estimated delivery time frame. Of these, **234 sites** are existing housing commitments, some of which are under construction.

**3.5** Within the 'deliverable' 1-5 years delivery time frame there is potential capacity for **18,357 houses** across the county and within the 6-15 years delivery time frame there is the potential capacity for a further **7,747 houses**.

**3.6** **156 sites** with an estimated capacity of **6,284 houses** have been identified as being 'Not Currently Achievable' i.e. at risk of not being delivered within the 15 year time period for a variety of reasons including site availability, ownership, viability and planning history.

**3.7** The total theoretical capacity of both the identified suitable 'deliverable' sites across the county within the next 15 years is therefore **26,104 houses**.

**3.8** A more detailed breakdown of these findings by Plan Monitoring Area is set out in Table 2 below. This is a high level capacity assessment, relating to the year of commencement and does not take into account potential build out rates for each site which will determine whether a site's delivery will span more than one time frame. It also summarises the capacity in relation to sites that are unlikely to be delivered by year 15 or are unavailable.

**Table 4 Capacity of Potentially Suitable SHLAA Sites by Plan Monitoring Area**

Monitoring Area	Total Number of Suitable Sites	Capacity of SHLAA Sites (Years 1-5)	Capacity of SHLAA Sites (Years 6-10)	Capacity of SHLAA Sites (Years 11-15)	Sub Total of Capacity for Monitoring Area (Years 1-15)	Capacity of Suitable Sites 'Unlikely to deliver by year 15' or unavailable	Total Capacity for Monitoring Area
Durham City	14	1,186	184	0	1,370	62	<b>1,432</b>
Central Durham	38	2,552	209	71	2,832	336	<b>3168</b>
North Durham	21	2,965	64	26	3,055	185	<b>3,240</b>
North West Durham	46	1258	979	7	2,244	1,067	<b>3,311</b>
Mid Durham	81	3,747	1,130	35	4,912	2,060	<b>6,972</b>
South Durham	68	2,097	3,308	0	5,405	925	<b>6,330</b>
South East Durham	19	547	138	71	756	401	<b>1,157</b>
East Durham	54	3,384	992	234	4,610	850	<b>5,460</b>
West Durham	34	621	135	164	920	398	<b>1,318</b>
County -wide Total	<b>375</b>	<b>18,357</b>	<b>7,139</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>26,104</b>	<b>6,284</b>	<b>32,388</b>