

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL – 25 JULY 2013

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING
AND TRANSPORT

TOWN WIDE EMPLOYMENT STUDY FOR BISHOP'S STORTFORD,
JUNE 2013

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report summarises the findings of the Employment Study undertaken for Bishop's Stortford, and seeks endorsement to use the Study to inform the preparation of the East Herts District Plan. The Report presents the Executive Summary of the Study.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE
PANEL AND EXECUTIVE: That:**

(A)	the Town Wide Employment Study of Bishop's Stortford, June 2013, be supported as part of the evidence base to inform and support the East Herts District Plan and for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications.
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1.0 Background

1.1 Since 2008, the Council has commissioned and has been a partner to several studies which assess the quality of the district's employment land, forecast future employment needs of East Herts and Hertfordshire, and consider the strategic employment needs of the district in relation to the emerging District Plan.

These studies identify Bishop's Stortford as the town in East Herts best placed to capture economic and employment growth by virtue of its proximity to Stansted Airport and its strategic connections. The town of Bishop's Stortford has a number of options to capture this employment growth and to support the town's growing population. In order to better understand these options, Wessex Economics were commissioned to undertake a town wide study. The purpose of the Study is threefold:

- First to set out an overall vision for economic development in Bishop's Stortford, given the town's existing strengths and future opportunities. In doing so, Wessex Economics is mindful of the overall vision for the town set out in the Bishop's Stortford 2020 Vision Document.
- Second to advise the Council on how Bishop's Stortford can continue to prosper through the growth of business and employment, including an assessment of the types of business which are likely to underpin the local economy.
- Thirdly to give the Council advice on the requirement for employment sites for offices, industry and warehousing in Bishop's Stortford. This is particularly pertinent at this point in time when the Council is considering the planning applications for development to the north of Bishop's Stortford.

2.0 Report

2.1 Written in nine parts, the Study looks at Bishop's Stortford and the area around Stansted Airport. While the recommendations in the Study relate specifically to Bishop's Stortford, it would be unreasonable to examine the prospects for economic and employment growth in the town without recognising the importance of Stansted Airport to the local economy of both Bishop's Stortford and the towns and villages in the local area. As such, the Study includes the five Bishop's Stortford wards and four Uttlesford wards of Birchanger, Stansted North, Stansted South and Takeley and Canfield. The Executive Summary to the Study can be found at Essential Reference Paper 'B'.

2.2 Section 1 introduces the purpose of the Study and establishes the study area. Section 2 discusses the strategic context of the study area, the areas' history, location and connections. Section 3 details the current employment strengths of the area, explaining that despite the recent economic recessions, Bishop's Stortford and the wider Stansted area have shown a degree of resilience, even growing marginally. However, the Study indicates that the

town and Stansted area are very much reliant on the performance of Stansted Airport. Where reductions in passenger numbers occur, employment levels in the airport also fall, accounting for the majority of job losses in the study area.

- 2.3 The demographics presented in the Study are of particular concern when preparing a strategy for employment in Bishop's Stortford. There is a considerable amount of in and out commuting from the town and the differential in annual earnings between those who live in the area and those who work in the area is linked to the occupational profile of the area's residents. A higher proportion of residents have degree level qualifications and those in better paid occupations are more strongly represented among the residents of Bishop's Stortford than in the county or the East of England as a whole. The area therefore has a well-qualified labour force but many of these will not work in the area, since they can command higher salaries in London or elsewhere in the northern M25 corridor and Cambridge area. There may not be the sort of jobs available locally which would be suited to their expertise. This is of particular relevance when considering the types of employment the council may wish to attract to the area, and therefore the location and quality of employment land necessary.
- 2.4 There are consequently two key challenges for the area. Firstly to ensure that local employers can recruit the staff they need for their business, given high economic activity rates and low unemployment; and secondly, to ensure that there are opportunities for those who need to or wish to work locally to do so.
- 2.5 Section 4 of the Study considers the main drivers of employment growth in the study area. Stansted Airport has considerable scope to expand passenger numbers within current permission limits. The new airport owners Manchester Airports Group (MAG) have announced plans to grow by five million passengers over the next five years. The Study indicates that although the relationship between passenger numbers and employment is a complex one, nonetheless, East Herts and Uttlesford District Councils should factor in a potential growth of 3,000 jobs in or related to the airport by 2026. However, it would be reasonable to assume that a significant proportion of these jobs will not be filled by the local residents.
- 2.6 The Study indicates that local job growth tends to follow in the

wake of population growth, particularly if the growth is associated with those in work or on good pensions. Even if a growth in working population is partly offset by an ageing population, there will be an increased demand on the service and retail sectors, resulting in job creation. Whilst the majority of this growth does not result in the need for designated employment land, expanding some services do create some demand for space that can be accommodated on employment sites.

- 2.7 Nationally, economic forecasters expect that growth of business services will be the major source of employment growth. These services include financial and professional services, software development, marketing, wholesale distribution, education and health services. These sorts of services chose a location for a number of reasons, including the airport, proximity to London by motorway or rail, the draw of Bishop's Stortford town centre and related quality of life issues. The Study notes that it is significant that the ready availability of good quality premises does not seem to be a factor drawing such services to the area, and might be a barrier to attracting businesses.
- 2.8 Forecasts for employment growth in the area anticipate a rapid job growth over the next four years. However, the Study, along with previous advice warns against expecting a rapid recovery, but taken in the whole with growth at Stansted Airport, the Council should continue to plan for a reasonable level of employment growth in Bishop's Stortford over the plan period, not least because the other towns in East Herts are less well placed to attract and accommodate additional jobs.
- 2.9 Section 5 of the Study proposes a set of objectives in relation to employment land, which draw upon the National Planning Policy Framework, the East Herts Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy and the Bishop's Stortford 2020 Vision.
- 2.10 Section 6 assesses the existing stock of employment land in Bishop's Stortford in relation to office, industrial and warehouse markets and sets out some of the policy implications related to these markets. For example, the industrial and warehouse markets would favour land well located in relation to Junction 8 of the M11, and while it may be appropriate in the longer term to allow the redevelopment of some older, less attractive sites, these must be replaced by new employment land well located to the M11 and Stansted Airport. If looser criteria were applied by Uttlesford District Council on what are 'airport-related'

businesses, then this might relieve pressures on other sites used for non-airport-related businesses. With respect to office provision, again, there is a need to restructure the market, reducing the stock of larger older office premises in Bishop's Stortford and to plan for the re-provision of such space in the town centre and on the northern edge of Bishop's Stortford.

- 2.11 Section 7 of the Study looks in more detail at existing business space development opportunities in Bishop's Stortford and the study area, noting where improvements are needed in existing employment sites and the types of businesses that could be attracted to sites such as the Goods Yard and the Mill Site.
- 2.12 Section 8 of the Study discusses potential new business space development opportunities. The Study indicates that in terms of planning for employment space in Bishop's Stortford, the pressing requirement in terms of providing choice and flexibility of office and commercial space is to identify edge of town sites that could accommodate B1 users. Existing occupier preference would be for a new business park style accommodation located on, and with access to the A120, in a visible location with good access and parking. The Study advocates this approach and discusses the benefits of providing a new 'business park' style accommodation.
- 2.13 An alternative would be to provide new employment space at the heart of mixed use local centres in a residential-led scheme. The Study raises concerns with this approach, suggesting that in a relatively small town like Bishop's Stortford, if an employer wants to be located in a lively vibrant centre with a range of facilities, they will choose to be in the town centre. At the same time, if employers want modern premises close to the M11 with good parking, they will prioritise this over access to local facilities. Such employers would prefer modern freestanding offices with good parking and a local centre would not facilitate this.
- 2.14 The Study identifies six potential development locations for a business park style development and discusses the issues around each.
 - Location A: Bishop's Stortford Football Club (junction of A120 and A1250)
 - Location B: The Birchanger Site (junction of A120 and B183, within Uttlesford District boundary)

- Location C: The Mountbatten Site (land west of Hazelend Road)
- Location D: The Foxdells Farm Site (land west of Rye Street)
- Location E: Hadham Road (junction of A120 and A1250 Hadham Road)
- Location F: South Stortford (junction of B1383 London Road and A1184 St James Way)

2.15 Section 9 of the Study draws together key conclusions and sets out a series of recommendations to guide the economic development of Bishop's Stortford over the next 15 to 20 years. The Study recommends that the Council should be proactive in seeking to promote the development of new office space in Bishop's Stortford, and the redevelopment and re-provision of outdated office accommodation in acceptable locations. It is particularly important to ensure that plans for the Goods Yard site have a significant element of office (B1a) floor space. The Mill Site is likely to come forward in the medium to long term and should provide for a mix of uses including B1a office floor space. Existing stock should be maintained at least at current levels, with older larger office stock which is no longer fit for purpose being replaced with newly built or refurbished space.

2.16 With regards to new employment land, the recommendation of the Study is to identify a range of edge of town sites to accommodate B1 uses.

- In the immediate future, the Council should seek to incorporate proposals for around 3 to 4 hectares of B1 floor space at Location E: Hadham Road, as part of the Bishop's Stortford North development.
- In order to meet medium term requirements, the Council should engage with Bishop's Stortford Football Club and the landowners to identify relocation options with a view to removing the site from the Green Belt and designation as an employment site. The Football Club could relocate to the south of the town.
- To meet longer term requirements, the Council should make representations to Uttlesford District Council that the Birchanger site should be identified for mixed employment and residential development.
- The District Plan should reserve a site to the south of the town for future employment land development, which could compensate for lost town centre employment land.

2.17 As with all technical studies, the recommendations in this Study will be used to inform the preparation of the District Plan and the emerging development strategy of Bishop's Stortford and the District as a whole. It is therefore important to remember that these recommendations will need to be considered in relation to all the other planning issues and development needs of the town.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

- Town Wide Employment Study for Bishop's Stortford, Wessex Economics, June 2013 <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/>
- East Herts Employment Forecasts and Strategic Economic Development Advice, DTZ 2012 – <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=26574>
- East Herts Employment Land and Policy Review, Halcrow 2008 – <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=15660>
- Hertfordshire Strategic Employment Sites Study, Regeneris Consulting 2011 <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=24806>

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