

Site Selection Topic Paper

Submission Document

Medway Council

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1 Introduction

1.1 Definition and purpose

- 1.1.1 Topic papers set out written material produced by the local planning authority to be submitted with a local plan for examination.
- 1.1.2 The purpose of this Topic Paper is to explain how sites were selected or rejected for allocation.

1.2 Relationship between Land Availability Assessment, Sustainability Appraisal and Site Selection

- 1.2.1 The Land Availability Assessment (LAA) identified a supply of sites in Medway which is suitable, available and achievable for housing and economic land up to 2041.
- 1.2.2 The LAA did not determine whether a site should be allocated for development. Rather, the LAA provided information on the range of sites to meet Medway's development needs. It involved planning officers' judgements about overcoming site-specific constraints.
- 1.2.3 The integration of the LAA with the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) was critical. To prevent duplication of assessment criteria, the Interim SA site assessments, i.e. pre- and post-mitigation scoring against 12 objectives, were also considered in the assessment of suitability.

2 Site Selection

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 The site selection/rejection process is shown in Figure 1.

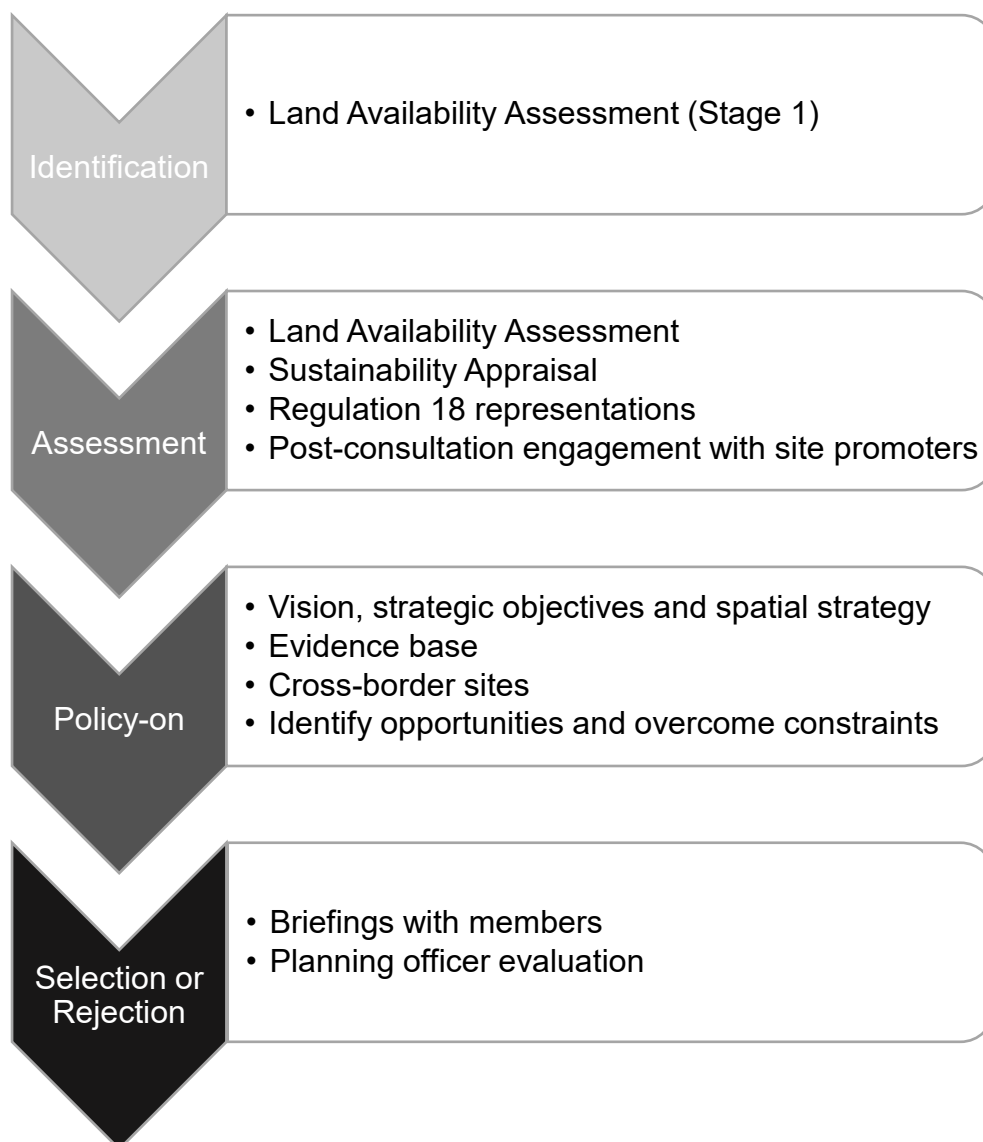


Figure 1: Site Selection/Rejection Process

2.1.2 Figure 1 shows a sequential process of four stages to select or reject sites for allocation. More information on each stage is set out below.

2.2 Identification

2.2.1 Stage 1 of the LAA took a proactive and comprehensive approach in identifying as wide a range of sites as possible.

2.2.2 A total of 462 sites were identified.

- 2.2.3 Each site was assigned an identification reference for use in the LAA. The identification references were used in the site allocation policies and as annotation on the Policies Map.

2.3 Assessment

- 2.3.1 The LAA involved estimating the development potential and an assessment as to the suitability, availability and achievability of each site.
- 2.3.2 An initial survey calculated the extent (proportion) of sites covered by Habitats sites, Ancient Woodland and flood risk zones; this provided a foundation for the assessment of suitability.
- 2.3.3 The assessment of suitability considered each site's planning status, and the presence of previously developed land and best and most versatile agricultural land. The assessment of suitability also considered whether a site is well-served by existing public transport and its potential to contribute to Medway Council's regeneration agenda.
- 2.3.4 To prevent duplication of assessment criteria, the Interim SA site assessments, i.e. pre- and post-mitigation scoring against 12 objectives, were also considered in the assessment of suitability.
- 2.3.5 A site was considered available for development when, based on the best information, there is confidence no legal or ownership barriers exist. Sites owned or promoted by landowners/developers who intend to develop were treated as available.
- 2.3.6 Granting of planning permission is used as an indicator of availability; sites with planning permission were assessed as available.
- 2.3.7 Availability information came from the call for sites and continued promotion of sites through Regulation 18 consultations.
- 2.3.8 The Interim LAA sought further availability details for 109 sites, mainly town-centre locations identified from development briefs (some with concept plans), emerging neighbourhood plans, planning applications, and vacant/derelict land and buildings.
- 2.3.9 Sites identified from the above sources were treated as unavailable unless their availability was later confirmed.
- 2.3.10 The assessment of achievability is a judgement about the economic viability of a site, and the capacity of the developer to complete and let or sell the development over a certain period. It considered each site's planning status and what action would be required to overcome constraints. Sites have been deemed achievable and viable unless their constraints, such as contaminated land, are so significant that they would prevent development.
- 2.3.11 Representations received from site promoters during Regulation 18 consultations also informed the assessment of achievability. Following the Regulation 18 consultation in 2024, planning officers invited larger site promoters to discuss their sites.

2.4 Policy-on

- 2.4.1 'Spatial growth options' were assessed in the SA. The Interim SA found that the 'Blended Strategy' option is likely to offer the best balance of sustainability considerations to meet Medway's development needs. The 'Blended Strategy' was identified as Medway Council's preferred spatial strategy.
- 2.4.2 The recommendations of evidence base work, in particular the Employment Land Needs Assessment and the Green Belt Review, informed refinements to the spatial strategy.
- 2.4.3 The proposed submission draft Local Plan set out a vision, strategic objectives and spatial strategy. In deciding whether to select or reject a site, its potential contribution to delivering the plan's vision and strategic objectives was considered.
- 2.4.4 Medway Council, Gravesham Borough Council and Maidstone Borough Council have cooperated on areas subject to large-scale development. The emerging Gravesham Local Plan Partial Review and the Maidstone Local Plan Review 2021-2038 (adopted 2024) were important considerations in the selection of sites to the west of Strood and the Capstone Valley respectively.
- 2.4.5 The preparation of planning policies and site allocation criteria, along with concept plans, brought together work to identify opportunities and overcome constraints.

2.5 Selection or rejection

- 2.5.1 Planning officers organised fortnightly meetings with key members in advance of key governance stages, such as the Special Full Council meeting on 26 June 2025.
- 2.5.2 The process culminated in a planning officer's technical and professional judgement as to whether a site was recommended for selection or rejection.
- 2.5.3 The reasons for site selection/rejection for allocation are set out in the SA (Volume 3, Appendix J). This Topic Paper will not reproduce content in the SA.