

North Hertfordshire District Council
North Hertfordshire Housing Capacity Study
Non-Technical Summary Report
May 2003

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North Hertfordshire Housing Capacity Study

Non-Technical Summary Report

1. The purpose of this Housing Capacity Study is to provide objective advice to North Hertfordshire District Council on the housing potential within the four main towns and fifteen villages. This will assist the Council's decision-making in respect of housing allocations in the current Local Plan Review. The main Housing Capacity Study report includes advice on key development and phasing considerations.
2. Halcrow's approach to urban capacity studies follows the identification of capacity sources, surveying capacity, assessing yield and discounting potential stages set out in the Government's guidance on urban capacity studies "Tapping the Potential - Assessing Urban Housing Capacity: Towards Better Practice".
3. The towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston and the villages of Ashwell, Barkway, Barley, Pirton, Sandon (Church End), Therfield, Codicote, Ickleford, Kimpton, Knebworth, Whitwell, Little Wymondley, Breachwood Green, Great Offley and Weston, were identified as the settlements to be assessed for capacity because they have the services and facilities to justify consideration for housing allocations.
4. Urban capacity sites were identified using desktop surveys. Sites considered inviolate (including historic sites or environmentally sensitive land) were excluded from the initial capacity assessment.
5. The remaining land in the towns was divided into two categories for survey purposes. Town centre areas were surveyed on a street-by-street basis. In the remaining residential (homogenous) character areas, "uncharacteristic" one-off sites were also visited individually.
6. Seven homogenous character areas were identified in the residential areas, with similar plot layouts and sizes, street pattern and architectural style. To identify possible infill and backland development sites, sample areas from each type of homogenous area were surveyed on a street-by-street basis.
7. As an initial discount of unconstrained capacity, a large number of identified sites were removed from the capacity estimates on the basis of the sustainable development and urban design criteria devised by Halcrow and set out in section 3.4 of the main Housing Capacity Study report.
8. Following an initial market viability assessment retained sites were identified as likely to come forward at different Review Plan Periods. Accessibility Catchment Areas for the town centre, railway stations and bus routes were identified in Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston, to help inform site capacity estimates and the Local Plan Review site selection process.
9. Following comprehensive desktop and on-ground surveys 405 sites were identified and recorded on a GIS database for future reference. Of the 405 sites originally identified, 257 sites were retained (over 63%) and 148 sites removed.
10. Appendix B of the main Housing Capacity Study report contains schedules including a full assessment and capacity estimates for each site. The main report Appendix D maps show all identified sites.

11. Based on the urban design criteria, the site analyses, and market viability assessments, urban design exercises were prepared for 16 identified categories of site under different planning policy scenarios. The sites selected for the exercises are representative of the types of sites found in the four main towns and fifteen villages.
12. Design exercises, set out in Appendix C of the main Housing Capacity Study report, were prepared to provide density multipliers to use on sites with similar characteristics. Different design approaches (referred to as Scenarios) were applied to each identified category of site.
13. Under Scenario 1, reflecting Local Plan amenity, off-street parking and private open space standards, 3,722 additional dwellings could be accommodated in the four towns and fifteen villages.
14. Under Scenario 2, whereby Local Plan standards are revised in line with PPG3 "Housing" to focus on a flexible, design-led approach and providing higher densities, the capacity figure could be 5,322 additional dwellings (over 43% more than Scenario 1).
15. Under Scenario 3, a more creative approach, again involving a relaxation of Local Plan standards, but also combining identified sites, often with additional land, providing opportunities to create better residential and mixed-use environments at still higher densities, the capacity figure could be 5,150 additional dwellings. This lower figure has arisen principally because the Design Exercise 8 Scenario 3 study echoes the generally spacious and lower density characteristics of the surrounding area producing a lower capacity estimate than the Design Exercise 8 Scenario 2 study.
16. It is apparent from the work undertaken on this Study that there could be significant potential in the four main towns and fifteen villages to accommodate additional residential development.
17. By applying the most appropriate Scenario to each category of site, which was assessed on the basis of urban design criteria, site location and realistic capability of being developed, but did not always return the highest possible dwelling capacity, a "Best Fit" capacity figure was calculated.
18. The Study Best Fit figure is 4,122 additional dwellings (10% more than under Scenario 1). Based on the findings of the Study market viability assessment, this capacity would be phased as follows: 1312 dwellings between 2003-2010; 1510 dwellings between 2011-2015; and 1300 dwellings 2016 plus.