

Town Wide Employment Study for Bishop's Stortford

Executive Summary

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East Hertfordshire District Council
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The economy of Bishop's Stortford and Stansted is prosperous. The key drivers of growth are Stansted Airport, an excellent rail service into central London and good road links via the M11 to London, the M25 northern sub-region and Cambridge. Bishop's Stortford is well positioned in relation to the UK's most dynamic economies.

The town is still relatively small and retains its charm as a market town. The quality of life is an important economic asset and the town has a skilled population. A high proportion of residents are highly skilled and well paid, though many work outside the area. The appeal of the towns and villages around Bishop's Stortford reinforce its attraction as a place to live and work.

The town faces two key challenges: accommodating the inherent potential of the area for economic growth, without sacrificing the quality of life of residents; and the need to plan for the provision of employment land in the right locations to allow the provision of modern business space for employers. This study provides EHDC with guidance on what employment space is needed where over the next 15 to 20 years.

Much additional employment will be associated with growth in the retail and leisure sector, in health and educational provision. This will reinforce the existing role of Bishop's Stortford town centre as a major centre of employment and services. The other major source of employment growth (other than that associated directly with the airport) is likely to be business and financial services.

Growth in business and financial services will increase the requirement for office, research and technology floorspace (B1 use class). There has been relatively little development of new office floorspace in the town centre in recent years, and a significant part of the stock is not suited to modern business requirements. Action is required to bring forward additional supply of office floorspace in the town centre.

There is demand for modern office floorspace both in Bishop's Stortford town centre, but there is also interest in office and B1b and B1c (R&D and light industrial) space in edge of town locations. Existing industrial estates in Bishop's Stortford provide adequately for the requirements of business for industrial (B2) and warehousing space (B8).

Emerging proposals by Uttlesford District Council will significantly increase the supply of land for industrial and warehousing space uses on the east side of the M11. Given that much of the requirement for warehousing and industrial space may be linked in some way to businesses that service the airport, it is appropriate to expand provision to the east of the M11 rather than to the west.

EHDC should be proactive in seeking to promote the development of new office space in Bishop's Stortford town centre, and the redevelopment and re-provision of outdated office accommodation in acceptable locations. It is particularly important to ensure that the plans for the development of the Goods Yard site have a significant element of office (B1a) floorspace.

Development proposals for the Mill Site are likely to come forward in the medium to long term. As with the Goods Yard site, EHDC should seek to encourage redevelopment for a mix of uses including office B1a space.

EHDC should seek to ensure that the stock of office floorspace in the town centre is maintained at least at current levels. Over time older stock should be replaced with newly built or refurbished space. Some conversion of existing office accommodation to other uses should be permitted but the focus should be on replacement of larger older offices which are no longer fit for purpose, or not centrally located.

The range of small offices in the town centre let on relatively cheap rents provides valuable incubator space for small business. Policies to protect such space from conversion to higher value uses (eg residential) should be developed. There would be merit in seeking to bring such space under common management, perhaps through a Development Trust or Community Interest Workspace Company.

EHDC should identify a range of edge of town sites that could accommodate B1 uses over the next 20 years. These sites would not come forward at the same pace, and EHDC would need to work with landowners and other parties to bring them forward. Key recommendations regarding the location of new employment sites on the edge of Bishop's Stortford are as follows:

- In order to meet currently identified requirements (years 0 to 5) for a choice of employment sites, EHDC should seek to incorporate proposals for employment (B1 development) at Hadham Road (Site E) as part of the Bishop's Stortford North proposals of around 3 to 4 hectares
- In order to meet medium term (Years 5-15) requirements for B1 space, EHDC should engage with Bishop's Stortford Football Club and relevant landowners to identify relocation options (Site A); with a view to removing the site from greenbelt and designation as an employment site
- With respect to longer term requirements (15+ years) EHDC should make representations to Uttlesford District Council that the Birchanger site should be identified for mixed employment (B1) and residential development in the longer run (Site B).
- EHDC as part of the preparation of the new Local Plan should reserve a site on the South Stortford site (Site F) for employment land development. This might be used to compensate for loss of employment land if it is deemed that some of the industrial units south of the town centre are functionally redundant.
- Alternatively the site might be required for relocation of Bishop's Stortford Football Club, or for development of employment floorspace to meet local business requirements and sui generis uses that are not suited to the town centre.

Within Bishop's Stortford, EHDC should foster the renewal of existing industrial estates and work to improve access to these estates. The most significant action required is to improve the highways access to the estates accessed by means of Raynham Road.

In terms of economic development actions, Wessex Economics believe the key task of the authority is to plan strategically for the anticipated growth of the area and ensure that the appropriate infrastructure to deliver growth is put in place in a timely manner.