Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) 2022 - 2023

Part 3 of 9

Methodology

May 2023

Chelmsford
City Council

METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

1.1   Chelmsford City Council conduct a Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) to gain an understanding of the potential developability of sites proposed for future development.

1.2   The SHELAA forms part of the evidence base for the preparation and review of the Local Plan. The purpose of the SHELAA is to help the Council make informed decisions of where to allocate future development and in preparing annual housing and employment trajectories.

1.3   In preparation for the upcoming review of the Local Plan, the Council have reviewed and refined the SHELAA methodology to reflect emerging national and local priorities as well as to provide greater clarity and transparency to stakeholders on how the process is carried out. To ensure a justified and robust approach is taken, the Planning Advisory Service have been involved as part of this reviewing and refining process.

1.4   This report has been prepared to set out the revised SHELAA methodology.

2. Policy Background

2.1   Paragraph 68 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)[1] sets out the requirement for local authorities to undertake land availability assessments to establish their understanding of sites that may be suitable, available and achievable for development:

"Strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability".

2.2   Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) for Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments elaborates further on this, by clarifying that:

"…the assessment does not in itself determine whether a site should be allocated for development" but to *"provide information on the range of sites which are available to meet the local authority's requirements…"*

"An assessment should:
- *Identify sites and broad locations with potential for development;*
- *Assess their development potential; and*
- *Assess their suitability for development and the likelihood of development coming forward (the availability and achievability)."*
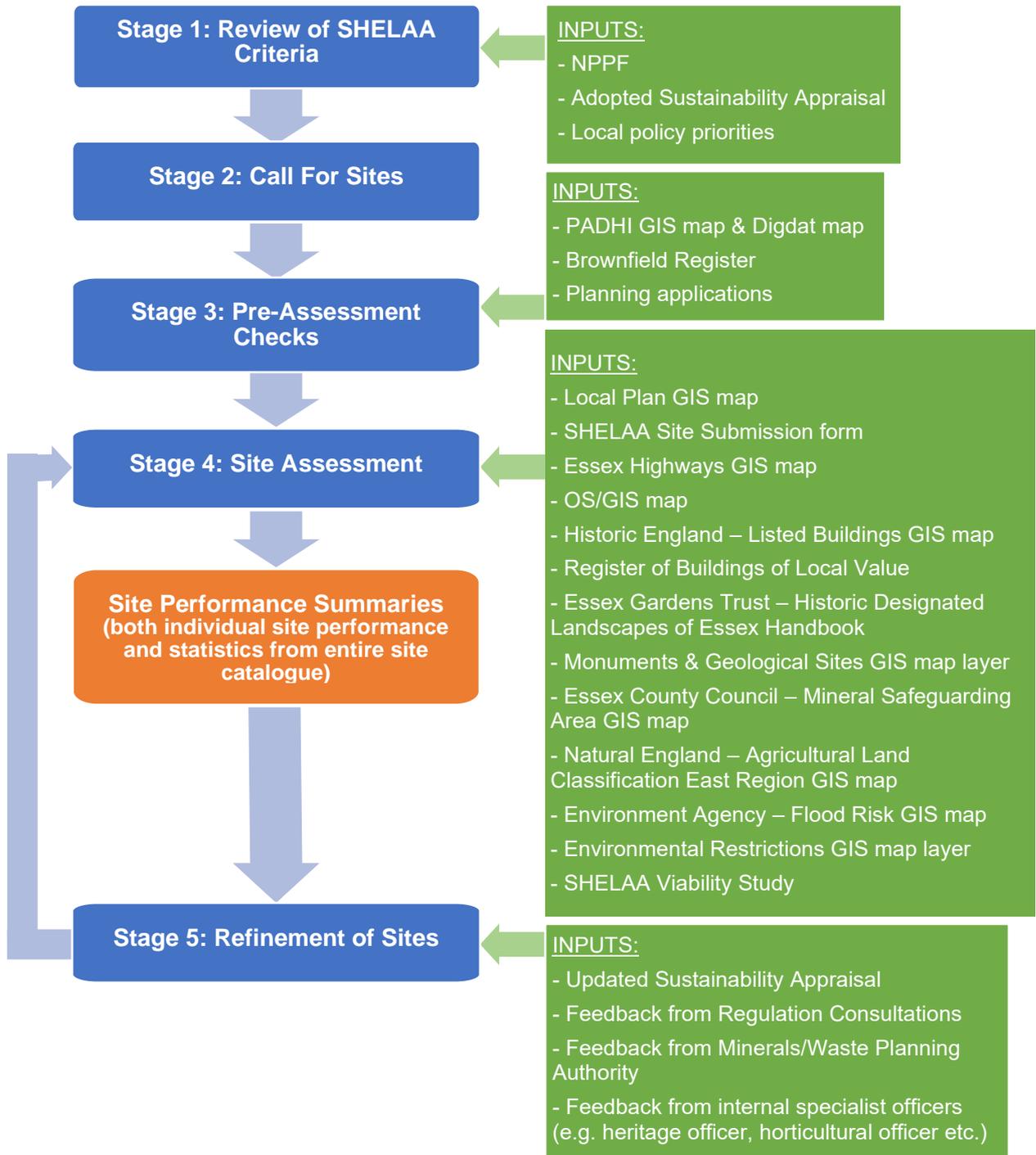
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[1] NPPF 2021 Update

2.3   To adhere to the guidance, the Council undertake a 'Call for Sites' facility enabling site owners, developers, interested parties, and members of the public to put forward sites for consideration. This facility is accessible through the Council's Consultation Portal, is open for submissions all year round and enables promoters to submit new sites for consideration and/or to propose amendments to existing SHELAA sites.

2.4   This approach provides flexibility to promoters and further seeks to ensure that the Council hold a continued up-to-date catalogue of sites that may be available within the administrative area.

2.5   Cut-off periods to the 'Call for Sites' facility are scheduled so that the assessment can be carried out. The assessment is desk-based and considers a wide range of suitability, availability and achievability criteria (see Criteria Note), which together help determine whether each site is likely deliverable, likely developable or neither.

2.6   To be developable, the NPPF states that:

       "Sites should be in a suitable location for housing development with a reasonable prospect that they will be available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged".

2.7   To be deliverable, a site must meet additional criteria. The NPPF states that deliverable sites:

       "… should be available now, offer a suitable location for development now, and be achievable with a realistic prospect that housing will be delivered on the site within five years. In particular:
       a) sites which do not involve major development and have planning permission, and all sites with detailed planning permission, should be considered deliverable until the permission expires, unless there is clear evidence that homes will not be delivered within five years (for example because they are no longer viable, there is no longer a demand for the type of units or sites have long term phasing plans).
       b) where a site has outline planning permission for major development, has been allocated in a development plan, has a grant of permission in principle, or is identified on a brownfield register, it should only be considered deliverable where there is clear evidence that housing completions will begin on site within five years."

2.8   To reiterate national guidance, it is not the purpose of the SHELAA to allocate land for future development. Instead, the assessment provides a high-level profile of the promoted sites; identifies a wide range of site characteristics; highlights the strengths and constraints that sites may face in achieving the local authority requirements; and establishes the likelihood of site developability/deliverability. Together this information is considered alongside other evidence base documents to enable officers and Members to make informed decisions of where to allocate future development.

3. Methodology

3.1   In undertaking the SHELAA, Chelmsford City Council follow five stages detailed within Figure 1 on the following page. Explanation of our processes at each stage follow below.

Figure 1: Methodology Flowchart

Stage	Inputs
Stage 1: Review of SHELAA Criteria	**INPUTS:** - NPPF - Adopted Sustainability Appraisal - Local policy priorities
Stage 2: Call For Sites	**INPUTS:** - PADHI GIS map & Digdat map - Brownfield Register - Planning applications
Stage 3: Pre-Assessment Checks	
Stage 4: Site Assessment	**INPUTS:** - Local Plan GIS map - SHELAA Site Submission form - Essex Highways GIS map - OS/GIS map - Historic England – Listed Buildings GIS map - Register of Buildings of Local Value - Essex Gardens Trust – Historic Designated Landscapes of Essex Handbook - Monuments & Geological Sites GIS map layer - Essex County Council – Mineral Safeguarding Area GIS map - Natural England – Agricultural Land Classification East Region GIS map - Environment Agency – Flood Risk GIS map - Environmental Restrictions GIS map layer - SHELAA Viability Study
Site Performance Summaries (both individual site performance and statistics from entire site catalogue)	
Stage 5: Refinement of Sites	**INPUTS:** - Updated Sustainability Appraisal - Feedback from Regulation Consultations - Feedback from Minerals/Waste Planning Authority - Feedback from internal specialist officers (e.g. heritage officer, horticultural officer etc.)

Stage 1: Reviewing the SHELAA Criteria

3.2   Prior to each assessment, the Council undertake an internal review of the existing SHELAA criteria and assessment process. This is to ensure the criteria remain in alignment with National Policy; are reflective of the sustainability objectives set out within the Sustainability Appraisal, as well as emerging local policy priorities; and are feasible to be measured through desk-top methods.

3.3   The SHELAA is undertaken in-house by dedicated officers within the Spatial Planning Team. The assessment process has been developed (and is continually reviewed) to maximise the utilisation of available digital software including GIS mapping. This ensures that a robust desk-top site assessment can be undertaken with algorithms in place to minimise, as far as possible, any subjective assessment decisions or human error.

3.4   For the 2022/2023 iteration of the SHELAA, the assessment criteria have expanded to cover proposals not only for residential and employment/commercial use, but also for community facilities (including education, healthcare, places of worship, sports, leisure, or recreation facilities) and renewable power generation. A full breakdown of the criteria is featured in the Criteria Note.

3.5   The inclusion of these uses reflects the aims within the NPPF, particularly in relation to promoting healthy communities and planning for climate change. Understanding what land may be available for community facilities or renewable power generation helps the City Council make informed decisions of where to allocate these uses to sustainably support future housing and employment development.

3.6   Impartial feedback has been sought on the updated SHELAA Criteria Note from the Planning Advisory Service, who have helped to ensure that the assessment criteria is reasonable and forms a robust assessment.

Stage 2: Call for Sites

3.7   The Council maintain a 'Call for Sites' facility that is open for submission all year round and enables promoters to submit new sites to be included within the SHELAA and/or to propose amendments to existing promoted sites. This facility is accessible through our website at: https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-local-plan/call-for-sites-shelaa-and-parish-maps/

3.8   Promoters are required to complete the relevant submission form, which requires them to provide an OS map outlining the site, site ownership details, proposed use/s, delivery timescales, known legal issues, and an overview of some of the site's characteristics.

3.9   Sites will be considered for the SHELAA providing most of the site (over 50% of the promoted area) falls within the Chelmsford administrative area, detailed in Figure 2 below. There is no site size threshold for submission.

Figure 2: Chelmsford Administrative Area
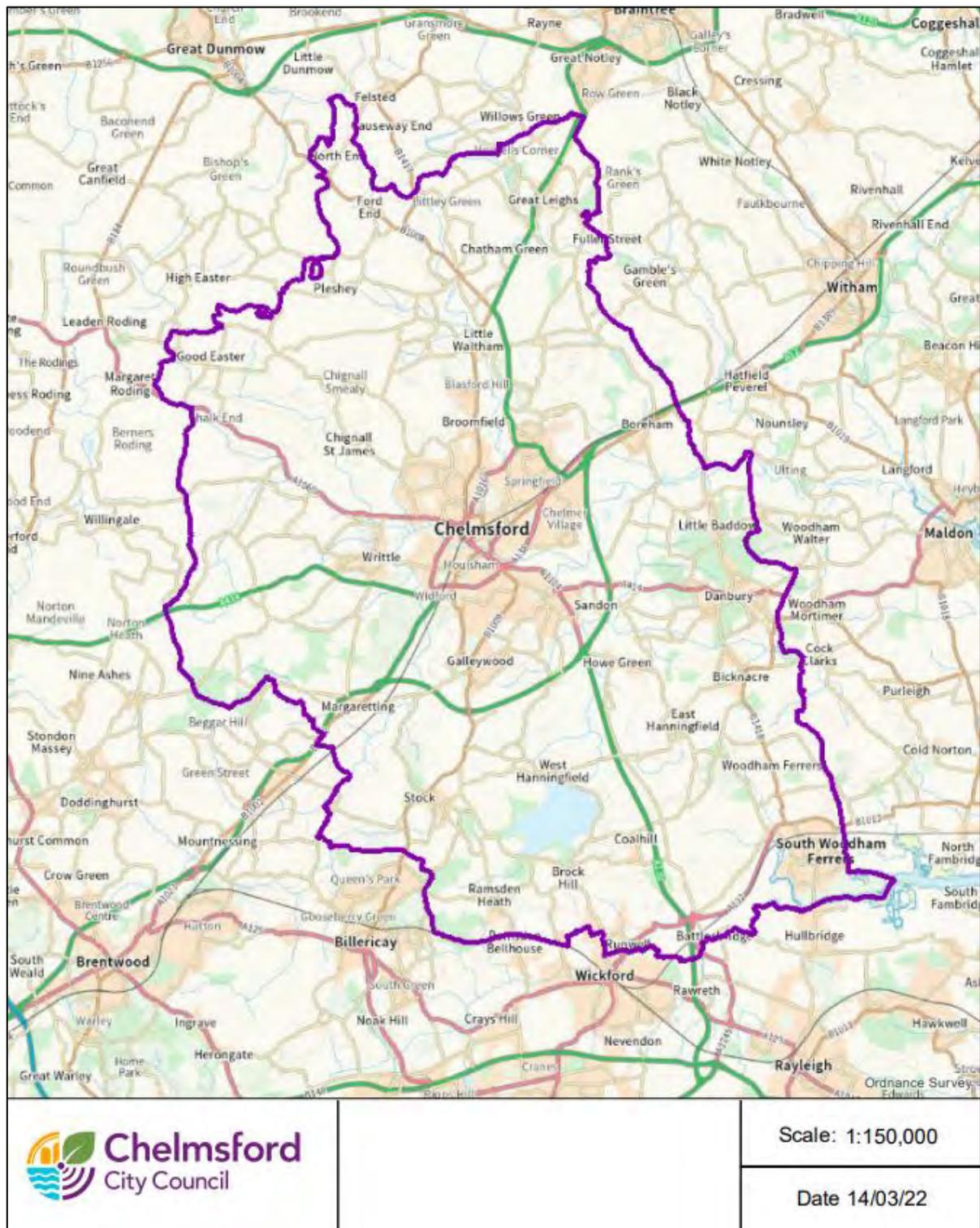
Source: CCC, 2022.

3.10   At the scheduled 'Call for Sites' cut-off times, all new submitted sites and proposed amendments are individually reviewed to ensure that the promoter has provided enough information to be able to carry out an assessment, to make any proposed amendments to sites, and to ensure that any new sites are not a duplication of an

existing SHELAA site.

Stage 3: Pre-Assessment Checks

3.11   Using Council databases and GIS software, the entire catalogue of SHELAA sites (new and existing) are checked to see if they feature on the Brownfield Register, have been granted planning Permission in Principle, have received planning permission for development, or have previously been refused planning permission. Where areas of/whole sites have permission and are well underway with or have completed development, these areas/sites will be omitted from the SHELAA. Simply having permission granted is not enough to remove an area/site from the SHELAA as these do not always get built-out.

3.12   Again, using GIS software, SHELAA sites are also checked for the presence of any human hazards on site (this includes gas and oil pipelines, electricity towers/lines, electricity substations, and sewage pumping stations). Any hazardous areas identified within promoted sites are discounted from the SHELAA.

3.13   At this stage, a list of sites to be omitted from the assessment is produced. Sites can be omitted for the following circumstances:

- If the site consists wholly of a human hazard
- If the site is considered to be identical or almost identical to another submission. Where a site is considered almost identical to another site, the assessing officer makes a judgement to remove the site if they feel the discrepancy would not likely impact the assessment outcome
- If subsequent to submission, the site has commenced/completed development
- If removal of site is requested by the landowner. In the case where only a portion of a SHELAA site is owned, only this portion will be omitted from the submission
- If removal of site is requested by the person/organisation who submitted the site or if the promotor is no longer contactable

3.14   Sites that are omitted from the SHELAA through Stages 2 and 3 are listed within the List of Omitted Sites document with their reason for omission.

Stage 4: Site Assessment

3.15   Sites that have passed through the pre-assessment checks are brought through to Stage 4 where they are each profiled and assessed against suitability, availability, and achievability criteria[2]. The sites are then RAG rated determined by their scores and compliance with national and local policy, as summarised in Table 1 below.

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[2] Note: Sites are assessed individually with the area of assessment defined by the red line boundary provided by the promoter. If two or more adjoining SHELAA sites come forward for development at a later stage, then any in combination effects are identified and appropriately addressed with stakeholders at that stage.

Table 1: SHELAA RAG Rating Summary

Red	Site is contrary to national policy and/or faces significant constraints or adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated.
Amber	Site scores poorly against criteria, is contrary to local policy, and faces moderate constraints that would require mitigation.
Yellow	Site scores well against criteria but has some characteristics contrary to local policy. Site faces minor constraints that would require mitigation. Site is considered developable.
Green	Site scores highly against criteria and demonstrates compliance with national and local policy. Site faces minimal constraints and is considered deliverable.

3.16   The Criteria Note provides a full technical breakdown of how each proposed use is assessed and RAG rated. The criteria that are used have been developed based upon policy requirements in both the NPPF and Chelmsford's Local Plan, and to reflect the current Sustainability Appraisal site appraisal criteria. This is to ensure that the SHELAA can highlight the most suitable sites, favour sites that look likely to achieve sustainable development, and to provide alignment between the SHELAA and subsequent iterations of the Sustainability Appraisal which will look to test the economic, environmental, and social impacts of the Reviewed Local Plan.

3.17   The assessment is desk-based and utilises the evidence sources detailed in Table 2 below to determine the suitability, availability, and achievability of each site.

Table 2: Evidence Sources Utilised within SHELAA

Criterion	Evidence used to undertake assessment
Suitability Criteria	
Proximity to employment areas	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*)
Impact on retail areas	SHELAA submission form, Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*)
Proximity to the workplace	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*)
Public transport	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*), https://www.essexhighways.org/getting-around
PROW and cycling connectivity	https://www.essexhighways.org/getting-around
Vehicle access	GIS map (also viewable on any up-to-date OS map)
Strategic road access	GIS map (also viewable on any up-to-date OS map)
Impact on designated heritage assets	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*), https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/
Impact on non-designated heritage assets	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*), Register of Buildings of Local Value, Essex Gardens Trusts: Historic Designated Landscapes of Essex Handbook
Impact on archaeological assets	Monuments & Geological Sites GIS map
Minerals and waste constraints	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*), Mineral Safeguarding Area GIS map provided by Essex County Council as the minerals and waste planning authority Essex County Council minerals and waste officers
Impact on areas of defined open space	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*)
Impact on the Green Belt and Green Wedge	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*)
Land classification	Natural England's Agricultural Land Classification East Region (ALC008), Aerial Photos GIS map
Impact on protected natural features	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*)
Impact on flood risk	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*), updates provided from Environment Agency
Impact on Air Quality Management Areas	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*)
Ground condition constraints	Environmental Restrictions GIS map
Neighbouring constraints	SHELAA submission form, Aerial Photos GIS map
Proximity to key services	Local Plan GIS map (viewable online*)
Impact on community facilities	SHELAA submission form, GIS map
Availability Criteria	
Ownership	SHELAA submission form
Land condition	SHELAA submission form, Aerial Photos GIS map
Legal constraints	SHELAA submission form, Aerial Photos GIS map
Achievability Criteria	
Viability	Viability Study
Timescale for deliverability	SHELAA submission form

*See Policies Map at: https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-local-plan/adopted-local-plan/

3.18   To ensure the SHELAA is transparent, most of the criteria is assessed using maps, documents or websites that are accessible to the public. GIS maps that are not accessible to the public feature designations are generally ones provided to the Council by third parties (such as the Environment Agency or Essex County Council).

3.19   The Council also do not publish the SHELAA submission forms in line with GDPR since these forms contain personal and sensitive information. Therefore, the information detailed on these forms is not visible to the public.

3.20   The [Viability Study](#) has been prepared by the Council for the purpose of determining the likely economic viability of SHELAA sites. The study follows the same methodology as the Local Plan Viability Study in the development and appraisal of a number of typologies, representative of the range of sites and uses considered within the SHELAA. The Viability Study is reviewed on the same regular basis that the SHELAA criteria is reviewed to ensure all typologies, associated build costs and CIL/S106 contributions are up to date.

3.21   The Viability Study does not feature appraisals for the community facilities nor renewable power generation uses. Instead, at the call for sites stage, promoters will be asked to provide evidence of viability to justify their promoted use for the assessing officer to consider. The reasoning behind this is because of the varied and ever evolving nature of both of these uses, it has not been possible for the Council to develop typologies to cover these uses.

3.22   In addition to the assessed criteria, the proximity of each site to defined settlement boundaries, retail allocations and employment allocations is recorded, as well as the general gradient of the site, and utilities (water, electric, gas, sewage) that are already present on site. These features are not scored against but provide greater clarity of the general character of the site.

3.23   Performance for each site is summarised in a concise report, with RAG rating and details of their suitability, availability, and achievability outcomes. All SHELAA sites are also plotted digitally and displayed on an interactive GIS map to provide additional spatial context. The most up-to-date assessment outcomes can be viewed in the [Site Performance Summaries](#) document. The GIS map is viewable here: https://chelmsford-gov.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d5bae70913a14999b423522592e3cd62

Stage 5: Refinement of Sites

3.24   A refinement of sites will be undertaken by the Council to ensure that the final site performance summaries are accurate.

3.25   Dependent on the findings from the assessment undertaken within Stage 4, there are instances whereby further information may be sought, or additional information inputs identified. Though not exhaustive, the list below identifies such instances:

- When the Council is in the process of drafting a Local Plan or Local Plan Review, feedback from statutory consultations will be incorporated;

- Where a site has been identified as requiring assessment from the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority, feedback from this authority will be incorporated;
- If a SHELAA site is selected as an allocation option, an external consultant will undertake a Sustainability Appraisal. The outcomes of that appraisal will then be incorporated;
- If additional investigation is sought from specialist officers, then their assessments will be incorporated.

4. Uses of SHELAA outcomes

4.1   The purpose of the SHELAA is not to allocate land for future development. The assessment helps officers and Members make their own informed decisions of where to allocate future development.

4.2   The assessment does this by highlighting areas of likely deliverable land. This is a particularly useful feature when looking at how the Council's Housing and Employment targets are going to be met within the plan period, and further into the future, as the assessment offers an indicator of how many dwellings could possibly be delivered, what size site is needed and whether the type of development would likely be viable or not.

4.3   Additionally, the assessment acts as a sieve to filter through sites that could be eligible to be added onto the Council's Part 1 of the Brownfield Register. If the assessment deems the site to be predominantly previously developed land, an officer will review the site against the Brownfield Register Regulations to see if it is eligible to be added to the register.