



Centre for Sustainability

**St Albans Local Development Framework  
Core Strategy: Spatial Strategy Options**

Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic  
Environmental Assessment) Working Note

September 2010

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	BACKGROUND.....	2
1.2	SPATIAL STRATEGY OPTIONS.....	2
1.3	UNCERTAINTY AND FLEXIBILITY .....	3
1.4	ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY.....	3
<b>2</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	OPTION 1: 9,720 DWELLINGS 2001 – 2028 .....	5
2.2	OPTION 2: 8,950 DWELLINGS 2001 – 2028 .....	7
2.3	OPTION 3: 12,100 DWELLINGS 2001 – 2028 .....	8
<b>3</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>10</b>

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

St Albans City and District Council (SADC) published its Emerging Core Strategy for consultation in July 2009 and this was accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment) Working Note. The Working Note summarised the interim findings of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) on the Emerging Core Strategy.

With the recent abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies, SADC are now reconsidering various options for levels of housing growth that will be provided in the District from 2001 through to 2028 and have identified sites that could be developed to deliver the different levels of growth. This SA Working Note has been produced to examine the relative sustainability performance of each of the options and to make recommendations as to which options and which sites could be taken forward to consultation in the autumn of 2010.

The Core Strategy is not however just a house building programme and it sets out how the District will develop spatially in terms of other factors such as employment, retail and leisure provision, and community and green infrastructure. Where relevant the appraisal of the housing growth options has taken this wider context into account when arriving at conclusions or making recommendation over the suitability of particular growth options or individual sites.

## 1.2 Spatial Strategy Options

Three options for growth have been considered and these are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Spatial Strategy Housing Growth Options**

<b>Time Horizon</b>	<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Option 2</b>	<b>Option 3</b>
<b>2001 to 2021</b>	7,200 (360 p/a)	7,200 (360 p/a)	8,600 (360p/a 2001-11; 500p/a 2011-21)
<b>2021 to 2028</b>	2,520 (360 p/a)	1,750 (250 p/a)	3,500 (500 p/a)
<b>Total 2001 to 2028</b>	<b>9,720</b>	<b>8,950</b>	<b>12,100</b>

### **1.3 Uncertainty and Flexibility**

There are a number of outstanding issues and ongoing studies that are not yet available to inform the sustainability appraisal and this has therefore introduced a degree of uncertainty into the appraisal process. Examples include:

- A Green Infrastructure Study is currently being produced and will be available in January 2011. The findings may show that higher levels of growth at a particular site may result in much greater Green Infrastructure improvements than if lower levels of development at the same site or several other smaller sites were to go ahead. This might then favour the selection of fewer, larger sites to maximise Green Infrastructure gains.
- Hertfordshire County Council is currently undertaking studies relating to the provision of schools across the District. In the absence of this information it is not possible to provide detailed assessments of how certain developments would impact on local schools, or in the cases of larger developments contribute to the provision of new facilities.
- No final decision has been taken on whether the rail freight depot at the former Radlett Aerodrome site will be going ahead or not. This provides uncertainty over the future role of this area in the spatial strategy.
- Traffic modelling work is currently being undertaken to assess the implications of growth and development with particular reference to the potential strategic sites.

As a result of these uncertainties a degree of flexibility will need to be maintained in terms of the potential sites proposed for development, and the levels of growth planned for certain sites.

In addition, whilst the different growth options are supported by schedules of sites to deliver the specific levels of growth, some flexibility in the specific sites included in the schedule should be available.

### **1.4 Assessment Methodology**

The growth options have been assessed in terms of their performance against the SA/SEA Framework Objectives that were developed for the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and which have been used for all previous rounds of appraisal (Table 2).

**Table 2: Sustainability Appraisal Framework**

	Reference Term	SA Objective
1	Biodiversity	To protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity at all levels, including the maintenance and enhancement of Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species in line with local targets
2	Water quality/ quantity	To protect, maintain and enhance water resources (including water quality and quantity) while taking into account the impacts of climate change
3	Flood risk	Ensure that new developments avoid areas which are at risk from flooding and natural flood storage areas
4	Soils	Minimise development of land with high quality soils and minimise the degradation/loss of soils due to new developments
5	Greenhouse gas emissions	Reduce the impacts of climate change, with a particular focus on reducing the consumption of fossil fuels and levels of CO <sub>2</sub>
6	Climate change proof	Ensure that developments are capable of withstanding the effects of climate change (adaptation to climate change)
7	Air Quality	Achieve good air quality, especially in urban areas
8	Use of brownfield sites	Maximise the use of previously developed land and buildings, and the efficient use of land
9	Resource efficiency	To use natural resources, both finite and renewable, as efficiently as possible, and re-use finite resources or recycled alternatives wherever possible
10	Historic & cultural assets	To identify, maintain and enhance the historic environment and cultural assets
11	Landscape & Townscape	To conserve and enhance landscape and townscape character and encourage local distinctiveness
12	Health	To encourage healthier lifestyles and reduce adverse health impacts of new developments
13	Sustainable locations	To deliver more sustainable patterns of location of development.
14	Equality & social exclusion	Promote equity & address social exclusion by closing the gap between the poorest communities and the rest
15	Good quality housing	Ensure that everyone has access to good quality housing that meets their needs
16	Community Identity & participation	Enhance community identity and participation
17	Crime and fear of crime	Reduce both crime and fear of crime
18	Sustainable prosperity and growth	Achieve sustainable levels of prosperity and economic growth
19	Fairer access to services	Achieve a more equitable sharing of the benefits of prosperity across all sectors of society and fairer access to services, focusing on deprived areas in the region
20	Revitalise town centres	Revitalise town centres to promote a return to sustainable urban living

This SA draws on information from a variety of sources including:

- Previous Sustainability Appraisals;
- Input from SADC officers;
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments;
- Proactive Greenbelt Management Strategy Working Draft; and
- Other assessments (e.g. consultants reports relating to specific sites)

This SA Working Note does not form a formal part of the SA/SEA reporting process. It has been produced to contribute to the ongoing plan-making process, by providing an independent appraisal of the housing growth options. Sustainability Appraisal is a decision aiding tool rather than a decision making one and the contents of this report should therefore be considered in this light.

## **2 Assessment Findings**

The following section provides a summary of the findings of the sustainability appraisal of the different options for growth. More detailed information relating to the appraisal of the growth options can be found in the appendix.

The appraisal has compared the relative sustainability of the three options for growth and in many cases has identified potential adverse effects in relation to some of the objectives. However, it should be noted that other topic based policies included in the Core Strategy and future Development Policies DPD will help mitigate many of these effects (e.g. policies relating to design of development, landscape enhancement, and provision of infrastructure).

### **2.1 Option 1: 9,720 dwellings 2001 – 2028**

#### **2.1.1 Environmental Objectives**

The level of housing growth under this option would require 2,800 – 3,000 new homes to be developed on greenfield sites in the Green Belt. This could have adverse effects on local landscapes and could erode gaps between settlements in some locations.

Development on greenfield sites will result in soil sealing and the potential for adverse effects on biodiversity, archaeological resources and historic landscapes and townscapes. These effects will be greater than for Option 2 but significantly lower than for Option 3.

Any new development will result in increased levels of natural resource use, waste generation and greenhouse gas emissions. Again, levels will be greater than for Option 2

but significantly lower than for Option 3. This level of growth may cause issues in terms of waste water treatment, particularly as there are already capacity issues at the Maple Lodge works which not only serve St Albans and London Colney but also serve Hemel Hempstead where housing growth is also planned. However, some flows from the Maple Lodge catchment could be diverted to the Blackbirds wastewater treatment works where there is some scope for upgrading. Therefore housing levels to be achieved under this option are unlikely to be jeopardised.

The option contains one very large site (1,000 dwellings North East of Hemel Hempstead) which could realise some significant Green Infrastructure gains, the other sites being likely to generate gains commensurate with their size and location.

None of the strategic development sites proposed are at risk from flooding.

### **2.1.2 Social Objectives**

Based on achieving delivery of 40% affordable housing from all new developments this option would provide 144 affordable dwellings pa from 2011-2028. This is well above the Council's target of providing 100pa. However, the option falls short of meeting the overall projected housing needs of the District which could result in an insufficient provision of certain types of homes and lead to some people having to move to other areas to access appropriate housing, which would not support the Core Strategy objective for promoting mixed and balanced communities. This could have disproportionate effects on certain sections of the population such as first-time buyers, key workers and larger / extended families.

The provision of retirement homes at the site to the West of Chiswell Green would help to meet the identified demand for this type of housing in the District.

Compared to the higher growth Option 3, this option would place less pressure on existing infrastructure which is already at a deficit. However, the smaller levels of growth, and the smaller sites, mean that there will be less opportunity for community facilities and infrastructure gain than if fewer, larger sites were to be taken forward. This could mean that opportunities such as the development of Green Infrastructure to encourage healthy lifestyles may not come forward at levels similar to Option 3.

### **2.1.3 Economic Objectives**

The levels of new employment development are likely to be fairly similar under each of the three growth options and there is uncertainty over the match between the levels of housing growth and new job provision. The Core Strategy proposes new employment

development in several areas of the District and this is matched by the spatial distribution of new housing proposals under Option 1.

Consistent annual levels of housing growth through the plan period will mean increased input into the local economy (post-2021) compared to Option 2 which has lower growth in this period, however levels will be significantly less compared to Option 3.

## **2.2 Option 2: 8,950 dwellings 2001 – 2028**

### **2.2.1 Environmental Objectives**

This option would have the lowest impact on the Green Belt with a requirement for 2,030 – 2,230 new homes to be developed on Green Belt land this being approximately 25% less than Option 1 and 60% less than Option 3.

This lower level of growth would put the least demand on natural resource usage and result in the lowest increase in waste generation and greenhouse gas emissions. This level of growth may cause issues in terms of waste water treatment, particularly as there are already capacity issues at the Maple Lodge works which not only serve St Albans and London Colney but also serve Hemel Hempstead where housing growth is also planned. However, some flows from the Maple Lodge catchment could be diverted to the Blackbirds wastewater treatment works where there is some scope for upgrading. Therefore housing levels to be achieved under this option are unlikely to be jeopardised.

Whilst any developments on greenfield sites will inevitably result in some adverse effects related to soil sealing and potential impacts on biodiversity and historic landscapes and townscapes, the lower levels of growth under this option will minimise these effects compared to the other options.

However the smaller developments that are proposed under this option are unlikely to be able to deliver the same levels of Green Infrastructure gain as the larger developments which are included in Options 1 and 3.

None of the strategic development sites proposed are at risk from flooding.

### **2.2.2 Social Objectives**

The lower levels of growth under this option limits the opportunities for providing the additional new dwellings required in the District post-2021. This could result in some people having to move to other areas to access appropriate housing, which would not support the Core Strategy objective for promoting mixed and balanced communities. Lower levels of growth would limit the supply of affordable housing and could restrict the types of dwellings that would be delivered (e.g. less opportunity for a mix of family

homes and houses for young people and key workers). This could have disproportionate effects on certain sections of the population, such as first-time buyers and larger / extended families.

Based on achieving delivery of 40% affordable housing from all new developments this option would provide 144 affordable dwellings pa from 2011-2021 and 100 pa from 2021 – 2028. This would just meet the Council’s target of providing 100 affordable homes pa. However it is uncertain as to whether this level is achievable for this option, given that some developments may not deliver the full 40% if they are delivering other infrastructure or are located on small sites.

The provision of retirement homes at the site to the West of Chiswell Green would help to meet the identified demand for this type of housing in the District.

The smaller developments that are proposed under this option are unlikely to deliver the levels of community facility and infrastructure gains that would be generated from the larger developments that are included in Options 1 and 3. This could result in increased deficiencies in infrastructure on top of that already experienced in the District. However the lower levels of growth will put less pressure on infrastructure post-2021 than the other two options.

Also, the reduced levels of planning gain under this option could mean that opportunities such as the development of Green Infrastructure to encourage healthy lifestyles, or community facilities to foster community cohesion, will not come forward at levels similar to Option 3.

### **2.2.3 Economic Objectives**

The levels of new employment development are likely to be fairly similar under each of the three growth options and there is uncertainty over the match between the levels of housing growth and new job provision. However the distribution of housing and employment growth are relatively well balanced across the District.

Lower levels of housing growth will mean less input into the local economy (post-2021) compared to Option 1 and significantly less input compared to Option 3.

## **2.3 Option 3: 12,100 dwellings 2001 – 2028**

### **2.3.1 Environmental Objectives**

Under this option approximately 5,180 - 5,380 new homes would need to be developed on Green Belt land, therefore requiring substantial levels of Green Belt release with

associated adverse effects on local landscapes and settings, loss of amenity and the increased potential for eroding existing gaps between settlements.

The higher levels of greenfield site development will result in increased levels of soil sealing, and increased potential for adverse effects on biodiversity, archaeological resources and historic landscapes and townscapes.

However, the larger developments proposed under this option provide the greatest opportunities for realising significant gains in Green Infrastructure provision which could help to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets and community forest objectives.

Developing this number of new dwellings will result in significantly higher natural resource use and waste generation than the other two options and will result in increased levels of vehicle use, with the associated adverse effects on local air quality and increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The high levels of growth would also exacerbate current congestion problems in St Albans which would result in further increases in greenhouse gas emissions and worsen local air quality (NB: there is already an Air Quality Management Zone designated in St Albans city).

This level of growth will cause significant issues in terms of waste water treatment, particularly as there are already capacity issues at the Maple Lodge works which not only serve St Albans and London Colney but also serve Hemel Hempstead where housing growth is also planned.

None of the strategic development sites proposed are at risk from flooding.

### **2.3.2 Social Objectives**

The level of growth under this option would be the closest in meeting the District's projected future housing requirement and would be able to deliver considerably in excess of the Council's target of 100 affordable homes pa.

The provision of retirement homes at the site to the West of Chiswell Green would help to meet the identified demand for this type of housing in the District.

However the high levels of growth are a big increase from current levels of new housing delivery (approx. 350 dpa) and are planned to take place from 2011 onwards. Without allowing any time for new infrastructure to be developed prior to housing delivery this would put immediate significant pressure on the District's already stretched infrastructure (schools, waste water treatment, transport etc) which is unsustainable.

Some of the larger development sites included as part of this option could result in the delivery of community facilities and infrastructure gains which would be of benefit to the wider District community. This includes Green Infrastructure (as mentioned under the

environmental objectives above) which could generate new opportunities for uptake of healthy lifestyle choices.

### **2.3.3 Economic Objectives**

Growth in housing will need to be supported by increased employment opportunities within the District so that the housing growth does not fuel the levels of out-commuting from the District. Levels of new employment development are likely to be fairly similar under each of the three growth options which suggests that under this option out-commuting may continue to rise.

The Core Strategy proposes new employment development in several areas of the District and this is matched by the spatial distribution of new housing proposals under Option 3.

Higher levels of housing growth will provide an increased population to support the vitality of the local economy.

## **3 Conclusions**

All three options provide a balanced distribution of housing growth across the District appropriate to deliver the planned levels of growth associated with each option. As a result most of the effects identified across the options are similar in type, but differ in scale.

Option 3 which would provide the highest levels of growth, with a consistently high annual delivery across the plan period, has been forecast to have significant adverse effects in relation to the landscape SA objective. This option would require release of land from the Green Belt to accommodate over 5,000 new homes on greenfield sites – with associated adverse effects on other environmental objectives. Such a scale of development would change the landscape character in these areas and erode gaps between neighbouring settlements.

The high levels of growth under Option 3 would also result in unsustainable pressure being placed on the District's already stretched infrastructure, particularly schools and waste water treatment works.

Whilst there are these dis-benefits, the appraisal has identified a range of positive effects that would result from the high levels of growth under Option 3. In particular the provision of the higher numbers of new dwellings would meet the forecast housing need over the plan period and would deliver the highest number of affordable homes to help resolve an issue for the District, particularly with respect to young people and key workers. This would help to promote balanced and mixed communities across the

District. The high levels of growth would also provide the greatest support to the local economy, however there is the risk that increased growth could fuel the already high levels of out-commuting.

The larger developments that are proposed under this option provide the greatest opportunities for realising significant gains in Green Infrastructure provision which could help to meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets and community forest objectives as well as encouraging the take up of active and healthy lifestyles. In addition larger developments would be required to provide significant new infrastructure which could have benefits for the wider community.

The lower growth options (Options 1 and 2) are similar in that levels of housing growth are the same up until 2021, and it is only after this period that growth under Option 2 lags behind that provided by Option 1.

The levels of development under Option 1 would result in the need for less development on greenfield sites in the Greenbelt compared to Option 3 with associated reduced adverse effects on some of the environmental objectives, particularly in relation to effects on landscapes. Option 1 would however need some large sites to be developed which would provide Green Infrastructure gains with the associated benefits described above. Pressures on local services and infrastructure would be less than for Option 3 but would still be an issue, particularly in relation to school provision and waste water treatment.

Under Option 1 there would be a shortfall in meeting the forecast housing demand which could have implications for maintaining balanced and mixed communities in the District.

Delivering Option 2 would further limit the impact on the local environment and the pressure on existing infrastructure compared to Option 1, although the lack of larger sites would mean that there would be limited opportunities for planning gains relating to Green Infrastructure and community facilities and infrastructure.

However conversely, the lower level of growth will limit the success of meeting a number of the social and potentially the economic objectives. The needs of the local community for new housing, particularly affordable housing, will not be met and there would be a significant shortfall in terms of meeting forecast local housing needs. This could result in certain groups of the population such as young people and key workers having to move to other areas, thereby creating unbalanced communities.

The lower levels of growth could also have implications for the viability of existing services and facilities in the District and reduce the vitality of the town and village centres.