

URBAN POTENTIAL STUDY

2002 – 2006

Non Technical Summary



EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

May 2007

1. East Northamptonshire Urban Housing Capacity Study

- 1.1 The Government has required that all Councils should produce a study showing how land could be better used for housing in their towns. This is because there is a national target of building at least 60% of new homes on previously developed land (brownfield) by the year 2008. National planning policies try to encourage most development to take place in towns and cities, where there is more likely to be access to jobs, shops, leisure, health and other facilities.
- 1.2 This study therefore looks at the built up areas of all six towns in East Northamptonshire, in terms of the scope of using land more efficiently, converting buildings into housing use, or re-using brownfield land for new housing, over the period up to 2021. The Government has produced guidance on the way such studies should be carried out and the types of sites that should be considered for new housing. These are covered in more detail in the main report, along with tables and maps.

2. Methodology

Survey and analysis

- 2.1 A street by street survey was carried out in 2002 for all six towns and forms were filled in for every piece of land or building that seemed to have some potential for housing development. The forms included space to write down any known development problems or planning issues. All the sites were marked on maps, so it was relatively easy to gain a picture of the overall amount of land that had been identified.
- 2.2 The sites were then divided into “small”, where there was space for less than 10 homes, and “large”, where 10 or more could be provided. Development Plans can set an allowance for the number of small sites that could be developed for housing in the period they cover. The large sites will make more of an individual impact and it may be necessary to set out detailed proposals for them in the formal Plans.
- 2.3 All the sites surveyed were put into 15 groups in line with the government guidance. A full list is shown in Appendix 4 and details are given in the main report. Some thought was then given for each site as to how likely development would be over the period up to 2021. Some of the sites were already unused or derelict and for some there was a planning application awaiting a decision, so interest from developers could already be shown. These sites were grouped as ‘likely’ to be developed within the plan period.
- 2.4 Other sites were still in use, for example factories and other commercial buildings, and areas of land behind existing houses, often made up of several large gardens. The availability of such sites for development is uncertain and they form a separate group to the more likely sites. Based on past experience, many of these ‘uncertain’ sites will become vacant and be proposed for development over the next 15-20 years (these are known as ‘windfall’ sites because their development is not specifically planned for but it may be acceptable within the terms of overall planning policies.)
- 2.5 A further group of sites was ‘discounted’ from having any housing potential. Mainly these sites are public open space, parks and playing fields. Some are well-used car parks in the smaller towns where there is no other off-street parking. The current use of these sites is preferred to potential housing and there are good reasons to protect them from development.

3. Checking Development Potential

- 3.1 After the 2002 study was completed, planning consultants were asked to assess the prospect of sites being developed for housing in relation to the likely land values and development costs. They did this by taking a representative sample of 50 sites and costing out a likely development mix, then comparing this with current housing land values in the area. This assessment found that overall, the market would support the development of 85% of the 2002 study sites in economic terms. In general, this shows that it is reasonable to expect that many of the sites from the 2002 study will make a contribution to new housing provision over the next 15 – 20 years.

4. Updating and the 2006 report

- 4.1 Each year (via an annual survey in April) the sites in the 2002 study have been checked against sites with planning permission. If any have since received permission, they have been taken out of the 'urban potential' category. Otherwise, there is a danger they will be double counted for housing land supply purposes. Therefore the tables in the main report for 2006 only now include those sites where there was not a current planning permission at 1 April 2006. Comparison with the 2002 report shows that the overall urban potential for housing has gone down and much of this is due to sites receiving planning permission in the meantime. This shows that the pressure for housing land has made development of such sites realistic and confirms that it was reasonable to include them as having potential in the original 2002 survey.
- 4.2 Progress with the new style Area Plans, which will replace the adopted Local Plan, has to be taken on board in the 2006 report. Due to the priority that is to be given to sites within built up areas, some of the main urban potential sites are identified as 'preferred options' for new development.

5. The Findings

- 5.1 The 2002 survey showed that there are a considerable number of sites where there is potential for land-use change. The older parts of the more 'industrial' towns contain many large sites with scope for re-development. There are quite a few examples of older factories within terraced streets with on street parking, where nuisance and environmental problems are now caused by visiting heavy lorries. This would not have been the case when they were first built.
- 5.2 The use of many of these sites for housing is preferred by Government to greenfield extensions to the towns. There is more pressure for development on these types of sites than there was when the current Local Plan was prepared because Government policy did not restrict greenfield development then.
- 5.3 The total number of homes that could be provided by the sites identified in the study has been reached by multiplying the site area (minus an allowance for open space or other uses) by 35 (or by 50 in town centre areas). This is because Government policy requires a minimum net site density of 30 homes per hectare and the Northamptonshire Structure Plan, in place from 2001, has a policy requiring 35 homes per hectare. Although it does not follow that all sites are suitable for development at this standard density, it is necessary for this study to apply a set formula to gain a picture of the possible number of homes that could be created.
- 5.4 The 2006 review has found that about 1730 homes could be created within the towns on sites considered likely to be available for development over the next twenty years. Of these, around 1,140 could be on large sites and a further 590 could be on small sites.

- 5.5 On sites where the likelihood of development is more uncertain, over 2100 additional homes could be created, with 1200 on large sites and 880 on small sites.
- 5.6 The picture for each town at March 2006 looks like this:

Town	Total potential units from "Likely" sites	Total potential units from "Uncertain" sites	Total potential units for each Town
Higham Ferrers	55	179	234
Irthlingborough	467	239	706
Oundle	348	236	584
Raunds	78	399	477
Rushden	614	843	1457
Thrapston	169	227	396

5.7 Section 2 of the report draws out key findings. Of note are the following:

- There is a considerable amount of potential housing land within the six towns, although the total has dropped from 4,826 units in 2002 to 3,854 in 2006 – a decline of 20%
- Potential from "likely" sites dropped by 27% between 2002 and 2006. This suggests that the "likely" sites identified in 2002 were reasonably realistic, as such sites went on to gain planning permission.
- 80% of the potential housing units were located on brownfield sites (as nationally defined in PPG3) in 2006
- 43% of the potential came from one source; namely the redevelopment of areas with an existing non-residential use.
- Rushden had 38% of the potential land in the six towns in 2006.

5.8 More detailed analysis is contained in the main report and its Appendices, including:

- (i) the sources of land and their contribution both to small and large sites and to "likely" or "uncertain" land for housing
- (ii) the distribution of small and large sites amongst the six towns
- (iii) the distribution of "likely" and "uncertain" sites between the six towns and mapping of large sites for each town in the main report