

Matter 5: Housing Land Supply

This matter considers how the housing requirement will be met; whether those means of meeting the requirement have been justified and will be effective; and whether the LP will have a 5-year housing land supply (HLS) on adoption of the LP

Policies to be covered by Matter 5: LPA05, LPA05.1

Main Evidence Base

SD025 - Housing Need and Supply Background Paper

HOU002 - St Helens Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

SHBC001 – Council response to Inspector's preliminary questions

SHBC004 - Further evidence on Housing Supply, including updated SHLAA Site Assessments

SHBC005 – Council's response to Inspectors' Preliminary questions on Site Allocations and Safeguarded Land

In response to preliminary questions the Council has indicated as follows:

- Table 4.6 of the Plan (housing land requirements and supply) will be updated to reflect the tables in Appendix 5 to SD025 but as of 31 March 2021 and potentially including an extended Plan period up to 2037.*
- The housing trajectory at Figure 4.3 would be replaced by an update reflecting that shown in Appendix 1 to SD025.*
- SD025 also includes a more detailed trajectory showing how allocations and other major sites (including commitments and SHLAA sites) will deliver for each year over the Plan period.*
- The above takes into account updated SHLAA site assessments (SHBC004).*
- The Table at Appendix 2 of SD025 shows the key assumptions and parameters that will be relied on to calculate the 5-year HLS (5% buffer and the Sedgfield2 approach to dealing with shortfalls). This could be added to the reasoned justification to Policy LPA05.*

Issue 1: Components of Housing Supply

1. Having regard to the Council's responses referred to above, will the up to date housing supply position be clearly shown in the Plan (base date of 31 March 2021)?

Table 5.2 to 5.5 of the Housing Need and Supply Background Paper (October 2020) are easier to read than Table 4.6 of the Plan and would be an improvement to the Plan. Once updated to a base date of 31st March 2021 it is considered they should provide a clearer position for the housing supply.

2. Having regard to Council's responses referred to above, will the components of the housing supply that will meet the housing requirement be clearly shown in the Plan?

It would be beneficial if the supply from table 5.3 of the Housing Need and Supply Background Paper (the non-Green Belt / SHLAA sites) was broken down further to set out the number of dwellings on sites that are under construction, with detailed permission or outline permission, are allocated or with no permissions but identified in the SHLAA.

3. Is the small sites allowance of 93 dpa justified by compelling evidence (see paras 4.10 to 4.13 of SD025)?

The Housing Need and Supply Background Paper sets out that an average of 103dpa (gross) have been provided on small sites. It does not identify the net figure. Table 4.1 of the Paper suggests that over the same 10-year period the Council has had 200 dwelling losses, an average of 20dpa. It is not clear however, if these are all on small sites or not. The paper does not consider whether these trends are realistic going forward. The HBF considers that it is likely the windfall development from small sites is likely to continue going forward, but it is not apparent if it will continue at the levels seen previously.

The paper also notes that to avoid the potential for double counting the Council has not included small sites with planning permission as part of the supply. The HBF considers that it is appropriate for the Council to seek to avoid double counting.

4. Should the supply shown within the Plan make an allowance for demolitions or are they accounted for within the net number of homes anticipated to be delivered from each site?

It is not clear from the Housing Need and Supply Background Paper how dwelling losses have been considered. For example, the small sites allowance appears to be evidenced by the gross average of completions rather than the net. The Paper suggests that historically the majority of completions have been undertaken by Registered Providers and that going forward that there are no significant clearance programmes. Therefore, the Council considers that demolitions are likely to remain low. However, the Council does not seek to determine what this 'low' figure may be. The HBF considers that it would be appropriate to give consideration to the loss of dwellings within the supply calculations.

5. Should empty homes be included as a component of supply?

The Housing Need and Supply Background Paper does not appear to have considered empty homes and the Plan¹ states that whilst the re-use of empty homes can make a contribution to housing needs the Council has only limited control over the delivery of homes from this supply. Due to this lack of robust evidence that empty homes will be brought back in to use, the HBF consider that this potential source of supply should only provide flexibility to supply and not be included within the supply at this stage.

6. Does the Plan show sufficient flexibility in the supply to ensure that the housing requirement will be met over the Plan period (the Council's latest figures show a residual requirement of 7778 units and potential housing supply of 8384 units assuming a Plan period until 2037)?

The HBF considers that it is important that the Plan has sufficient flexibility to adapt to change and to ensure that the housing requirement will be met over the Plan period.

7. Is the flexibility in housing supply provided by the Green Belt sites justified?

The HBF considers that it is important that the Plan has sufficient flexibility to adapt to change and to ensure that the housing requirement will be met over the Plan period.

¹ Paragraph 4.18.17 of the Local Plan

8. Would greater certainty be provided within the Plan if SHLAA sites (or the larger sites) were to be allocated (see SHBC001 – PQ52)?

The HBF considers that allocating the SHLAA sites would provide greater certainty, for both the developers of the sites and the local community. The Council suggest that as many of these sites already have permission there is already certainty, however the HBF considers that the allocation would also provide greater certainty were the existing permissions to expire.

Issue 2: The Housing Trajectory

9. Is the evidence that supports the Housing Trajectory (Figure 4.3 as amended by Appendix 1 to SD025) based on realistic assumptions?

The HBF is concerned about the developability of a number of the sites contained within the housing supply and trajectory. The HBF is concerned that the Council has not always made realistic assumptions in relation to the developability of these sites, particularly where sites are currently in use or where there is no developer identified. The PPG² sets out the evidence that local authorities can use in demonstrating that there is a reasonable prospect that a site is developable. This includes a written commitment or agree that relevant funding is likely to come forward, written evidence of agreement between the Council and the site developer, likely build out rates on sites with similar characteristics and the current planning status. For sites where the developer is known the HBF would expect the Council to work closely with the developer to ensure that the lead in times and build out rates are appropriate.

10. In particular:

a. Should a lapse rate be applied to sites expected to deliver in the next 5 years as well as those delivering later in the Plan period (see SHBC001 – PQ50)?

The HBF considers that it can be beneficial to include a lapse rate in consideration of the supply, as this allows for circumstances where sites do not come forward as expected or where sites are stalled or where sites are amended and there is a change to the previous permission. It is evident from the information provided by the Council that there are sites that have not come forward as expected or that have had multiple permissions or have stalled, the HBF considers that it is important that this information is taken into consideration as part of the supply considerations.

b. Is the evidence about the delivery of SHLAA sites contained within the SHLAA together with SD025 and SHBC004 robust?

The HBF considers that there is limited information in SD025 and SHBC004 in relation to some of the sites included within the trajectory and does not support the delivery of all of the sites as set out in the trajectory. The PPG clearly sets out the type of evidence that may be expected to support sites being considered as deliverable and developable.

c. Is the evidence about delivery from stalled sites robust (see SHBC001 – PQ53)?

The HBF does not wish to answer this question, at this time.

² PPG ID: 68-020-20190722

d. Are the assumptions about delivery from allocations robust (discussed under Matter 4)?

The HBF does not wish to comment on the deliverability or developability of individual sites. However, the HBF would recommend that the Council works closely with the developers of the allocations to ensure that the assumptions made about their delivery are correct and robust.

e. Are lead in times and build out rates realistic?

The HBF does not wish to comment on the deliverability or developability of individual sites. However, the HBF would recommend that the Council works closely with the developers of the sites, where they are known to ensure that the lead in times and build out rates are realistic. For sites without a known developer, the Council should ensure that the lead in times and build out rates reflect the characteristics of the site and the market of the area.

f. Is the significant spike in delivery shown in the trajectory between 2025/26 and 2026/27 realistic and supported by evidence (see SHBC001 – PQ54)?

The HBF does not wish to answer this question, at this time.

Issue 3: Five Year Housing Land Supply

The five-year housing requirement is based on the annual requirement of 486 dpa x 5 with a 5% buffer applied. There has not been any shortfall in provision since the start of the Plan period (2016). Supply is made up of large sites under-construction and those with planning permission, some SHLAA sites, delivery from some LP allocations and a small sites allowance. Appendix 2 to SD025 shows a supply of 5 years.

11. Is the use of a 5% buffer to calculate the housing land supply position appropriate?

The NPPF³ makes it clear that a buffer is required as part of the supply of specific deliverable sites, the 5% requirement is the minimum requirement and applies where the Council is not wishing to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable sites through a recently adopted plan (where a 10% buffer would apply) and there has not been a significant under delivery of housing over the previous three years (where a 20% buffer would apply). The NPPF⁴ states that under delivery will be measured against the Housing Delivery Test (HDT), where this indicates that delivery was below 85% of the housing requirement. The 2020 HDT score for St Helens was 145%, therefore the 20% buffer would not apply. The HBF does not know if the Council wishes to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable sites through a recently adopted Plan so can not confirm if the use of the 5% or the 10% buffer would be appropriate.

12. Is the inclusion of 465 units from small sites in the 5-year supply justified?

The HBF considers it may have been more accurate to have included the small sites that had planning permission with a lapse rate rather than the small site allowance. The Housing Need and Supply Background Paper sets out that an average of 103dpa (gross) have been

³ Paragraph 73 of the NPPF

⁴ Footnote 39 of the NPPF

Home Builders Federation (HBF) response to the
St Helens Local Plan Examination
Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions

provided on small sites. It does not identify the net figure. The paper does not consider whether these trends are realistic going forward. The HBF considers that it is likely the windfall development from small sites is likely to continue going forward, but it is not apparent if it will continue at the levels seen previously.

13. Generally, are the assumptions about the delivery from commitments, SHLAA sites and allocations within the 5-year supply realistic?

The NPPF⁵ defines a deliverable site and sets out which types of sites would require further evidence to be considered deliverable – these include major sites which have outline permission, sites which are allocated in a development plan or are identified in a brownfield register. The PPG⁶ sets out the evidence which would be used to demonstrate deliverability this includes the current planning status, firm progress being made towards the submission of an application, firm progress with site assessment work and relevant information about sites viability, owners or infrastructure provision. It is not apparent from the information contained within SD025 and SHBC04 whether the Council has sufficient evidence in line with the PPG to determine if the assumptions about the delivery from the sites within the five year supply is realistic.

14. Are lead in times and build out rates within the 5-year supply realistic?

The SHLAA 2017 identifies typical build rates based on the different sizes of development these are 20dpa for sites of less than 50 units, 30dpa for sites of 50-150 units and 45dpa for sites of more than 150units. However, not all of the sites have build rates in line with these assumptions and it is not always clear if this has been based on discussions with the developer(s). The HBF considers that the build out rates need to be considered in discussion with the developer(s) and should reflect the number of developers or brands on site, along with the market strength and variety of development taking place in the area.

15. Are there any measures that the Council can take to provide more elbow room in terms of the 5-year supply? Note - SHBC001 – PQ55 refers to the possibility of a stepped housing requirement and/or increasing the small sites allowance.

The HBF recommends that the Council could consider allocating more sites, this could increase the five-year housing land supply. The Council could also seek to work closely with the developers of sites already included in the supply to address any issues which may mean that the site is not currently included in the five-year supply but could be if these issues were addressed. The Council could also work closely with developers to bring sites forward at a faster rate than is currently expected. The HBF does not consider that it would be appropriate to introduce a stepped housing requirement or to increase the small sites allowance. Both of these proposals create uncertainty, are not considered to be planning positively and do not seek to boost the housing supply in line with Government's objectives.

16. Will there be a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites on adoption of the LP?

The HBF does not wish to comment on the deliverability or developability of individual sites. However, the HBF is concerned that the Council has not provided the evidence to support the deliverability of all the sites included within the supply. The HBF is also concerned that it

⁵ Annex 2 of the NPPF

⁶ PPG ID: 68-007-20190722

Home Builders Federation (HBF) response to the
St Helens Local Plan Examination
Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions

will only take one site being found to be not deliverable and the Council will not have a five-year housing land supply.

Issue 4: The wording of Policy LPA05

17. Will Policy LPA05 as worded be effective in maintaining delivery through the Plan period?

The HBF is concerned by some of the wording of part 4 of Policy LPA05. It is not apparent what the Council will consider is 'significantly below' the required level of supply. The HBF also do not consider that it is appropriate to then have to wait for a full or partial review of the Plan to be undertaken before this issue with the supply is addressed. The HBF recommends that the Council should consider if other measures could be utilised in the interim to try to address the issue whilst also looking at the potential for new allocations through a full or partial review of the Plan.

Home Builders Federation (HBF) response to the
St Helens Local Plan Examination
Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions