



BEDFORD BOROUGH Local Plan 2050

DRAFT FOR INFORMATION ONLY

SITE SELECTION METHODOLOGY

JULY 2026



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



1. Introduction

Scope of the methodology report

We (Bedford Borough Council) are producing an updated evidence base to inform the development of the new Bedford Borough Local Plan to guide the future growth and development of the borough through to 2050.

A key component of the evidence base is the preparation of a strategic housing and employment land availability assessment (SHELAA) in accordance with the government's national guidance. It functions as a technical document to assess potential site opportunities, ensuring a steady supply of housing and employment land to meet future needs.

The SHELAA identifies sites and broad locations with development potential across the borough, while excluding those deemed unsuitable. Although the assessment does not determine which sites will be formally allocated, it provides valuable information on the potential suitability of sites and the likelihood of development coming forward (availability and achievability). The output from the assessment will be a list of sites deemed to be deliverable or developable during the plan period, from which suitable sites can be selected to include in the local plan to meet future development needs.

In May 2022, we published a housing and employment land availability assessment to inform the preparation of the Local Plan 2040, which was subsequently withdrawn in October

2025. We have since reviewed and refined the site selection methodology from that plan to reflect updates to national planning policy, local priorities and current best practice.

This document sets out a revised methodology outlining how we intend to carry out each stage of the SHELAA, including the processes used to identify sites and assess them.

As well as assessing potential new development sites, the SHELAA will review existing unimplemented local plan allocations to confirm that the proposed use / site is still suitable, available and achievable. This includes assessing whether the current use remains the most appropriate or whether an alternative use, or a different mix of uses, should be explored through preparation of the new local plan. The timetable for preparation of the new local plan is set out on our [Bedford Borough Local Plan 2050 webpage](#).

It is important to note that the SHELAA will be a 'live' document. Any information will be correct at the time of publication. Any subsequent changes will be integrated as appropriate.

Consultation on the draft methodology

Please note: This methodology is provided for **background information purposes only** at this stage and we will be seeking your views on this draft methodology alongside the consultation on the scope and emerging priorities of the new Bedford Borough Local Plan 2050, which will start in September 2026.

2. Policy context

National Planning Policy Framework

This methodology will be prepared in line with the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which is due to be finalised in summer 2026.

Policy PM9: Identifying land for development of the draft NPPF (December 2025) states that:

1. *Development plans should be informed by an assessment of the land available in their area to meet development needs.*
2. *For plans that allocate specific sites for development the assessment should be undertaken with reference to national guidance¹⁵ and include:*
 - a. *A thorough site identification process to identify a sufficient range and quantity of potential sites;*
 - b. *An assessment of the availability, suitability and achievability (including likely viability) of those sites;*
 - c. *An assessment of the amount of development those sites have the potential to accommodate and the potential timescales over which development could be delivered¹⁶; and*
 - d. *The identification of the most appropriate sites for development taking into account the emerging vision and spatial strategy of the plan and the information above.*

Footnote 15 states that relevant tools and templates are published in [Create or update a local plan using the new system – GOV.UK](#).

Footnote 16 adds: *“taking into account the policies in this Framework, associated infrastructure requirements and their potential to be addressed, and the impact of any relevant environmental plans o*

r strategies (including Environmental Delivery Plans)”.

National guidance

The government’s [information and resources for local authorities on creating a local plan under the new plan-making system](#) - published on 27 November 2025 - sets out a recommended process to follow when identifying, assessing and selecting sites for local plans. The guidance focuses on:

- a framework and supporting methodologies to identify sites;
- what data to collect during the call for sites process;
- how to assess sites that are identified;
- an approach to selecting the sites that meet the long-term vision of the new local plan; and
- documenting decision making on why the sites have been selected.

3. Methodology

Overview of the site selection process

The section of national guidance on [selecting sites for development](#) sets out a four-stage process:



The focus of the SHELAA methodology is on stages 1 and 2 of the process. The assessment and findings relating to stages 3 and 4 set out above will be presented in separate evidence base documents.

Stage 1 – Identifying sites

Desktop review

National guidance states that plan makers need to be proactive in identifying potential sites from existing sources.

Table 1 sets out the data sources that can support the desktop identification of sites and broad locations.

Table 1: Data sources for desktop identification of sites

Data source	Examples
Existing housing and economic development allocations from the current adopted Local Plan not yet with planning permission	- Local plans and neighbourhood plans - Planning application records - Building control records
Planning permissions for housing and economic development that are unimplemented or under construction	- Planning application records - Development starts and completions monitoring records - Building control records
Planning applications that have been refused or withdrawn	Planning application records

Data source	Examples
Sites with permission in principle and identified brownfield land	- Planning application records - Brownfield land register
Pre-application submissions (in agreement with developers)	Pre-application records
Land in the local authority's ownership and other public sector land	- Local authority records - National register of public sector land - HM Land Registry information - Engagement with public sector bodies - Identification of surplus or likely to become surplus land
Vacant and derelict land and buildings	- Local authority empty property register - Call for sites and development opportunities - Identification of underutilised assets - Engagement with commercial property sector - Brownfield land register
Land in alternative use that may be suitable for redevelopment	Local and neighbourhood plans



Data source	Examples
	• Call for sites and development opportunities • Regeneration appraisals • Planning application records • Ordnance Survey maps • Aerial imagery • Site surveys
Opportunities to intensify uses or redevelop areas	• Local and neighbourhood plans • Planning application records • Ordnance Survey maps • Aerial imagery • Site surveys • Discussions with internal stakeholders
Potential opportunities to extend existing settlements	• Local and neighbourhood plans • Planning application records • Ordnance Survey maps • Aerial imagery • Site surveys
Potential opportunities to identify new free-standing settlements	• Call for sites and development opportunities • Local and neighbourhood plans • Planning application records • Ordnance Survey maps

Data source	Examples
	• Aerial imagery • Site surveys • Viability evidence
Planning policy evidence base	• Sites considered through previous housing and employment availability assessments • Sites identified as having development potential in emerging evidence base studies • Call for sites and development opportunities

Proposed uses

We will identify sites that can support a range of different types of housing and economic uses. The following uses will be assessed through the SHELAA:

- Housing - market housing for sale or rent, affordable housing, build to rent, supported and specialist housing, such as homes for older people and disabled people, self-build and custom-build housing, student accommodation, pitch and plot locations to meet the needs of gypsies, travellers and travelling show people.
- Economic – offices, industrial, logistics, data centres, research and development, town centre uses, leisure, tourism.
- Mixed uses – a combination of uses.

Site thresholds

Regarding size and type of sites, national guidance advises that plan makers should identify a range of different size sites to create a diverse mix of development opportunities, helping to meet the specific needs identified in the plan process. These range from small-scale sites through to large-scale development opportunities and broad locations where appropriate.

In previous assessments, sites under 5 dwellings (residential) or under 0.25 hectares (economic) were filtered out and the same thresholds are proposed to continue. Site proposals

below these thresholds are not precluded from coming forward through the planning application process. In plan making terms, sites of less than 5 dwellings will be counted as windfall.

Call for sites and development opportunities

Alongside a desktop review, we are running a 'call for sites and development opportunities' exercise to invite site submissions from landowners, developers and other interested parties. The opportunity to submit sites and development opportunities will close at midnight on Friday 30 October 2026.

These submissions will feed into the SHELAA and help identify all potential sites that could contribute to meeting the borough's future development needs.

If your site has previously been submitted to the council as part of a previous HELAA, we ask you to resubmit your site in this call for sites to ensure all the information is up to date. This will ensure an accurate assessment of its suitability, availability and achievability.

In accordance with national guidance, the call for sites exercise will seek the information set out in table 2:

Table 2: Information to be collected through the call for sites and development opportunities exercise

Category	What should be included
Respondent details	- Contact details - Relationship to site – for example, owner or developer
Site location	- Site name and address, including postcode - Grid references - Digital mapping – option to draw or upload a GIS layer / shapefile of the site boundary - Parish and ward location
Site information	- Site size - Type of site – for example, is it previously developed - Previous and current use - Surrounding land uses - Relevant planning history - Any pre-application discussions - Details of vehicle access to and from public highway
Proposed site use	- Single or multiple use - Specific or preferred use(s) - Potential scale of development - Proposed site density (dwellings per hectare)

Category	What should be included
Known constraints	- Needing investigation before development – for example, flood risk issues, the presence of important or protected trees, proximity to heritage assets, proximity to international, national, or local wildlife sites, ground conditions, public rights of way, topography - Mitigations for known risks
Any other considerations	- If the site has multiple owners - Any critical or limiting covenants on the land - When the development could start and the reasons for this - Proximity to services / infrastructure - Details of market interest such as evidence of discussions with developers / housebuilders - Likely viability – for example, if there are any known factors that could result in abnormal development costs - Alignment to local and national planning policy requirements



Site nominations should be submitted through the online survey form on our [Bedford Borough Local Plan 2050 webpage](#).

During the consultation period, you will receive an automated response to confirm that we have received your submission. We will assess your proposed site using the methodology set out in this document. If we need any further information, we will contact you. Any information provided that is not relevant at this stage may not be used. We will hold data submitted in accordance with data protection principles.

Any sites submitted after the end of the formal 'call for sites and development opportunities' exercise will be assessed as part of the next update of the SHELAA.

Listing potential sites

Following the identification of sites, we will compile a list of all the potential sites. We will check the list to ensure sites for the same use are not duplicated as they may have been identified through multiple sources. Where there is duplication of a site or broad location with identical boundaries, the site or broad location will only be assessed once within the SHELAA.

Where site or broad location boundaries overlap, the first action will be to explore the reason for this overlap. This can be done by considering the source(s) of the sites/broad locations in the first instance. In the situation that a more

recent submission or data source supersedes an earlier submission or data source, the more recent boundary will be used.

All site submissions will be recorded in a GIS shapefile which will include the site boundary and information in an attribute table. We will utilise the object ID field in the attribute table to assign each submission a site unique reference number. This information is capable of being exported into .csv or .xlsx format via power automate for analysis and publication.

Publishing sites

In January 2027, we will publish a list of sites identified through the call for sites and development opportunities exercise with an interactive map showing the name of and location of the site and suggested land use. At this stage, the sites identified through the call for sites and development opportunities exercise will not have been assessed and no decisions will have been made on which sites may or may not be taken forward into the draft plan.

Stage 2 – Assessing sites

Categorising sites

The purpose of categorising sites is to give an early indication of the type and amount of different development opportunities available, signpost early in the process where evidence may be needed to support certain types of



development opportunities and enable us to assess similar types of sites consistently. Categorising sites will also help to inform our spatial strategy and inform decisions on the types of sites to take forward as draft allocations in stage 3.

We will categorise our sites based on information provided in the call for sites and development opportunities form:

Housing – new settlements; town centre redevelopment and around transport hubs; development within the urban area; development adjacent to the urban area boundary; development within settlement policy area boundaries; development adjacent to settlement policy area boundaries; development outside of settlement policy area boundaries; gypsy and traveller pitches; travelling showpeople plots; boat dweller residential moorings.

Employment – research and development; local employment space; strategic logistics and distribution; data centre; office; employment-led mixed use; other.

Town centre uses – retail; food and drink; leisure and entertainment; arts, culture and tourism; office; other commercial services; other.

Visitor accommodation – hotel; aparthotel; guest house, bed and breakfast; holiday lodges, cabins; camping, glamping; conference facility; other.

Leisure and recreation – outdoor sports facilities; indoor leisure and recreation; visitor attraction; country park, public open space, Local Green Space; children's play facility; other.

Community use – village hall; community hub or workspace; community library; worship space; cultural centre; day nursery; health and wellbeing; education; other.

Other land uses – renewable energy generation; utilities infrastructure; telecommunications; water and waste water infrastructure; transport infrastructure; battery energy storage; other.

Sites may be included in more than one category. We will not double count a site and its development potential at this stage.

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

We will begin our assessment by undertaking an initial 'sift' to filter out any obviously unsuitable sites or broad locations where constraints are so significant they are likely to make a site unsuitable for development, and where further detailed assessment of the site's suitability would not be required. The

reasons why sites may be excluded at this stage are set out in table 2.

Table 2: Reasons for exclusion of sites during initial sift

Category	Reason for exclusion
Sites delivering fewer than 5 dwellings or economic development on sites of less than 0.25 hectares.	Sites will be excluded from further assessment as they do not meet the size thresholds.
Planning status	Sites to be excluded if a permitted development covering the whole area has been completed, or if development has commenced and there is no further development potential.
Sites within flood zones 3a (high probability of flooding) and 3b (functional floodplain)	Sites that are wholly within flood zones 3a or 3b will be excluded from further assessment. Sites that lie partly within flood zone 3 will be carefully considered at the next stage of assessment.
International and national biodiversity and geological designations	There are no internationally designated sites of biodiversity or geological value in Bedford borough, although there are eight Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs),

Category	Reason for exclusion
	which are national designations, found across the borough. Sites that are wholly or partially within a SSSI boundary will be excluded from further assessment.
Scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens	Sites that are wholly within the boundary of a scheduled monument or registered parks and gardens will be excluded from further assessment. If the designation covers only part of the site, a judgement will be made based upon the sensitivities of the designation and likely impacts of development.
Ancient woodland designation	Ancient woodland refers to areas of woodland that have existed continuously in England since at least 1600 AD. Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable habitat and therefore any sites wholly or partially within ancient woodland will be excluded from further assessment.
Designated Local Green Space	Sites that are wholly within a designated Local Green Space will be excluded from further assessment. If the designation covers only part of the site, a judgement will be made based



Category	Reason for exclusion
	upon the sensitivities of the designation and likely impacts of development.

Following the initial ‘sift’, we will have a list of sites considered ‘currently unsuitable for development’ and a list of ‘potentially suitable’ sites. All sites excluded at this stage will still be mapped and the final SHELAA will list the site as unsuitable, alongside the reason explaining its exclusion.

All other sites which are not excluded will be carried forward to the next stage of assessment, which will consider a site’s suitability, availability and achievability as well as its development potential. This stage will involve a more detailed desktop survey including seeking input from technical consultees and from other stakeholders as necessary and may include a survey/site visit.

Assessment methodology and scoring

When assessing the suitability, availability and achievability of each site, national guidance advice is to compare each site and give them a proportional score using a RAG (red, amber, green) scoring method. We will assess each site against the constraints and sustainability considerations that are relevant

to our sites and our local area. We will score each site’s suitability, availability and achievability as a red, amber or green depending on the impact the constraints have and their potential to be mitigated and the opportunities the development of the site could present.

Suitability

National guidance states that a site can be considered suitable if it would provide an appropriate location for development when considered against relevant constraints and their potential to be mitigated and opportunities that development of the site could present. Guidance advises plan-makers to consider national planning policy and any relevant policies in a spatial development strategy (SDS)¹ covering this area. The other factors to consider will depend on the characteristics of our local area and the matters we want to consider. We have developed a set of selection criteria to assess each site on a consistent basis under a series of themes: location, accessibility, physical constraints, and environmental constraints and designations. The selection criteria are set out in appendix 1.

Our suitability assessment will be underpinned by the local plan evidence base and engagement with stakeholders and statutory consultees. The key evidence documents that we

¹ There is no spatial development strategy in place covering the borough of Bedford at the time of writing this report.



intend to prepare are listed in our [Project Initiation Document](#). The evidence and/or data source which inform the assessment are listed alongside the criteria information. The assessment will also be based on information provided in the call for sites form and any supporting information from the landowner/developer or site promoter.

If a constraint or designation exists, we will assess what impact it may have on the development potential of the site, as part of our overall suitability assessment conclusion, taking account of all relevant factors. In accordance with the NPPF, some criteria carry more weight than others. Some criteria may score more positively where negative effects can be mitigated. We will therefore make a high-level judgement on whether, in principle, such impacts could be reduced. If any specific mitigation measures or infrastructure provision has been provided in the call for sites form or within the site submission, these will be considered when undertaking the assessment. We will seek advice from technical consultees, where appropriate, to verify any conclusions. Where a constraint does not completely rule out all the development on the site at some stage, for example by fundamentally altering the site boundary to remove constraints, we will assess the site and record the constraint and change we have made. The development potential of the site will take account of this.

We will consider the opportunities presented through each site (and cumulatively). For example, bringing a disused listed building back into use, contribution to regeneration activity or assistance in reducing multiple deprivation within an area.

We will assess potential environmental benefits, such as the role of the site in delivering the Bedfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, creating new habitats or strengthening links to existing habitats, connecting to the green infrastructure network, improving access to existing green space, enhancing the quality of current green spaces and providing new green space. We will also consider the location of the site in relation to access to blue space including the River Great Ouse and watercourses.

In addition, we will examine opportunities to strengthen sustainable travel networks, including potential links to and extensions of the pedestrian and cycle network (such as the Bedford Green Wheel), along with contributions to the objectives of the Forest of Marston Vale and the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway projects.

Sites that are existing plan allocations or have planning permission or have recently lapsed permissions will be presumed to be suitable unless there is new evidence to suggest otherwise.



Based on the assessment of suitability, sites will be split into one of the following suitability categories:

- **Red** will indicate that a site does not offer a suitable development location for the proposed land use or uses, as there are known constraints which significantly impact development potential and cannot feasibly be overcome with mitigation.
- **Amber** will indicate that a site offers a potentially suitable development location for the proposed land use or uses, but has constraints which may impact development potential, or the site needs further assessment/site specific evidence before it can be deemed suitable.
- **Green** will indicate that a site offers a suitable location for the proposed land use or uses, and any known constraints are likely to be feasibly overcome with mitigation.

Availability

Availability is assessed on whether, based on current evidence, there is a reasonable prospect that the site will come forward at a particular point in time. For sites put forward through the 'call for sites' exercise, we will use information provided in the call for sites form (i.e. a developer has expressed intention to develop and/or the owner has expressed willingness to sell). If sites have been identified through other means, such as refused planning applications,

efforts will be made to identify landowners and contact them to seek their views on the potential availability of the site for development. Where it is not possible to identify or contact landowners, a reasoned judgement will be made as to the likelihood of development coming forward. The matters we will consider when assessing a site's availability include site ownership, covenants, and any legal or ownership issues that could affect the deliverability of the site such as unresolved ransom strips or tenancies. Where constraints have been identified, we will consider what action could reasonably be taken to overcome them.

Sites that are existing plan allocations, or have planning permission, or a recently lapsed planning permission will be presumed to be available unless there is evidence to suggest otherwise.

We will endeavour to confirm availability at regular intervals to ensure that the sites continue to remain available to deliver development. Where we are unable to contact the landowner/developer, or a landowner confirms that there is no longer an intention to develop the site, the site will be treated as not available. This will exclude the site from any further assessment.

Based on the assessment of availability, sites will be split into one of the following availability categories:



- **Red** will indicate that there is no reasonable prospect that a site could be available for development within the time envisioned.
- **Amber** will indicate that a site has legal or ownership issues that are considered capable of being resolved and the site could become available for development within the time envisioned, or the site needs further assessment/site specific evidence base before it can be deemed available.
- **Green** will indicate that there is a reasonable prospect that a site will be available for development within the time envisioned and there are no known legal or ownership issues.

Achievability

Achievability is assessed on whether there is a reasonable prospect, based on the information available, that a site is capable of being realistically developed at a particular point in time, including whether the site is likely to be viable. For sites put forward through the 'call for sites' exercise, we will use information provided in the call for sites form. Details of economic viability after considering the likely planning obligations in line with local and national policy, information on any known factors that could result in abnormal development costs or any issues that might affect the viability of developing the site, and mitigation measures will be sought

in the call for sites form. In addition to this, we will request the status of current land uses including whether they need to be relocated and end dates for leases, where applicable, will be requested in the call for sites form as this could affect the timing of delivery of sites.

We will also draw upon the existing evidence base and undertake a high-level review of the viability of the sites using typologies or samples of sites. This is instead of assessing each individual site. These assessments could split the plan area into different value areas or typologies which reflect price differences, including:

- likely market attractiveness;
- development on previously developed / not previously developed sites;
- rural / urban development;
- different sizes and density of development; and
- more marginally viable schemes

This will help us identify whether any site typologies are likely to be considered unviable at first 'sift'. Any sites with a typology that is unviable will be considered unachievable at this stage.

Sites that are existing plan allocations, have planning permission or a recently lapsed planning permission will be presumed to be achievable unless there is evidence to suggest otherwise.

Based on the assessment of achievability, sites will be split into one of the following achievability categories:

- **Red** will indicate that there is no reasonable prospect that a site could be capable of being developed for the land use within the plan period.
- **Amber** will indicate that a site's capability to deliver is limited to the later years of the plan period, either because it is not known when factors affecting its achievability will be resolved or because further assessment/site specific evidence base is required to understand some aspects of its achievability.
- **Green** will indicate that there is a reasonable prospect that a site is capable of being developed for the intended land use within the first five years of the plan period.

Overall final scoring

Sites and broad locations that are identified as not being suitable and available for development will not be considered achievable. Sites and broad locations that are identified as being suitable for development but not available may not be deliverable within the first five years but may be identified as being achievable later in the plan period.

Taking the above considerations into account, we will assign each site an overall RAG score:

- **Red** will indicate that a site is not currently a candidate for allocation (although some red sites may need to be reconsidered at later stages, depending on the outcomes of any consultation, examination or further assessment work).
- **Amber** will indicate that a site is currently a candidate for allocation but has several constraints that need to be mitigated against or further assessment is required.
- **Green** will indicate that a site is a strong candidate for allocation, with few or no constraints that need mitigation.

After scoring, we will discount sites if they are unsuitable with constraints that cannot feasibly be mitigated, unavailable or unachievable within the time envisioned.

Estimating development potential

The development potential of a site (or site capacity) is a significant factor that affects the economic viability of a site and its suitability to accommodate a particular use or a mix of uses. We will estimate the development potential alongside assessing the suitability, availability and achievability of a site or broad area.

For housing and employment sites put forward through the 'call for sites' exercise, we will use information provided in the call for sites form, which we will 'sense check' to ensure all data received is realistic and achievable. If sites have been



identified through other means, such as a recently lapsed planning permission, or a withdrawn application, we will use the amount of development proposed in the application. Policy L3.3 of the draft NPPF (2025) states that *“minimum densities for residential development proposals are appropriate in locations which provide high levels of connectivity to jobs and services. Where development proposals for housing or mixed-use schemes are within reasonable walking distance of a railway station⁴⁴, a density of at least 40 dwellings per hectare should be achieved within the net developable area of the site, or 50 dwellings per hectare where the station or stop is defined as ‘well-connected’⁴⁵”*. Footnote 44 states that, for the purpose of this policy, references to railway stations also includes stops on underground, tram and other light rail systems. Footnote 45 defines ‘well-connected’ as all rail stations and underground, tram and light rail stops in a top 60 travel-to-work area located partially or fully within England by gross value added (GVA) and which, in the normal weekday timetable, are served

(or have a reasonable prospect of being served due to planned upgrades or through agreement with the rail operator) throughout the daytime by four trains or trams per hour overall, or two trains or trams per hour in any one direction². Should Bedford become a top 60 travel-to-work area, we will apply this higher density to housing sites located within 800 metres walking distance of applicable rail stations within the borough.

For gypsy, traveller and travelling show people sites, the size and layout of existing traveller sites will be considered, as well as the government’s [Good practice guide: Designing gypsy and traveller sites](#) (May 2008). Although the guide is dated and has been withdrawn, it does include useful design principles which are still relevant. Advice will be sought from technical consultees on pitch provision and layout assumptions.

Assessment of timescale and rate of development

For sites put forward through the ‘call for sites and development opportunities’ exercise, we will use information provided in the online form, which we will ‘sense check’ to ensure all data received is realistic and achievable. We will

² At the time of writing this document, Bedford is not a top 60 travel-to-work area.

also consider historic delivery rates and expected future trends in the borough.

We will assign each housing site into a five-year timescale banding, based upon the likely adoption date of the new plan. This will help us to determine whether a site is considered deliverable or developable based on NPPF/PPG definitions later in the process.

Determining whether sites proposed for housing are deliverable or developable

Once we have assessed a site's suitability, availability and achievability and assigned an overall RAG rating, we will use the availability timescale information to determine whether the site is deliverable or developable as a housing use.

For a housing site to be considered deliverable, it should be:

- suitable for development;
- available within five years of the likely adoption date of the plan; and
- with at least some development achievable within five years of the likely adoption date of the plan.

For a housing site to be considered developable, it should be suitable for development, with a reasonable prospect it could be available and achievable at the time envisioned. This would normally mean at least some development could occur at some

point in the plan period, after the first five years of the likely adoption date of the plan.

Finishing the stage 2 assessment

When we have completed our detailed assessment, we will have a list of sites with the following information as a minimum:

- Site name or reference
- Land use (existing and proposed)
- Site location (this should also be mapped)
- Site size
- Site categorisation
- Development potential – how much could be built on each site and when it might come forward for development
- A list of constraints and potential mitigations to overcome these
- Individual RAG scores (suitability, availability and achievability)
- Overall RAG score
- Justifications for overall score
- For sites proposed for housing use, it is considered deliverable or developable
- A clear indication of which sites progress to stage 3 and which ones do not, and the reasons why this is the case

3. Next steps

Finalising the methodology

We will consider all comments received on this draft version of the methodology and, where appropriate, the methodology will be amended to reflect any updates to the process. This methodology will replace the previous version of the document which supported the now withdrawn Local Plan 2040.

Preparation of the SHELAA

We will prepare our SHELAA report in line with the methodology outlined in this document. All sites that are put forward through the call for sites exercise and those sites that we identify will be assessed, although no decisions will be made on which sites may or may not be taken forward into the draft local plan until a later date. In January 2027, we will publish a list of sites identified through the call for sites and development opportunities exercise, with an interactive map showing the name of and location of the site and suggested land use.

During the preparation of the new local plan, the SHELAA will be updated to allow the assessment of each site to reflect upon the emerging spatial strategy, vision and policies of the new plan; new or updated information and evidence; and engagement with relevant stakeholders.

Progressing to stages 3 and 4 of the site selection process

We will move on to stage 3 of the site selection process, selecting our draft local plan allocations from the list of sites brought forward from stage 2 of the process. The starting point for selecting our draft allocations is the information collected from stages 1 and 2 of the site selection process. We will also draw on:

- relevant evidence (our [Project Initiation Document](#) provides a list of the evidence we intend to prepare);
- feedback received from community and stakeholder consultation;
- the emerging plan vision and spatial strategy; and
- conformity with sustainable development principles set out in national planning policy.

We will also have regard to the high-level priorities set out in the [Bedford Borough Corporate Plan](#) and other key council strategies and plans.

National guidance provides examples of some of the factors that should be considered when determining draft allocations and we will take these into account:

- the type and category of the sites determined in stage 2
- settlement hierarchy and function (linking to related evidence and the plan vision and spatial strategy)



- Proximity to existing settlements
- Existing and future connectivity by private, public and active transport
- Accessibility to services and facilities
- The efficient use of land
- Alternative or competing land uses use as employment, minerals extraction or safeguarded land³
- Timescales for delivery to ensure new development can be provided throughout the plan period – for housing sites consider the deliverability and developability of sites
- Ability to deliver strategic development, either alone or combined with other sites (linking to the plan vision and spatial strategy)
- Any relevant environmental considerations or objective of the plan
- Economic sustainability considerations such as jobs and skills, regeneration and social inclusion
- Local considerations, such as constraints relating to neighbouring or nearby uses or existing or emerging policy designation
- Other new or emerging local plan evidence – for example the whole draft plan's viability study may give a more complete picture of how sites meet the needs of the area

We will review our sites to understand whether there is potential to cluster neighbouring sites to form larger strategic sites. Where clusters of sites are identified, it enables a more comprehensive view to be taken of potential impacts on infrastructure, landscape, biodiversity and heritage impacts. It also enables a more holistic view of matters such as water management, green infrastructure and landscaping, while facilitating opportunities such as better access to public transport. Where we consider that a cluster of sites would be appropriate, we will engage with landowners/developers or site promoters as the local plan preparation progresses.

In accordance with national guidance, in determining our draft allocations, we will consider the type and category of sites determined in stage 2 to ensure that our growth needs are met in accordance with our emerging evidence base. We will also assess the size of proposed housing sites to meet national policy expectations, which requires a proportion of the housing requirement to be met on small and medium-sized sites, thereby supporting greater housing choice and offering more certainty to small and medium-sized builders.

The sites we select as draft allocations will be those we consider to be the most sustainable and deliverable overall,

³ Minerals and waste matters will not be covered in the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2050 and therefore one plan will need to take account of the other at key stages.



and those which will facilitate the strategic policies, vision and objectives of the local plan.

In stage 4 of the site selection process, we will confirm the sites to take forward as our draft local plan site allocations. We will set out our site decisions and rationale in a summary table within our SHELAA.

If a shortfall in supply to meet the needs of the plan area is identified, the assessment will need to be revisited, for example to carry out a further call for sites or changing

assumptions about the development potential of particular sites to ensure these make the most efficient use of land. If evidence shows that a shortfall in provision continues to exist, we will consider continued cross-boundary provisions in accordance with the statutory duty to assist. This will enable the necessary statements of common ground and other joint agreements to be formulated as local plan work progresses, helping to achieve a sound local plan.



Appendix 1: Site suitability assessment criteria

Location

Assessment criteria	Conformity with the settlement hierarchy
Description	The main built-up area of a settlement, as defined in saved Allocations and Designations Local Plan (policy AD41) and the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 (policies 5S and 6).
Evidence and data source	Bedford borough interactive Policies Map showing: - the urban area boundary; - settlement policy area boundary.
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is not within or adjoining the urban area or defined settlement policy area, or within the built form of a small settlement 2 - The site is within or adjoining a defined settlement policy area boundary or within the built form of a small settlement 3 - The site is within or adjoining the urban area boundary

Assessment criteria	Town centre vitality and viability
Description	A key objective of the NPPF is to promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres, prioritising them as locations where main town centre uses can be focussed and enabling them to adapt to changing community and business needs. Town centre vitality refers to how lively a centre is and viability is a measure of its commercial success or economic health.
Evidence and data source	Bedford borough interactive Policies Map showing: - the town centre boundary - local centre boundaries
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is outside a designated centre boundary (town centre, district centre or local centre) 2 - The site is within a designated centre boundary (town centre, district centre or local centre)



Assessment criteria	Previously developed land
Description	Previously developed land, as defined in the NPPF (2025) glossary, is “land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed. Previously developed land excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill, where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures; land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape”.
Evidence and data source	- Bedford borough interactive planning register map - Aerial imagery - Information provided in the call for sites form
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is not previously developed land 2 - The site is largely / wholly previously developed land

Assessment criteria	Likelihood of best and most versatile agricultural land
Description	Best and most versatile agricultural land, as defined in the NPPF (2025) glossary, is “land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). ALC is graded from 1-5 and based on yield, range and versatility of use, and need for input.”
Evidence and data source	Natural England’s Likelihood of best and most versatile agricultural land – strategic scale maps
Score and scoring criteria	1 - All or the majority of the site is best and most versatile agricultural land as defined in the NPPF, or the classification of the site is not known 2 - The site is not on best and most versatile agricultural land as defined in the NPPF

Accessibility

Assessment criteria	Accessibility to services and facilities via walking, driving, cycling and public transport
Description	A measurement of accessibility to education, leisure, health and shopping facilities using the Department for Transport Connectivity Tool. This tool is based on the connectivity metric which measures an individual's opportunity to travel to employment, services and, for social reasons, weighted by their overall tendency to take those options. Each location has a connectivity score from 0 to 100, which is calculated as a percentage of the highest score in England in Wales, which is always 100.
Evidence and data source	Department for Transport's Connectivity Tool (and any future relevant national data releases e.g. ALIGN Tool)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - Connectivity score equal to or less than 25 2 - Connectivity score between 26-50 3 - Connectivity score between 51-75 4 - Connectivity score equal to or more than 76

Assessment criteria	Accessibility to public transport (bus)
Description	Walking distance to a bus stop with a regular bus service
Evidence and data source	• Google maps • Bedford Borough Council webpage (bus service timetables) • https://www.traveline.info/ • Bus operator websites – e.g. Stagecoach and Grant Palmer • Bedford Borough Council corporate GIS (NapTAN bus stops)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - There is no bus stop within 10 minutes walk (800m) from the site 2 - Within 10 minutes walk (800m) of a bus stop that has an infrequent bus service (less frequent than one every hour) between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday 3 - Within 10 minutes walk (800m) of a bus stop that has a bus service every hour between 8am and 6pm (Monday to Friday)



Assessment criteria	Accessibility to public transport (bus)
	4 - Within 10 minutes walk (800m) of a bus stop that has a bus service every 30 minutes between 8am and 6pm (Monday to Friday)

Assessment criteria	Accessibility to public transport (rail)
Description	Walking distance to the nearest railway station
Evidence and data source	- Google maps https://www.traveline.info/ - Bedford Borough Council corporate GIS (transport stations)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - More than 1600 metres walking distance to railway station 2 - 800-1600 metres walking distance to railway station 3 - 400-800 metres walking distance to railway station 4 - Within 400 metres walking distance to railway station

Assessment criteria	Highways capacity and access to the site
Description	Assessment of vehicle access to the site and highway and junction capacity issues
Evidence and data source	- Highways development control and transport policy officer advice - Information provided in the call for sites form - Bedford Borough Council corporate GIS (highways)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - There are serious highway, junction capacity issues or access constraints that requires extensive mitigation or cannot be mitigated 2 - Potential highway, junction capacity or access constraints requiring mitigation 3 - No highway, junction capacity or access constraints

Physical constraints

Assessment criteria	Land contamination
Description	Land where substance in or under land make it actually or potentially hazardous to people's health, or hazardous to the environment.
Evidence and data source	• The past use of the land from historic aerial imagery • Information provided in the call for sites form • Environmental Health officer advice • Bedford Borough Council corporate GIS (contaminated land)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is likely to be significantly contaminated requiring substantial ground preparation and remediation 2 - The site is likely to be contaminated requiring some ground preparation and remediation 3 – There is limited potential that the site is contaminated requiring minimal ground preparation and remediation works 4 - The site is unlikely to be contaminated and no significant ground preparation works are required

Assessment criteria	Proximity to hazards and underground / aboveground utilities infrastructure
Description	Major hazard sites (including chemical process sites, fuel and chemical storage sites), major accident hazard pipelines and utilities infrastructure such as water, gas, oil, and electricity can affect the type of development of a site or limit the footprint of new structures and pose an accident risk such as an explosion.
Evidence and data source	Bedford Borough Council corporate GIS showing: • Health & Safety Executive consultation areas • Health & Safety Executive consultation areas, explosion areas • Gas pipelines • Oil pipelines • Water pipelines • Electricity lines



Assessment criteria	Proximity to hazards and underground / aboveground utilities infrastructure
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is wholly contained within the easement or areas for infrastructure and development cannot be accommodate outside of these areas 2 - The site is partly within the easement or areas for infrastructure and development can be accommodated outside of these areas 3 - The site is not contained within any easements or areas for the infrastructure

Assessment criteria	Flood risk
Description	Flood zones give an indication of the present-day likelihood of a flood event occurring from rivers and the sea on an area of land. Flood zones data includes national and local modelled data and information from past floods.
Evidence and data source	- GOV.UK: Flood map for planning - Bedford Borough Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
Score and scoring criteria	1 - Development would be in flood zone 3 (areas shown to be at a 1% (1 in 100) or greater annual probability of flooding from rivers or 0.5% (1 in 200) or greater annual probability of flooding from the sea) 2 - The majority of the site is within flood zone 2 (land having between 0.1%-0.5% (1 in 200 to 1 in 1000) annual probability of flooding from the seam and accepted recorded flood outlines) 3 - The site is within flood zone 1 (land having a less than 0.1% (1 in 1000) annual probability of flooding)

Environmental constraints and designations

Assessment criteria	Outside, adjoining or within the air quality management area
Description	An area designated by the local authority where national air quality objectives are unlikely to be met within the relevant deadlines. There is one air quality management area in Bedford town centre where the annual mean level of nitrogen dioxide exceeds national air quality standards (40 µg/m ³).
Evidence and data source	Bedford Borough Council corporate GIS (air quality management area)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is within the air quality management area



Assessment criteria	Outside, adjoining or within the air quality management area
	2 - The site is adjoining the air quality management area 3 - The site is not within or adjoining the air quality management area

Assessment criteria	Groundwater source protection zones
Description	Groundwater source protection zones are defined around large and public potable groundwater abstraction sites to provide additional protection to safeguard drinking water quality.
Evidence and data source	Defra's: Magic map showing: Source protection zones merged (England)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is located within a source protection zone and the proposed use could harm water supplies 2 - The site is located within a source protection zone but the proposed use is unlikely to be a risk to water supplies 3 - The site is not located within a source protection zone

Assessment criteria	Mineral safeguarding areas
Description	Areas of proven mineral resources which are, or may become, of economic importance that are protected from being permanently covered or “sterilised” by other types of development.
Evidence and data source	Identified on the Policies Map in the adopted Bedfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Strategic Sites and Policies
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is located within a mineral safeguarding area 2 - The site is located within a mineral safeguarding area and minerals can be extracted before development 3 - The site is not located within a mineral safeguarding area 4 - The site is located in an area of known mineral resource of national or local significance (BGS data)



Assessment criteria	Impact on designated or non-designated heritage assets or their settings
Description	A heritage asset, as defined in the NPPF (2025) glossary is <i>“a building, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes but is not limited to designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing)”</i> . The setting of a heritage asset is defined as <i>“the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral”</i> .
Evidence and data source	• Heritage team officer advice • Bedford Borough interactive Policies Map showing: • Conservation areas • Listed buildings • Scheduled monuments • Registered parks and gardens
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The proposal is likely to have a beneficial effect upon the significance of heritage assets or their settings or has no impact on heritage assets and their significance 2 - The proposal has the potential to cause harm to heritage assets or their settings. This harm may range from low to high. There may be options to avoid, reduce or mitigate this harm 3 - The proposal has the potential to cause a very high level of harm to heritage assets or their settings that cannot be mitigated

Assessment criteria	Important open spaces and views into and out of a settlement
Description	The Allocations and Designations Local Plan (adopted in 2013) protects village open spaces and urban open spaces through policies AD40 and AD43 respectively. Policy AD42 of this plan seeks to prevent coalescence between nearby settlements through the identification of local gaps.
Evidence and data source	Bedford Borough interactive Policies Map showing: • Local green space • Urban open space • Village open space



Assessment criteria	Important open spaces and views into and out of a settlement
	- Urban open space gap - Local gaps
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is located largely / wholly within a designated open space, view or gap 2 - The site is located partially within a designated open space, view or gap 3 - The site is not located within a designated open space, view or gap

Assessment criteria	Landscape character sensitivity
Description	Sensitivity of the landscape character and its potential to absorb change.
Evidence and data source	Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2020) and update (to be prepared)
Score and scoring criteria	Based on which landscape type / landscape character area the site is within - as determined by the Bedford borough landscape character area (LCA) and update to be prepared: 1 - likely to have a negative impact on the landscape type/landscape character 2 - likely to have a neutral impact on the landscape type/landscape character 3 - likely to have a positive impact on the landscape type/landscape character

Assessment criteria	Renewable and low carbon energy potential
Description	Broad areas that have been identified as being suitable for the location of renewable energy schemes.
Evidence and data source	Review of renewable energy locations study (to be prepared)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is identified as an opportunity for renewable energy 2 - The site is not identified as an opportunity for renewable energy

Assessment criteria	Nationally designated biodiversity and geological sites
Description	Legally protected areas recognised for their national importance to wildlife, habitats or geology. Designations in Bedford borough include sites of special scientific interest (SSSI).
Evidence	Defra's: Magic map showing: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England)



Assessment criteria	Nationally designated biodiversity and geological sites
	SSSI impact risk zones
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is within an SSSI impact risk zone 2 - The site is adjacent or partially within an SSSI impact risk zone 3 - The site is not within an SSSI impact risk zone

Assessment criteria	Locally designated biodiversity and geological sites
Description	Non-statutory areas identified due to their significant local nature or geological conservation value. Designations in Bedford Borough include local nature reserves (LNR), county wildlife sites (CWS), roadside nature reserves and local geological sites (LGS).
Evidence and data source	Bedford Borough Council corporate GIS showing: - Local nature reserves - County wildlife sites - Roadside nature reserves - Local geological sites
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site is located within a locally designated site and the proposal will have a negative impact on the site 2 - The site is located within a locally designated site however the proposal will not have a negative impact on the site 3 - The site is adjacent to a locally designated site 4 - The site is not located within a locally designated site

Assessment criteria	Woodland and trees
Description	Trees are a vital component of the built and natural environment, adding variety, contributing to the character of an area and enhancing environmental quality. Trees also absorb noise, filter air-borne pollutants, provide a habitat for wildlife, provide shade and define structure and spaces. When considering a site for development, we will assess the potential impact on existing woodland and trees.



Evidence and data source	Bedford Borough Council corporate GIS showing: • Tree preservation orders (points) • Tree preservation orders (polygons) Defra's Magic map showing: • Ancient woodland – revised completed counties (England) • Community forests (England)
Score and scoring criteria	1 - The site contains ancient woodland and / or TPOs present on the site 2 - The site contains ancient woodland and / or TPOs present on the site, but the impact can be mitigated 3 - The site contains no ancient woodland and there are no TPOs present on the site