



# Colchester Local Plan Review

## Strategic Land Availability Assessment Methodology

December 2023

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council adopted the current Colchester Local Plan Section 1 in February 2021 and Section 2 in July 2022. This guides growth and development across Colchester to 2033. To ensure plans remain effective, they require reviewing and updating at least every five years.
- 1.2 The Council are now in the early stages of reviewing the Colchester Local Plan.
- 1.3 A Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) is an essential part of producing a Local Plan. Its purpose is to identify what land is capable of being developed and to assess the constraints and opportunities of developing that land. The SLAA process highlights issues which help inform future decisions regarding the allocation of land for housing, employment and other uses in the e Local Plan Review. The Council will also be assessing sites for green uses, such as for biodiversity net gain, open space, country parks. This will be the first time these uses have been included in the assessment.
- 1.4 The purpose of the SLAA is not to create the spatial strategy it is part of the technical evidence base for the Local Plan which complements other important sources of information such as public consultation and sustainability appraisal. Together these sources of evidence inform the strategic planning decision-making process. Therefore, the SLAA is not the sole source of evidence informing which sites should be allocated for development, but instead it contributes to the local planning authority's understanding of what land is developable.
- 1.5 The Council has reviewed and refined the SLAA methodology to reflect updates to national policy, local priorities and take account of the latest best practice. This document sets out the methodology for the Strategic Land Availability Assessment, including details of the Call for Sites.
- 1.6 This methodology has been subject to public consultation and following this, adopted by the Council's Local Plan Committee at the meeting in December 2023.

## 2. Policy Context

2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 68 sets out the requirement for local authorities to prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment:

*“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 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) for Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments expands on this by clarifying that:

*“An assessment of land availability identifies a future supply of land which is suitable, available and achievable for housing and economic development uses over the plan period. The assessment is an important source of evidence to inform plan-making and decision-taking, and the identification of a 5-year supply of housing land.*

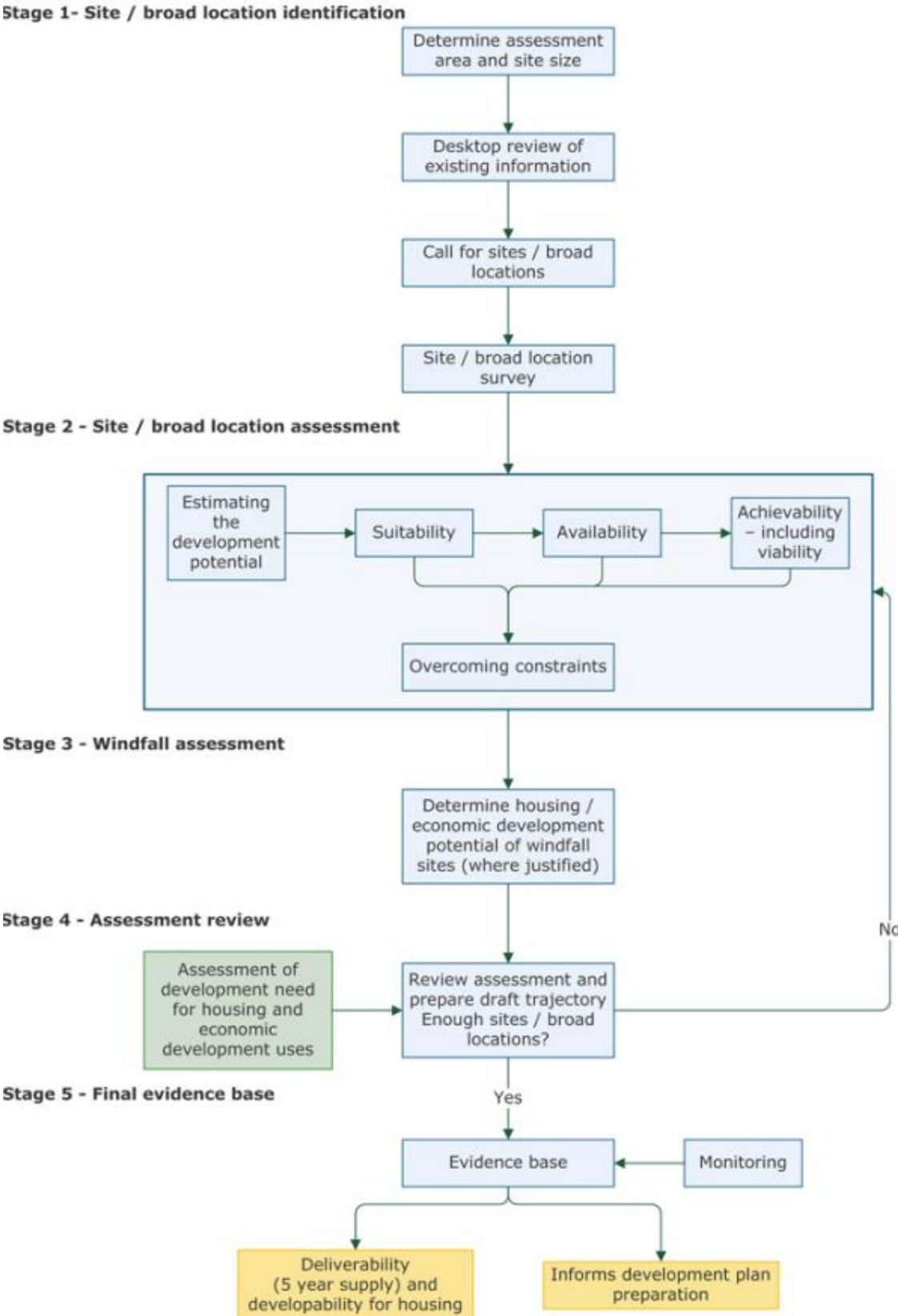
*Plan-making authorities may carry out land availability assessments for housing and economic development as part of the same exercise, in order that sites may be identified for the use(s) which is most appropriate.*

*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).”*

The PPG also provides a methodology flow chart (see figure 1 below) which indicates the inputs and processes that can lead to a robust assessment. Local Authorities must have regard to this guidance in the preparation and updating of their methodologies and where there are any departures from the guidance, an explanation must be provided.

Figure 1 – Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment Methodology Flowchart (as set out PPG)



### **3. Methodology**

#### **Overview**

3.1 The Council's SLAA methodology has been prepared in accordance with the methodology set out in the PPG. This follows a five stage process, comprising:

- Stage 1 – Identification of sites and broad locations
- Stage 2 – Assessment of sites and broad locations
- Stage 3 – Windfall sites assessment
- Stage 4 – Review of assessment
- Stage 5 – Final evidence base

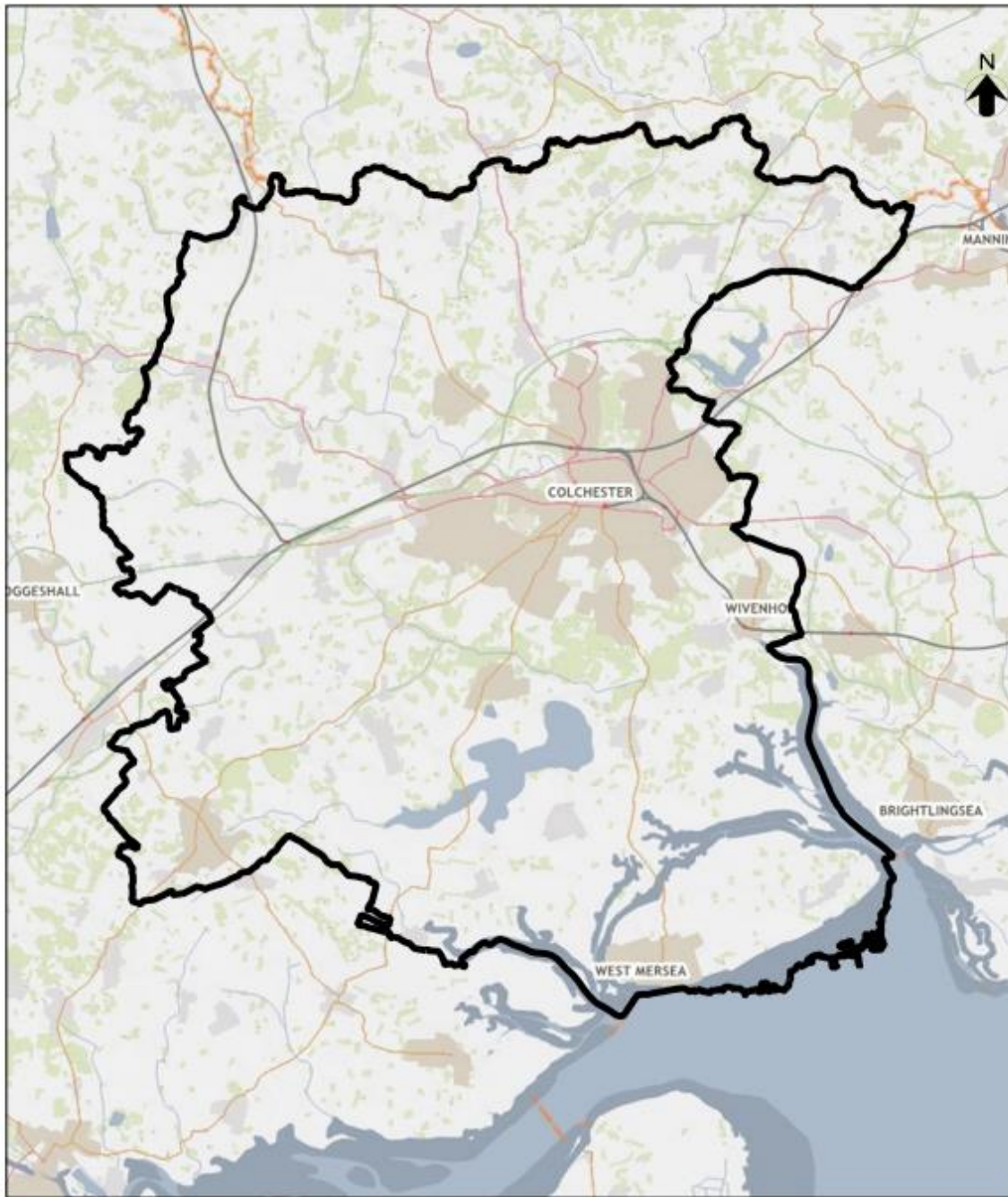
3.2 This report addresses the first two stages of the process in detail with Stage five being the final output of site assessments (from stages 1 and 2) and a separate evidence base document will be prepared to support the Local Plan.

#### **Stage 1 – Identifying the sites**

##### **Geographical Area**

3.3 The first stage of the SLAA is to determine the geographical area of the assessment. The PPG states this should be the plan making area. The geographical area of the assessment is the Colchester City Council administrative area. This is shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Colchester City Council Administrative Boundary



Scale: 1:140000  
Date: 18/09/2023

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## Proposed Uses

3.4 The following uses will be assessed through the SLAA:

- Residential
  - Market and Affordable Housing
  - Custom and Self Build
  - Older Persons Housing
  - Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation
- Commercial
  - Employment
  - Retail
  - Sports and Leisure
  - Restaurant/Café
  - Logistics
- Infrastructure
  - Education
  - Community Facilities
  - Health and Wellbeing
  - Transport
  - Renewable Energy
  - Telecommunications
- Green Infrastructure
  - Open Space
  - Park, Sport and/or Recreation Grounds
  - Country Park
  - Allotments
  - Biodiversity Net Gain

## Site Thresholds

3.5 The PPG sets out that it may be appropriate to consider all sites capable of delivering 5 or more dwellings or economic development on sites of 0.25ha (or 500m<sup>2</sup> floor space) and above. These site size thresholds for built development have therefore been adopted.

3.6 Site proposals below these thresholds are not precluded from coming forward via the planning application process.



## Desktop Review

- 3.7 The PPG sets out that plan makers need to be proactive in identifying as wide a range of sites and broad locations for housing and economic development as possible and do not simply rely on sites that they have been informed about.
- 3.8 Table 1 below sets out the data sources that the Council could use for the desktop identification of sites and broad locations.

*Table 1 – Desktop Review Data Sources*

<b>Type of Site</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>
Existing housing and economic development allocations and development briefs not yet with planning permission	Local and Neighbourhood Plans Development Briefs/Supplementary Planning Documents Planning Application Records
Sites considered through previous SLAAs	Currently adopted Local Plan Evidence Base Currently made Neighbourhood Plans Evidence Base
Planning Permissions for housing and economic development that are unimplemented	Planning Application Records Five Year Housing Land Supply Statements
Planning Applications that have been refused or withdrawn (in relation to spatial strategy) where decision issued after October 2017	Planning Application Records
Land in the local authority's ownership	Local Authority Records
Surplus and likely to become surplus public sector land	National register of public sector land Engagement with strategic bodies such as Essex County Council
Sites with permission in principle or identified brownfield land	Council's Brownfield Land Register
Vacant and derelict land and buildings	Local authority empty property register Council's Brownfield Land Register
Additional opportunities for unestablished uses (e.g., making productive use of under-utilised facilities such as garage blocks)	Planning Application Records Aerial Photography Ordnance Survey Maps Discussions with internal stakeholders including elected Members
Business requirements and aspirations	Enquiries received by Local Planning Authority Discussions with internal stakeholders including elected Members
Sites in rural locations	Local and Neighbourhood Plans

Type of Site	Data Sources
Large scale redevelopment and redesign of existing residential or economic areas	Planning Application Records Aerial Photography
Sites in adjoining villages and rural exception sites	Ordnance Survey Maps Discussions with internal stakeholders
Potential urban extensions and new free standing settlements	including elected Members
Existing green spaces	

Call for Sites

3.9 In addition to the desk top review, the Council have also issued a Call for Sites to enable people to promote sites for consideration and assessment. In accordance with the PPG, this will be aimed at as wide an audience as is practical so that those not normally involved in development have the opportunity to contribute.

3.10 A Call for Sites was launched in Autumn 2023, closing on 5 January 2024. The Call for Sites has been advertised on the Council’s website and notifications sent to those on the council’s Planning Database. This has been hosted on the Council’s Consultation Portal where site promoters, developers, landowners and members of public are required to complete an online survey covering a number of categories including:

- Contact Details
- Site Details
- Planning History
- Proposed Future Use
- Site Ownership
- Site Constraints
- Existing Infrastructure and Utilities
- Site Availability

3.11 Each site submission also includes the site boundary to either be drawn directly into the interactive map or a GIS file can be uploaded. There is also the opportunity to submit any additional information such as early site appraisals, indicative plans etc.

3.12 There has also been the opportunity to complete the form and return this to the council via email or post, for those who are unable to use digital resources. However, it was intended this will only be for members of the public with difficulty in accessing the online resource, and those working within the profession i.e., site promoters have to utilised the Consultation Portal.

### Duplication of sites

- 3.13 There is potential for duplication of sites when using a variety of data sources. Where there is duplication of a site, this will only be assessed once within the SLAA.

### Sites with overlapping boundaries

- 3.14 Where sites or broad location boundaries overlap, the first action will be to explore the reason for this overlap. This can be done by considering the source(s) of the sites/broad locations in the first instance. In the situation that a more recent submission or data source clearly supersedes an earlier submission or data source, the more recent boundary will be used. In the situation that two or more distinct sites or broad locations overlap, they will be assessed together as a whole, with commentary provided on the suitability, availability and achievability of individual parcels.

### Initial Survey

- 3.15 As outlined above, the Call for Sites process will be managed through the Council's Consultation Portal. This system will also enable officers to complete the more detailed site assessments in a more digital and efficient manner. However, not all of this information will be accessible to the public, due to GDPR and commercial sensitivities.
- 3.16 In addition to the sites submitted via the Call for Sites, those sites identified through the desktop review outlined above will be integrated into the Consultation Portal for further assessment.
- 3.17 The PPG sets out that an initial survey can be undertaken at this stage to establish up to date, high level information on each site in relation to its character and key constraints. This is also a way to check if any sites have been duplicated through the Call for Sites and desktop review. At this stage, the PPG also enables the identification of any sites which, when taking into account national policy and designations, it would not be appropriate to carry out the more detailed assessment as it is clear they will not be suitable for development.
- 3.18 The first step in this process is to prepare a complete list of all sites which have been submitted through the Call for Sites and desktop review. Any duplicated sites will immediately be omitted from further consideration.
- 3.19 Tables 2 below sets out the constraints and criteria for the initial survey which will omit sites from any further detailed assessment. This will determine, when taking into account national policy and designations, whether a site is suitable or not for future development and whether a site should progress to the next stage of the SLAA.

3.20 Any sites promoted for infrastructure (including green infrastructure) development will not be considered through the initial survey. These sites will be assessed from Stage 2 of the assessment process.

*Table 2 – Initial Survey Constraints and Explanation (Residential and Commercial)*

<b>Assessment Criterion</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
Is the site for fewer than 5 dwellings or less than 0.25ha (or 500m <sup>2</sup> of floor space)?	Site thresholds not met.	Unsuitable – site is below 0.25ha or does not have capacity to accommodate at least five dwellings  Suitable – site is above 0.25ha or has capacity to accommodate more than five dwellings
Does the site have extant planning permission? Has development commenced?	If the site has extant planning permission and development has commenced there is no further development potential. If a site has extant planning permission but that has not been implemented, the site will not be ruled out at this stage.	Unsuitable - site has extant planning permission and has commenced development.  Suitable - site does not have an extant planning permission or site has extant planning permission but development has not commenced.
Is the site already allocated for development in the Colchester Local Plan or a Neighbourhood Plan, with extant planning permission or is it allocated with a strong likelihood of planning application being submitted by 2033?	If the site is allocated and there is evidence to suggest it is going to be delivered in the near future i.e., pre application discussions with Local Planning Authority, Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) in place, Masterplan being progressed or adopted or information provided by the developer/landowner there is no requirement to assess the site for its deliverability as the principle of development has already been established.	Unsuitable - site is allocated in the Development Plan and has extant planning permission or site is allocated in the Development Plan and there is a strong likelihood a planning application will be submitted by 2033.  Suitable – site is not allocated in the Development Plan and does not have an extant planning permission or site is allocated in the Development and does not have a strong likelihood of

Assessment Criterion	Explanation	Assessment
		a planning application being submitted by 2033.
Is the site physically isolated in the open countryside?	Locating new development in close proximity to existing services and facilities is a key principle of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF. To not prejudice the Settlement Boundary Review (another evidence base document to support the Local Plan Review) those sites in close proximity to an existing settlement boundary will not be ruled out at this stage.	<p>Unsuitable - the site is physically isolated in the open countryside</p> <p>Suitable - the site is not physically isolated in the open countryside</p>
Is the site wholly located within flood zone 3?	Sites will be excluded for development the site is within Flood Zone 3. The NPPF is clear that development should be directed away from areas at the highest risk of flooding.	<p>Unsuitable –the site is wholly in Flood Zone 3</p> <p>Suitable –the site is not in Flood Zone 3</p>
<p>Is the site wholly located within any of the following designations?</p> <p>Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)  Special Area of Conservation (SAC)  Special Protection Area (SPA)  Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)  Ancient Woodlands  RAMSAR</p>	Sites wholly located within a designation will be excluded. The NPPF contains many commitments to protecting sites nationally or internationally designated for their landscape, biological, geological, archaeological or historical importance.	<p>Unsuitable – site is wholly located within a designation</p> <p>Suitable – site is partially or not at all located within a designation</p>
Can the site be access by vehicle from the public highway?	Highways access both for resident vehicles and service vehicles (as well as	Unsuitable – site does not have highways access.

Assessment Criterion	Explanation	Assessment
	pedestrians and cyclists) is considered an essential component of new development.	<p>Site is not adjacent to a classified road.</p> <p>Suitable – site has highways access. Site is adjacent to a classified road.</p>

3.21 A list of all omitted sites will be prepared, identifying the reason for their omission and this will be published on the Council’s website.

3.22 Following the initial survey, all remaining sites will proceed to the full site assessment as outlined in Stage 2 below.

## **Stage 2 – Site Assessment**

- 3.23 Following the initial survey (Stage 1), the remaining SLAA sites will proceed to the full Stage 2 site assessment. All sites are considered against a range of constraints and their potential to be mitigated.
- 3.24 The site assessment criteria, as set out below, aligns with the approach set out in the PPG which requires assessment of a site's suitability, availability, and achievability. The initial Survey (Stage 1) is the only part of the assessment where a site can be excluded from further assessment.
- 3.25 The majority of the criteria within Stage 2 of the assessment can be met through a desktop study. However, site visits will be undertaken where it is considered necessary or additional benefits can be gained to help inform the assessment.
- 3.26 To ensure the SLAA is transparent, most of the criteria are assessed using maps, documents or websites that are accessible to the public. However, some information will also be drawn from information provided as part of the Call for Sites process.
- 3.1 From Stage 2 of the assessment one Red RAG Assessment does not necessarily rule out the site from further consideration. The RAG Assessment is not intended to rate the sites at this stage or identify preferred sites.
- 3.2 The SLAA represents a starting point for the consideration of sites with the potential for allocation in the new Local Plan. It is a proportionate study that considers a wide range of sites for a variety of uses in different locations across the City area.
- 3.3 The SLAA will be carried out without consideration of the overall housing and employment requirements of the City (in line with national policy) therefore the capacity of all the SLAA sites which have progressed to Stage 2 of the assessment will likely exceed the overall housing and employment requirement over the plan period.

### Estimating Development Potential

- 3.4 The PPG states that the estimation of the development potential of a site can be guided by existing or emerging plan policy including locally determined policies on density. Plan makers should seek the most efficient use of land in line with policies set out in the NPPF. Development potential is a significant factor that affects the economic viability of a site and its suitability for a particular use. The PPG therefore suggests that assessing achievability (including viability) and suitability can usefully be carried out in parallel with estimating the development potential.
- 3.5 The development potential of the sites will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The housing potential is indicative only and does not prejudice assessments made through the Local Plan or planning application process.



## **Residential, Commercial or Infrastructure (Built Development)**

### **Section 1: Suitability**

- 3.6 Section 1 of the site assessment had the purpose of assessing sites' suitability. A site is considered to be suitable for development if it is free from significant constraints, or where any constraints affecting the land can potentially be overcome through reasonable mitigation.
- 3.7 Suitability constraints include physical constraints such as the site's relationship to the existing settlement boundary and the capacity for highways access to site. Additionally, there are environmental constraints which will be assessed.
- 3.8 Four criteria have been included in relation to access to key services including primary and secondary schools, supermarkets/shops and GP surgeries. Distances to train stations, bus stops and the City Centre have been excluded as well as capacity of schools as it is considered more suitable to look at certain infrastructure and services on a settlement scale, as opposed to individual sites. This will also enable consideration of frequency of services and future capacity to gain a better understanding of their sustainability. This will be addressed through the Settlement Boundary Review, which is proposed to be in two stages. The first stage providing an overview of the existing settlement/ward and the second stage considering growth options and future development opportunities within settlements/wards.

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<b>Physical Constraints</b>		
<p>Is the site within or adjacent to the existing settlement boundary?</p> <p>Source: <a href="#">Colchester City Council: Maps (planvu.co.uk)</a>, <a href="#">Map Search - Colchester Borough Council</a>, <a href="#">Neighbourhood Planning - Colchester City Council</a></p>	<p>Locating new development in close proximity to existing services and facilities is a key principle of sustainable development which is strongly supported by national policy.</p>	<p>Red – removed from settlement boundary with significant area separating site from boundary</p> <p>Amber – adjacent to or within close proximity an existing settlement boundary</p> <p>Green – within an existing settlement boundary</p>
<p>Would development of the site lead to coalescence between settlements?</p> <p>Source: Proposals Map, mapping, site visit</p>	<p>Protecting the individual identity of settlements is considered an important principle of planning and remains an important issue locally for settlements that are in close proximity to each other.</p>	<p>Red – significant contribution to coalescence</p> <p>Amber – some contribution which results in a reduction of green space between settlements</p> <p>Green – no contribution to coalescence</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>What is the main access point/s to the site? Is the access safe and suitable? Are there any highway constraints? Source: Mapping, &amp; ECC</p>	<p>Establishing the capacity to deliver adequate highways access is essential to the operation of a development site. Following on from the Initial Survey, this criterion allows for any highways constraints to be explored. For example highway access to a site may be feasible (and would have passed the initial survey) but may be constrained in its capacity, thereby reducing the overall capacity of the site to accommodate new development. In addition to vehicle access, access by active modes will also be a consideration. Comments related to this criterion will be provided by Essex County Council Highways.</p>	<p>Red – significant constraints identified and access is not considered safe and suitable which are likely to affect the site’s deliverability</p> <p>Amber – some constraints identified but not significant enough to affect the site’s deliverability</p> <p>Green – no reasonable constraints and highways access is considered safe and suitable</p>
<p>Is there any evidence that it would not be possible to deliver the necessary utilities? Source: Call for Sites pro-forma &amp; information from discussions with infrastructure providers</p>	<p>Utility provision is a key component of development viability. The Call for Sites proforma requests specific information on utility provision in order to gain a general understanding of provision in the locality.</p>	<p>Red – significant issues with utility provision which are likely to affect the site’s deliverability</p> <p>Amber – some issues with utility provision</p> <p>Green – no known issues with utility provision</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Are there any issues that would prevent/limit the developable area of the site? e.g. topography/levels, pylons, canopy cover</p> <p>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, mapping, site visit</p>	<p>The presence of site specific issues can significantly affect deliverability through the impact of achievability and availability. Identifying site specific issues early ensure sites are not allocated which are not capable of being delivered within reasonable timescales.</p>	<p>Red – significant site specific issues which are likely to affect the site’s deliverability</p> <p>Amber – some site specific issues which could be addressed</p> <p>Green – no known site specific issues or evidence has been provided which demonstrates that site constraints can be adequately addressed</p>
<p>Is the site brownfield or greenfield?</p> <p>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, mapping, site visit</p>	<p>The inclusion of this criterion reflects the NPPF’s preference for utilising previously developed land (brownfield land) over greenfield land</p>	<p>Red – greenfield (approx. 75% plus)</p> <p>Amber – part brownfield, part greenfield</p> <p>Green – brownfield (approx. 75% plus)</p>
<p>What is the agricultural land classification?</p> <p>Source: mapping</p>	<p>The NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. The most obvious way of doing this is to identify the quality of agricultural land on potential development sites through the SLAA.</p>	<p>Red – Grades 1, 2 and/or 3a (50% or more)</p> <p>Amber – Grades 3b (50% or more) or a mix of categories</p> <p>Green – Grades 4-5 (50% or more)</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Impact of neighbouring uses (e.g. noise, smell, amenity) – would development be likely to be negatively impacted by, or cause negative impact on, neighbouring areas?  Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, mapping, site visit</p>	<p>The NPPF requires plan makers to achieve high quality design and good standards of amenity for occupants. Ensuring sensitive uses such as housing, are not located in close proximity to other uses which may compromise the health and wellbeing of occupants is fundamental to achieving these objectives</p>	<p>Red – there is a strong possibility development would be significantly affected by neighbouring use issues</p> <p>Amber – there is a possibility development would result in some neighbouring use issues</p> <p>Green – there are no neighbouring use issues</p>
<p><b>Natural and Historic Environmental Constraints</b></p>		
<p>Is the site partially located within any of the following designations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)</li> <li>• Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)</li> <li>• Special Area of Conservation (SAC)</li> <li>• Special Protection Area (SPA)</li> <li>• Ancient Woodlands</li> <li>• RAMSAR</li> </ul> <p>Source: Mapping</p>	<p>The NPPF contains many commitments to protecting sites nationally or internationally designated for their landscape, biological, geological, archaeological or historical importance.</p>	<p>Red – more than 50% of the site is located within a designation.</p> <p>Amber – less than 50% of the site is located within a designation.</p> <p>Green – site is not located within any designations listed.</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Is the site located within any of the following local designations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Wildlife Site (LoWS)</li> <li>• Local Nature Reserve (LNR)</li> <li>• Coastal Protection Belt</li> </ul> <p><i>Source: Mapping</i></p>	<p>The NPPF encourages the protection and enhancement of sites of biodiversity and geological value and maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast.</p>	<p>Red – more than 50% of the site is located within a designation.</p> <p>Amber – less than 50% of the site is located within a designation.</p> <p>Green – site is not located within any designations listed.</p>
<p>Could development of the site enhance or create green infrastructure e.g Open Space, Park, Sport and/or recreation grounds, Country Park, Allotments,?</p> <p><i>Source: Call for sites proforma, mapping, Evidence Base</i></p>	<p>The Local Plan Review is taking an environment first approach. This criteria helps to identify opportunities for green infrastructure through development.</p>	<p>Red – no, there are no opportunities to enhance or create green infrastructure.</p> <p>Amber – possibility of opportunities to enhance or create green infrastructure.</p> <p>Green – yes, there are opportunities to enhance or create green infrastructure.</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Would development of the site be likely to cause harm to any archaeological or heritage assets or their setting?</p> <p>Grade 1 Grade 2 Grade 2* Listed Building Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) Registered Parks and Gardens Conservation Areas Locally Listed Heritage Asset archaeological assets</p> <p><i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, mapping, Proposals Map, Colchester Local List &amp; <a href="#">Historic Environment Characterisation Report</a></i></p>	<p>The NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance.</p>	<p>Red – there is a strong possibility of harm arising from new development.</p> <p>Amber – there is a possibility of harm arising from new development.</p> <p>Green – no potential harm.</p>
<p>Would development of the site result in the loss of, or partial loss of, public open space, a Public Right of Way (PRoW), or a bridleway?</p> <p><i>Source: Call for Site pro-forma, Evidence Base, mapping</i></p>	<p>The NPPF promotes the protection and enhancement of existing open space, public rights of way and bridleways. It does this by stating that open space should only be built on if an assessment deems the spaces to be surplus to requirements, the loss resulting from the development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision, or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision which clearly outweighs the loss. Public rights of way also have additional legal protection.</p>	<p>Red – development would result in the loss of public open space, public right of way or a bridleway.</p> <p>Amber – development would result in partial loss of public open space, public right of way or a bridleway.</p> <p>Green – development would not result in the loss of public open space, public right of way or a bridleway.</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>What flood zone is the site located in? <i>Source: mapping</i></p>	<p>The NPPF is clear that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk.</p>	<p>Green – Site is wholly located in Flood Zone 1</p> <p>Amber – site is partially located in Flood Zone 1 with some areas of the site within or adjacent to Flood Zone 2 or 3</p> <p>Red – Site is predominately within Flood Zone 2 or 3</p>
<p>Is the site within a Critical Drainage Area? <i>Source: Surface Water Management Plan, mapping</i></p>	<p>Essex County Council have undertaken a Surface Water Management Plan for Colchester which identifies Critical Drainage Areas. These are small catchments where there is an increased risk of surface water flooding.</p>	<p>Green – site is not located within a Critical Drainage Area</p> <p>Amber – site is partially within or adjacent to a Critical Drainage Area</p> <p>Red – site is wholly located within a Critical Drainage Area</p>
<p><b>Access to Key Services</b></p>		
<p>Distance to primary schools <i>Source: mapping</i></p>	<p>NPPF states that all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development. Limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health.</p>	<p>Red – Site is in excess of 801m of a primary school</p> <p>Amber – Site is within 401 and 800m of a primary school</p> <p>Green – Site is within 400m of a primary school</p>



<b>Assessment criterion</b>	<b>Justification</b>	<b>RAG Assessment</b>
<p>Distance to secondary school Source: mapping</p>	<p>NPPF states that all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development. Limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health.</p>	<p>Red – Site is in excess of 2km of a secondary school</p> <p>Amber – Site is within 2km of a secondary school</p> <p>Green – Site is within 800m of a secondary school</p>
<p>Distance to supermarkets/convenience stores Source: mapping</p>	<p>NPPF states that all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development. Limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health.</p>	<p>Red – Site is in excess of 2km of a supermarket/convenience store</p> <p>Amber – Site is within 2km of a supermarket/convenience store.</p> <p>Green – Site is within 800m of a supermarket/convenience store</p>
<p>Distance to GP surgeries Source: mapping</p>	<p>NPPF states that all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development. Limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health.</p>	<p>Red – Site is in excess of 2km of GP surgeries</p> <p>Amber – Site is within 2km of GP surgeries</p> <p>Green – Site is within 800m of GP surgeries</p>

## Section 2: Availability

A site is considered to be available for development when, on the best information available, there is confidence that there are no legal or ownership impediments to development. For example, land controlled by a developer or landowner who has expressed an intention to develop may be considered available. The availability of a site could be adversely affected if it is in multiple ownership and the intentions of all interested parties are not known.

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Has the site been submitted for development through the Call for Sites for the Local Plan Review? <i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma</i></p>	<p>The NPPF requires local planning authorities to have an up-to-date supply of deliverable housing sites to meet identified need. For sites to be considered deliverable they must be available to be developed.</p>	<p>Red – Site has never been submitted for development.</p> <p>Amber – No, but it was submitted in previous Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan by a site owner or developer or it was submitted through the Call for Sites for the Local Plan Review but not by the land owner of a developer.</p> <p>Green – Yes, the site has been submitted through the Call for Sites for the Local Plan Review by a site owner or developer.</p>
<p>What is the site ownership situation? <i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma / any land ownership information the Council has obtained from the Land Registry</i></p>	<p>Assessing a site's availability is a key component of its overall deliverability. Information regarding any issues with ownership of the land are important to this assessment.</p>	<p>Red – ownership not known or complex ownership - not all intentions known.</p> <p>Amber – site owned by 2 or more different parties</p> <p>Green – Single ownership.</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Is the land owner open to working in partnership and bringing the site forward in combination with others to enable a comprehensive approach to development?  <i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma</i></p>	<p>Where adjacent sites are promoted, it is important that development is comprehensively planned to make the most efficient use of land and deliver better local infrastructure.</p>	<p>Red – No, the land owner is unwilling to work in partnership to bring the site forward in combination with others.</p> <p>Amber – unsure/don't know.</p> <p>Green – Yes, the land owner is willing to work in partnership to bring the site forward in combination with others.</p>
<p>Is the site currently in use and is it likely to continue to be used for the foreseeable future / would that use prevent development on the site from coming forward?  <i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, mapping, site visit</i></p>	<p>Information regarding a site's current use is important in determining availability and the timescale of it being available to be developed.</p>	<p>Red – site is occupied/in use and there are likely to be significant delays to relocating its current use.</p> <p>Amber – site is occupied/in use but its current use does not require relocation.</p> <p>Green – site is vacant or its current use can cease at short notice.</p>
<p>Does the site have a history of unimplemented permissions?  <i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, mapping</i></p>		<p>Red – three or more unimplemented permissions.</p> <p>Amber – up to two recent lapsed permissions.</p> <p>Green – No unimplemented permissions.</p>

### Section 3: Achievability (including viability)

A site is considered achievable if there is a reasonable prospect that the particular type of development will be developed on the site at a particular time and whether it is financially viable to do so. For example, a site could be both suitable and available, but the level of financial mitigation required to make it acceptable could result in the site being considered unviable.

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Is development of the site in line with existing policies requiring a contribution, i.e., affordable housing, is development of the site economically viable? Are there any factors which could limit its viability?</p> <p><i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, additional information from site promoter / land owner</i></p>	<p>Economic viability is a key component of a site's deliverability as defined in the NPPF. Establishing the viability of development sites ensures that decisions on future allocations take into account any abnormal costs which may affect development outcomes.</p>	<p>Red – development is likely unviable.</p> <p>Amber – development is marginal.</p> <p>Green – development is likely viable.</p>
<p>Does the development of, or access to, the site rely on another piece of land, and has that land been put forward for development?</p> <p><i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, mapping</i></p>	<p>Relying on another piece of land to come forward (e.g. ransom strips) can prevent development from coming forward or render development unviable. Establishing the presence of ransom strips through the SLAA process provides the Council with reasonable assumptions about a site's achievability.</p>	<p>Red – the site relies on another piece of land and that land has not been put forward for development and/or a ransom strip has been identified.</p> <p>Amber – the site relies on another piece of land but that land has been put forward for development.</p> <p>Green – the site does not rely on another piece of land.</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Is the site within a Minerals Safeguarding Area and/or Minerals and Waste Consultation Area?  <i>Source: Mapping, ECC data</i></p>	<p>Land may be protected for a number of different uses irrespective of the land ownership. For example the land may be safeguarded because of its value as a minerals extraction site. Where a promoted site lies within a Minerals Safeguarding Area, , ECC will be consulted to confirm whether a Minerals Resource Assessment is required (this applies where the area of a site within a Minerals Safeguarding Area is 5ha or over – this includes contiguous parcels i.e. cant split Site into 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d etc. to negate the threshold)</p> <p>Where a promoted site lies within a Minerals and/or Waste Consultation Area, a Minerals and/or Waste Infrastructure Impact Assessment is required.</p>	<p>Red – Site is wholly within a Minerals Safeguarding Area. Mineral could be sterilised as a result of the non-mineral proposal.</p> <p>Amber – Site is within a Minerals Consultation Area and/or a Waste Consultation Area.</p> <p>Green – Not within a Minerals Safeguarding Area, Minerals Consultation Area or Waste Consultation Area</p>

Assessment criterion	Justification	RAG Assessment
<p>Is the land currently protected for an alternative use within the Colchester Local Plan or a Neighbourhood Plan?</p> <p><i>Source: Source: Call for Sites pro-forma, Local Plan evidence base, mapping</i></p>	<p>Land may be protected for a number of different uses irrespective of the land ownership.</p>	<p>Red – the site is protected for an alternative use and there is no evidence to suggest that the site should be released for an alternative use.</p> <p>Amber – the site is protected for an alternative use but there is evidence to suggest that the site could or should be released for an alternative use.</p> <p>Green – the site is not protected for any alternative use.</p>
<p>Is the site contaminated or partially contaminated?</p> <p><i>Source: Call for Sites pro-forma</i></p>	<p>Contamination can have a significant effect on the achievability of sites. Establishing the presence of contamination in the SLAA ensures that the Council can make reasonable assumptions about the site’s achievability for development.</p>	<p>Red – there is a strong possibility of contamination and remediation measures are likely to affect development viability.</p> <p>Amber – there is possibility of contamination, but it can be remediated without affecting development viability.</p> <p>Green – no contamination issues foreseen.</p>

## **Green Infrastructure**

As outlined above, it is proposed to include Green Infrastructure within the Call for Sites. Detailed site assessments will be prepared and informed by advice from specialists including Natural England and utilise their environmental benefits for nature tool.

The criteria will enable assessment of the site's suitability, availability and achievability.

Alongside this, other principles to be considered through the assessment will include:

- Connectivity to existing network
- Environmental constraints e.g., flood risk, water quality
- Access barriers e.g., roads, railways, water courses
- Current use of the site
- Importance of the site to local community

### **Stage 3 – Windfall Assessment**

3.9 The Council have been able to justify a windfall allowance in recent years. However, the evidence to underpin this will need to be reviewed as part of this assessment. It is expected that some allowance will continue to be justified.

### **Stage 4 – Assessment Review**

3.10 As other evidence base documents are prepared to support the Local Plan, including the outcome of the SLAA Stage 2 Assessments, site allocations will be identified. To support the Local Plan, an indicative trajectory of those allocated sites will be prepared and updated throughout the plan making process to demonstrate how housing needs will be met across the plan period.

3.11 The trajectory will be subject to risk assessment and will set out how much housing and economic development can be provided. If insufficient sites are allocated the assessment will be revisited and a further Call for Sites may be necessary.

### **Stage 5 – Final Evidence Base**

3.12 In accordance with the PPG, the outputs of the SLAA will be:

- A list of all sites considered for development and cross referenced to their location on maps;
- An assessment of each site including:
  - Whether the site has been excluded and an explanation given;
  - Whether the site is considered suitable, available and achievable, the potential type and quantity of development, including a reasonable estimate of build out rates, setting out how any barriers to delivery could be overcome and when;
- An indicative trajectory of anticipated development based on the evidence available.

3.13 The assessments will be made publicly available via the Council's website and/or Consultation Portal.

3.14 The outcomes of the SLAA will not definitively allocate land for development but will contribute to the Local Planning Authority's evidence base and ensure that decisions regarding site allocations are backed by robust and objective evidence.



## **4. Site Assessment Outcomes**

- 4.1 The SLAA represents a starting point for the consideration of sites with the potential for allocation in the new Local Plan. It is a proportionate study that considers a wide range of sites for a variety of uses in different locations across the City area.
- 4.2 The SLAA is a mandatory part of the plan making process and it will form an important part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review. It provides a comparative record of assessment of sites which may have the potential for development. It comprises assessment of sites put forward by landowners and developers as well as those additionally identified through the desk top study as required by the PPG.
- 4.3 The SLAA identifies sites which have been assessed as potentially available, suitable, and deliverable but it does not recommend which sites should be allocated for development. It is critical to the future soundness of the Local Plan that the process for selecting and rejecting sites is robust and transparent.
- 4.4 The initial Survey (Stage 1) is the only part of the assessment where a site can be excluded from further assessment. In Stage 2 of the assessment one Red RAG Assessment does not necessarily rule out the site from further consideration. The RAG Assessment is not intended to rate the sites at this stage or identify preferred sites.
- 4.5 The SLAA will be carried out without consideration of the overall housing and employment requirements of the City (in line with national policy) therefore the capacity of all the SLAA sites which have progressed to Stage 2 of the assessment will likely exceed the overall housing and employment requirement over the plan period.
- 4.6 The purpose of the SLAA is not to create the spatial strategy. A number of evidence base documents (including the SLAA, Sustainability Appraisal, Settlement Boundary Review, Green Infrastructure Strategy and others) will be used alongside engagement and consultation to develop a spatial strategy and preferred site allocations. This aligns with the Local Plan Review being environment led and more focused on place shaping and making.