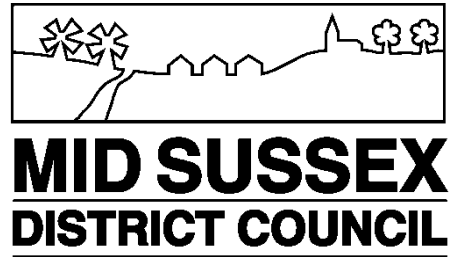


**Mid Sussex
District Council**



District Plan Review: Site Selection Methodology

October 2023

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District Plan Review: Site Selection Methodology

Introduction

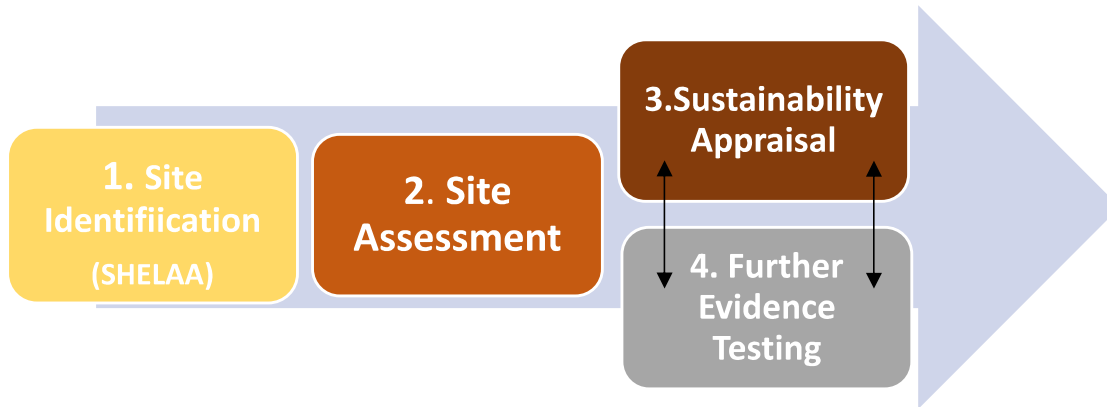
1. The Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 was adopted in March 2018. In line with the requirements of the planning regulations and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as well as the commitment set out in District Plan Policy DP4, Mid Sussex District Council (Council) is preparing a revised District Plan. It will determine the overall strategy for future development across the District to 2039 including the location of residential development to address housing need.
2. The Site Selection Methodology has been developed to enable a robust and transparent site assessment process, which will inform decisions the Council makes on future District Plan strategy and site allocations.

Purpose of the Paper

3. The purpose of this paper is to explain the methodology that will be followed to develop a shortlist of potential housing sites that could be allocated in the Revised District Plan. The final decisions on which sites will be allocated in the Revised District Plan will be informed by other evidence documents such as Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulation Assessment.
4. NPPF paragraph 11 a) states “all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects;” Therefore, this methodology will be applied to the assessment of all housing types including specialist accommodation for older people, self and custom build and Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. All housing should be provided in sustainable locations, well located to existing settlements or form part of new ‘stand-alone’ settlements, to support the delivery of sustainable communities.

Site Selection Process – Overview

5. The process of selection sites for allocation in the District Plan is a 4-step process as set out below:



6. The site selection process has been developed in order to determine the most sustainable and developable sites in accordance with the NPPF, which will ensure that the site selection is consistent with the principles of sustainable development and consistent with the policies within the Framework (NPPF, Chapter 2).
7. This paper explains the steps that will be undertaken at each stage.
8. The overall Site Selection Methodology has been subject to a focussed consultation with neighbouring local authorities and the Council's Developer Liaison Group which is formed of representatives from across the development industry. Comments received and the Council's response to these comments can be found in Appendix 3.

Stage 1: Site Identification - SHELAA

9. The initial step has been to identify the pool of sites for consideration and assessment. The NPPF requires all local authorities to prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA), to enable them to have a clear understanding of the land available in their area.
10. The Council prepared an updated SHELAA (April 2020) to support the preparation of the Site Allocations DPD. It included a review of the methodology to ensure that the new SHELAA is robust and complies with the most recent Government Guidance reflecting best practice. The methodology was prepared in consultation with a Member Working Group, representatives from the development industry, other Local Authorities and Town and Parish Councils. The methodology does not depart from that set out in the NPPF; it remains robust and reflects latest guidance, therefore a review of the methodology is not required at this stage.
11. The full detailed SHELAA methodology is available to view on the website at www.midsussex.gov.uk/SHELAA.
12. The latest 2023 SHELAA includes:
 - Sites included in the 2020 SHELAA that supported the preparation of the Site Allocations DPD;
 - Sites submitted during the two rounds of consultation on the Site Allocations DPD;
 - The Call for Sites that the Council held between 7th January and 19th February 2021;
 - Sites that came forward following the call for sites up until an agreed date that allowed sufficient time for the site to be assessed and included within the next the SHELAA update; and
 - Sites submitted to the Mid Sussex District Plan Consultation Draft (2021-2039) (Regulation 18) consultation undertaken between 7th November to 19th December 2022.
13. The 2023 SHELAA includes approximately 272 housing sites. These sites form the pool of sites for the preparation of the District Plan Review and subject to the Site Selection Process outlined at Stages 2 – 4 below.
14. The SHELAA contains sites with a yield of 5+ dwellings, there is no upper limit for consideration for allocation within the District Plan Review. For the purposes of the Site Selection process, sites have been classified into the following categories (as different considerations are made for 'Significant' sites during the process).

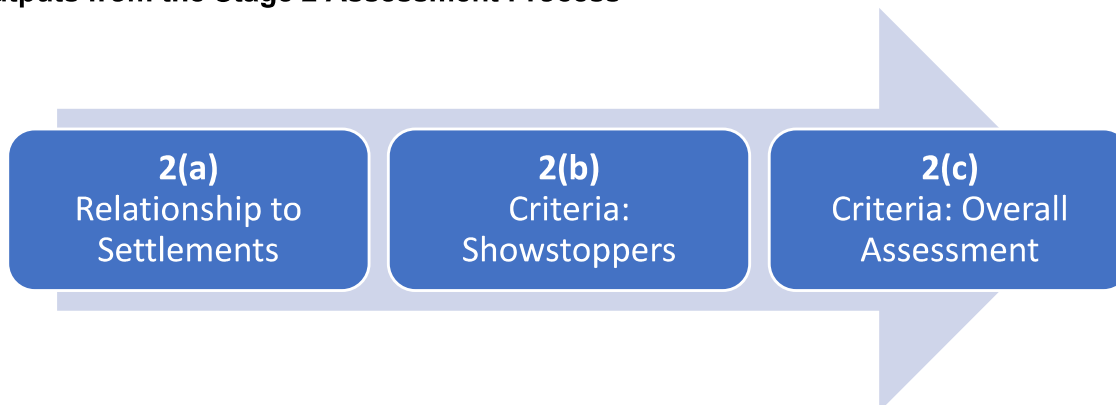
| Classification | Approximate Yield |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Small Scale | 5 - 49 |
| Medium Scale | 50 - 299 |
| Large Scale | 300 - 999 |
| Significant | 1,000+ |

Stage 2: Site Selection

15. The SHELAA 2023 (Stage 1) provides the pool of sites, from which specific deliverable and developable sites will be identified and allocated through the Plan making process.

16. Stage 2 of the process is the detailed assessment of sites. This includes three steps by which sites can be rejected resulting in a final shortlist of sites for further testing at Stage 3. This will ensure that only the most suitable, sustainable and deliverable sites are proposed for allocation. The site selection process broadly follows that adopted for the Site Allocations DPD, which the Council considers to be robust and transparent and has been tested at the Site Allocations DPD Examination.

Outputs from the Stage 2 Assessment Process

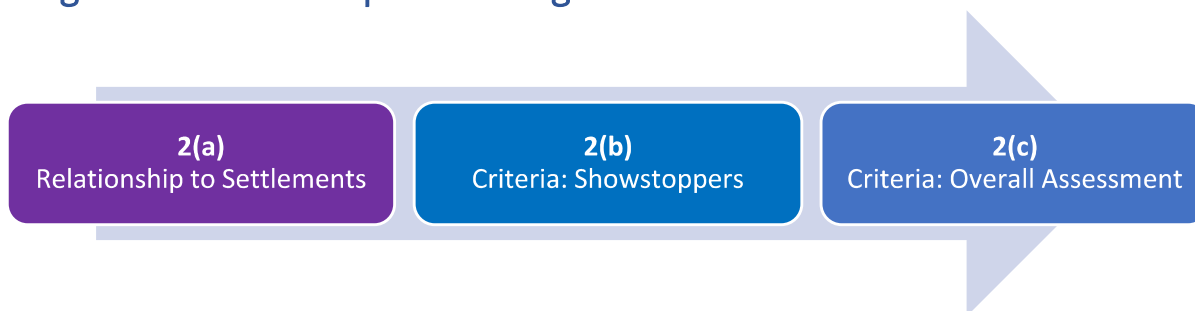


17. Stage 2(a) will assess the relationship of the site to existing settlements. Sites that are disconnected from existing settlements, that cannot provide significant on-site facilities/services (and are therefore not likely to represent sustainable development as set out in the NPPF) will be rejected at this first stage.

Assessment against Site Selection Criteria – Stages 2(b) and 2(c)

18. A set of selection criteria have been developed in order to determine the most sustainable and developable sites in accordance with the NPPF, which will ensure that the site selection is consistent with the principles of sustainable development and consistent with the policies within the Framework (NPPF, Chapter 2).
19. The Selection Criteria are set out in **Appendix 1**. Sites classified as “Significant” (1,000+ dwellings) will also be subject to additional scrutiny in light of the additional information gathered from the focussed questionnaires, as set out in **Appendix 2**. Because of the more challenging nature of delivering larger scaled sites, due to their infrastructure requirements, constraints, on-site provision of facilities and services, land assembly/ delivery mechanisms, and likely phasing (including potential continued development beyond the plan period), additional considerations and due diligence are required. Similar questionnaires were sent to the other “Non-significant” sites for consistency and to ensure that the Council has the most up-to-date information.

Stage 2a: Relationship to Existing Settlements



20. The NPPF states that Plans should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development “all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development” (NPPF, paragraph 11) and “be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and “be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable” (NPPF, para 16). It goes on to state that “Planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability” (NPPF, para 68).
21. In order for development to be considered to be sustainable it needs to be supported by the appropriate infrastructure and services, such as shops, places of employment and education, which are generally found within the Towns and Villages of Mid Sussex. For development to be sustainable it should also seek to protect and enhance the natural environment. Development that is isolated and disconnected from existing settlements is unlikely to contribute towards a sustainable pattern of development.
22. A distinction is made during the assessment process between ‘Significant’ sites (capable of delivering 1,000 homes or more) and other sites, as sites of significant scale can act as ‘stand-alone’ settlements supported by on-site infrastructure and services which could enable them to be self-sufficient and deliver sustainable places. All ‘Significant’ sites progress directly to Stage 2(b).
23. Stage 2(a) of the process is to exclude those sites that will not contribute to a sustainable pattern of development. An assessment will be made as to the degree of separation from an existing built-up area boundary (as defined on the Policies Maps). This assessment will be based on the consideration of:
 - proximity of site to defined built up area boundary;
 - physical separation of site from existing built-up area by features such as ancient woodland and watercourses;
 - ability to safely access the site, on foot via existing footpath from nearest settlement
24. The sites rejected at this stage will not be subject to assessment against the selection criteria at Stages 2(b) and 2(c) as they do not represent sustainable development.

Stages 2(b) and 2(c) – Assessment against Site Selection Criteria

25. All sites progressing from Stage 2(a) will be assessed against the full Site Selection Criteria.
26. The criteria include relevant land designations, constraints, access to services, infrastructure and transport. The methodology has been developed to provide a clear framework to assess each housing site on a consistent basis to develop a shortlist of the most suitable and sustainable sites for inclusion in the District Plan.
27. There are 14 criteria which each housing site will be assessed against, split into three parts:
 - Environmental Constraints
 - Deliverability
 - Accessibility

28. The impact on each criterion is graded using a ‘traffic light’ system dependent upon its potential impact:

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| | Very Positive Impact |
| | Positive Impact |
| | Neutral Impact |
| | Negative Impact |
| | Very Negative Impact |

29. For some criteria, there is more than one way of achieving a ‘very positive impact’ or ‘very negative impact’. Similarly, some criteria may not achieve any negative impacts as all possible outcomes are positive. The ‘very negative’ impacts are usually reserved for criteria that are highlighted within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as a significant constraint to development, or those which would “significantly and demonstrably” outweigh any benefits.
30. At Stage 2(c), sites will also be considered against other NPPF considerations, such as whether a site is in employment use or playing fields, the loss of which would be contrary to national policy.
31. Since Regulation 18 of the Mid Sussex District Plan, an amendment has been made to the two Heritage criteria; Criterion 5: Listed Building and Criterion 6: Conservation Area. The change reflects comments received at Regulation 18 and the Members Working Group, as well as a review of the NPPF, that ‘great weight should be given to the [heritage] asset’s conservation [...] irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to [...] less than substantial harm to its significance.’. Therefore, any site concluding ‘Less than Substantial Harm’ will achieve ‘negative impact’, unless an assessment or review of heritage assets has been undertaken to enable the consideration of potential suitable mitigation on the identified heritage assets of the proposed scheme. In this circumstance, a ‘Neutral impact’ is reached.
32. A full list of the criteria is set out in **Appendix 1**.

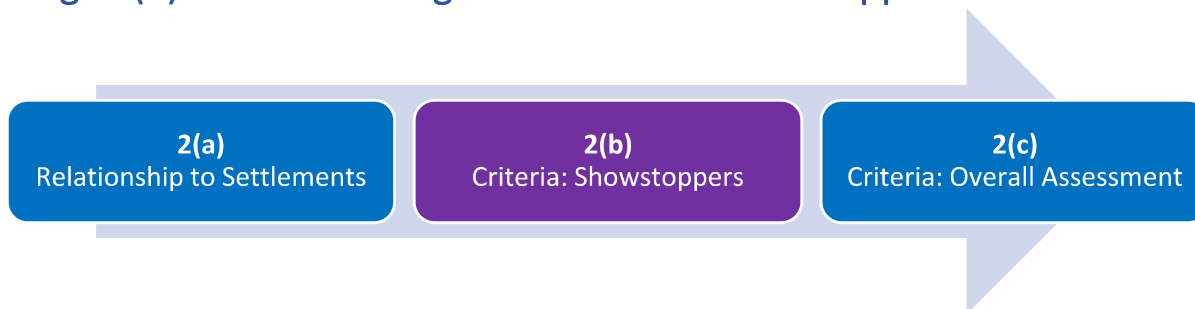
Assessment and weighting

33. The first section of the assessment considers the Environmental constraints. This section of the criteria has been developed to reflect the requirement of the NPPF to steer development away from the most environmentally sensitive locations. The Council will use the site selection stage to ensure that the greatest weight is given to those criteria.
34. The second section of the assessment looks at the Developability considerations. This will take account factors such as availability of sites and the achievability of appropriate and safe access.
35. The third section of the assessment looks at Accessibility; the proximity and connection of sites in relation to services to ensure sites are located in the most sustainable places.
36. Once all the sites have been assessed they will be ranked against other sites, according to how they perform against the Site Selection criteria. This ranking will not be a simple totalling of the number of 'Very Positive' → 'Very Negative' impacts because some criteria carry more weight than others. For example, the impact on AONB carries more weight than distance to a local service.

Evidence

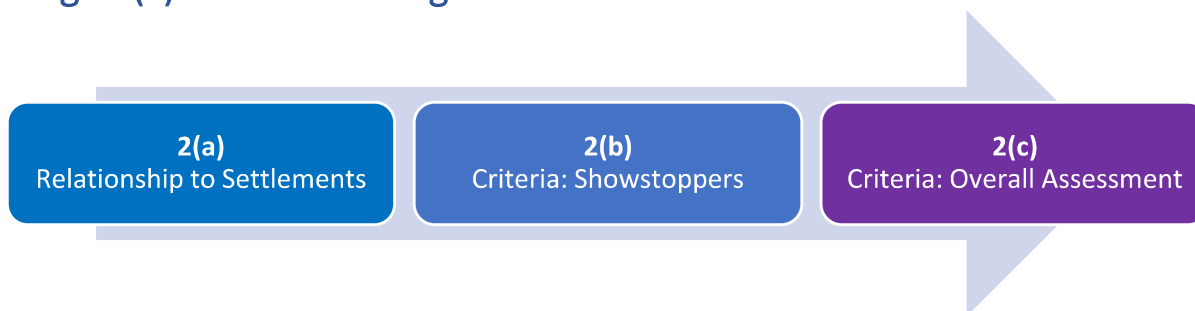
37. The assessment conclusions will be justified by the supporting evidence base and through liaison with stakeholders and statutory consultees. The source of evidence which inform the assessment are listed alongside the criteria information in the Assessment Framework.
38. The assessment will also be based on information provided by the site promoters at least up until the point of assessment. The Council welcomes the submission of any evidence/technical reports/etc that would assist in undertaking the assessment.
39. It may be possible to improve the impact against certain criteria by mitigating negative impacts. However, in order to provide a consistent approach, it is not for the Council, at this stage, to establish the specific mitigation that would be required in order to improve any negative impacts. However, a high-level assessment will be made as to whether negative impacts could, in theory, be mitigated (for example, Ancient Woodland can be mitigated by the application of a 15m buffer or excluding the area from the developable area of the site), as already noted in the Site Selection Criteria.
40. If any specific mitigation measures/infrastructure provision has been provided by site promoters within their site submission or subsequent correspondence, these will be considered when undertaking the assessments. If the promoters do not provide this information, it will be assumed that no mitigation/additional infrastructure is to be accounted for within the assessment process. The Council will continue to engage proactively with site promoters to explore mitigation measures, and promoters will have the opportunity to comment and provide further information on mitigation (should it be required) once the initial assessments have been completed.

Stage 2(b): Assessment against Criteria – Showstoppers



41. In order to ensure that the detailed assessment strictly focusses on those sites most likely to be considered reasonable alternatives, an initial review of the site assessments will take place to exclude sites with the greatest constraint i.e. showstoppers, or where a significant proportion of a site is affected. This will ensure that sites are not excluded in their entirety where alterations to a site boundary could be made to remove absolute constraints or where areas of absolute constraints could be considered for other uses.
42. Showstoppers are those environmental constraints and deliverability considerations for which the site assessment can result in a very negative impact against the site assessment criteria ('red'). This approach is supported by the NPPF which is clear that development in the most environmentally sensitive locations should be avoided. Therefore, the Council will use this stage of the process to ensure that the greatest weight is given to those relevant criteria. See list below:
 - High Impact on the High Weald AONB
 - Significant area of flood risk/Historic flood events
 - Direct loss or harm to ancient woodland
 - High impact on biodiversity designation of national importance (SSSI)
 - Substantial harm to a Listed Building
 - Substantial harm to a Conservation Area
 - Severe impact on archaeological asset
 - Severe access issues that are not likely to be mitigated
43. In addition, there are some sites within the SHELAA that lack evidence to demonstrate that the site is available for development (for example, where no contact can be made with the landowners). These sites will also be excluded at this stage.
44. The sites rejected at this stage will not be subject to further assessment as they do not represent sustainable development.

Stage 2(c): Assessment against Criteria - Overall Assessment



45. The sites left in the pool of sites once Stage 2(a) and 2(b) have been completed will be subject to further detailed assessment taking into account the performance against all criteria. Whilst there will not be any 'Showstoppers' on these sites, a combination of negative impacts against the criteria as a whole may render the site unsuitable for allocation, and therefore be rejected at this stage. A site may also be rejected at this stage if the loss of the site's current use is concluded to be contrary to national policy.
46. The degree of constraints and how this could impact on potential development will be considered, as well as whether they can be overcome. Other considerations such as planning history will also be reviewed at this stage in order to provide a meaningful overview of the constraints impacting each site proposed for development.
47. The assessment will provide consideration of sites against 'Made' Neighbourhood Plans, if applicable. There is not a specific criterion for this within the assessment criteria due to the differences in content of the various Neighbourhood Plans, and the need to be consistent when assessing sites, however commentary will be provided which will inform the conclusion. The assessment will take into account any land use designations in the Neighbourhood Plans on the site and consideration will be given to how this designation may impact on the delivery of the site for housing uses. However, it is important to note that the objective of the District Plan will be to, as a minimum, meet the housing needs of Mid Sussex and this may result in conflict with policies in Neighbourhood Plans. Any such conflict would be discussed with the relevant Town or Parish Council.
48. A 'fact-checking' exercise will be undertaken on all sites that reach at least Stage 2(b) to ensure factual accuracy of results. The findings of the assessment will be shared with the site proponents of each site who will be invited to report any identified factual errors to the Council to inform the final assessment.
49. This process will provide site proponents with the opportunity to verify quantitative conclusions or note if the assessment has overlooked proximity to a key feature or service which might affect the overall suitability of the site. It will also be an opportunity to review the way in which officers applied the Council's assessment methodology, though the fact checking exercise is not designed to be a forum for disputing qualitative findings and professional judgement of officers.
50. A 'fact checking' exercise was undertaken in November 2021. The comments received from site promoters and the Council's response can be found at Appendix 2 of the Site Selection Conclusions Paper. A similar exercise will be done for new sites submitted during the Regulation 18 consultation.
51. A qualitative commentary will be provided to detail the rationale for excluding sites at this stage.

52. The sites rejected at this stage will not be subject to further assessment and will not be included in the 'development scenarios' that will be tested through Sustainability Appraisal and other detailed evidence testing at Stage 3.

Stage 3: Scenario / In-Combination Testing

53. All sites that progress past Stage 2(c) will be subject to detailed testing and due diligence, as these form the sites with the greatest potential for allocation.
54. Whilst Stages 2(a), 2(b) and 2(c) will be carried out on an individual site basis, Stage 3 includes testing the sites “in combination” with each other by way of likely development scenarios or testing of a ‘preferred option’.

Further evidence testing

55. Once a development scenario(s) has been developed, these will then be subject to further evidence testing which will include:
 - Transport Modelling
 - Habitats Regulations Assessment
 - Air Quality Modelling
 - Viability Assessment
56. Findings from the evidence testing will inform the conclusions within the Sustainability Appraisal.

Sustainability Appraisal

57. A key part of the evidence base of the District Plan is the Sustainability Appraisal (SA). It is a systematic process that must be carried out during the preparation of a local plan. Its role is to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which the plan, when judged against all reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives. The SA allows for the consideration of opportunities to improve environmental, social and economic conditions in the local area and identify how to mitigate the impact of development.
58. All sites considered to have potential for allocation at the end of Stage 2 will be assessed against the Sustainability Framework to consider the sustainability credentials of each site independently and cumulatively. The findings of this work will help identify potential scenarios to address the housing need in the district and corresponding preferred options.
59. The SA is applied as an iterative learning process running parallel to the preparation of the District Plan. Therefore, the findings of the further evidence testing will inform the content of the SA, as well as the SA identifying further options that may need to be tested further through the evidence base.

Stage 3 Outputs

60. The SA will draw conclusions on the most sustainable development options and report the process in full. An additional topic paper which concludes on the preferred development scenario, taking into account the findings of the SA as well as other considerations through further evidence testing, will document the reasons for the preferred development scenario to be included within the District Plan Review.

Next Steps

61. All SHELAA sites will be assessed through the methodology outlined above.
62. The Site Selection methodology provides a clear and transparent process for the selection of sites for inclusion in the development strategy of the District Plan. The selection process will enable evidence-based decisions to be made on the most sustainable development strategy for Mid Sussex.
63. The NPPF states that plans should “provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas” (NPPF, paragraph 11). Until the site assessment work is undertaken it is not known to what extent the District Plan will be able to meet the housing needs of Mid Sussex and potentially unmet need arising elsewhere. The site selection process may therefore need to be an iterative process, with the outcomes at Stages 2 and 3 revisited if necessary, to ensure these requirements have been fully considered.