



Northumberland
County Council

Northumberland Local Plan

Employment Land Site Option Appraisal for selected towns

Introduction and Methodology

July 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The NPPF (2012) identifies that "local planning authorities should have a clear understanding of business needs within the economic markets operating in and across their area" (para: 160), and likely changes to the market. Central to this is providing the right amount of land for employment use in the right locations, taking into account the existing supply and distribution of land, and the future need to provide for forecast growth rates over the plan period.
- 1.2 The primary sources of evidence for the (now withdrawn) Core Strategy are the Employment Land Review (2011) (ELR) and the Employment Land and Premises Demand Study (2015) (ELPDS). Following an independent review of that evidence base, this particular evidence has been found to be sufficiently up-to-date to be used to inform the new Local Plan. The ELR used long term employment projections produced by St Chad's College, Durham University (2010) to determine possible job and GVA growth scenarios over the plan period. These were subsequently updated by the Council utilising a similar methodological approach, but based on employment projections revised in 2014 by St Chad's College. Collectively these studies provided the basis of the objectively assessed need for employment for the (withdrawn) Northumberland Core Strategy. A further update has been carried out by PBA to inform the new Local Plan
- 1.3 The evidence base indicates that the County currently has an overall oversupply of employment land, and a degree of rationalisation of the land supply is required, but that economic growth in certain submarkets in the County may be constrained over the plan period owing to a lack of available land for new business growth.
- 1.4 This paper sets out the methodology and process of the assessment of potential new employment sites in the settlements that are particularly constrained by Green Belt designations and a local undersupply. Here, despite the apparent Countywide oversupply, the evidence is strong enough to justify exceptional circumstances to allow the exploration of Green Belt areas around the settlements to facilitate the allocation of new land to provide for local market need. Specifically, a need is identified in –
 - Hexham
 - Ponteland
 - Prudhoe
- 1.5 In the case of Morpeth, while the made Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan allocates land for the current Plan period, the assessment needs to be revisited to ensure that the imposition of a Green Belt inset boundary, through the Local Plan, does not constrain employment land needs for beyond the end date of the Neighbourhood Plan

2. Site option identification

- 2.1 The ELR (2011) undertook 'a call for sites' in the spring of 2010 as part of the study in order to provide options for where the additional demand for employment space for the County could be provided. This produced 32 site options, although only 9 of these were proposed by the

owner / developer for b-class development. Each site was assessed using the ELR methodology used to review the existing land portfolio. The results of these assessments are presented in the Employment Land Review (2011) Appendices.

- 2.2 It was apparent that many of the sites proposed were not in areas of the County where the Employment Land Review (2011) identifies a need for new land. In addition the ELR has associated some sites with settlements which are quite distant, and the sites in reality were physically isolated from the town in question. Where it was known that the site is still available for employment use and could serve the settlement identified in the evidence base as requiring additional employment land, it is included in this assessment for the Northumberland Local Plan.
- 2.3 A second 'call for sites' was undertaken in 2013, as part of a joint site search with the Northumberland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). This resulted in an Employment Land Review Update (2013). Those submitting their land for consideration for residential development were asked if they would also be willing for their land to be considered for employment development. 43 proposed sites were submitted through this process. Where a site has the potential to provide for a settlement with identified need and where it may still be potentially available and deliverable for employment use, it is included in this assessment for the Northumberland Local Plan.
- 2.4 The most recent call for sites, for the 2018 Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA), brought forward 14 sites where the proposer wished to see employment use and a further thirty (approximately) where a mixed use, including some element of employment or commercial development, was being suggested. Again, many sites were in isolated locations. Some had been assessed before. Nonetheless, a handful of new sites have come forward in this way and have been added to the sites assessed for the Northumberland Local Plan.
- 2.5 Site options for each settlement were mapped. These site options provide genuine alternatives for the allocation of land, but the following known constraints to each settlement were considered when identifying site options. Site identification particularly considered the importance of unconstrained access, level topography for the development of large buildings, and issues and opportunities concerning current and planned infrastructure –
 - Hexham – options were identified to maximise access from the A69, which would be a key requisite to future operators. No site options were considered on hilly areas to the south of the town, as any significant employment site would need to be accessed via residential roads, and topography would be unsuitable for large footprint commercial buildings. Known town centre congestion was also considered, and the need to avoid excessive ribbon development to the east and west of the town were also factored in, although some options have been considered.
 - Ponteland – options were identified to maximise the benefits of proximity to the A696, the Tyne and Wear Metro, and Newcastle International Airport. Sites to the north of Ponteland were not identified because of the known traffic constraints stemming from the junction of Ponteland Road and Callerton Lane, which an employment allocation would likely

accentuate. It was assumed that Ponteland was unlikely to be bypassed in the plan period, so this was not considered a viable mechanism to facilitate development to the north.

- Prudhoe – the settlement has a distinct employment area to the north which utilises level land, with residential areas to its south. The town is heavily constrained by topography, infrastructure and the River Tyne. No sites were considered to the south of the town, except for one adjacent to Prudhoe Community High School identified through a previous ‘call for sites’, owing to the steep and undulating topography and the need to access sites via residential areas. Options were focused where land is likely to be level enough for employment development, and where sites can be accessed via the A695.
- Morpeth – discussions with agents and commercial developers as part of the ELR (2011) and Employment Land and Premises Demand Study (2015) identified that market demand would be significantly reduced if the only additional land allocations were to the south or east of the town. It was identified that commercial traffic and in particular HGVs would need to traverse congested residential areas or the town centre to reach the A1 and the Clifton junction did not offer access north bound. The development of the Morpeth Northern Bypass presented the opportunity of unconstrained access to the strategic road network as well as frontage onto the A1. Options in the original assessment focused on utilising this opportunity and land allocations in this vicinity have been taken forward in the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan. With the need to avoid overly constraining opportunities beyond the end date of the Neighbourhood Plan and, given the emergence of additional sites through the 2018 SHELAA, the assessments are reproduced, updated and extended.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The assessment looks at the suitability, availability, achievability and deliverability of each site option in accordance with the approach to economic land availability assessment set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance. The basis of the assessment is the site survey methodology utilised for the ELR (2011).
- 3.2 The ELR (2011) reviewed the suitability of existing and potential employment sites using a set methodological approach to score different aspects of the sites physical, market and planning characteristics. The assessment criteria are –
 - Strategic road access
 - Local road access
 - Site characteristics and development constraints
 - Proximity to urban areas, and access to labour and services
 - Sustainability / Planning Factors
 - Compatibility of adjoining land uses
 - Market attractiveness
- 3.3 Commentary was also provided on the availability of sites for development and potential barriers.

- 3.4 Each criterion was scored out of 5 according to a described methodology¹. This is not prescriptive but rather provides guidance for the lowest and highest score (e.g. 5 for strategic road access within 2km of the site) allowing for a flexible judgement in scoring a site between 1 and 5. The accumulation of the scores provides an overall site score out of 35, which indicates if the site is 'high', 'average', or 'poor' quality for employment use. Scores were awarded based on on-site assessments and a GIS based review of constraints.
- 3.5 To ensure consistency with site assessments of potential new employment sites undertaken as part of the Employment Land Review (2011) and subsequent 'calls for sites', this assessment utilises the same broad assessment framework. However, as the assessment is limited to certain local market areas associated with the four Green Belt towns, it is important to assess local factors including marketability in somewhat greater detail.

Expanded site assessment

- 3.6 The 7 key site criteria which the ELR site assessment reviewed collectively represent the key considerations of the suitability of a site for employment use. This study uses a mix of desk based assessment, utilising other evidence studies and GIS mapping, consultation with key stakeholders, and on-site assessments. The following data sources and methods have been used in the assessment -

1. Strategic road access –

- GIS review to measure distance to the nearest trunk road junction.
- Site assessment to review local traffic constraints which could impinge on efficient movement of vehicles to the nearest junction.
- Review of 2015 Transport Assessment to determine potential impact on the strategic road network junctions' road network in conjunction with other planned development.

2. Local Road Access and impact-

- Site assessment and GIS review to establish existing access points, local traffic conditions, nearby generators of traffic, and traffic sightlines.
- Consultation with County Highways to determine the feasibility of mitigation work to deliver access to the site.
- Review of Transport Assessment to determine impact on the local road network in conjunction with other planned development.

3. Site characteristics and development constraints

Ground conditions

- Site visit assessment of topography and shape to determine its suitability to develop large footprint buildings.

¹ See Employment Land Review, 2010, Appendix 4 – Site Assessment Criteria

- Review of the Coal Authority interactive map² to determine the risk to development on the site of past mine workings.
- Review of Council GIS mapping to determine if development of the site would result in sterilisation of mineral resources.
- Determination of grading of agricultural land in line with DEFRA guidelines³ using Council GIS mapping. Para 112 of the NPPF indicates that local authorities should seek to use poorer areas of agricultural land ahead of higher quality land.

Biodiversity

- Desk based assessment by the County Ecologist to determine if the site contains a protected habitat, and/or if a protected species has been recorded within or adjacent to a site.

Landscape and Green Infrastructure

- Site visit to determine the relationship of the site within the landscape and its relationship with the nearby settlement.
- Review of the Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010) and the Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010) to determine the existing character of the landscape which would be impacted and its capacity to absorb development.
- Impact on designated green infrastructure and corridors using Council GIS mapping of the Northumberland PPG17 assessment (2011).

Flooding and water management infrastructure

- Flood risk (surface and fluvial) to development on the site determined through the Northumberland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2015).
- Impact on water and sewerage infrastructure and the need for additional investment to mitigate the development of the site option determined through consultation with Northumbrian Water.
- Water supply capacity determined through the Northumberland Water Cycle Study (2015).

Archaeology and Historic Environment

- GIS review by Council Building Conservation Officer of designated historic assets within or close to the site which may be impacted, including their setting.
- GIS review by Council Archaeology Officer of archaeological interest associated with the site and required works in advance of development.

Rights of Way

- GIS review of designated rights of way crossing the site and the constraint this may place on whole site development.

² <http://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/coalauthority/home.html>

³ Agricultural Land classification of England and Wales, MAFF, 1988

4. Proximity to urban areas and access to services and labour

- GIS measurement of distances to access complementary services for employment such as town centre uses, and the ease of access for labour including through sustainable transport modes.

5. Sustainability and planning factors

- Review of potential and serious sustainability constraints impacting the site as identified in Sustainability Appraisal work carried out in 2015.
- All settlements requiring additional employment land are surrounded by existing Green Belt or are within the general extent of the Green Belt extension established in saved Policy S5 of the Northumberland Structure Plan (2005). Allocation of a new site will require Green Belt deletion or the setting of inner boundaries for Morpeth to exclude the allocated site. The Northumberland Green Belt Assessment (2015), reviewed the contribution of distinctive land parcels around settlements in terms of their contribution to the 4 main purposes of the Green Belt, as identified in the NPPF⁴. This study is reviewed to determine the likely impact on the Green Belt of the removal of the site option.

6. Compatibility of adjoining uses

- Site visits and GIS used to identify adjoining land uses which may be sensitive to employment development on the site. This includes consideration of the potential impact on residential amenity.

7. Market Attractiveness

Ownership and Availability

- Information provided through calls for sites and/or Land Registry searches were used to determine land ownership and review potential conflicts of interest which may deny the site being available for employment development.

Development costs

- Broad review of potential development costs which may impinge on the attractiveness of the site for employment development. This is not intended to be a viability assessment.

⁴ The Green Belt purpose “To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land” was excluded from the Green Belt Assessment methodology as Green Belt land is considered to contribute equally to fulfilling this purpose by encouraging development in urban areas to an equal extent. See Table 3 of the Northumberland Green Belt Review Methodology, December 2014.

Market attractiveness

- Broad review of the local industrial and office market and physical factors which may impact on the attractiveness of the site for new employment development. Consideration is given to the business surveys and industry workshops undertaken as part of the Employment Land Review (2011) and the Employment Land and Premises Demand Study (2015).

3.7 The assessment is intended to specifically evaluate the potential for B-class uses⁵ which are:

- B1a – offices
- B1b – research and development
- B1c – light industry
- B2 – general industry
- B8 - storage and distribution

3.8 However it is reasonable to assume that the mix of B-class uses is likely to vary in relation to the location of the site and the proximity of other land uses, as well as the quality of local transport infrastructure. For example, sites which are close to residential development and/or a town centre would be more likely to accommodate office development, whilst sites close to junctions on the strategic road network may attract more market demand from distribution companies. The proximity to sensitive land uses could also impact on the attractiveness of the site to B2 operators, which would not want to be impinged by restrictions on noise, hours of operation etc. Where a site is adjacent to existing employment development such as an office park, it is also reasonable to assume that an extension of the site would provide for the same type of development.

3.9 For each site option a hypothetical development mix has been modelled in relation to the location and characteristics of the site, and the scoring of the assessment criteria has been undertaken with this in mind. The development mixes are not a set indication of what will be developed on the site, but are considered to be reasonable scenarios.

3.10 From the assumed mix of uses on the site the number of jobs that would likely be delivered by the development has been modelled. The approach to this is consistent with that in the Northumberland Long Term Employment Forecasts (2014). It has been assumed for most sites 40% would be built out with the remainder being developed for ancillary uses such as roads and landscaping, but for sites where it is likely that it would be developed for B1a offices it is assumed that 60% of the site would be built-out, accounting for the typical built form of such developments. The number of jobs which the development could deliver has been modelled in relation to the assumed quantum of floorspace the site could accommodate in each use-class, and the required proportion of this floorspace which would likely be required to support each job. The assumed job densities are in the table below.

⁵ As defined in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) and the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended).

Use Class	M ² per employee
B1a – offices	11
B1b – Research and Development	29
B1c – Light industrial (suitable near residential)	47
B2 – General industrial	36
B8 – Storage or Distribution	70

4. Presentation of the Employment Land Site Option Appraisal

4.1 Due to the size of the Employment Land Site Option Appraisal, the report has been divided into 5 separate documents:

- Introduction and Methodology
- Hexham Site Option Appraisal
- Morpeth Site Option Appraisal
- Ponteland Site Option Appraisal
- Prudhoe Site Option Appraisal