



# **Site Assessment Methodology**

**Oundle NP**

**Oundle TC**

**NMP005**

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**PLEASE NOTE:** This methodology has been designed to objectively assess all land identified as realistic development sites within Oundle by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Party (NPWP). It does not recommend the best approach to identifying these opportunities in the first instance, as I am aware that significant work has been undertaken to date to enable the NPWP to draw up a long list of sites within the town.

Legislation does not require the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan to comprise a formal 'Call for Sites' in the same way that the preparation of a district-led Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment does. At the same time, Maroon Planning Ltd will generally recommend that this process is undertaken in advance of the detailed assessment of sites described within this report wherever practical.

## 1.0 Introduction

### Overview

- 1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of Oundle Town Council to set out the methodology that will be applied when seeking to identify suitable developable sites within the town to help deliver the housing targets assumed by the emerging Neighbourhood Plan as a response to the required levels of development for the plan area set out in the emerging North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy.

### Background and work undertaken to date

- 1.2 To take a step back for one moment, it is worth setting the context of why the development of a consistent and objective process is necessary to identify the most appropriate site or sites for development within Oundle. As you are obviously aware, Neighbourhood Plans are a significant new tool granted to communities as a result of the Localism Act 2011. They enable communities to identify any specific issues that exist within their parish, village or neighbourhood and to set about overcoming them through the development of a targeted and informed set of planning policies that will assume statutory weight upon the adoption of their plan. The onus should be placed upon sustainability, deliverability and the ability of the plan to most adequately meet the needs of the town.
- 1.3 It is therefore vital that, when preparing your plan, you set out to tackle real issues and overcome them through identifying the best possible workable solution. Neighbourhood Plans should not be prepared in haste and should certainly not be developed based on hunches – in particular the recommendation of sites for allocation should be made based on sound foundations following an exploration of everything that is known about the site, its surroundings and its ability to deliver against all of the Neighbourhood Plans detailed objectives.
- 1.4 A great deal of work has already taken place to identify suitable opportunities within the town. Sensibly, this has been based largely on the land identified during the production of the most recent Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) undertaken by the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit to identify strategic development opportunities within the JPU area. The recommendations provided within the initial ‘Policy on Residential Development’ background paper prepared by the NPWP provide a strong **qualitative** analysis of each site, including good detail on deemed constraints, and demonstrate a clear understanding of the factors to be considered when identifying whether a site is an appropriate location for development.
- 1.5 At the same time, the recommendation that has been made to, and accepted by, the NP Working Party (NPWP) is that a tailored and more consistent **quantitative** approach to the identification of sites is required to help the group progress the plan with certainty and to

allow them to identify the most sustainable development options for the town. An up-to-date and objective sites assessment methodology for Oundle will be a vital tool to assist the group in the preparation of their plan for the following reasons:

- It will allow the group to assess every site objectively and against a transparent and consistent set of criteria that will help identify whether the site is developable during the period of time covered by the Neighbourhood Plan;
- It will allow the group to demonstrate that each site has been assessed transparently and objectively;
- Importantly, in the context of Neighbourhood Plan making and the basic conditions that will be applied at the point of independent examination, it will allow the group to clearly demonstrate that the Neighbourhood Plan is helping achieve sustainable development;
- It will allow the group to develop a means of assessing the suitability of each site against criteria specific to Oundle, to ensure that it helps deliver not just homes, but also against all of the other key objectives set out within the Neighbourhood Plan;
- As a result of which, it will serve as a valuable tool when engaging with land owners / developers to allow the group to set out what are the important criteria in regards to Oundle and exactly what they must do to ensure their site is considered favourably; and
- It will allow the group to make clear recommendations based on robust evidence as and when they choose to publicise the initial options available to the town.

## 2.0 Approach and rationale

### Recommended methodology

- 2.1 As a start point it is recommended that the methodology used in the assessment of each of the identified sites builds largely on the matrix approach adopted in the preparation of Borough Council of Wellingborough's (BCW) Rural Housing Allocation background paper produced in 2010. This is an approach that I am familiar with and I understand was prepared by BCW to add detail to the relatively high level and generic assessment of sites undertaken during the preparation of the emerging Joint Core Strategy.
- 2.2 The value of the approach taken by BCW is that it provides the availability to factor in sustainability criteria that are very specific to the individual settlement (in this instance specific to Oundle and the objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan) to tailor land based policy solutions that are the most appropriate for the locality.
- 2.3 A level of manipulation will be needed to BCW's approach to both take into account the more recent guidance provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) relating to the identification of housing land as well as the specific sustainability criteria applicable to Oundle. The following section sets out the required analysis and identifies the recommended assessment criteria to ensure that the approach of the NPWP is appropriate.

### What needs to be assessed?

#### Developability or deliverability?

- 2.4 Through background work undertaken to date (conducted in partnership with East Northamptonshire Council) it has been clarified that the District benefits from a significant supply of housing land that will enable the delivery of its housing requirement for the next 8.53 years before new sites or opportunities need to be identified. This is due in part to the up-to-date Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan which identifies sufficient deliverable housing sites within Oundle to cover the period until 2021. It has also been initially identified that the draft housing figure that Oundle's Neighbourhood Plan should seek to accommodate is somewhere in the region of 250-300 dwellings, to be delivered ideally between 2021 and 2031 through a combination of allocations and windfall sites (i.e. non-allocated sites that would realistically be expected to come forward within the boundaries of more general policies).
- 2.5 Government guidance set out at Paragraph 47 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) only requires Local Planning Authorities to identify a rolling supply of deliverable sites to meet the housing needs of, at most, the next 6 years (in the worst case scenario the next 5 years plus a 20% buffer where a chronic undersupply of housing can be demonstrated). To this end, it is clear that Oundle's Neighbourhood Plan does not necessarily need to identify short term development opportunities (i.e. additional strategic sites that can be delivered within the next 5 years) and instead it should be used to map the residual sites required to

cater for the additional housing directed towards the town within the emerging Joint Core Strategy, covering a period until 2031. To this end, the focus of the site assessment undertaken in support of the Plan should be to identify sites that are **developable** rather than necessarily immediately deliverable under the guidance set out in the NPPF. The NPPF defines developable as follows:

*“To be considered **developable**, sites should be in a suitable location for housing development and there should be a reasonable prospect that the site is available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged.”*

2.6 To this end, the criteria that the matrix should assess in more detail should include:

- Physical constraints
- Ease of utility provision
- Existing use
- Accessibility
- Reasonable prospect of availability in the medium to long term
- Viability / achievability

#### Sustainability

2.7 More generally, in the context of the NPPF, due to the neighbourhood planning ‘basic conditions’ and the importance that the people of Oundle themselves will place on delivering development that is right for the town, a large part of the assessment process should involve identifying the **sustainability** of the site. Generally, paragraph 7 of the NPPF defines the three dimensions of sustainability as follows:

*“(Having) an economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;*

*(Having) a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community’s needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and*

*(Having) an environmental role – contributing to protecting our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.*

2.8 Generally then, to demonstrate that a proposal is broadly sustainable a full range of site specific criteria should be assessed, which I recommend comprise the following broad headings (referring as frequently as possible to the objectives of existing studies including NCC's 3<sup>rd</sup> Interim Transport Plan, Oundle's own 2020 Vision and the North Northamptonshire Urban Structures Study):

#### **Economic**

- Likely loss or gain of employment opportunities or business infrastructure;
- Whether the site is located on a site used or previously used for mineral extraction;
- The ability to directly support Oundle Town Centre;
- The ability to support other economic initiatives in the town, such as the promotion of tourism, through means such as the enhancement of surrounding waterways etc

#### **Social**

- The ability to meet the housing needs of the town, both by number, tenure and type;
- Accessibility to shops and services;
- Proximity to public transport or the ability for public transport to serve the site;
- The ability to promote walking and cycling to and from shops, services and jobs;
- The loss or gain of recreational facilities;
- The loss or gain of a vital community facility or establishment;
- The proximity to any 'bad neighbour' uses, sources of noise or contamination;
- The impact of the development of the site on existing residential amenity;
- The ability to strengthen routes (both vehicular and pedestrian) to surrounding rural settlements;

#### **Environmental**

- Effects on designated environmental sites or habitats;
- Direct effects on designated historical assets;
- Traffic impact on both the town and surrounding areas;
- Respect for the built form and settlement pattern of the town;
- The impact on existing ground water sources;
- The proximity of the site to areas liable to flood;
- Land stability;
- The agricultural value of the land;
- Whether the site is brownfield or greenfield in nature;
- Impact on the open countryside;

2.9 The full list of recommended detailed criteria, dealing with both the developability and sustainability of the site, are set out at **Appendix 1** of this report.

### 3.0 Undertaking the assessment

3.1 The first step is to satisfactorily identify all sites to be subject of this assessment. I understand that the NPWP have determined their own methodology to allow them to undertake this step up until this point, comprising a combination of a review of SHLAA sites and opportunities known to OTC. Whilst it is recommended that additional sites and opportunities may need to be identified, this report and methodology deals solely with the objective categorisation of sites rather than the means of identifying them in the first instance.

3.2 As referenced in Section 1.0 of this report, a fully comprehensive testing of sites will comprise both a quantitative and qualitative review of the opportunity.

#### Quantitative assessment

3.3 This is the first stage assessment, and should be focused on the testing of all sites using the 28 'objective' criteria identified in Section 2.0 and expanded on in **Appendix 1** of this report (excluding the more qualitative assessment). This approach adopts a simple matrix-based assessment of the likelihood that the site can be developed within the plan period, whether it is sustainable in nature and whether development on the site would be compatible with the overarching objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan. It does this by applying a simple tick or cross approach to the site against each one of the criteria as set out below:

Assessment	Definition
✓	No constraint identified, development acceptable in principle or positive contribution towards objective
-	There may be constraints, but mitigation is possible or no contributions towards objective (neutral)
x	Significant constraints although mitigation should be possible or detracts from objective
xx	Severe constraints where mitigation is unlikely to be possible or makes objective unachievable in totality and development is unacceptable in principle

3.4 This analysis should be undertaken utilising a variety of sources and techniques, including:

- A desk based assessment, including a review of the existing SHLAA, past planning decisions on site or other relevant sources of empirical information;
- A site visit; and / or
- Discussions with utilities, statutory bodies or landowners to identify any outstanding issues in relation to the site.

- 3.5 Each site should be subject of its own form setting out each of the assessment criteria and then providing an explanation of the surveyors rating in the adjacent column (see **Appendix 2** for the model form). All ticks, dashes and crosses should then be inserted into the overall matrix.
- 3.6 At the end of the process a ‘tallying up’ of all of the ticks and crosses should be undertaken. The presumption in terms of this particular methodology will be for the promotion of sites with the least negative rather than most positive impacts set against the sustainability criteria, as this objective testing is designed to primarily identify the most suitable sites on a quantitative (i.e. objective and statistical) basis. This outcome will, however, then have to be weighed against the potential qualitative (i.e site specifics, response to the option during consultation etc) benefits of the delivery of each site following conversations with landowners and the full consultation process.
- 3.7 To ensure that the most appropriate sites are promoted initially, sites that scored a **double cross** in the assessment should be discounted immediately, as they are demonstrably unsuitable or in contravention of policies elsewhere. The remaining sites should then be ranked with priority given to those with the lowest number of **single crosses** followed by the highest number of **ticks**. With this methodology, then, it is recommended that a site scoring 5 ticks and 0 single crosses is considered to be preferable for the purposes of this objective assessment to a site scoring 7 ticks and 5 single crosses as it will have less of a negative impact.

#### **Qualitative assessment**

- 3.7 Primarily, the methodology set out above will be used to identify sites that are inherently unacceptable or unsustainable. In this respect, the outputs can be used to a certain extent as a standalone report on the acceptability and sustainability of sites in the broadest sense prior to the consideration of any external factors such as the views of the community.
- 3.8 Once the unacceptable sites have been filtered out and you are aware of the outstanding options that will require further analysis, it will be necessary to undertake a qualitative assessment that may well include significant levels of discussion and consultation to allow you to come to firmer conclusions. Your qualitative assessment should be informed by:
- **Initial qualitative assessment:** Further assessment of the sites against your emerging detailed objectives for the plan, such as the potential to require additional parking, to deliver a certain community facility or any other potentially site specific benefit not picked up within the matrix;
  - **Detailed qualitative assessment:** Discussions with land owners or promoters to identify whether they would be happy to deliver community requirements such as affordable housing, off-site contributions or community facilities above and beyond what would necessarily be required; and

- **Consultation:** What is the communities' reaction to certain proposals? Where would they like to see development located?

3.9 As and when you undertake this further research or consultation, it may become apparent that certain site specific findings can be altered (a cross upgraded to a neutral, for example, where it turns out that something you initial considered to be an issue actually isn't) as you find out greater detail about the site, the opportunities and the constraints.

## **Appendix 1**

### **The site assessment criteria**

## 1.0 Developability

Criteria	Reason	Outcome	
1.1 Physical constraints	NPPF, local plan	The site has no obvious physical constraints	✓
		The site has constraints such as steep slopes, pylons, TPOs, contamination etc	X
1.2 Ease of utility provision	NPPF, local plan	Very easy to service (SHLAA rating 5)	✓
		Easy or average to service (SHLAA rating 2-4)	-
		Hard to service (SHLAA rating 1)	X
1.3 Existing use	NPPF, local plan	Site is vacant	✓
		Site is occupied, albeit site clearance will not be necessary	-
		Site is occupied and site clearance will be necessary	X
1.4 Accessibility	NPPF, local plan, NCC Transport Plan	Vehicular access currently exists to adoptable standards	✓
		Vehicular access to adoptable standards can be realistically created	X
		Site is disconnected from highway network and access is not possible	XX
1.5 Reasonable prospect of availability over plan period	NPPF, local plan	The site is being promoted through the NP process	✓
		Ownership unknown	-
		Multiple ownership or complex ownership issues	X
		Site not available, either through landowners unwillingness to put it forward for the NP process or due to long term leases	XX
1.6 Viability / achievability	NPPF	To be assessed during the qualitative assessment stage	?

## Sustainability

<b>Economic</b>			
2.1 Loss or gain of employment or business infrastructure		Development of the site will likely present a net gain in employment or BI	✓
		Development will have no impact on employment or BI	-
		Development will result in the net loss of employment or BI	X
2.2 Mineral extraction		The site is located outside land allocated for mineral extraction	-
		The site is located either partially or fully in an area safeguarded for mineral extraction in the NCC Minerals Local Plan	X
		The site is on land used for mineral extraction	XX
2.3 The ability to directly support Oundle Town Centre		The site will likely encourage the majority of residents to undertake pedestrian trips to Oundle Town Centre on a regular basis through proximity and linkages	✓
		The site will provide satisfactory access to the town centre for residents, via either footpaths or public transport	-
		The site is disconnected from the town centre and will likely encourage the development of a disconnected suburb	X
2.4 The ability to support other economic initiatives such as tourism		The site has the potential to deliver or enhance on-site infrastructure to encourage the promotion of tourism or other economic activity in and around the town	✓
		The site will have no impact on economic development initiatives	-
		The site will result in the loss of economic development or access to tourist facilities	X
<b>Social</b>			
3.1 The ability to meet housing needs		By virtue of scale, the site is capable of delivering a varied mix of tenure, size and house type	✓
		By virtue of other means, the site can realistically deliver a varied mix of tenure, size and house type	-
		The site will likely only deliver a narrow range of house type and limited or no affordable	X
3.2 Accessibility to shops and services		The site offers easy and safe pedestrian access to local shops and services (within 300m)	✓
		The site offers pedestrian access to shops and services, albeit with either barriers or at a greater distance than 300m	-
3.3 Proximity to public transport		The site is well connected to public transport links (bus stop within 300m of centre of site)	✓
		The site is of a scale where enhanced public transport services can either be brought past or through the site	-

		The site is not in close proximity to public transport nor is it likely to be through rerouting	X
3.4 The ability to promote walking and cycling		The site is well linked to both a network of footpaths and cycleways	✓
		The site has the ability to create additional footpath and cycleway linkages	-
		Additional footpath and cycleway linkages in and out of the site will not be possible	X
3.5 Recreational facilities		The site will likely provide additional or enhanced recreational facilities	✓
		The site will not result in a loss or gain of recreational facilities	-
		The site will result in a net loss of recreational facilities	X
3.6 Community facilities		The site will either introduce new community facilities or strengthen the role of existing community facilities	✓
		The site will not result in any impact, positive or negative, on the provision of community facilities	-
		The site will result in the net loss of community facilities	X
3.7 'Bad Neighbour' uses		The site is more than 500m from a major source of noise or odour	✓
		The site is less than 500m but more than 100m from a major source of noise or odour	-
		The site is less than 100m from a major source of noise or odour	X
3.8 Existing residential amenity		Development of the site will have no impact on existing residential amenity	-
		Development of the site will impact on existing residential amenity by way of traffic or other impacts	X
3.9 The ability to strengthen linkages with other rural settlements		Development of the site will help strengthen linkages with the rural area, through enhanced travel networks or bringing services closer to the hinterland of Oundle	✓
		Development of the site will have no impact on the rural network	-
<b>Environmental</b>			
4.1 Effects on designated sites or habitats		Have no effect on any designated site or known protected species. While there may be constraints, it should be possible to mitigate as part of the development proposal	-
		Constraints identified, although it may be possible to mitigate (impact on CWS and PWS only)	X
		Significant constraints, including impact on SSSIs or protected species	XX
4.2 Heritage Assets		Development would enhance an existing heritage asset	✓
		Development would have no effect on any	-

		asset	
		Constraints identified, although mitigation would be possible	X
		Significant impact on a heritage asset where mitigation is unlikely	XX
4.3 Traffic impact on existing 'pinchpoints' in the town		The development would not likely carry the majority of traffic to and from the site through existing pinchpoints in the town	-
		The only access or the primary access to the site from the wider highway network would likely draw traffic through an existing pinchpoint	X
4.4 Built form and settlement pattern		The site is within the existing built up area as defined by the town boundary	✓
		The site is entirely bordered on 2 sides by built development	-
		The site is bordered on 1 side by built development	X
		The site is entirely detached from the town	XX
4.5 Ground water sources		The site is not located on a 'major high' permeable strata	-
		The site is located on a 'major high' permeable strata	X
4.6 Flooding and water management		The site is outside a designated flood zone	✓
		The site is located partly or entirely within Flood Zones 1 or 2 or is likely to be effected (adjacent to) Flood Zone 3	X
		The site is located within Flood Zone 3	XX
4.7 Land stability		There are no known land stability issues in the area	-
		There are known land stability issues in the area	X
4.8 Agricultural value of the land		The site does not contain any agricultural land	✓
		Part of the site contains agricultural land	-
		The site is entirely agricultural land	X
4.9 Previously developed land		The site is entirely brownfield	✓
		The site contains 50% + brownfield	-
		The site is less than 50% brownfield or entirely greenfield	X
4.10 Impact on the open countryside		The site is entirely within the urban area	✓
		The site will not have any impact, either physical or visual, on the rural setting of Oundle	-
		The site will likely introduce an urbanising level of development to the semi-rural edge of Oundle	X

## **Appendix 2**

### **Model 'Site Specific' Form**

<b>Site Ref / Site Location:</b>			
<b>Size and likely yield:</b>			
<b>Objective criteria:</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Reasoning</b>	
1.1 Physical			
1.2 Utilities			
1.3 Existing use			
1.4 Accessibility			
1.5 Availability			
2.1 Employment			
2.2 Minerals			
2.3 Oundle centre			
2.4 Economic initiative			
3.1 Housing needs			
3.2 Shops and services			
3.3 Public transport			
3.4 Walking / cycling			
3.5 Recreation			
3.6 Community			
3.7 Bad neighbour use			
3.8 Existing amenity			
3.9 Rural linkages			
4.1 Habitats			
4.2 Heritage assets			
4.3 Traffic impact			
4.4 Settlement pattern			
4.5 Ground water			
4.6 Flooding			
4.7 Land stability			
4.8 Agriculture			
4.9 PDL			
4.10 Open countryside			
<b>Totals</b>			
✓	-	X	XX
<b>Initial qualitative assessment (if no 'XX'):</b>			
<b>Summary and conclusions (quantitative plus qualitative)</b>			

## **Appendix 3**

### **Site Assessment Table**

**(attached excel spreadsheet)**

