

# MID SUFFOLK STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENT (S.H.L.A.A.), UPDATE, 2011 DRAFT

A joint Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) was prepared by Babergh, Forest Heath, Mid Suffolk and St Edmundsbury councils in 2008/9. The Mid Suffolk part of the SHLAA was finalised in August 2009 and is available on the Mid Suffolk District Council website:

<http://msdc.onesuffolk.net/planning-and-building/planning-policy/supporting-information/>

The 2010 Update document for Mid Suffolk contained updated information on the sites assessed in 2008/9, and some additional sites that had since been notified as being available.

## **Changes since the 2010 update**

It is proposed to update the Mid Suffolk SHLAA with details of site changes and progress during 2011. This will be done, as previously, in conjunction with developers, landowners, agents, highways authority, Environment Agency etc. It is intended that a “stakeholders panel” meeting will be held with representatives of these groups to add further input to the draft and then to publish it on the council’s website.

This year the update is being carried out separately from Babergh District Council, because we are currently at different stages in preparing planning policy and evidence documents. In future, planning and other services of the two authorities are to be integrated.

This draft update document also summaries some of the recent important changes to Government policy which will have implications for housing land availability.

## **Planning for Growth**

In March 2011 the Government published a Ministerial Statement “Planning for Growth”.

It announced the intention to introduce a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development in the forthcoming National Planning Policy Framework. This will expect local planning authorities to plan positively for new development; to deal promptly and favourably with applications that comply with up-to-date plans and national planning policies; and wherever possible to approve applications where plans are absent, out of date, silent or indeterminate.

## **The Localism Act, November 2011**

Will bring changes to the planning system, including:

- Abolition of regional strategies and regional housing targets.
- Neighbourhood planning, by parish councils or neighbourhood forums.
- A new right for communities to draw up a “neighbourhood development plan”, but it would need to conform to national policy and local strategy.

- “Community right to build”, if there is local support through a referendum.
- Obligation on developers to carry out pre-application consultation on major development schemes.
- The Bill made clear that if local finance considerations, including the community infrastructure levy and the new homes bonus, are relevant to local planning decisions then they must be taken into account.
- Payments must be relevant to the planning application being considered otherwise they cannot be taken into account.

Most changes are to be introduced through secondary legislation during 2012.

### **National Planning Policy Framework**

The Government published the draft National Planning Policy Framework for consultation in July 2011. This is a key part of its reforms intended to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, and to promote sustainable growth. The NPPF will replace over 1,000 pages of national policy with less than 100 pages.

Ten core land-use planning principles are set out:

- Planning will continue to be plan-led, but plans must be kept up to date
- The default answer to development proposals is “yes”, except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in the Framework
- Take account of local circumstances and market signals
- Take account of environmental quality
- Planning policies and decisions should seek to protect and enhance environmental and heritage assets, appropriate to their significance
- Make effective use of land, promote mixed use developments
- Enable reuse of resources
- Development in places that are, or can be made, sustainable
- Support local strategies for health and well being
- Good standard of amenity for existing and future occupants

The Government’s key housing objective is to increase significantly the delivery of new homes. The previous PPS3 requirement to maintain at least 5 years supply of housing land will be increased with an additional allowance of at least 20% to ensure choice and competition in the market for land.

Local councils will be able to allocate sites that they consider are the most suitable for development, without being constrained by a national brown field target.

Mid Suffolk DC’s response to the consultation includes concerns and questions about policy gaps and uncertainty resulting from greatly reduced guidance e.g. -

- Reducing guidance will not necessarily speed up plan making and development
- Risk of uncertainty and more “planning by appeal”
- Concerns about reduced protection for countryside.
- Presumption in favour of sustainable development - definition of sustainable development needs to be more specific.
- What constitutes an up to date plan and who decides?

- Proposed Neighbourhood Plans will involve examination procedures and costs which may deter parish council involvement.

## **Affordable Housing**

The draft NPPF proposes a change to rural exceptions policy for affordable housing. Under PPS3 no cross subsidy with market housing was allowed. The draft NPPF states that “In rural areas, local planning authorities should be responsive to local circumstances and plan housing development to meet local requirements, particularly for affordable housing. Local planning authorities should in particular consider whether allowing some market housing would facilitate the provision of significant additional affordable housing to meet local needs.”

Under “localism” proposals for parish councils to have a greater role in assessing local housing needs and promoting sites for affordable housing, some SHLAA sites may in future be considered for a mix of affordable and market housing under a new form of rural exceptions policy.

Suffolk Coastal District Council has already adopted a policy to allow a proportion of up to one in three market to affordable houses on sites arising from community / parish council led schemes on exception sites. This is intended to provide an incentive to landowners to release land for affordable housing. This policy has been included as an example of good practice in the report “Making the Most of Community-led Planning: a best practice guide for local authorities”, by Acre, Action for Market Towns and CLG, 2011.

## **Stowmarket Area Action Plan and Core Strategy Focused Review**

The Examination in Public for Mid Suffolk’s Stowmarket Area Action Plan was due to start on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2011. The Inspector appointed to examine the ‘Stowmarket Area Action Plan’ had maintained her concerns that the Stowmarket Area Action Plan does not conform to certain aspects of Mid Suffolk’s Core Strategy.

If the Council proceeded with the examination the likelihood would be that Stowmarket Area Action Plan would be found ‘unsound’. Therefore, the Council decided to ask the Inspector to suspend the examination of the Stowmarket Area Action Plan in order to allow focused changes to be made to Policy CS8, Housing, and the Employment chapter within the Core Strategy. This would add a further 485 dwellings to the Stowmarket housing allocation in policy CS8.

The opportunity is also being taken to update the Core Strategy approach to sustainable development, in anticipation of national planning policy changes indicated in the draft National Planning Policy Framework. This partial review will update the Core Strategy in order to bring the Stowmarket Area Action Plan into conformity.

On 23 September 2011 the Inspector granted the suspension and the Planning Policy team have begun working on the focused review which has been timetabled to last six months. The timetable includes preparation time to partially revise the Core Strategy and produce the Sustainability Appraisal and to hold two six-week consultation periods. The first consultation period for the Core Strategy Focused Review (under “Regulation 25”) is from 31 October to 9 December 2011. The second consultation period (under “Regulation 27”) is due to be from 11 January to 22 February 2012. The Examination, in Spring 2012, will consider the Stowmarket Area Action Plan and the Core Strategy Focused Review.

## **Infrastructure**

A proposed Infrastructure Delivery Programme has been included in the Stowmarket Area Action Plan and it is intended that the approach used, in conjunction with developers and infrastructure providers, will be developed in future to produce a District wide scheme for Community Infrastructure Levy, or possibly produced jointly with Babergh District Council.

## **Babergh / Mid Suffolk Integration, future plans**

No allocations of sites for housing or other development have yet been proposed outside the Stowmarket area. Mid Suffolk District Council elected members had decided that Stowmarket was their main priority for housing development with associated improvements to employment opportunities and town centre retail and other services. There has also been uncertainty regarding possible merger of Mid Suffolk and Babergh Councils and changes to the planning system emerging through the Localism Bill.

It seems unlikely that any proposals will come forward in a site allocations document before 2013. Public consultation decided against a merger but there will now be integration of services between Mid Suffolk and Babergh Districts. This will require joint working on future plans, in order to make necessary cost savings. The initial intention is to prepare a joint Development Management Policies DPD.

## **Parish Councils**

The Government's proposals for more local community involvement in the planning process, and the intended presumption in favour of sustainable development, will provide opportunities for parish councils to take part in decision making on the amount and type of development in their area.

However parish councils may not wish to go through the statutory process for Neighbourhood Plans, with examination procedures and costs, and the need for a referendum could be divisive.

## **Selection of sites**

Selection of the most suitable sites for housing development will need to take account of planning policies, sustainability appraisal and local needs and priorities. The SHLAA provides information on availability and suitability of sites; in particular those put forward as "land bids" or potential redevelopment sites on previously developed land. Housing development will need to contribute to essential infrastructure and to affordable housing, while maintaining viability of the development.

## **House Completions 2010-2011**

House completions for Mid Suffolk from April 2010 to March 2011 were 330, compared to the Core Strategy / Regional Spatial Strategy average provision for 415 per year. Over the 10 year period 2001-2011 housing completions in Mid Suffolk have averaged 420 per year. Annual housing land availability updates, the Annual Monitoring Report and five year housing land supply information are published on the Council's website.

## **SITE UPDATES, MID SUFFOLK**

### **MS 6 Stowmarket - Navigation Wharf**

Development of 54 flats on a "brown field" site near the railway station completed.

### **MS 11, 12, 13, 20 Stowmarket - Land around Chilton Leys**

Proposed housing allocation in Stowmarket Area Action Plan, subject to Examination by a planning inspector - Spring 2012?

### **MS 17, 18 Stowmarket - Ashes Farm**

Proposed housing allocation in Stowmarket Area Action Plan, subject to Examination by a planning inspector - Spring 2012?

### **MS 23, 24 Stowmarket - Farriers Road / Poplar Hill**

Proposed housing allocation in Stowmarket Area Action Plan, subject to Examination by a planning inspector - Spring 2012?

### **MS 27 Stowmarket – Atco Bosch, Suffolk Works**

This site has been included in the SHLAA as a land bid for redevelopment on previously developed land, for 131 apartments. Planning application 1170/06 has been "stalled" since 2008, due to key issues such as a flood risk objection by the Environment Agency. Flood risk issues have recently been resolved and the Secretary of State has confirmed that the application is not to be called in and can be determined by the District Council. The related access road works have been completed. The latest proposal is for up to 182 dwellings (apartment blocks), as part of a mixed use development, with consolidation and updating of the existing factory, and housing and bulky goods retail on surplus industrial land.

### **MS 28 Stowmarket - Cedars Park**

74 dwellings completed 2010-2011. Total site completions 1,384 dwellings. Overall site capacity now estimated at 1,780 dwellings.

### **MS 30 Stowmarket – Suncrest, Creting Road**

11 bungalows, now completed

### **MS 31 Needham Market - Unilever site**

Pre-application discussions have taken place, public consultation exhibition held by prospective developers, June 2011. Planning application submitted August 2011, for 90 dwellings and conversion of building for 4 flats.

### **MS 32 Needham Market - Quarry**

Pre application discussions have continued.

### **MS 40 Eye - Hartismere Hospital**

Outline planning application for demolition of redundant health care accommodation to rear of refurbished hospital, and erection of residential care home and up to 14 market dwellings - not determined.

### **MS 69 Bramford – Scotts Factory**

Pre-application discussions have taken place with potential developers, regarding mixed use redevelopment including housing. The current estimate of housing capacity in the SHLAA is 380 dwellings, including conversion of the large listed building to flats. This estimate will be reduced if amended proposals are taken forward to convert the listed building for business use rather than housing.

### **MS 73 Great Blakenham - former Cement Works Site**

Planning permission for 356 dwellings, including 113 affordable homes, site works carried out, first phase of housing under construction.

### **MS 93 Debenham - Bowling Green Cherry Tree PH**

Planning permission for extension of pub, restaurant, with 1 flat + 4 detached dwellings.

### **Further Information**

Further background information and evidence is set out in the annual Housing Land Availability Assessments for Mid Suffolk and the Five Years Supply of Housing Land documents, produced in conjunction with the Annual Monitoring Report. These documents are available on Mid Suffolk's web site:

<http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-development-framework/annual-monitoring-report/>

**MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL  
DECEMBER 2011.**