



Rutland County Council

RUTLAND LOCAL PLAN 2026 - 2046

DRAFT Site Assessment Methodology

September 2026



Rutland
County Council

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1. Introduction

1.1 This document sets out the process that we will follow to assess and compare the development potential of various sites across the Rutland authority area.

1.2 This will help us to determine, together with the views expressed through consultation stages, a preferred list of sites for allocation in the next local plan. There are three key objectives for this document:

- To set out the process we will undertake to **identify land** for development
- To set out the process for assessing the **suitability, availability and achievability** of sites; and
- To set out the process for **selecting sites for allocation** that align with the emerging Local Plan's vision and objectives

1.3 This document sets out the factors that will be considered in the assessment and selection process. We will continue to develop and refine the detailed criteria for each factor and set this out in future versions of this document. We will also update the methodology, including assessment factors where necessary, to reflect the emerging plan's vision and strategy, as well as respond to any new pieces of evidence where appropriate.

1.4 The methodology is guided by a number of principles that will allow us to prepare a plan that will be found 'sound' when it is examined by a planning inspector. We will ensure that the approach taken in the methodology should:

- Align with the objectives and requirements of the NPPF;
- Align with the objectives and requirements of the emerging Local Plan; and
- Help meet the requirements of the environmental assessment regulations in respect of sites.

Version

Version No.	Date	Changes
1	September 2026	Draft for public consultation (this document)

2. Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework

2.1 The current National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2026) requires local planning authorities to make sufficient provision for homes, employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development. Sufficient provision should also be made for infrastructure and community facilities and allow for the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment.

2.2 Plans must do this within the framework of delivering sustainable development, guided by three overarching objectives, the NPPF states that:

- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

2.3 To deliver the development needed, and to ensure that it is sustainable, it is important to set out a clear, consistent and robust methodology from which to select the most appropriate site options. Ultimately, a local plan must be tested for soundness at an examination,

Plan Making Guidance

2.4 The Government published new guidance on identifying, assessing and selecting sites in November 2025. This is the key guidance around which this assessment and selection methodology has been prepared. The Government regards this guidance as an essential part of preparing a local plan to help meet the expectations of national policy. The guidance focuses on:

- a framework and supporting methodologies for identifying sites
- what data to collect during the call for sites process
- how to assess sites we have identified
- an approach to selecting the sites that meet our plan vision
- documenting our decision making on why we selected these sites

According to the guidance, the site selection process consists of four stages:

- Stage 1 – identifying sites
- Stage 2 – assessing sites

- Stage 3 – determining your draft allocations
- Stage 4 – confirming your draft allocations and recording your decisions

2.5 The intention of the guidance is to provide a consistent framework for local planning authorities to work with, although the Government recognises that no two areas are the same. As such, it is flexible enough to account for local circumstances and can be adapted to individual needs.

2.6 These stages form the basis for the approach we will take in Rutland. Where we intend to deviate from the framework, or added a more local dimension, we will set this out.

Environmental Assessment

2.7 Proposed plans, policies and strategies must be tested using a systematic, high-level process to evaluate their potential environmental effects before being approved. This is usually carried out through the process of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Under the new planning system, the Government is intending to replace SEA and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) with Environmental Outcomes Reports (EORs). These requirements have not yet been formalised through regulations, so for now, the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 continues to apply. In the absence of the formal requirement for Environmental Outcomes Report (EOR), the Council will expand the SEA to include consideration for appropriate social and economic factors, including impacts on health, education and job creation.

2.8 The role of the SA is to promote sustainable development and a separate SA report will be prepared which will identify, assess and compare the likely significant environmental effects of potential site allocations and reasonable alternatives, ensuring environmental considerations are taken into account. This will provide a summary of SA findings for each site and consider ways of mitigating any negative sustainability impacts identified. The findings will consider:

- the likely significant environmental effects of our preferred site selection;
- alternatives to the preferred sites, and the likely significant environmental effects of those alternatives; and
- how we have used the information to inform the preferred spatial strategy and site selection.

Spatial Development Strategy

2.9 A Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) is a new sub-regional planning document introduced by the government under the Planning and Infrastructure Act (2025) that will provide a long-term strategic framework for matters such as housing growth, infrastructure, economic development and environmental priorities across a wider area.

2.10 Rutland support the proposed Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) SDS geography and we are working on the assumption that an LLR Strategic Planning Board will be established during 2026 to prepare the SDS.

2.11 While the Local Plan cannot be required to conform to a strategy that does not yet exist, we will need to have regard to emerging strategic planning work across LLR, and future reviews of the Local Plan will need to be in general conformity with the SDS once adopted.

3. Process Overview

3.1 This methodology adopts a four-stage approach as outlined in national plan making guidance. It has been developed to provide a fair assessment with transparency and consistency, whilst also taking into consideration site-specific circumstances and to find the most suitable locations for varying development, resulting in a preferred list of sites that adhere to local need and meet the expectations of national planning policy.

Stages

3.2 The four stages set out in Government guidance have been incorporated into this methodology. A brief overview is provided below with further detail addressed in following sections.

Stage 1: Identify Sites

3.3 The first part of the process is to identify the sites we will take through the assessment and selection process. Sites will be identified from a range of sources.

Stage 2: Assess Sites

3.4 Sites will be categorised and an initial filter will be applied to help screen out sites that are obviously unsuitable. Sites must then be assessed regarding their suitability, availability and achievability. To do this assessment, a series of factors are to be developed, addressing different aspects that seek to highlight any constraints or issues that would affect the development of the site. Grading against the factors is on the basis of providing a RAG rating which once complete, will provide the evidence to form an overall final RAG rating for each site. The final step in this stage is to determine the development potential of those assessed sites.

Stage 3: Determine Draft Allocations

3.5 The purpose of stage 3 is to identify, of the list of sites assessed in stage 2, the most appropriate sites for allocating in the emerging local plan. Stage 3 will involve a degree of planning judgement to help identify the most appropriate sites for allocating, giving consideration to any issues raised in stage 2. It will also involve having regard to a range of additional factors ensuring compliance with planning policy and identifying any issues and opportunities that new development may address.

Stage 4: Confirming the draft allocations and recording our decisions

3.6 Stage 4 is the point in which we confirm the sites to take forward as the draft site allocations in the plan. It is the output and record of the assessment process we have undertaken. This document is critical to Stage 4 as it sets out and justifies the methodology we will have applied. We will record the outputs of the assessment on our website.

Allocated Uses

3.7 This methodology will, in most instances, be used to assess and select sites for all different uses. Previously, we have allocated or safeguarded land for the following uses:

- Housing (including market and affordable housing, self-build housing and specialist housing)
- Employment (including but not limited to; retail, industry, offices)
- Gypsy, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople
- Infrastructure (including health, education and community facilities)
- Mixed Use
- Broad locations for large-scale mixed-use developments (such as urban extensions or new settlements)

3.8 The new local plan will aim to allocate land for many of the same uses again and will determine priorities in accordance with the need identified across various need assessments, inclusive but not limited to; Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA), Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment and, potentially, a Visitor Accommodation Needs Assessment. These needs assessments will progress alongside the site assessment process, to ensure for any identified need for a particular use, we will have assessed and identified the most appropriate sites for allocating.

3.9 We will use the Government's standard method for housing and calculating local housing need, to provide a starting point for the amount of housing required for the local plan period.

Supporting Evidence

3.10 The site assessment and eventual site selection process will be supported by a range of evidence across varying sources. These include:

- Specialised evidence prepared for the local plan and to aid planning decisions (e.g. strategic flood risk assessment, landscape sensitivity and character assessment, biodiversity assessment, infrastructure delivery plan);
- Strategies, assessments and studies published by key stakeholders (e.g. different departments within the council, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Local Transport Plan);
- Accompanying documentation submitted by site promoters for assessment; and
- Where appropriate, information gained through discussions with those promoting sites, any relevant consultee (e.g. Natural England, Anglian Water) and the local community.

3.11 Assessments will take account of the best available information. The key sources of evidence that will be used to appraise sites are highlighted within the detail for each factor. New or updated sources of information that become available following the publication of this methodology will be taken into account. This may include additional information that mitigates a negative effect.

Future Revisions

3.12 This draft site assessment methodology has been prepared prior to undertaking the main activities required for plan making. It reflects our current position and is reflective of the available evidence and national policy framework at the time of writing. As the plan making process continues to progress, revisions to the assessment and selection methodology may be required as the preparation of this document has been completed before any consultation on the new local plan has taken place. As a vision develops through consultation and further evidence base development, the priorities and development strategy will be incorporated within the plan making process. Consequently, elements of this methodology may be revised, expanded or refined as plan preparation progresses.

4. Stage 1– Identifying Sites

4.1 The first stage is to identify potential sites for further assessment from a variety of sources. At this stage we do not need to consider any constraints on land or development. Output of this Stage: A list of sites with potential for development in our area that will be assessed in Stage 2.

Sources of Sites

4.2 In line with the plan making guidance, we may consider a wide number of sources to identify sites, including but not limited to the following:

- Land submissions (call for sites inclusive of sites submitted in previous call for sites exercises)
- allocations in current local and neighbourhood plans
- the brownfield land register
- planning applications
- current or previous land availability assessments
- land owned by the local authority and other public bodies
- opportunities to extend existing settlements

The most substantial source of site options will be come from the call for sites exercises.

Call for Sites

4.3 A call for sites is an exercise that allows the opportunity for sites to be put forward, this helps us to understand what land is potentially available for development in Rutland to meet future needs of the county. It is primarily aimed at landowners, developers, housebuilders and other stakeholders to submit land for consideration in preparing a new local plan. The call for sites process is an effective way of finding new sites for potential development that may currently be in an alternative use. The process has been developed using our consultation system which requires a range of information inclusive but not limited to availability, size, current and proposed use, that will allow the assessment to take place. The information can also provide more accurate indications about the deliverability of specific sites by requesting landowners' aspirations for the site.

5. Stage 2 – Assessment of Sites

5.1 Stage 2 of the process is composed of the main assessment of the sites identified in Stage 1. The key priorities for this stage are to:

- Filter out any sites clearly unsuitable for development
- Categorise sites
- Assess each site for their suitability, availability and achievability for development
- Estimate the development potential of sites
- Provide a RAG rating for each site and for each of the determined factors
- Determine the deliverability or developability of sites proposed for housing use

Site Threshold

5.2 Thus far, the spatial strategy for the local plan is not yet decided therefore, with the interest of receiving a wide variety of sites, we will not apply a minimum or maximum threshold for the Call for Sites, as there will be a requirement for sites of different sizes.

Categorising Sites

5.3 The Government guidance on site assessment advises that the next step in site assessment is to categorise sites. The purpose of categorising sites is to:

- give an early indication of the type and amount of different development opportunities available in the area
- signpost early in the process where evidence may be needed to support certain types of development opportunities
- help inform the emerging spatial strategy
- allow the assessment of similar types of sites consistently
- inform decisions on the type of sites to take forward as draft allocations.

5.4 We are still developing the categories we will use in the site assessment. We may need to change the category a site falls within because of new information gathered through our assessment. However, we will confirm our site categories before moving to Stage 3 of the process.

Initial Sift

5.5 At the time of writing, the decision for the assessment factors have not been finalised but initial discussions give a good basis for what it is we want to achieve through the assessment process.

5.6 The first stage of site assessment, or initial filter of sites, is to determine those that are immediately unsuitable and do not require any further assessment. The sites that are ruled out at this stage likely have fundamental constraints that are so significant, that development is unachievable and where mitigation measures would not address the issues at hand. Using the Government's plan making guidance and our own knowledge of Rutland, the likely factors for unsuitable sites at this stage are:

1. International and national biodiversity designations (SSSI or SPA/RAMSAR)
2. Designated Local Green Space

3. More than 50% of site area in Flood zone 3.

5.7 Sites that contain other constraints will continue through the site assessment process, in which they will be considered in more detail, and we will consider the possibility for mitigation measures.

Assessing suitability, availability and achievability

5.8 Following this initial sift, we will have a list of sites that are considered 'unsuitable for development' and the remaining sites are considered 'potentially suitable'. All of the sites excluded in the initial sift will be mapped and reasoning for their exclusion will be documented. Following this, we will move on to assessing the remaining sites in terms of suitability, availability and achievability, to filter the remaining sites down to a list that perform well against the assessment criteria and could be considered for allocation, these will then go forward for further assessment through Stage 3 of this methodology.

5.9 The Government's plan making guidance advises a RAG rating approach, as such we will provide a Red, Amber or Green rating on an array of suitability, availability and achievability factors to determine an overall RAG score for each site. Ratings are determined as follows:

Rating	Suitability	Availability	Achievability
Green	The site is in a suitable location for the proposed land use, with little to no constraints, any identified constraints can be easily overcome with minor mitigation.	The site will be available for development within the proposed time frame and there are no known legal or ownership issues.	The site is capable of being developed for the proposed land use within the timescale proposed.
Amber	The site is in a potentially suitable location for the proposed land use however has some constraints that could impact the developability of the site, or the site cannot be deemed suitable until further assessment has been completed.	The site has some legal or ownership issues, but resolution is considered achievable, or the site cannot be deemed available until further assessment has been completed.	The capability of the site to be delivered in the timescale proposed is uncertain or the site cannot be deemed achievable until further assessment has been completed.
Red	Based on the information provided and the information we hold, the site does not appear to be in a suitable location for the proposed land use at this time. The site may have constraints that significantly impact development potential and are not easily overcome with mitigation.	The site is unlikely to be available for development in the timescale proposed.	The site is unlikely to be achievable for development in the timescale proposed.

5.10 The overarching aim for assessment is to ensure that development is allocated in locations that avoid the most harm to existing assets and that the amount of mitigation required is limited. Whilst a red rating does not automatically mean the site is excluded, it is less likely to be allocated at this time.

5.11 To ensure all aspects have been taken into account to provide the most accurate rating for the assessment of each site, key factors for suitability, availability and achievability will be identified. These factors will then be given a RAG rating to help determine the overall RAG for each site. Whilst these have not yet been finalised, potential factors may include:

Potential Factors affecting suitability:

- Agricultural land quality
- Ancient Woodland designation
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments and registered parks and gardens
- Proximity to a Planned Limit of Development
- Landscape sensitivity
- Open space
- Access to highway network
- Local Wildlife Sites
- BAP Habitats
- Mineral safeguarding areas
- Groundwater protection zones
- SSSI Impact Risk Zones

Potential Factors affecting availability:

- Land ownership
- Legal constraints
- Timescales

Potential Factors affecting achievability:

- Market interest
- Viability

Results of Stage 2

5.12 After undertaking the assessment within Stage 2, based on the assessment above, each site will have an overall RAG score, Red, Amber or Green. Those allocated Green or Amber are deemed suitable to go forward to Stage 3 of the site assessment process, and those allocated as Red will not be taken forward to Stage 3 of assessment on this occasion and are not currently included as potential allocations in the local plan. This does not mean they are entirely unsuitable for development and may be considered in the future.

For each of the sites going forward to Stage 3, we will have the following information:

- Site name
- Site location, plotted on interactive mapping
- Site area
- Current and proposed land use
- A list of constraints
- Potential mitigations for said constraints

- Availability – ownership and timescales for development
- Individual RAG ratings for the determined factors
- Overall RAG rating for each site with justification
- Development potential for each site;
 - Potential capacity (housing/new settlements)
 - Potential floorspace (employment/retail/infrastructure)
 - Potential number of pitches (Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites)

Determining development potential

5.13 In addition to the RAG rating for each site, at this stage we will also determine the development potential for each site. This means we will decide how much development we think each site could deliver. This is important to ensure best use of land and to ensure any new development is in keeping with its surroundings.

5.14 For residential sites, the development potential is determined by calculating density assumptions (number of dwellings per hectare) and the net developable area (the amount of land that is suitable for dwelling development, excluding areas for other use).

5.15 For other uses, the development potential is not a calculated figure and is determined on an individual basis, ensuring the best use of land is still essential, however existing and submitted evidence will have more influence on the determination of the available floor space dependant on the proposed use.

6. Stage 3 – Determining the Draft Allocations

6.1 The purpose of Stage 3 is to begin to identify the most suitable sites from allocation, from the list that was established following Stage 2 of the site assessment. A site being considered suitable in Stage 2, does not automatically mean it is to be allocated in the local plan.

6.2 In Stage 3, sites go through a further selection process, and this selection process will be determined by the local plans overarching objectives and through further factors of site assessment, including comparison to alternative options to ensure the most suitable allocation.

6.3 Government guidance notes reiterate that this stage is dependent on a high degree of planning judgement and will be more qualitative therefore, not completed through the RAG rating route. We envisage that a written assessment will be provided for each to help influence the decisions we will make. These will be considered alongside the outputs from Stage 2 as part of the overall selection process.

6.4 At the time of writing, a number of issues important to the plan making process are still to be determined, which makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly how draft allocations will be selected. This includes the spatial strategy, vision and plan objectives however we can confirm that sites at this stage will not be considered in isolation, the selection process will involve the comparison of sites against alternative options, taking into account the development needs of the area and any other relevant evidence that is identified.

6.5 That said, we also want to ensure any proposed development has no harm on the existing environment, or any expected harm can be easily mitigated against therefore, key factors for further site assessment are likely to include:

- Adhering to the Spatial Strategy
- Links to existing infrastructure
- Infrastructure requirements
- Flood risk
- Blue-Green Infrastructure
- Historic Environments (including Conservation Areas/Article 4 Direction)
- Tree Protection Orders
- Topography
- Previously developed land
- Archaeology
- Contamination

6.6 At Stage 3, we will be starting to think about what a proposal could look like. Documents submitted by those promoting the site will be a one source of evidence, alongside the evidence from our key stakeholders including but not limited to; highways, ecology, flooding, landscape, heritage, archaeology and biodiversity.

7. Stage 4 – Confirming the draft allocations

7.1 Following the thorough assessment of each site, taking into consideration the specialist comments from key stakeholders, and through consultation responses, we will confirm the final sites that are to be taken forward as the draft site allocations in the local plan. The rationale for the chosen sites, and those that have been excluded, will be documented alongside the evidence that formed the decisions. The output of the overall process will contain the following information:

- Site name
- Site location, plotted on interactive mapping
- Site area
- Proposed use
- The development potential for each site
- Details on the timescale for development on each site
- Individual RAG ratings for the determined factors
- Overall RAG rating for each site with justification
- Specialist comments from key stakeholders
- Final decision whether suitable for allocation or excluded.