

SECTION 8 INITIAL SITE ASSESSMENT - PROCEDURE

In order to ensure that land identified in the LDP: is capable of development; can contribute to the delivery of the Development Strategy; and meet the Objectives of the Plan, the Council has undertaken a significant amount of site assessment work at this early stage of plan preparation as an integral part of the preparation of the Evidence Base for the plan.

The procedure outlined below is designed to ensure that there is a clear, transparent and objective assessment procedure in place, which makes the process accessible to all interested persons and organisations. The assessment procedure can be categorised into five discreet stages

Stage 1 : Only sites greater than or equal to 0.33 hectares will be considered as part of the assessment process.

Sites submitted to the Council for consideration that are smaller than 0.33 hectares referred to as 'small sites', will be considered at a later stage of the plan preparation process.

Small sites will be considered in 2 ways:

- **small sites outside existing settlement boundaries**
These sites include land on the edge of existing settlement boundaries and sites clearly outside these boundaries. As an integral part of plan preparation the Council will review all settlement boundaries within the County Borough to determine if they are still appropriate in light of the preferred strategy of the plan. Sites on the edge of existing settlement boundaries will be assessed as an integral part of this review process.
- **small sites within existing settlements**
The development of small sites within existing settlements will be determined through the Development Control process. The development plan will provide criteria based policies for determining planning applications on small sites.

Stage 2 : All sites greater than or equal to 0.33 hectares, will be subject an initial planning assessment.

An initial planning assessment examines the following broad planning issues:

- relationship to existing settlement;
- proximity to sites of national importance for biodiversity
- compatibility with neighbouring uses;
- flood risk designation;
- relevant planning history

The initial planning assessment (refer to Section 9) determines whether a site is considered suitable in planning terms for the proposed use identified by the landowner, or whether an alternative use would be more appropriate. Candidate sites that fail to satisfy the initial planning assessment are not considered suitable for

further consideration as part of the LDP process. **No further assessment to be undertaken.**

Several sites have been submitted for tourism uses such as golf courses and tourist accommodation. Due to the different nature and locational requirements of such uses, specific criteria has been devised to assess these sites which encompasses factors such as:

- Location
- Type of development
- Relationship to other tourist facilities
- Accessibility

Where sites satisfied these criteria, they will be assessed as part of the detailed expert assessments.

Stage 3: Expert Assessments

All sites that satisfy the initial planning assessment in Stage 2 undergo detailed expert assessment in stage 3 undertaken by a wide range of experts including, ecologists, landscape architects, arboriculturists, engineers, environmental health officers and town planners. These assessments are based on the preferred land use identified as a result of the initial assessment in Stage 2.

Detailed assessment proforma have been prepared in respect of the following issues: Countryside and Landscape; Environmental Health and Highways and Engineers which consider the site in terms of a wide range of criteria (refer to Section 9).

Stage 4: Consideration of Expert Assessment

A Planning Assessment Team comprising senior planning officers from Development Control and Strategic Planning consider the results of the expert assessments.

On the basis of the expert assessments the team will determine whether a site is suitable for development in full or in part, and will determine whether or not the site should be given further consideration for inclusion within the LDP. **It is important to note that at this stage these decisions are in principle only. A significant amount of further survey work is usually required in order to finally determine the suitability or otherwise, of a site for development and thus for its inclusion in the LDP.** Where further survey work is necessary, for example in respect of ground contamination, presence of habitats, conditions of trees and hedgerows, etc this is identified in the sites register Sites failing to satisfy the Planning Assessment Team will not proceed to a Stage 5 assessment.

Stage 5: Sites identified as being suitable for further consideration in Stage 4 are then assessed against the four Strategy Options to determine their compatibility with each, with specific reference to the conformity of the site with the eight component parts of the strategy. It should be noted that the outcome of the site assessment process is still provisional and individual sites may be re-categorised on the basis of new information.