

Site Assessment Matrix

March 2018

1. Explanatory note

The table below is a Site Assessment Matrix for use by neighbourhood planning groups within South Hams and West Devon. It is intended to help groups to provide robust evidence to back up any site allocations, and is offered by South Hams District Council and West Devon District Council as part of the Councils' duty to support neighbourhood plans. It should not be seen as a definitive site assessment method and may be adapted as appropriate.

The matrix uses a traffic light scoring system to facilitate a comparison of alternative sites which have been suggested for potential development. It sets out criteria (flood risk, landscape etc.) against which the attributes of the site need to be identified by selecting from a menu of measures.

Guidance on the appropriate information source is given at the right-hand side of the table in column 4 and each measure carries a colour coded traffic light score in column 3. Annotations give some further instruction or guidance for further work.

The basic colour coding is:

GREEN = positive / favoured; **ORANGE** = possible problem; **RED** = negative / not favoured

The assessment system is intended to help identify the relative merits of alternative sites, but it does not give a numeric score, in some instances the Red assessment identifies a fundamental problem with the site, but the system is otherwise a means of facilitating a transparent and systematic comparison of sites, the more green the better.

The first step is to complete one of these forms for each site, this is done by establishing for each criteria which measure applies and then simply black out the colour coding cell for the non-applicable measures. This will leave a mix of traffic light scores for the site which can be compared with others. (A separate summary chart presenting all sites on one sheet will aid this).

2. Transparency

The matrix is intended to facilitate a consistent and transparent assessment and results should be published in conjunction with any subsequent public consultation. Once complete, it may be used as part of the Evidence Base for neighbourhood plans.

3. Limitations

This assessment is an initial guide based on the inherent attributes of each identified site, depending on the characteristics of the sites being compared, this exercise might not reveal decisive differences but even if the assessment leaves little to choose between the best performing sites, the process should have;

- (a) given a reasoned rejection of poor sites
- (b) identified the factors which are relevant to further deliberations or which need further investigation.

A conclusion about a preferred site or scheme should take account of how the overall package will make a positive contribution to the community, sustainable development and local character.

Settlement	Site location / address	Site area (ha)	Site Reference

Criteria (District Policy ref)	Measure	Indicative assessment for this measure	Information source
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High-level exclusion in respect of international or national nature conservation /archaeology designations

Designated sites of international or national importance for nature conservation/ archaeology	Site is wholly located within the following international designations: Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SACs), and Ramsar Sites, and the following national designations Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), ancient woodland and Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs)	Eliminate immediately (no further consideration)	Desktop http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk/magicmap.aspx
	Site is adjacent to one of the above designations, or development here may have a significant effect on one (give particular attention to the South Hams SAC flyways and sustenance zones)		
	Site is not located within or adjacent to the above international and national designations and is unlikely to have a significant effect on one.		

Major Policy Constraints / filters

Flood Risk	Flood Zone 1	Prefer over Zone 2 or 3	Desktop – EA Flood Map https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/
	Flood Zone 2	Prefer over Zone 3, but need to pass Sequential Test	
	Flood Zone 3a	Reject unless there are no suitable alternatives at lower risk (Sequential Test)	
	Flood Zone 3b	Reject	
Landscape Will a housing development on this site potentially result in a significant adverse impact on the landscape? Ultimately it may be possible to mitigate through good design and landscaping, but at this stage it is necessary to gauge the inherent landscape value of the site.	Site is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	Major constraint, but may be no alternative. It may be appropriate to carry out a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) or to request this from the promoter of the site. See https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/technical-resource/landscape-visual-impact-assessment/ Ensure that the site can meet the requirements of NPPF 116	Desktop: South Hams AONB http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/ Tamar Valley ANOB http://www.tamarvalley.org.uk/about/maps/
	Site is within a designated green edge / wedge / strategic gap	Potentially a major constraint	Desktop http://gis.swdevon.gov.uk/CN/ET4914LIVE/CMFindIt/
	Site is prominent in views from AONB	LVIA should be considered – see above.	Desktop (and Site Visit if in close proximity) AONB websites as above.

Landscape cont.	Site contains trees or woodland subject to preservation order	Potentially a major constraint	Desktop http://gis.swdevon.gov.uk/CN/ET4914LIVE/CMFindIt/
	Site contains particularly significant trees and hedgerows some / all of which would be threatened by development (e.g. need to be removed to create access and visibility)	Potentially a major constraint (may warrant TPO)	Desktop and Informal Site Survey
	Site is particularly prominent in key public views into or out of the settlement		Desktop and Informal Site Survey
	Site is a green field but is of limited landscape or visual interest.		Informal Site Survey
	Site contains significant trees and hedgerows but these are capable of being retained and provide a degree of screening (with or without additional planting) which could help to absorb a development into the local landscape.	Site survey will be required and scheme design will need to secure appropriate retention and enhancement.	Informal Site Survey

N.B. Historic Environment section separately considers whether the site forms an important part of the setting of a listed building or other heritage asset.

Nature Conservation Will a housing development on this site potentially result in a significant adverse impact on nature conservation? There may be a need for site surveys and further assessment, but at this stage you should take account of any recognised designations / biodiversity information	Site is a designated County Wildlife Site / County Geological Site / Local Nature reserve	Reject unless there are absolutely no alternatives	Desktop. Request info from SHDC/WDBC, or pay for wildlife report from DBRC http://www.dbr.org.uk/neighbourhood-plans/
	Site is known to be used by a European Protected Species (e.g. Dormouse, Great Crested Newt, Bats) Site is within the South Hams SAC Bat Consultation Zone	Ecological survey may be required and scheme design will need to secure appropriate habitat retention, mitigation and potentially compensation measures. In some circumstances they may pose a significant constraint	

Nature Conservation cont.	Site is within 1km of a designated site of international importance (SAC / SPA / Ramsar) or national importance (SSSI / NNR)	Will need to consult Natural England and Plan may need Habitat Regs Assessment	Websites as above
	Development on this site could have potential impact on a European Protected Species (e.g. disturbance).	Seek expert advice.	Websites as above
	Site contains habitats or features which provide wildlife corridors or stepping stones (e.g. watercourse / hedgerow / trees / copse / pond) some / all of which would be threatened by development (e.g. need to be removed to create access and visibility).	Ecological survey may be required and scheme design will need to secure appropriate retention and enhancement.	Informal Site Survey
	The site has no known or suspected nature conservation value which would preclude development.	Scheme design should seek to enhancement value of site for wildlife.	Desktop/local knowledge
	Site contains habitats or features which provide wildlife corridors or stepping stones (e.g. watercourse / hedgerow / trees / copse / pond) but there is sufficient space to retain all of these.	Ecological survey may be required and scheme design will need to secure appropriate retention and enhancement.	Ariel photo/Informal Site Survey

Agricultural Land Classification	Site is Grade 1, Grade 2 or Grade 3a	Lower grade land should be preferred unless this site is justified by other sustainability considerations	Desktop http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/5954148537204736 Note: maps available at the above link are not detailed enough to accurately assess small sites. However many landowners will know the grade of their land.
	Site is Grade 3b,3 (in areas where 3a / 3b are not differentiated), 4 or 5, or unclassified.		
Suitability in respect of scale, location and accessibility			
Site size Is this site of a suitable size to meet the identified local housing need for affordable and market housing? An approximate target site size should have been identified prior to the call for sites.	Site is considered to be about the right size to accommodate some or all of the identified local need without compromising design and environmental considerations		Desktop (GIS)
	Site is considered to be larger than is needed to accommodate the identified local need (without compromising design and environmental considerations)	Consider opportunities for the site to be phased for future use or for surplus to remain in agricultural use or to be used for community benefit (e.g. allotments/ play/ space / community woodland)	
	Site is considered to be too small to accommodate all of the identified local need	(a) is there adjacent land which could be added; Or (b) are additional sites available to accommodate the balance of the need.	
Location in relation to development boundary	Within or adjacent to development boundary but not projecting prominently into surrounding countryside ('rounding off', already bounded on at least 2 sides by the existing built up area)	Probably preferred unless site has specific landscape/ ecological / cultural value	Desktop (GIS)

	On edge of settlement and projecting in countryside (extension)	Could be acceptable, subject to landscape assessment etc.	
	Not immediately adjacent to Development Boundary, but close to and well-related to the settlement	Could be acceptable, subject to landscape assessment etc.	
	Not immediately adjacent to Development Boundary, and isolated from the existing settlement	Reject unless there are no alternatives	
<p>Proximity to local facilities</p> <p>Distance (by actual path) to local services (measured from centre of site)</p> <p>See JLP Submission Draft Figure 3.2 (page 19)</p> <p>An alternative mix of facilities may be substituted if more appropriate to the settlement.</p> <p>Distance may need to be reduced to provide a useful differentiation in some settlements</p>	Within 600m walking distance of nearest bus stop		<p>Desktop mapping</p> <p>N.B. In all cases it will also be worth considering what opportunity a development of the site could bring for improvement (e.g. new path/play space)</p> <p>Definitions of open space types are given in https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/WestDevonOpenSpaceSportAndRecreationStudy.pdf See the table on p.4 and Appendix 7.</p>
	Not above		
	Within 800m walking distance of nearest local convenience store		
	Not above		
	Within 800m walking distance of nearest primary school		
	Not above		
	Within 300m walking distance of nearest local accessible natural space		
	Not above		
	Within 300m walking distance of nearest local playable space / LEAP		
	Not above		
	Within 1,000m walking distance of nearest neighbourhood playable space		
	Not above		

<p>Walking, cycling and wheelchair routes to local facilities</p> <p>(Local facilities = whatever school(s), shop(s), play space, health, and leisure facilities exist in the village and could be used by residents of the new houses)</p>	There are safe and convenient walking, cycling and wheelchair routes between the site and all local facilities		<p>Desktop/local knowledge</p> <p>Some guidance at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/3695/inclusive-mobility.pdf</p>
	There are safe and convenient walking routes between the site and all local facilities	Can cycle and wheelchair access be improved?	
	There are safe and convenient walking, cycling and wheelchair routes between the site and some local facilities	Is there potential to improve the routes to other facilities?	
	There are safe and convenient walking routes between the site and some local facilities	Ideally there should be routes to all facilities	
	There are no safe and convenient walking routes between the site and some local facilities		

Physical characteristics / limitations of the site

<p>Vehicular Access</p> <p>Can this site be developed without adverse impact on the safety and/or function of the local or strategic road network?</p>	Site is potentially accessed by an extension of an existing residential estate road	Need to be aware that this may involve a “ransom strip” which could affect feasibility.	Desktop/Informal site inspection
	Site has a frontage thought to be capable of safely accommodating a new access road junction and associated visibility onto a road which is suitable and within a 30mph (or less) speed limit		<p>Desktop and site visit, County Highway Design Standards, Manual for Streets</p> <p>Manual for Streets https://www.gov.uk/govern</p>

	Site has a limited road frontage and the creation of a new access road junction with satisfactory visibility may be problematic (e.g. very close to an existing junction / visibility improvements will require removal of hedgerows or structures).		Highway Design Standards https://new.devon.gov.uk/planning/apply-for-planning-permission/get-help-with-an-application/guidance-for-applicants
	Site access would be onto a section of unclassified road with a speed limit of over 30mph	Reject unless the site is preferred on other criteria	Desktop and site visit/ local knowledge
	Site access would be onto a section of a main road (A or B classification) with a speed limit of over 30mph.	Reject unless the site is preferred on other criteria.	
Public Right of Way N.B. development must not adversely affect the convenience of users, but the presence of a public footpath / bridleway is not a major constraint and should instead be assessed with a view to enhancement of the local network.	There is no PRoW on or adjacent to this site		Desktop
	There is a PRoW adjacent to this site, or there is one or more PRoWs on this site	The existence of a PRoW is not in itself a fundamental issue (and connectivity could be useful to future residents), but the scheme will need to incorporate it appropriately.	
Historic Environment Guidance on Allocating Sites for Development can be found on the Historic England website at https://content.historicengland.org.uk/image-s-books/publications/historic-environment-	There are no listed buildings, Conservation Area or known historic / archaeological features on or adjacent to the site		Desktop http://gis.swdevon.gov.uk/CNET4914LIVE/CMFindIt/ https://new.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment/the-devon-historic-environment-record/
	There is a listed building and/or Conservation Area and/or known historic / archaeological feature adjacent to the site	Potential for adverse impact will need to be considered	

	There is a listed building and/or Conservation Area and/or known historic / archaeological feature on the site	May significantly constrain development	
	Site is within or adjacent to the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site	May constrain development. Seek expert advice	See the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/article/3867/Local-Development-Framework
	Site forms an important part of the setting of a listed building or other heritage asset		Informal site inspection
Pollution, contamination and hazards	There is no known contaminated land / “bad neighbour” (e.g. source of smell, dust or noise nuisance) / hazardous installation which would affect this site.		Desktop and local knowledge
	The site is thought to be contaminated by pollution from a previous use	May affect the viability of the site.	Desktop and local knowledge
	There is a “bad neighbour” (e.g. source of smell or noise nuisance) / hazardous installation nearby which might affect this site.	The degree of potential impact will need to be assessed (may need to reject)	Local knowledge
	There is a “bad neighbour” (e.g. source of smell or noise nuisance) / hazardous installation adjacent to the site.		

Ground Conditions	Site is not limited by steep slopes / unstable ground / conditions such as poor porosity or waterlogging which would limit the potential for the development to be served by a sustainable drainage system (SuDS)		Local knowledge/Informal site inspection
	Site is limited by steep slopes / unstable ground / conditions such as poor porosity or waterlogging which would limit the potential for the development to be served by a sustainable drainage system (SuDS)	Would need technical assessment which may conclude site is unsuitable	
Availability of mains drainage (foul water)	There is a public sewer network in the vicinity of the site to which it will be possible to connect		Local knowledge / South West Water www.southwestwater.co.uk
	The availability of a sewer connection is uncertain		
	There are thought to be difficulties in connecting this site to mains drainage		
Planning history	Planning permission has refused on this site in the past.	It will important to understand what the proposal was and why it was refused. Can objections made at the time be overcome?	SHDC and WDBC planning application search http://apps.westdevon.gov.uk/PlanningSearchMVC/
	Planning permission has been granted on this site in the past, or a planning application has never been made on this site		