

Buntingford Employment Study

East Hertfordshire District Council

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Study Context

- 1.1.1 AECOM was commissioned by East Herts District Council to deliver an Employment Study for Buntingford.
- 1.1.2 The Employment Study forms part of the evidence base to underpin the review of the East Herts District Plan, and will support with determining future planning applications. This is of particular importance in Buntingford, which is the only town in the District not constrained by Green Belt and has therefore been subject to a number of speculative planning applications.

1.2 Policy and Strategic Context

- 1.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides overarching guidance on the Government's development aims and describes the Government's vision for building a strong, competitive economy. It emphasises that Local Plans should present robust evidence to support clearly defined designations and allocations of land for employment uses. Furthermore, the need for an evidence base to assist in understanding existing business needs, local circumstances and market conditions is also emphasised in the national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). Whilst this Study is not an economic needs assessment, and therefore does not need to align with this guidance, it is relevant for consideration in the context of understanding employment needs in Buntingford.
- 1.2.2 At the local level, the current District Plan identifies that Buntingford is an ideal location for small scale employment allocations given the town's relative isolation and subsequent ability to serve its residents as well as neighbouring rural settlements. The District Plan sets out that the employment strategy for Buntingford (Policy BUNT3) is to ensure there is appropriate land provided for office, industrial and warehousing uses to serve local businesses. This aims to enhance existing employment areas in the town through increasing employment generating floorspace within three existing designated areas: Park Farm; Buntingford Business Park; and Watermill Industrial Estate. Three hectares of additional employment land are allocated to the north of Buntingford Business Park to extend the existing employment area as part of the District Plan.

1.3 Socioeconomic Profile

- 1.3.1 The socio-economic baseline analysis has highlighted that population growth has been significantly higher in Buntingford between 2015 and 2022 than in East Herts, the East of England and England as a whole. This has been driven by residential development in the town and, while population projections are not available at the Buntingford level, current approved planning applications suggest the potential for a further 608 new homes, indicatively accommodating an additional 1,443 residents in Buntingford, of which 706 would be expected to be aged over 16 and economically active. Moreover, there are a number of planning applications yet to be determined that could result in further increases in the resident population.
- 1.3.2 Buntingford has a distinct employment profile compared to East Herts and the regional and national picture. It registers sizable proportions of employment in the construction and motor trades sectors, well above the comparator areas. In relation to the sectors driving office-based employment, Buntingford sees a high proportion of employment in the professional, scientific and technical (7.9%) and business administration and support services (9.3%), though these sit well below the average across East Herts.
- 1.3.3 Over the period since the previous Employment Study, Buntingford has seen changes in sectors that would be expected to drive demand for E(g)/B class floorspace. The town has registered notable growth in the construction sector, with other increases in employment

registered in the business administration and support services, property and motor trades sectors. Conversely, there has been a notable fall in employment in the wholesale and transport and storage sectors.

- 1.3.4 The vast majority of businesses in Buntingford are classed as micro (defined as companies employing up to nine employees), making up 92.4% of local units. Conversely, Buntingford has a notably lower proportions of small and medium-sized businesses than the comparator areas, and no large businesses.
- 1.3.5 Outward commuter movements from Buntingford (2,022) exceed inward commuter movements (949) by 1,073, with the local authorities of significance to Buntingford in terms of commuter trends being North Hertfordshire, Broxbourne, Welwyn Hatfield, Stevenage and South Cambridgeshire.

1.4 Property Market and Existing Employment Sites

- 1.4.1 There is approximately 26,000 sqm of employment generating floorspace in Buntingford, the vast majority of which is for industrial use. There has been a significant loss of industrial employment floorspace in Buntingford associated with the loss of the former Sainsbury's Distribution Depot. However, there has been an increase of ~3,000 sqm of industrial floorspace in recent years, with engagement with commercial agents suggesting this is associated with the development of small workshop units at Watermill Industrial Estate. With regards to office space, there has been some growth, with an additional 1,000 sqm in 2017.
- 1.4.2 There is no vacant employment floorspace identified in Buntingford, with vacancy rates at the district level well below regional and national comparators. This suggests very limited spare capacity in the local and district market to support move-ins and move-outs.
- 1.4.3 There are 3 key employment sites in Buntingford which represent the majority of the existing supply of employment floorspace: Buntingford Business Park, Park Farm Industrial Estate and Watermill Industrial Estate.
- 1.4.4 These sites offer a variety of accommodation in terms of size, age and quality. Watermill Industrial Estate has the largest number of units of the employment sites in Buntingford, with 63 units, with Park Farm Industrial Estate comprising 42 units accommodating micro and small sized businesses. Conversely, Buntingford Business Park comprises three larger industrial buildings totalling approximately 10,100 sqm.

1.5 Land Available for Development

- 1.5.1 The Buntingford Employment Study (2014) identified a number of sites with potential for development in Buntingford, including vacant land at Buntingford Business Park, Watermill Industrial Estate and Park Farm Industrial Estate, and potential land at the former Sainsbury's Distribution site. In the period following the delivery of the 2014 Study, all of this vacant land has been developed for employment or residential use apart from the vacant land at Buntingford Business Park, which totals 3.8ha across land to the south east of the site and the allocation to the north of the site. East Herts Council has confirmed with the landowner that this vacant land is available.
- 1.5.2 In addition to the vacant land identified at existing, allocated sites, approval has been granted at appeal for the mixed-use development of a 28.95ha parcel of land to the east of the A10 in Buntingford (Ref 3/23/1447/OUT), which includes the provision of employment floorspace.
- 1.5.3 It is relevant to the development of policy for Buntingford to know how many jobs could be created should this vacant land come forward for development. Taken together, the analysis suggests that the development of vacant land and land to the east of the A10 in Buntingford (Ref 3/23/1447/OUT) could result in the generation of between 275 and 736 FTE jobs across the employment land use classes, depending on the assumed breakdown of floorspace across this land.

Source of Supply	Floorspace (sqm)	FTE Employment
Vacant Land	13,718 – 18,630	246 – 707
Pipeline Supply	1,600	29
Total	15,318 – 20,230	275 – 736

1.5.4 If delivered, these jobs would represent growth of 12-33% on current workplace employment in Buntingford.

1.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

1.6.1 The Conclusions and Recommendations of this Study are summarised below.

Topic	Conclusion/Recommendation
Is it desirable to increase the number of jobs in Buntingford?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The analysis has demonstrated that additional employment space is required in Buntingford to address a notable disparity between population and employment growth in the Buntingford, suggesting a need for greater balance to support sustainable development. The loss of employment land and lack of spare capacity in the property market also support the need for additional employment space in Buntingford.
What sort of jobs could be attracted or developed in Buntingford? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buntingford was viewed to act as relatively self-contained from a commercial property market perspective. Sectors such as construction, manufacturing and wholesale and retail trades, as well as wider foundational sectors delivering the goods and services required by the local population are likely to remain prominent in the local economy. Micro and small businesses are anticipated to continue to drive demand for floorspace in the town.
What actions need to be taken to achieve the desired outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a need to provide choice in order to accommodate a range of potential occupiers and unit sizes, and to support the potential growth requirements of local businesses. In general, the majority of demand is anticipated in the 0-250 sqm bracket for E(g) uses and 0-1,000 sqm for B class uses. The Council should encourage the completion of approved planning permissions and safeguard existing sites where possible. The Council should continue to work proactively with the landowner at Buntingford Business Park to ensure the site remains available for development for employment uses, as well as engaging with the developer of the of land to the east of the A10 to ensure the provision of employment space closely aligns with requirements in Buntingford. The Council should continue to regularly monitor changes to existing and newly delivered employment space to identify evolving occupier/developer patterns and inform any policy responses that will be required. This is important given that much newly delivered employment space may come forward within the E Use class where there is flexibility for space assigned to E(g) use to later switch to other, non-employment land, uses. Should existing employment land be lost to other uses, or permissions including employment space do not come forward, or are developed for different uses than have been consented, this land or floorspace should be re-provided to a similar or improved quantity and quality specification. Should the wider evidence base support the need for additional employment land at the District level, the evidence presented suggests a potential requirement for additional employment land in Buntingford. In considering additional employment land, or whether the existing supply of employment land is fit for purpose, a number of criteria should be considered, including those set out in Section 8.4.5.

2. Introduction

2.1 Study Context

- 2.1.1 East Herts District Council commissioned AECOM to deliver an Employment Study for Buntingford.
- 2.1.2 In 2023, the Council agreed to undertake a Review of East Herts District Plan (2018). Formal work to update the Plan will commence at the end of 2025 and the Council is currently updating its evidence base to support the District Plan Review. In line with this, an update of the Buntingford Employment Study is required as part of this evidence base and to support with determining future planning applications. Buntingford is the only town in the District not constrained by Green Belt and has therefore been subject to a number of speculative planning applications. With increasing national demand for housing, infrastructure, industry and employment opportunities, this could place pressure on Buntingford to grow at a rate that could pose a challenge to sustainable development.
- 2.1.3 This Study builds on the previous Buntingford Employment Study, delivered in 2014, which established an overall vision and objectives for employment growth in Buntingford, considering the likely growth in the resident population and workforce of the town over the local plan period, the need for employment land to provide local employment opportunities and how this might be achieved.
- 2.1.4 In this Study, employment land is defined as land with business activities falling under the E(g), B2, and B8 use classes as per the Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended). These include:
- E(g) i) office ii) the research and development of products or processes or iii) any industrial process, (which can be carried out in any residential area without causing detriment to the amenity of the area)
 - B2 – general industrial; and
 - B8 – storage and distribution.

2.2 Approach

- 2.2.1 In order to develop an evidence base to determine the need to support employment in Buntingford, our approach includes a number of key elements:
- Understand the existing situation – Analysis of socioeconomic conditions and the commercial property market in Buntingford, and how these have changed following the previous Employment Study, as well as a supply-side assessment of the town's current employment sites;
 - Future requirements – Understand the likely future demand for employment space in the town and what level of employment could be supported on existing vacant land and commitments within approved planning applications; and
 - Conclusions and recommendations – Set out evidence-based conclusions and recommendations for supporting employment in Buntingford.

2.3 Report Structure

- 2.3.1 This report is structured as follows:
- Section 3 sets out the Policy and Strategic Context.
 - Section 4 presents the socio-economic characteristics of Buntingford, compared against the local authority area and wider geographies.
 - Section 5 outlines a review of activity in the commercial property market.

- Section 6 provides an overview of the existing employment sites in Buntingford.
- Section 7 identifies the potential employment supported by the land available for employment development in Buntingford.
- Section 8 brings together the findings of each task to provide recommendations and conclusions and outline an overall strategy for development of employment land in Buntingford.

3. Strategic Context

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The following section provides an overview of the local area and the relevant policy and strategic context to employment and employment land in Buntingford at the national, sub-regional (Hertfordshire), local authority (East Herts) and neighbourhood (Buntingford) level.

3.2 Background Context

- 3.2.1 Buntingford is a small town, with a population of 9,767, located at the centre of a large rural area in the northern half of the East Herts District. The geography surrounding Buntingford primarily comprises rural hinterland, allowing the town to retain its historic market town character. The town centre of Buntingford has a functional role as an important service centre with a secondary shopping frontage. However, as Buntingford is not served by rail, and bus services are limited, residents rely on cars and private modes of transport to access major towns for commerce, employment and leisure.
- 3.2.2 The primary strategic routes in proximity to East Herts are the A1(M) and M11 corridors, situated approximately 15km to the west and east of Buntingford, respectively. Buntingford is located on the A10 London to Cambridge Road which provides connections to the M25 and the South. As a result, employment opportunities for residents of Buntingford are primarily sought along the A10 in Royston, Cambridge, Ware and Hertford as well as Baldock, Letchworth and Hitchin and the larger urban settlements of Stevenage, Bishops Stortford and London, with only approximately 20.4% of residents working and living in Buntingford¹.
- 3.2.3 Buntingford is the only town in the East Herts not constrained by Green Belt and has been subject to a number of speculative planning applications. With increasing national demand for housing, infrastructure, industry and employment opportunities, there is anticipated to be pressure on Buntingford to grow at a rate that could pose a challenge to sustainable development.

3.3 National Planning Policy/Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024)

- 3.3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework² (NPPF) consolidates the Government's economic, environmental, and social planning policies for England and provides overarching guidance on the Government's development aims. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which the Government states should be seen as a common theme running through plan-making and decision-taking.
- 3.3.2 In relation to the economy and employment land, the NPPF states that planning decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand, and adapt. They should support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. Decisions should also allow an area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses, and address any challenges of the future.
- 3.3.3 In addition, the Framework states that planning policies should seek to identify strategic sites for local and inward investment, address potential barriers to investment, allow for new and flexible working practices, and enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances.
- 3.3.4 The latest version of the NPPF, published December 2024, introduces a number of reformed policies. Chapter 6: Building a strong, competitive economy sets out that planning policies and decisions should *'pay particular regard to facilitating development to meet the needs of*

¹ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2012) Census 2011

² Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2024) National Planning Policy Framework

a modern economy, including by identifying suitable locations for uses such as laboratories, gigafactories, data centres, digital infrastructure, freight and logistics'. Locational requirements of sectors are highlighted and with regard to clusters of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries that 'new, expanded or upgraded facilities and infrastructure that are needed to support the growth of these industries' are made provision for in planning policies. Provision should also be made for the 'expansion or modernisation of other industries of local, regional or national importance to support economic growth and resilience.'

Planning Practice Guidance (2019)

- 3.3.5 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)³ includes guidance on housing and economic needs assessments, and housing and economic land availability assessments.
- 3.3.6 Whilst this Study is not an economic needs assessment, and therefore does not need to align with this guidance, it is relevant for consideration in the context of understanding employment needs in Buntingford.
- 3.3.7 Guidance on housing and economic needs assessments states that authorities need to prepare an evidence base to understand existing business needs, which will have to reflect local circumstances and market conditions. This includes assessing the best fit functional economic market area (FEMA), existing stock of land for employment uses within the area, recent pattern of employment land supply and loss, market demand and failure, and wider market signals relating to economic growth.
- 3.3.8 For housing and economic land availability assessments, PPG requires local planning authorities to work with other local authorities within the functional economic market area when assessing availability of land. A wide range of sites should be considered including existing sites that could be improved, intensified or changed.

3.4 Local Planning Policy/Guidance

East Herts District Plan (2018)

- 3.4.1 East Herts District Plan (adopted in 2018)⁴ establishes how development will be planned and delivered across East Herts over the period from 2011 to 2033. It sets out the strategy and policies for delivering growth and identifies appropriate areas and sites for development. These policies are then used to shape decisions on planning applications in the district.
- 3.4.2 The District Plan highlights 10 strategic objectives to form the basis of the policies, relating to climate change, community, housing, design, education and employment, accessibility, provision of facilities, health and wellbeing, biodiversity and infrastructure.
- 3.4.3 Objectives relevant to Buntingford and employment land within Buntingford include:
- Objective 5 – *'To foster entrepreneurial endeavour through educational attainment and encourage small and medium enterprises through maximising existing employment opportunities and clusters';*
 - Objective 6 – *'To improve access opportunities, minimise the need to travel, and encourage necessary journeys to be made by sustainable means to ease congestion and help reduce East Herts' carbon footprint';* and
 - Objective 10 – *'To ensure that development occurs in parallel with provision of the necessary infrastructure, including enhancement and provision of green infrastructure.'*
- 3.4.4 Chapter 6 of the East Herts District Plan focuses on the development strategy for Buntingford, highlighting seven areas of growth including employment and retail. Buntingford is identified as an ideal location for small scale employment allocations given the town's relative isolation and subsequent ability to serve its residents as well as neighbouring rural

³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019). Planning Practice Guidance

⁴ East Herts Council (2018). East Herts District Plan 2018.

settlements. The District Plan sets out that the employment strategy for Buntingford (Policy BUNT3) is to ensure there is appropriate land provided for office, industrial and warehousing uses to serve local businesses. Policy BUTNT3 aims to enhance existing employment areas in the town through increasing employment generating floorspace within three existing designated areas: Park Farm; Buntingford Business Park; and Watermill Industrial Estate. Three hectares of additional employment land are allocated to the north of Buntingford Business Park to extend the existing employment area as part of the District Plan.

3.4.5 Policy DPS1 highlights that across the plan period, East Herts District Council will provide a minimum of 10,800 new jobs, 19,020 hectares of new employment land for a mix of B class uses and an additional 7,100m² of convenience and 5,700m² of comparison retail floor space.

3.4.6 Other policies in the East Herts District Plan of relevance to Buntingford and employment land include:

- Policy BUNT1 Development in Buntingford – Buntingford will deliver a minimum of 1,074 homes across the plan period, although no site allocations for residential development have been proposed;
- Policy DPS2 The Development Strategy 2011-2033 – The strategy of the District Plan is to deliver sustainable development in accordance with sites within a number of urban areas, including Bishop’s Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware;
- Policy ED1 Employment – The District Plan makes land allocations for industry within designated employment areas, comprising a mix of use classes B1 (now E(g)), B2 and B8. The provision of new employment uses should be flexible in design, able to respond to the changing needs, be energy efficient, have fully integrated communications technology and be accessed by sustainable transport modes;
- Policy ED2 Rural Economy - Proposals for creating new employment generating uses or supporting the sustainable growth and expansion of existing businesses in rural areas will be supported where they are appropriately and sustainably located and do not conflict with other policies within the District Plan.

Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan (2016)

3.4.7 Buntingford Community Area (BCA) Neighbourhood Plan⁵ sets out planning policies to provide a vision for the future of Buntingford town parish and surrounding five parishes, in which the BCA must:

- Protect the heritage, biodiversity, community leisure, business and natural assets of the BCA;
- Ensure development is appropriate to meet local needs for:
 - Employment and leisure facilities as part of mixed use developments to make the most effective uses of the land available.
 - High quality design of all new development that adds to the existing rural nature of the quality of life for people and organisations in the BCA.
 - Housing, in terms of overall numbers, type, design and mix.
- Reduce the role of the settlements in the BCA as “dormitory” to enable them to be more sustainable in term of travel and more self-sufficient in terms of their local economies; and
- Enhance and improve the infrastructure that supports the people and business of the BCA for education, health, transport and leisure to reap the benefits of any development and growth in population.

3.4.8 The Neighbourhood Plan provides an overview of the current situation in Buntingford in terms of business and employment. It highlights the need for the BCA to maintain, protect

⁵ Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan (2016) 2014 - 2031

and grow its existing employment space and locally based commerce, as well as increasing the provision of workspace, in order to harness the benefits of potential employment growth and new economic development across the BCA.

3.4.9 The Neighbourhood Plan sets a number of policies for business and employment including the following:

- Policy BE2 – Supports proposals to upgrade, intensify or extend the main industrial sites of Watermill Industrial Estate, Park Farm Industrial Estate, Buntingford Business Park; Silkmead Farm and Buttermilk Farm Agricultural Industry subject to compliance with a range of criteria and the other plan policies; and
- Policy BE4 – A range of developments and proposals will be supported in the BCA including small scale B1 flexible serviced office accommodation, larger multi-let floor space development, Live work units and shared desk space and developments that enhance Buntingford’s market and commercial viability.

Hertfordshire Futures Economic Strategy

3.4.10 Hertfordshire Futures Economic Strategy⁶, currently under development, aims to focus on the residents and businesses of Hertfordshire in order to build a resilient, productive, inclusive and sustainable economy over the next 10 years. Current work under development has identified five key sectors as central to driving local and national economic growth. These are advanced manufacturing; life sciences; creative (film & TV); digital and clean growth / sustainable development. Hertfordshire Futures will incorporate the new Government’s priorities into the strategy, notably housing, planning reforms and devolution to address wider barriers to employment.

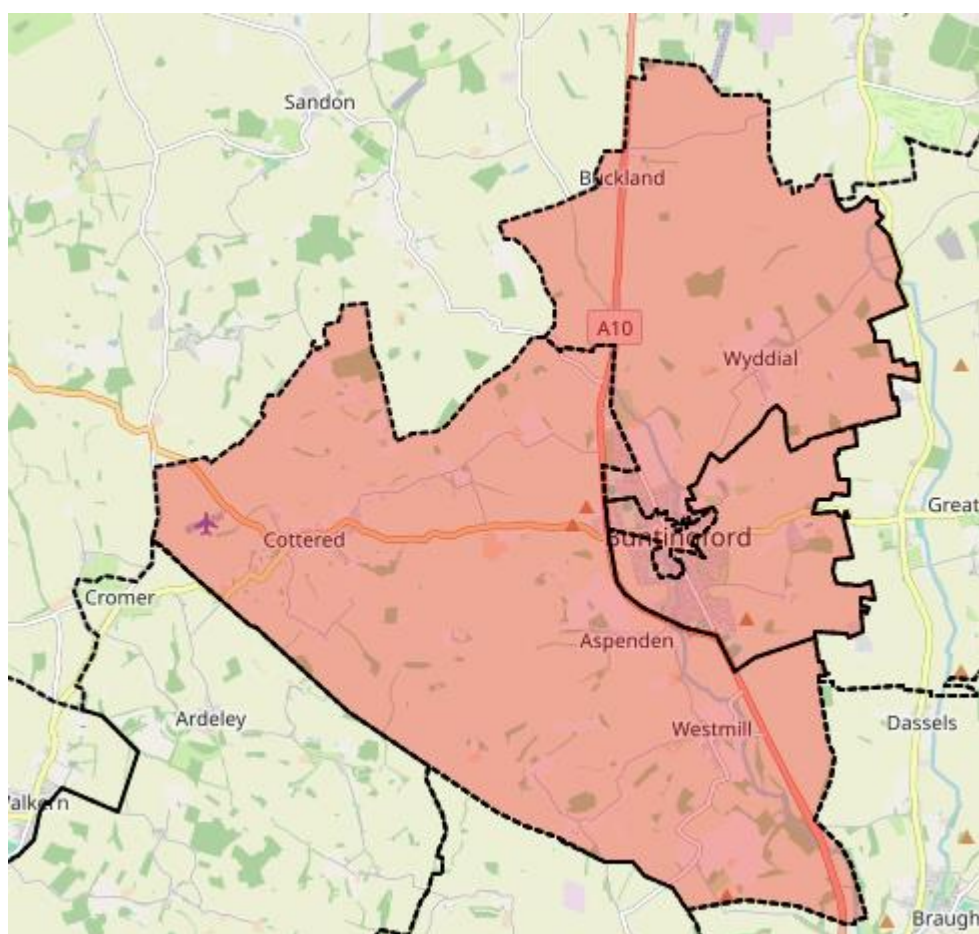
⁶ [https://www.hertfordshirefutures.co.uk/about-us/hertfordshire-s-economic-strategy/#:~:text=Hertfordshire%20Futures%20\(formerly%20Hertfordshire%20LEP,in%20delivering%20high%20value%20projects.](https://www.hertfordshirefutures.co.uk/about-us/hertfordshire-s-economic-strategy/#:~:text=Hertfordshire%20Futures%20(formerly%20Hertfordshire%20LEP,in%20delivering%20high%20value%20projects.)

4. Socio-economic Profile

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 This section of the report sets out an assessment of Buntingford's socio-economic profile, including an analysis of economic performance since the previous Employment Study, in order to understand the impact of changes on likely employment space needs. Comparison is provided with East Herts district, the East of England region and England.
- 4.1.2 The geographical area of Buntingford has been defined by Office for National Statistics (ONS) lower super outputs areas (LSOAs)⁷, and is set out in Figure 4-1 below. LSOAs are a statistical measure for small areas comprising between 400 and 1,200 households and have a usually resident population between 1,000 and 3,000 persons. These were used to define Buntingford rather than the ward boundary which covered a wider geographical area. It is recognised that, in order to incorporate all the built-up area of the town, including the employment site BUNT3 to the west of the A10, the four LSOAs also include a number of villages, notably Buckland, Chipping, Buckland, Aspenden, Westmill and Cottered. Throughout the study detailed demographic and employment analysis is for the study area so slightly overstates the population and jobs in Buntingford town itself, but this is not material to the analysis presented in this report. Throughout the report where reference is made to data for 'Buntingford' it refers to the study area. Where this is not the case, then this is made clear in the text.

Figure 4-1 Map of LSOAs used to define Buntingford



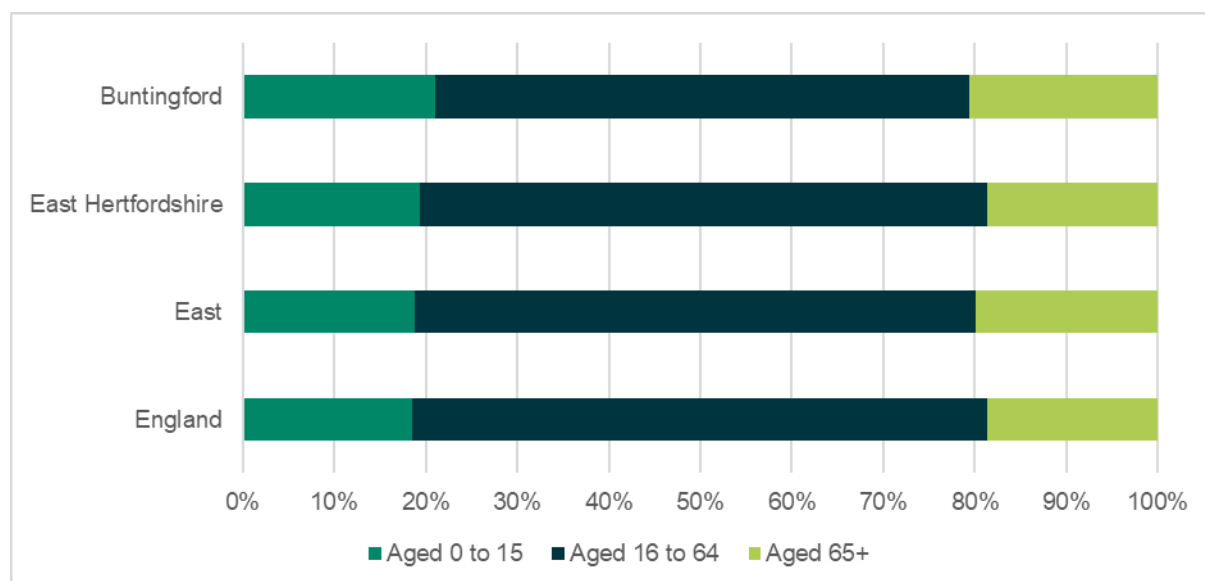
Source: NOMIS 2024

⁷ E01023464: East Hertfordshire 001B; E01023465: East Hertfordshire 001C; E01023466: East Hertfordshire 001D; and E01023494: East Hertfordshire 002B.

4.2 Population, Labour Force and Skills

- 4.2.1 ONS Population Estimates⁸ for 2022, the most recent year available, shows that the residential population of Buntingford stood at 9,767 in 2022. The population has increased from 7,293 in 2015, representing an increase of 33.9%. This growth is considerably higher than that recorded for East Herts (5.9%), the East of England (5.0%) and England (4.2%) over the same time period.
- 4.2.2 Figure 4-2 highlights that in 2022, 58.4% of Buntingford residents were of working age (aged 16-64). This is lower than the shares in East Herts (62.1%), the East of England (61.4%) and England as a whole (62.9%).

Figure 4-2 Population breakdown by age (2022)



Source: ONS Population Estimates 2022

- 4.2.3 The proportion of the population aged between 16-64 in Buntingford (working age population) has decreased over the period from 2015 to 2022, from 60.7% to 58.4%. The working age population in East Herts, the East of England and England also decreased across this period, albeit by a lesser extent.
- 4.2.4 The proportion of the population aged 65 and over in Buntingford saw muted growth over the period, rising from 20.3% in 2015 and 20.5% in 2022. In East Herts, the East of England and England, there has been more notable growth in this age bracket, though the proportion of the resident population aged 65+ remains below that registered in Buntingford. Conversely Buntingford has experienced an increase in the proportion of the population aged 0-15, standing at 21.1% in 2022, above East Herts (19.3%), East of England (18.8%) and England (18.5%).
- 4.2.5 The increase in the resident population reflects the residential development that has taken place in Buntingford since the previous Employment Study. Similarly, changes to the age profile in Buntingford, with a relatively higher proportion of the population in the 0-15 age bracket, could indicate an increase in the number of families locating in the town.
- 4.2.6 Population projections are not available at the Buntingford level. Current approved planning applications suggest the potential for 608 new homes associated with applications 3/24/1447/OUT, 3/22/1030/OUT and 2/24/0294/OUT⁹. With an average household size of 2.37 in East Herts¹⁰, this indicatively suggests the potential for an additional 1,443 residents in Buntingford, of which 706 would be expected to be aged over 16 and economically active.

⁸ ONS (2024); Population Estimates 2022.

⁹ Land North of Hare Street Road secured a resolution to grant planning permission, subject to S106, at January 2025 Development Management Committee.

¹⁰ ONS (2022) Census (2021) Household size, local authorities in England and Wales,

Moreover, there are a number of planning applications yet to be determined that could result in further increases in the resident population.

- 4.2.7 Buntingford's economic activity rate for all residents aged 16 and over in 2021 was 63.6%, below that in East Herts (65.7%), but above rates recorded across the East of England (61.8%) and England (60.9%). Similarly, the employment rate is lower in Buntingford (61.6%) compared with the East Herts (63.2%), but notably higher than across the East of England (58.8%) and England (57.4%).
- 4.2.8 The unemployment rate is lower in Buntingford (2.0%) compared with East Herts (2.5%), East of England (3.0%) and England as a whole (3.5%).
- 4.2.9 Buntingford therefore performs relatively strongly with regards to economic activity compared to the East of England and England as a whole; though employment and economic activity rates are lower than those registered across East Herts. Further detail regarding economic activity and inactivity can be found in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1 Economic activity and inactivity (2021)

	Buntingford (Number)	Buntingford (%)	East Herts (%)	East of England (%)	England (%)
Economic activity - aged 16 and over	4,796	63.6	65.7	61.8	60.9
Employment - aged 16 and over	4,647	61.6	63.2	58.8	57.4
Unemployment rate - aged 16 and over	149	2.0	2.5	3.0	3.5
% who are economically inactive	2,747	36.4	34.3	40.2	41.4

Source: ONS Census 2021

- 4.2.10 The economic activity rate in Buntingford (63.6%) has fallen significantly since the time of the previous Census, in 2011, when it stood at 73.1%. This is driven by an increase in retired people, as shown in Table 4-2. All comparator areas registered a similar decline in economic activity levels between the two censuses.
- 4.2.11 However, despite economic activity levels having fallen between 2011 and 2021, the absolute number of residents that are economically active has increased by 1,330, linked to the population change Buntingford has seen over the past decade. Buntingford has also seen a marked increase in the number of economically inactive residents, driven by those who are retired.

Table 4-2 Change in Economic Activity between 2011 and 2021¹¹

Economic Activity Status	2011	2021	Change 2011 to 2021
Total Economically Active	3,466	4,796	1,330
Full Time	1,829	2,641	812
Part Time	740	960	220
Self Employed	666	949	283
Unemployed	112	127	15
Full Time Student	119	119	0
Total Economically Inactive	1,273	2,747	1,474
Retired	750	1,834	1,084

¹¹ Note: Discrepancies between the employment and unemployment figures reporting in Table 4-2 and Table 4-1 relate to the treatment of full-time students, which are included in the employment and unemployment figures in Table 4-1. However, to allow comparability with the Census 2011 data, full time students are split out in the analysis in Table 4-2.

Economic Activity Status	2011	2021	Change 2011 to 2021
Student	204	255	51
Looking After Family	201	353	152
Long-term sick or disabled	71	162	91
Other	47	143	96

Source: ONS Census 2011 and 2021

- 4.2.12 According to Census 2021, the latest available data at the Buntingford level, 84.3% of residents aged 16 and over within Buntingford held some form of qualification¹², below the rate in East Herts (86.2%), but above the rate recorded across the East of England and England (both 81.9%). In addition, the proportion of the population holding a qualification in Buntingford has increased since 2011, from 78.4%¹³, demonstrating the population was more highly skilled in 2021.
- 4.2.13 Among residents of Buntingford, 30.9% held a degree level or equivalent qualification (National Vocational Qualification [NVQ] Level 4+), which is lower than the proportions in East Herts (38.6%), the East of England (31.6%) and England (33.9%). A higher proportion of residents in Buntingford have no qualifications (15.7%) than seen across East Herts (13.8%), however this is lower than in the East of England and England as a whole (both 18.1%). This is set out in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3 Qualification level of residents ages 16 years and over

	Buntingford (%)	East Herts (%)	East of England (%)	England (%)
% with NVQ4+	30.9	38.6	31.6	33.9
% with NVQ3+	18.5	16.8	16.8	16.9
% with NVQ2+	15.9	14.4	14.4	13.3
% with NVQ1+	11.1	9.4	10.8	9.7
% with other qualifications	7.8	7.0	8.3	8.1
% with no qualifications	15.7	13.8	18.1	18.1

Source: ONS Census 2021

4.3 Local Employment

- 4.3.1 Buntingford has a distinct workplace employment profile compared to East Herts and the regional and national picture. This section focuses on the sectors that are likely to drive demand across the employment land use classes (E(g)/B).
- 4.3.2 Employment in the construction industry in Buntingford accounts for the largest share of jobs at 16.7%, which is more than double the proportion recorded in East Herts at 7.9%, the East of England at 6.9% and England at 4.9%. Considering other industrial sectors, the motor trades sector is also a comparatively significant employer in Buntingford, accounting for 5.5% of all employment, higher than in East Herts (2.3%), the East of England (2.3%) and England (1.8%). Manufacturing accounts for 3.6% of employment, lower than East Herts (6.1%), the regional (7.3%) and national (7.4%) averages.
- 4.3.3 In relation to the sectors driving office-based employment, Buntingford sees a sizeable proportion of employment in the professional, scientific and technical (7.9%) and business administration and support services (9.3%), though these sit well below the average across the District (10.8% and 15.8%, respectively).
- 4.3.4 The education sector is also a comparatively significant employer in Buntingford, accounting for 13.6% of all employment, higher than in East Herts (10.1%), the East of England (8.4%)

¹² ONS, (2022); Census 2021.

¹³ ONS, (2012); Census 2011.

and England (8.3%). This is linked to the presence of several schools, namely Buntingford First School, Edwinstree Middle School, Millfield First School, Layston First School and Freman College, in the town. However, this would be unlikely to drive demand for E(g) / B class employment space, with schools falling under Use Class F1. This is shown in Table 4-4 below.

Table 4-4 Employment by Industry

	Buntingford (Number)	Buntingford (%)	East Herts (%)	East of England (%)	England (%)
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	35	1.7	1.2	1.7	1.2
Mining, quarrying & utilities	20	1.0	0.9	1.0	1.1
Manufacturing	75	3.6	6.1	7.3	7.4
Construction	350	16.7	7.9	6.9	4.9
Motor trades	115	5.5	2.3	2.3	1.8
Wholesale	70	3.3	3.6	4.3	3.8
Retail	185	8.8	7.9	8.8	8.4
Transport & storage (inc postal)	25	1.2	1.6	5.5	5.1
Accommodation & food services	230	11.0	8.6	7.9	7.9
Information & communication	60	2.9	3.4	3.5	4.7
Financial & insurance	15	0.7	1.4	2.0	3.3
Property	50	2.4	2.0	1.9	2.0
Professional, scientific & technical	165	7.9	10.8	7.9	9.4
Business administration & support services	195	9.3	15.8	10.8	9.1
Public administration & defence	30	1.4	2.2	3.4	4.2
Education	285	13.6	10.1	8.4	8.3
Health	75	3.6	9.4	12.1	12.9
Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services	115	5.5	4.7	4.0	4.4
Total	2,095				

Source: ONS BRES 2022

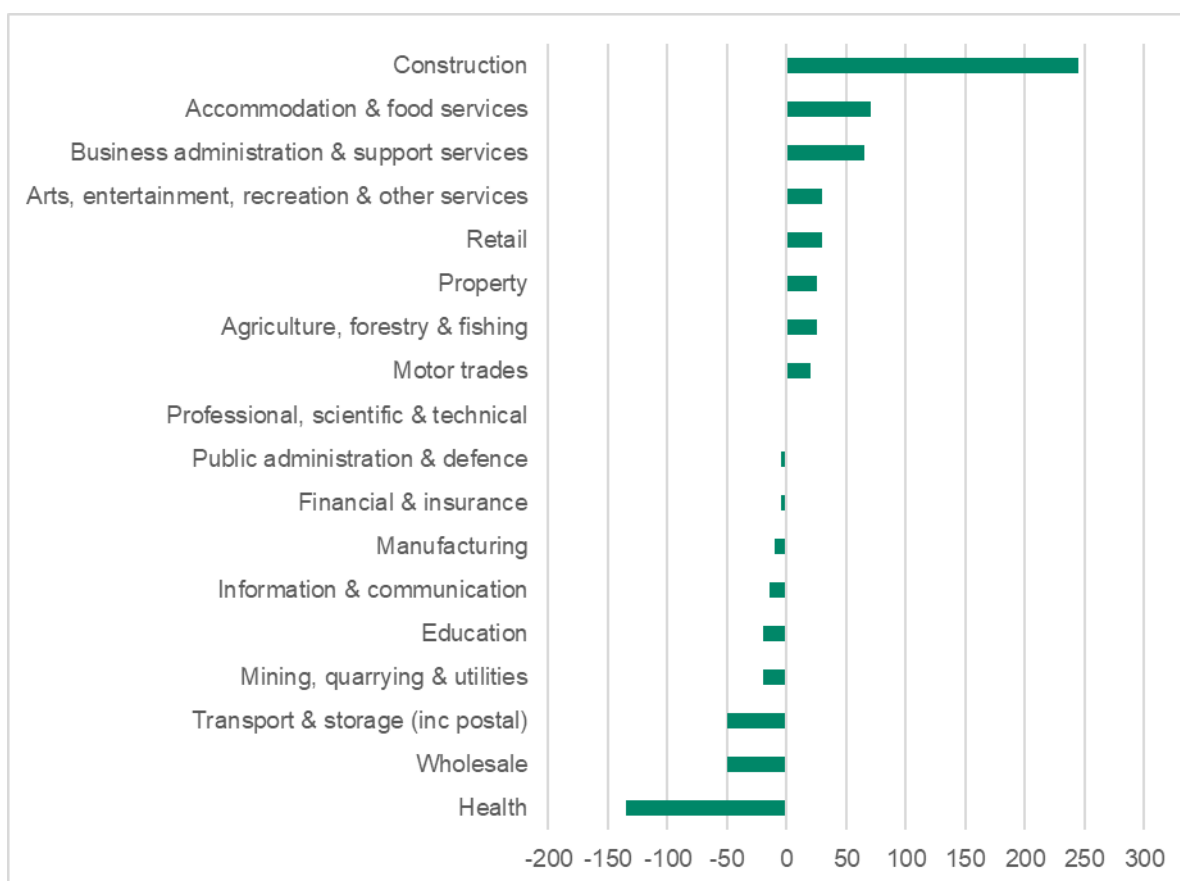
4.3.5 Over the period 2015-2022¹⁴, workplace employment in Buntingford increased by 205 jobs. Considering the sectors likely to drive demand for employment land use classes, there has been a significant increase in employment in the construction industry in Buntingford, which registered an increase of 245 workers. This is reflected in the proportion of employment in the sector rising from 5.5% of employment in 2015 to 16.7% in 2022. Other notable

¹⁴ Note: While BRES data was available up to 2023 at the time of writing, 2022 data is presented to align with the availability of population data and allow historic comparison of how workplace employment has changed alongside the population in Buntingford.

increases in employment have been registered in the business administration and support services, property and motor trades sectors.

4.3.6 Conversely, there has been a notable fall in employment in the wholesale sector, which has fallen from 120 workers in 2015 to 70 in 2022. This is reflected in the proportion of employment in the wholesale sector, which fell from 6.3% in 2015 to 3.3% in 2022. Other sectors to register a decline in employment over the 2015-23 period include transport and storage, mining, quarrying and utilities, information and communication, manufacturing, financial and insurance and public administration and defence. The health sector also registered a notable decline of 135 jobs between 2015 and 2022. However, as with education, the health sector would be unlikely to drive demand for E(g) / B class employment space, with most uses falling under Use Class D1. This is set out in Figure 4-3.

Figure 4-3 Change in Employment in Buntingford 2015-2022



Source: ONS BRES 2022

4.3.7 Employment by occupation in Buntingford is broadly comparable to East Herts. In general, Buntingford and East Herts outperform the regional and national comparators in traditionally higher skilled occupations, while the proportions of employment in traditionally lower skilled occupations are lower than the regional and national average.

4.3.8 The largest occupation category in Buntingford is managers, directors and senior officials (18.3%), notably higher than the regional (13.7%) and national (12.9%) average, albeit in line with the East Herts average (18.2%).

4.3.9 Notably, there is a higher proportion of people employed in skilled trades occupations in Buntingford (11.7%) than East Herts (9.3%), the East of England (10.7%) and England (10.2%). This likely reflects the significance of the construction sector locally.

4.3.10 Conversely, Buntingford and East Herts have lower proportions of people working in elementary occupations – which consist mainly of simple and routine tasks which often require the use of hand-held tools and some physical effort – accounting for 7.3% and 6.8%

respectively, than the East of England (9.9%) and England as a whole (10.5%). This is shown in Table 4-5.

Table 4-5 Occupation of residents ages 16 years and over

	Buntingford (%)	East Herts (%)	East of England (%)	England (%)
Managers, directors and senior officials	18.3	18.2	13.7	12.9
Professional occupations	18.2	22.3	19.6	20.3
Associate professional and technical occupations	15.1	15.8	13.3	13.3
Administrative and secretarial occupations	10.9	10.1	9.8	9.3
Skilled trades occupations	11.7	9.3	10.7	10.2
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	8.2	7.7	9.1	9.3
Sales and customer service occupations	5.3	5.4	7.0	7.5
Process plant and machine operatives	4.9	4.5	6.9	6.9
Elementary occupations	7.3	6.8	9.9	10.5

Source: ONS Census 2021

4.3.11 According to ONS Census, since 2011 the proportion of the population in Buntingford working in traditionally higher skilled occupations has increased¹⁵. The proportion of the population working as managers, directors and senior officials has increased from 15.2% to 18.3%, and the proportion of the population working in professional occupations has increased from 15.7% to 18.2%. This notable increase in the proportion of higher skilled occupations has also occurred in East Herts, the East of England and across England as a whole.

4.4 Business Demography

4.4.1 ONS UK Business Counts data indicates that the vast majority of businesses in Buntingford¹⁶ are classed as micro (defined as companies employing up to nine employees), making up 92.4% of local units. This is higher than the rates in East Herts (87.7%), East of England (85.3%) and England (84.6%). Conversely, Buntingford has a notably lower proportions of small and medium-sized businesses than the comparator areas, and no large businesses, as shown in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6 Business counts by employment size band

	Micro (0 to 9)	Small (10 to 49)	Medium-sized (50 to 249)	Large (250+)
Buntingford	92.4%	7.6%	1.0%	0.0%
East Herts	87.7%	10.1%	2.0%	0.3%
East England	85.3%	11.9%	2.5%	0.3%
England	84.6%	12.4%	2.6%	0.4%

Source: ONS UK Business Counts 2024

4.4.2 The change in business counts in recent years broadly mirrors the change in employment set out in Figure 4-3, with construction registering the greatest increase of 45 local units. Other sectors to record increases include business administration & support services, motor trades, manufacturing, transport & storage, property and professional, scientific & technical.

¹⁵ ONS, (2012); Census 2011.

¹⁶ Note: Data on business counts is only available at the medium level super output area, and therefore a broader definition of Buntingford is adopted for this analysis based on E02004878: East Hertfordshire 001

4.4.3 Conversely, the accommodation and food services and health sectors both registered a fall in business counts over the period 2016-2024, as shown in Table 4-7.

Table 4-7 Change in Business Counts in Buntingford 2016-2024¹⁷

	2016	2024	Change 2016-2024
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	25	25	0
Mining, quarrying & utilities	0	0	0
Manufacturing	30	35	5
Construction	65	110	45
Motor trades	20	25	5
Wholesale	15	15	0
Retail	35	35	0
Transport & storage (inc postal)	10	15	5
Accommodation & food services	25	15	-10
Information & communication	20	20	0
Financial & insurance	5	5	0
Property	15	20	5
Professional, scientific & technical	75	80	5
Business administration & support services	35	50	15
Public administration & defence	5	5	0
Education	15	15	0
Health	20	15	-5
Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services	30	30	0
Total	450	525	75

Source: ONS UK Business Counts 2024

4.5 Commuter Trends

4.5.1 Data from the 2011 Census¹⁸ showing the location of usual residence and place of work by age is the most recently available data regarding commuter trends for small areas.

4.5.2 While the ONS 2021 Census Origin-Destination data has been released, Census 2021 took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change; the national lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected the origin-destination data. Therefore, using these data for planning and policy purposes is cautioned, with Census 2011 likely to be a truer reflection of travel to work patterns, albeit the frequency of journeys may have reduced following the pandemic.

4.5.3 At the time of the Census 2011, there were around 2,540 people in work who lived in Buntingford, and 518 individuals residing in Buntingford both lived and worked within the town. This reflects a self-containment rate of 20.4%. As would be expected for a smaller settlement, this is below the self-containment rate of East Herts (49.3%). Commuter outflows from Buntingford totalled 2,022, with key destinations for work including: other

¹⁷ Note: No data was available for 2015, and therefore 2016 was the earliest year available to provide comparison with the period following the previous Buntingford Employment Study

¹⁸ ONS, (2012); Census 2011.

areas in East Herts (565), North Hertfordshire (205), Broxbourne (150), and Welwyn Hatfield (116).

- 4.5.4 Conversely, Buntingford registered 949 commuter inflows for work, with the highest inflows coming from other areas in East Herts (363), North Hertfordshire (181), Stevenage (54) and South Cambridgeshire (53). The Census Origin Destination data therefore show outward commuter movements from Buntingford (2,022) exceed inward commuter movements (949) by 1,073.
- 4.5.5 It would be anticipated that, since the 2011 Census, the number of those living and working in Buntingford (518) would have now increased, given the increase in hybrid working accelerated by trends associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.6 Summary

- 4.6.1 The socio-economic baseline analysis has highlighted that population growth has been significantly higher in Buntingford between 2015 and 2022 than in East Herts, the East of England and England as a whole. The population breakdown indicates that Buntingford has a higher proportion of the population aged 0-15 and 65+ compared with the comparators.
- 4.6.2 Population projections are not available at the Buntingford level. Current approved planning applications suggest the potential for 608 new homes. With an average household size of 2.37¹⁹, this indicatively suggests the potential for an additional 1,443 residents in Buntingford, of which 706 would be expected to be aged over 16 and economically active. Moreover, there are a number of planning applications yet to be determined that could result in further increases in the resident population.
- 4.6.3 Buntingford has a higher economic activity rate and employment rate than the East of England and England as a whole, though below rates recorded in East Herts. However, the unemployment rate in Buntingford is lower than across all comparators. The economic activity rate in Buntingford has fallen significantly since the time of the previous Census. This is likely driven by the timing of the Census 2021, with the Covid-19 pandemic driving up economic inactivity levels, which stood at 36.4% in 2021, compared with 26.9% in 2011.
- 4.6.4 A smaller proportion of the population of Buntingford is educated to degree-level or equivalent compared to East Herts, East of England and England as a whole. However, Buntingford exceeds all comparators for the proportion of the population with NVQ3+, NVQ2+ and NVQ1+ qualifications, and has a lower proportion of its population with no qualifications compared with the East of England and England.
- 4.6.5 Buntingford has a distinct employment profile compared to East Herts and the regional and national picture. It registers sizable proportions of employment in the construction and motor trades sectors, well above the comparator areas. In relation to the sectors driving office-based employment, Buntingford sees a high proportion of employment in the professional, scientific and technical (7.9%) and business administration and support services (9.3%), though these sit well below the average across the District.
- 4.6.6 Over the period since the previous Employment Study, Buntingford has seen changes in sectors that would be expected to drive demand for E(g)/B class floorspace. The town has registered notable growth in the construction sector, with other increases in employment registered in the business administration and support services, property and motor trades sectors. Conversely, there has been a notable fall in employment in the wholesale and transport and storage sectors.
- 4.6.7 The vast majority of businesses in Buntingford are classed as micro (defined as companies employing up to nine employees), making up 92.4% of local units. This is higher than the rates in East Herts (87.7%), East of England (85.3%) and England (84.6%). Conversely, Buntingford has a notably lower proportions of small and medium-sized businesses than the comparator areas, and no large businesses.

¹⁹ Household and resident characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021

- 4.6.8 Outward commuter movements from Buntingford (2,022) exceed inward commuter movements (949) by 1,073, with the local authorities of significance to Buntingford in terms of commuter trends being North Hertfordshire, Broxbourne, Welwyn Hatfield, Stevenage and South Cambridgeshire. At the time of the 2011 Census, 518 people lived and worked in Buntingford (518), reflecting a self-containment rate of 20.4%, though it would be anticipated that this number would have now increased, given the increase in hybrid working accelerated by trends associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. Property Market Assessment

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This section provides a review of property market indicators in Buntingford. Reference is also made to comparator geographies and wider local authority and regional data. This reflects the fact that the commercial property market in Buntingford is not self-contained, and instead forms part of a much wider market area encompassing the whole of East Herts and neighbouring authorities to some extent, varying somewhat by type of floorspace.
- 5.1.2 Data presented in this section is derived from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and CoStar which represents a comprehensive database of up-to-date property market data. Trends are presented where applicable.
- 5.1.3 Commercial properties comprised of office (E(g)(i)), light industrial (E(g)(iii)), general industrial (B2) and warehousing and storage (B8) types are considered, in line with the definition of employment land. It is recognised that there are other property types which may contribute to employment, but these will not be analysed for the purposes of this evidence base.
- 5.1.4 This section is organised into the following topics:
- Building Stock;
 - Vacancy;
 - Rental Values; and
 - Net Absorption

5.2 Building Stock

- 5.2.1 Data from the VOA²⁰ indicates that there is approximately 26,000 sqm of floorspace across the employment land uses within Buntingford, comprising approximately 3,000 sqm of office floorspace, and 23,000 sqm of industrial floorspace.
- 5.2.2 Industrial property types therefore provide the greatest amount of floorspace by property type, as shown in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1 Employment Floorspace in Buntingford 2014-2023

Floorspace Type	2014	2023	Change
Office	2,000	3,000	+1,000
Industrial	66,000	23,000	-43,000
Total	68,000	26,000	-42,000

Source: VOA 2023

- 5.2.3 Since the previous Employment Study was undertaken in 2014, there has been a significant loss of industrial employment floorspace in Buntingford associated with the loss of the former Sainsbury's Distribution Depot, now occupied by residential development and Buntingford First School. However, there has been an increase of ~3,000 sqm of industrial floorspace in recent years, with engagement with commercial agents suggesting this could be associated with the development of small workshop units at Watermill Industrial Estate, though with the permission relating to B1 uses this floorspace could sit across office or light industrial uses, with feedback from the Council suggesting a combination.

²⁰ VOA (2023) Non-domestic rating: stock of properties including business floorspace

- 5.2.4 With regards to office space, there has been some growth, with an additional 1,000 sqm in 2017. However, feedback from agents suggests that the market for office space has been impacted by the shift to hybrid working accelerated by Covid-19.

5.3 Vacancy

5.3.1 According to CoStar, as of 2024 Q3, there is no floorspace in Buntingford that is identified as vacant²¹ across the employment land use classes. The vacancy rate of identified commercial properties in 2024 Q3 is shown in Table 5-2. Additionally, it is shown that:

- Although there is no vacant office floorspace in Buntingford, in East Herts the vacancy rate for office properties is 1.8%, which is lower compared East of England (6.2%), and England (8.3%);
- There is no vacant industrial floorspace in Buntingford, however in East Herts the rate is 0.4%, which is below the rate in the East of England (3.3%) and England (2.3%);
- There is no vacant warehousing and storage floorspace identified in Buntingford, whereas in East Herts the rate is 1.8% representing a lower vacancy rate than recorded in the East of England (5.3%) and England as a whole (5.8%); and

5.3.2 The vacancy rates across office, industrial and warehousing and storage use classes in Buntingford and East Herts are below the rate which is typical for the East of England region and England as whole. This indicates a lack of spare capacity in the market, with a frictional vacancy rate of 5-8% generally viewed to represent a property market in balance, and with sufficient capacity to support move-ins and move-outs.

Table 5-2 Vacancy Rate

Property Type	Buntingford	East Herts	East of England	England
Office	0.0%	1.8%	6.2%	8.3%
Industrial	0.0%	0.4%	3.3%	2.3%
Warehousing and Storage	0.0%	1.8%	5.3%	5.8%

Source: CoStar, (2024).

- 5.3.3 The trend in vacancy rate between 2014 Q1 and 2024 Q3 in Buntingford demonstrates that, for office properties, the vacancy rate has remained at 0.0% throughout. Industrial and warehousing and storage property types exhibited some vacancy over 2014-15 however there has been no vacant floorspace across these use classes since 2015 Q1.
- 5.3.4 It is evident that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have not been reflected in any significant change to vacancy levels in Buntingford. Overall, the data highlight a persistent lack of spare capacity in the market in Buntingford, in particular over the past decade.

5.4 Rental Values

- 5.4.1 The market rental values in East Herts, East of England and England are set out in Table 5-3. There is limited data available for the rental values of properties in Buntingford, given the size of the market resulting in very few transactions, so data is not presented for this geography. The current rental values in East Herts are broadly in line with those for East of England, however there is some variation among property types.
- 5.4.2 Office properties attract the highest market rental values of the three property types in East Herts (£190.42 per square metre (/sqm)), whereas warehousing and storage properties tend to achieve the lowest market rental values (£138.86/sqm). This is typical across the East of England, however on a national level in England the lowest market rental values are seen in industrial properties.

²¹ Vacant space, as measured by CoStar, refers to all space not currently occupied by a tenant, regardless of any lease obligation that may be on the space. Vacant space could be space that is either available or not available.

- 5.4.3 In terms of office properties in East Herts, the market rent achieved in 2024 Q3 (£190.42/sqm) was lower than exhibited across East of England (£233.47/sqm) and England (£344.88/ sqm). As shown in Section 6, this is likely linked to the age and quality profile of the stock in Buntingford.
- 5.4.4 Industrial properties, on the other hand, attracted higher market rental values in East Herts (£140.36/sqm) than across the East of England (£112.38/sqm) or England (£87.30/sqm). Warehousing and storage properties in East Herts also have higher market rental values (£138.86/sqm) than the East of England (£108.82/sqm) and England (£98.28/sqm).

Table 5-3 Market Rental Values (£/sqm) (2024 Q3)

Property Type	East Herts	East of England	England
Office	190.42	233.47	344.88
Industrial	140.36	112.38	87.30
Warehousing and Storage	138.86	108.82	98.28

Source: CoStar, (2024).

- 5.4.5 Between 2014 Q1 and 2024 Q3, market rental values of office, industrial, and light industrial properties have exhibited an increasing trend.
- 5.4.6 Achieved warehousing and storage market rents have more than doubled over this period, with industrial rents increasing by 88.4% over the same period. Office rents however have seen more muted growth, at 25.7%, and registered an overall downward trend in market value between 2021 Q2 and 2023 Q4, before stabilising slightly since then.
- 5.4.7 These trends broadly reflect overall market trends seen since the Covid-19 pandemic. Office rents – particularly in non-prime locations – have been impacted by the reduced demand brought about by the shift to hybrid working, though this is now viewed to have peaked with many companies encouraging, or mandating in some cases, a return to the office more recently. Conversely, the rise in warehousing and storage rents reflects the accelerated shift towards e-commerce linked to behavioural changes such as increased home working and continued demand for rapid parcel deliveries²², with the levelling off observed from 2023 onwards in line with a slowdown in the market linked to geopolitical uncertainty and rising inflation, with a rise in vacancy and modest take-up at the national level²³. This is shown in Figure 5-1.

²² <https://www.knightfrank.co.uk/blog/2021/04/07/ecommerce-growth-driving-record-warehouse-development-in-2021>

²³ Savills The logistics market: Nationwide Overview 16 January 2025

Figure 5-1 Market Rent (£/sqm) in East Herts

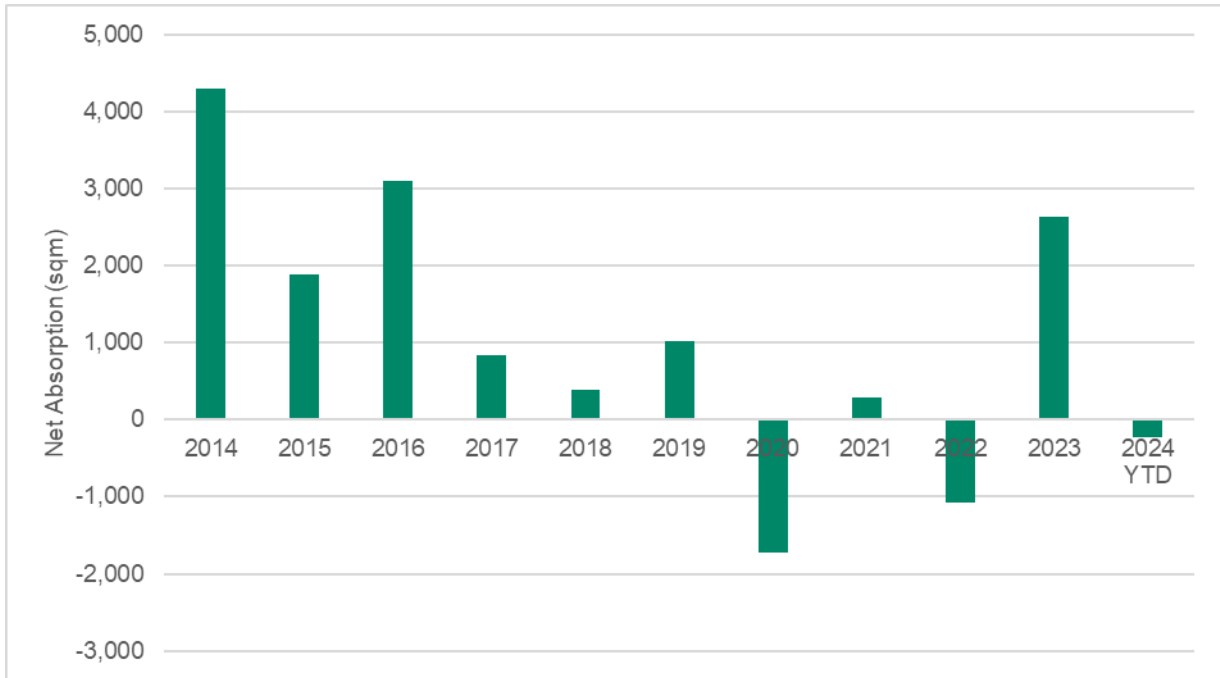


Source: CoStar, (2024).

5.5 Net Absorption

- 5.5.1 Net absorption provides another angle on demand. The measure expresses the change in the overall quantum of occupied floorspace, typically recorded year on year. Positive annual net absorption means that a greater amount of space has been occupied from a given year to the next. Net absorption is not the reverse of vacancy, as vacancy is an expression of the level of non-occupancy against total stock. In office markets where stock may be in decline, for example due to the conversion of offices to residential use, vacancy may reduce but net absorption would be negative.
- 5.5.2 In the absence of suitable data for Buntingford, given the size of the market resulting in limited activity, Figure 5-2 below presents the net absorption for East Herts. Net absorption in East Herts has been mostly positive between 2014 and 2024, which provides some evidence of positive demand, though there has been some volatility in the data from 2020 onwards, likely reflecting changes in the market since the Covid-19 pandemic. However, considering demand for office space in Buntingford, feedback from a property market agent suggested this was limited and negatively impacted by the shift towards hybrid working accelerated by Covid 19.

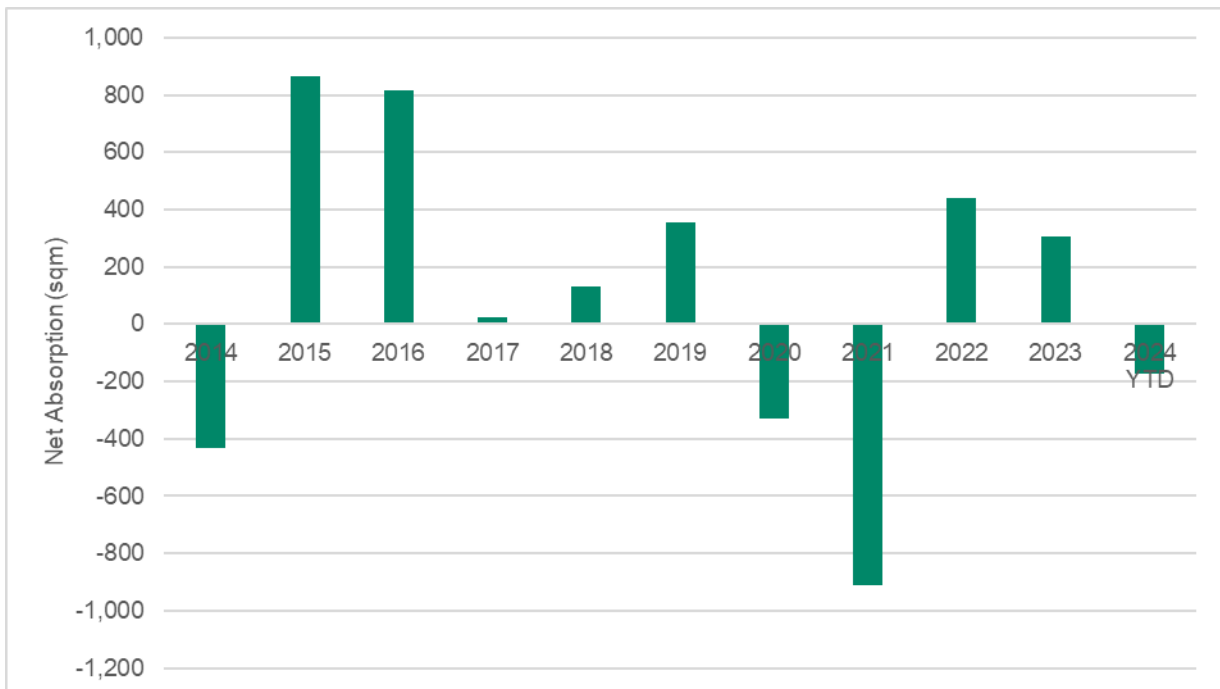
Figure 5-2 Historic net absorption of office floorspace in East Herts (2014 - 2024, sqm)



Source: CoStar, (2024).

5.5.3 With regard to industrial floorspace, net absorption in East Herts was broadly positive over the period 2015-2020, with some volatility over recent years suggesting variable demand. However, considering Buntingford, feedback from agents suggested robust demand for both small and relatively larger industrial units within Buntingford’s existing industrial estates, evidenced by units developed at Watermill Industrial Estate being sold and let off-plan, and robust interest and leasing of units at Buntingford Business Park.

Figure 5-3 Historic net absorption of industrial floorspace in East Herts (2014 - 2024, sqm)

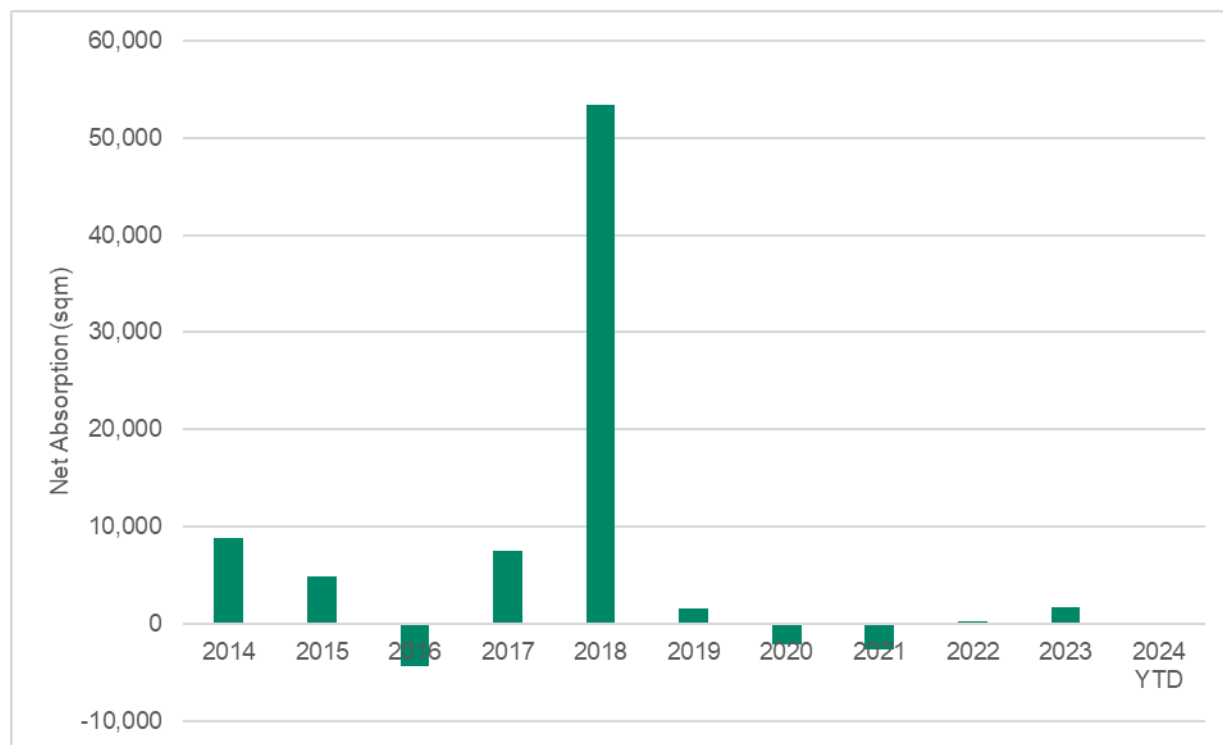


Source: CoStar, (2024).

5.5.4 Net absorption of warehousing and storage floorspace exhibited a generally positive trend over the period 2014-2019 in East Herts. However, net absorption has exhibited a more muted trend from 2019 onwards, indicating a potential slackening of demand for storage and

distribution properties. In relation to Buntingford, the property market agent consulted viewed there to be some potential for warehousing and storage uses in Buntingford, given transport improvements such as the Little Hadham bypass improving access to Bishop’s Stortford, Stansted Airport and the M11.

Figure 5-4 Historic net absorption of warehousing and storage floorspace in East Herts (2014 - 2024, sqm)



Source: CoStar, (2024).

5.6 Summary

5.6.1 In summary, a number of trends and characteristics are apparent with respect to the property market for commercial properties in Buntingford:

- There is approximately 26,000 sqm of employment generating floorspace in Buntingford, the vast majority of which is for industrial use.
- There has been a significant loss of industrial employment floorspace in Buntingford associated with the loss of the former Sainsbury’s Distribution Depot. However, there has been an increase of ~3,000 sqm of industrial floorspace in recent years, with engagement with commercial agents suggesting this is associated with the development of small workshop units at Watermill Industrial Estate. With regards to office space, there has been some growth, with an additional 1,000 sqm in 2017.
- There is no vacant employment floorspace identified in Buntingford, with vacancy rates at the district level well below regional and national comparators. This suggests very limited spare capacity in the local and district market to support move-ins and move-outs.
- East Herts attracts lower market rental values than the East of England and England as a whole for office properties. However, market rental values for industrial and warehousing and storage properties are higher than the comparator areas.
- Across East Herts, industrial and warehousing and storage market rents have broadly doubled over the past decade. However, office rents have seen more muted growth, increasing by 25.7% over the same period.

6. Existing Employment Sites

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 There are 3 key employment sites in Buntingford which represent the majority of the existing supply of employment floorspace:

- Buntingford Business Park
- Park Farm Industrial Estate
- Watermill Industrial Estate

6.1.2 This section of the report provides an assessment of the relative characteristics of these sites.

6.2 Buntingford Business Park

6.2.1 Buntingford Business Park is located close to the Buntingford town centre, to the north-east of the intersection of the A10 Buntingford bypass and Baldock Road. It serves a unique purpose in Buntingford, being the only employment site providing large units to accommodate large businesses and larger-scale operational activities.

Table 6-1 Overview of Buntingford Business Park

Number of Units	Property Types	CoStar Quality Rating ²⁴	Office Rent (£/sqm)	Industrial Rent (£/sqm)	Uses
3	Industrial	2-3	N/A	82.78 - 122.82	Telecommunications; waste and environmental management services

Source: CoStar (2024); East Herts District Council Monitoring

6.2.2 The site comprises three large industrial buildings of similar size, constructed in 2006 and together totalling approximately 10,100 sqm. The two buildings to the west are shared as Unit 1, while the building to the east is Unit 2. Currently Unit 1 is fully leased and occupied by East Herts District Council and North Herts District Council Waste Service, Parking Enforcement Service and Ground Maintenance, with Unit 2 leased and occupied by Datalec Precision Installations, an electrical installation company providing fit-out services to data centres. Rent across the units is estimated to vary between £82.78 – £122.82 per sqm. Feedback from agents highlighted demand for the two units. Whilst Unit 1 has been occupied by the Councils has been occupied as a long-term commitment, Unit 2 has been successfully leased 3 times in the past 10-15 years.

6.2.3 The site is high quality and modern in appearance and well maintained with no significant issues apparent. The three buildings are uniform, built from brick with large glass windows and metal roofing. The units have been constructed to be flexible and suit a range of occupants. The surrounding environment varies but is comprised of predominately agricultural land with overgrown and unmanaged vegetation, which hinders the appearance and environmental quality of the site.

6.2.4 Buntingford Business Park is accessed exclusively from Baldock Road, in the south-west corner of the site. Close to the junction with the A10, the site is well located connected to the road network and served by public transport, with Greenways bus stop on Baldock Road within walking distance (approximately 350m) and offering five bus services. The location of

²⁴ The CoStar Five Star Building Rating System is the industry's first nationally consistent building quality rating system that can be applied across all commercial real estate property types and across all markets. A five star rating represents best in class in terms of design and construction and very likely a certified sustainable and energy efficient building. Conversely, a 1 star rating represents a building that is uncompetitive with respects to the need of a typical industrial tenants, may require significant renovation.

the site is particularly convenient as it is separated from Buntingford which limits the potential noise and pollution externalities emitted by industrial and vehicular activity but remains close to the town centre preventing the site from being isolated. There is designated parking provided for each unit within the business park as well as an additional car park located to the west of the site, however greater parking provision is potentially required to alleviate the abundance of parking along the side if the main internal road.

- 6.2.5 The East Herts District Plan Policy BUNT3 allocated 3ha extension to the north of Buntingford Business Park, which is still to be developed. There is also vacant land adjacent to the southeast of the site which may present opportunity for further commercial development. In November 2024, the landowner has confirmed with the Council that the vacant land in the employment site is still available for employment development.

6.3 Park Farm Industrial Estate

- 6.3.1 Park Farm Industrial Estate is a well-established industrial estate to the north of Buntingford town centre, located within a residential area.

Table 6-2 Overview of Park Farm Industrial Estate

Number of Units	Property Types	CoStar Quality Rating ²⁵	Office Rent (£/sqm)	Industrial Rent (£/sqm)	Uses
42	Industrial; Office	1-2	151.99 - 185.79	70.40 - 103.98	Office-based activities; wholesale; motor repairs; IT support services; small-scale manufacturing; retail

Source: CoStar (2024); East Herts District Council Monitoring

- 6.3.2 The site is comprised of units arranged in terraces and a mix of older and more modern units. The units are predominantly small, single storey industrial units, with some two storey office units, accommodating micro and small sized businesses. In total there are 42 units with quite a range of occupiers, including office-based activities, service businesses (e.g. IT support services) and small-scale manufacturing operations. The units at the east of site predominantly in Class E service / non-industrial usage, while the units further into the site are primarily used for general-industrial, Class B purposes. The site has seen a loss of employment land to residential use since the previous Buntingford Employment Study in 2014.
- 6.3.3 The site is generally functional and acts as a provider of high-demand employment space, evidenced by the lack of vacancy. The industrial units are not modern but generally well maintained and in good condition. Units are typically small; however a number of businesses occupy multiple units to create larger single units. Indicated by the range of occupiers, the units can be used flexibly, appealing for industrial use, storage and distribution as well as office based and customer facing businesses. It is estimated that the Class E units have a higher rent (between £152 - £185.79 per sqm) than the Class B / industrial units (between £70.40 - £103.98 pr sqm).
- 6.3.4 The quality of the environment surrounding site is good with maintained roads, vegetation and a water body. However, the site is located in proximity to residential uses, with limited segregation between the site and residential units to the north.
- 6.3.5 Park Farm Estate has one main entrance on Ermine Street in the east of the site, which runs south into Buntingford. There is pavement connecting the site entrance to residential areas of Buntingford both north and south and the Crown Inn bus stop, which is approximately 900m from the estate and limits its accessibility by public transport. The stop is serviced by

²⁵ The CoStar Five Star Building Rating System is the industry's first nationally consistent building quality rating system that can be applied across all commercial real estate property types and across all markets. A five star rating represents best in class in terms of design and construction and very likely a certified sustainable and energy efficient building. Conversely, a 1 star rating represents a building that is uncompetitive with respects to the need of a typical industrial tenants, may require significant renovation.

5 bus routes, collectively connecting to Stevenage, Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock, Royston, Bishop's Stortford, Ware, and Hertford. Motor users can access the estate although the site suffers slightly from constrained access outside of Buntingford, as the Estate is located within a residential area and 1km from the A10. There is ample parking capacity on site with spaces in front of most units, as well as an additional car park with 25 spaces towards the entrance of the site.

6.4 Watermill Industrial Estate

6.4.1 The Watermill Industrial Estate is located on Aspenden Road, to the south of Buntingford.

Table 6-3 Overview of Watermill Industrial Estate

Number of Units	Property Types	CoStar Quality Rating ²⁶	Office Rent (£/sqm)	Industrial Rent (£/sqm)	Uses
63	Office; Industrial	1-2	162.54 - 198.60	82.78 - 103.98	Motor repair/servicing; fitness centre; electronic repairs; wholesale; small-scale manufacturing

Source: CoStar (2024); East Herts District Council Monitoring

6.4.2 As a result of development within the last 5 years, which has seen the 1.47ha of vacant land identified in the previous Buntingford Employment Study in 2014 now fully built out, Watermill Industrial Estate now has the largest number of units of the employment sites in Buntingford, with 63 units. The site provides an important volume of employment space aimed at smaller to medium local businesses.

6.4.3 Overall, the industrial units on the estate are of varying class uses, sizes, ages, and quality. Usage across the Watermill Industrial Estate generally ranges across Class E, with some more industrial Class B2 occupants, including numerous motor-related repair and servicing businesses, service businesses (e.g. fitness centres) and small-scale manufacturing. 11 small studios were developed in 2021 to the north of the site, ranging between 200sqft and 720sqft (~20-70 sqm), and 17 identical 1,500 sqft (~140 sqm) units were developed in 2019. The new developments contrast the existing older, traditional, small to medium sized units to the south of the site. On the whole, units are viewed to be well maintained, with no evidence of deterioration to the detriment of appearance or utility. The area surrounding the site is comprised of kept vegetation, enhancing the estate's appearance. However, neighbouring west is a sewage facility which emits an unpleasant smell, detectable from nearby points on site at times.

6.4.4 The site entrance is located to the south of the site off Aspenden Road, a narrow road with a poor-quality paving. As a result, accessibility for larger commercial goods vehicles is constrained, as the road is too narrow to accommodate cars passing at a number of points. Additionally accessing the site from the A10 is convoluted, as vehicles must either travel through the centre of Buntingford or London Road before travelling along the narrow Aspenden Road.

6.4.5 Most units provide designated onsite parking, including two units providing EV charging points. However, units located in the south of the site have access to more limited parking capacity, resulting in evidence of spillover along the site's internal roads, blocking pedestrian access on pavements. Watermill Industrial Estate can also be accessed by sustainable modes of transport, with one pedestrian access point located in the north of the site and one at the main entrance in the south, and Aspenden Road bus stop located 650m from pedestrian access points. The bus stop is serviced by four bus routes, connecting Watermill

²⁶ The CoStar Five Star Building Rating System is the industry's first nationally consistent building quality rating system that can be applied across all commercial real estate property types and across all markets. A five star rating represents best in class in terms of design and construction and very likely a certified sustainable and energy efficient building. Conversely, a 1 star rating represents a building that is uncompetitive with respects to the need of a typical industrial tenants, may require significant renovation.

Industrial Estate to Royston, Bishop's Stortford, Ware, and Hertford via public transport, as well as villages in-between.

- 6.4.6 At the time of writing rents are estimated to vary significantly from £82.78 – £198.60 per sqm. There is limited potential development land surrounding the site as the neighbouring greenfield land to the north-west has been granted permission on appeal for a mixed-use, residential led development, incorporating retail and employment floorspace.

7. Land for Employment Development

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 This section of the report examines the land for employment development in and around Buntingford to understand the potential and need for employment development, what employment land is available elsewhere in Buntingford, and the suitability and attractiveness of that land for commercial development for different uses.

7.2 Vacant Land

7.2.1 The Buntingford Employment Study (2014) identified a number of sites with potential for development in Buntingford, including vacant land at Buntingford Business Park, Watermill Industrial Estate and Park Farm Industrial Estate, and potential land at the former Sainsbury's Distribution site.

7.2.2 In the period following the delivery of the 2014 Study, all of this vacant land has been developed for employment or residential use apart from the vacant land at Buntingford Business Park, which totals 3.8ha across land to the south east of the site and the allocation to the north of the site, included in the East Herts District Plan (Policy BUNT3). East Herts Council has confirmed with the landowner that this vacant land is available.

7.2.3 It is relevant to the development of policy for Buntingford to know how many jobs could be created should this vacant land come forward for development. In order to make this calculation, a number of assumptions are required in relation to the type of activities and use class that could be supported. These are detailed below:

7.2.4 Use Class – The proportion of the land likely to be developed and associated floorspace will depend on the use class that is likely to be accommodated on site. The previous Buntingford Employment Study assumed that all development on vacant land in Buntingford would relate to light industrial [B1(c), now E(g)(iii)] uses. However, while this could be possible, no light industrial floorspace was identified in Buntingford through the Property Market Profile in Section 5. Moreover, a recent survey of the site from EHDC identified that current units are flexible and built to suit a range of occupants / usage across Use Classes E, B2, and B8. Given the uncertainty, a range of scenarios are adopted to align with potential uses across the site:

- Scenario 1: Light industrial use, to align with the 2014 Buntingford Employment Study
- Scenario 2: An even split of light industrial and general industrial use
- Scenario 3: An even split of general industrial and warehousing and storage use.
- Scenario 4: A split of office (20%), general industrial (40%) and warehousing and storage use (40%) uses.

7.2.5 It is important to note that, while we would expect employment land to come forward as E(g)(iii) / B2 / B8 development based on existing activity and market signals, the split of uses is ultimately indicative for the purpose of estimating the potential employment that could be supported. The proposed employment land allocation could, in practice, accommodate any eventual split across the employment land use classes.

7.2.6 Plot Ratio – The capacity of land to accommodate floorspace is known as the plot ratio and is expressed as the ratio of total development floor area to site area. There is some available evidence from research studies and many planning authorities use their own ratios, derived from design studies and measurement. In general, for industrial uses a plot ratio of 0.35-0.45 is relevant for light and general industrial uses, with 0.4-0.6 for warehousing and storage uses and 0.75 to 2.00 for office uses depending on the location of development²⁷. Having reviewed the employment land evidence in East Herts and

²⁷ OPDM Employment Land Reviews: Guidance Note 2004

neighbouring authorities, a plot ratio of 0.4 for E(g)(iii) and B2 uses is assumed; alongside a plot ratio of 0.5 for B8 uses and 0.75 E(g)(i) uses²⁸.

- 7.2.7 Employment Densities – Having applied plot ratios to calculate the total development floorspace associated with the available land, this can then be converted to employment through the application of employment densities. These are applied in line with HCA Employment Density Guide 3rd Edition (2015), as summarised below:

Table 7-1 Employment Density Assumptions

Use class	Employment Density	Employment density assumption used (sqm per job)
E(g)(i)	Office – 13 sqm NIA per FTE job	13
E(g)(iii)	Light industrial – 47 sqm NIA per FTE job	47
B2	Industrial & Manufacturing – 36 sqm GIA per FTE job	36
B8	Storage & Distribution – 70-95 sqm GEA per FTE job	70

Source: HCA Employment Density Guide (2015).

- 7.2.8 The ratio of external to internal areas – The application of plot ratios allows the gross external area (i.e. the whole area of a building taking each floor into account²⁹) to be calculated. As shown in Table 7-1, the employment densities vary in their application, from net internal area (light industrial), gross internal area (general industrial) and gross external area (warehousing and storage). As such, for light industrial and office floorspace, adjustments are required to convert the floorspace to NIA, while general industrial floorspace is converted to GIA. A 1:0.95 conversion ratio is assumed for GEA to GIA is assumed; with a similar 1:0.8 conversion ratio for GIA to NIA³⁰.
- 7.2.9 The application of the above assumptions is set out in Table 7-2. The analysis suggests that, if the 3.8 ha of vacant land were to be developed, additional employment of 246 – 707 FTE jobs could be generated in Buntingford.
- 7.2.10 However, it should be noted that these figures are only measures of capacity based on potential scenarios, not the likelihood of delivery. The market appeal of the site can differ very substantially and this will have a major bearing on actual delivery of employment floorspace and the actual creation of jobs.

Table 7-2 Estimate of FTE Jobs Generated by the Development of Vacant Land at Buntingford Business Park

Scenario	Use Classes	Site Area	Total Floorspace	Total FTE Employment
Scenario 1	E(g)(iii)	3.8	13,718	246
Scenario 2	E(g)(iii) / B2	3.8	14,079	323
Scenario 3	B2 / B8	3.8	16,720	336
Scenario 4	E(g)(i) / B2 / B8	3.8	17,708	707

7.3 Pipeline supply

- 7.3.1 In addition to the vacant land identified at existing, allocated sites, it is also important to consider the pipeline of future employment development in Buntingford.
- 7.3.2 Approval has been granted for the development of a 28.95ha parcel of land to the east of the A10 in Buntingford (Ref 3/23/1447/OUT). The mixed use development consists of 350 dwellings, up to 4,400 sqm of commercial and services floorspace (Use Class E and B8)

²⁸ This is consistent with the approach to employment land studies in North Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield as neighbouring authorities.

²⁹ VOA Code of measuring practice: definitions for rating purposes

³⁰ HCA Employment Density Guide (2015)

and up to 500 sq m of retail floorspace (Use Class E) and other associated works including drainage, access into the site from the A10 and Luynes Rise (but not access within the site), allotments, public open space and landscaping.

- 7.3.3 In order to assess the potential employment associated with this development, the breakdown of employment floorspace adopted within the planning application's supporting documentation³¹ is taken forward. This assumed that:

“The employment land will provide some 1,500 sqm Class E a b and c (offices), 1,500 sqm Class B8 and 100 sqm home working hub. It has also been assumed that there may be doctors surgery will be 1,300 sqm.”

- 7.3.4 The Economic Impact Assessment provided alongside the outline planning application calculated 167 direct jobs associated with the employment space. However, the 1,500 sqm Class E a/b/c floorspace and 1,300 sqm associated with the doctor's surgery are excluded from our analysis as these fall outside of the employment land use classes. Furthermore, in the case of the doctor's surgery, a resolution to grant planning permission (subject to S106) for this at Hare Street Road has now been approved and it will no longer come forward on this site. The 100 sqm home working hub is assumed to be use class E(g)(i).

- 7.3.5 Applying the assumptions set out in Section 7.2, the analysis suggests that, if the land to the east of the A10 were developed in line with the approved planning application (Ref 3/23/1447/OUT), 29.1 FTE jobs could be generated by the employment land use classes in Buntingford. This is set out in Table 7-3.

Table 7-3 Estimate of FTE Jobs Generated by the land to the east of the A10 (Ref 3/23/1447/OUT)

Use Class	Floorspace (sqm) ³²	Total FTE Employment
Office E(g)(i)	100	7.7
Warehousing & Storage (B8)	1,500	21.4
Total	1,600	29.1

7.4 Summary

- 7.4.1 Taken together, the analysis suggests that the development of vacant land and land to the east of the A10 in Buntingford (Ref 3/23/1447/OUT) could result in the generation of between 275 and 736 FTE jobs across the employment land use classes.

Table 7-4 Summary of Potential Employment Generated by Vacant Land and Pipeline Supply

Source of Supply	Floorspace (sqm)	FTE Employment
Vacant Land	13,718 – 18,630	246 – 707
Pipeline Supply	1,600	29
Total	15,318 – 20,230	275 – 736

- 7.4.2 If delivered, these jobs would represent growth of 12-33% on current workplace employment in Buntingford. However, it should be recognised that additional jobs will also be delivered across non-employment uses such as retail.

³¹ DLP Planning Economic Impact Assessment A Report For The Development At Buntingford West 2023

³² Note: Given no measurement classification is provided in relation to the floorspace, the ratio of external to internal areas is unknown and no conversion has been made for the purpose of this analysis.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 This section of the report presents our conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis in the preceding sections and outlines a potential strategy for the development of employment land in Buntingford.

8.1.2 The conclusions and recommendations of the Study are framed around a series of questions. These are as follows:

- Is it desirable to increase the number of jobs in Buntingford?
- What sort of jobs could be attracted or developed in Buntingford?
- What actions need to be taken to achieve the desired outcomes?

8.2 Is it desirable to increase the number of jobs in Buntingford?

8.2.1 Over the period 2015-2022, the population in Buntingford increased by 2,474, representing growth of 33.9%. This growth is considerably higher than that recorded in East Herts (5.9%), the East of England (5.0%) and England (4.2%).

8.2.2 Based on the age structure of the population and economic activity levels set out in Section 4.2, the economically active population of Buntingford is expected to have increased by 1,041 over this period, reflecting growth of 27.0%. This is again notably higher than East Herts, the East of England and England.

8.2.3 Over the same period, workplace employment in Buntingford increased by 205 jobs, as shown in Section 4.3.5, representing significantly lower growth of 10.8%, broadly comparable to the increases seen in East Herts (8.3%), the East of England (6.8%) and England as a whole (7.7%). This is set out in Figure 8-1 below.

Figure 8-1 Population Growth vs Employment Growth 2015-22



- 8.2.4 While population projections are not available for Buntingford, current approved planning applications suggest the potential for 608 new homes associated with applications 3/24/1447/OUT, 3/22/1030/OUT and 2/24/0294/OUT³³. With an average household size of 2.37³⁴, this indicatively suggests the potential for an additional 1,443 residents in Buntingford, of which 706 would be expected to be aged over 16 and economically active. Moreover, there are a number of planning applications yet to be determined that could result in further increases in the resident population.
- 8.2.5 Since the previous Employment Study was undertaken in 2014, there has been a notable loss of industrial employment land in Buntingford associated with the loss of the former Sainsbury's Distribution Depot, now occupied by residential development and a First School, as well as the development of vacant employment land at Park Farm Industrial Estate for residential use. However, there has been an increase of ~3,000 sqm of industrial floorspace in recent years and an additional 1,000 sqm of office space was delivered in 2017.
- 8.2.6 Property market analysis presented in Section 5 demonstrates that there is currently no known vacant floorspace within Buntingford across office, industrial, and warehousing and storage properties, while vacancy rates across East Herts are also below the regional and national averages for these uses. This indicates a lack of spare capacity in the market, with a frictional vacancy rate of 5-8% generally viewed to represent a property market in balance, and with sufficient capacity to support move-ins and move-outs.
- 8.2.7 Feedback from a local agent highlighted robust demand for industrial floorspace in Buntingford, both at the smaller scale (with 18 small units (1,500 sqft) developed on the Watermill Industrial Estate fully occupied), and at the larger scale, with the town's bigger units (~36,000 sqft) at Buntingford Business Park fully leased. Feedback suggests confidence in the future demand for similar uses in Buntingford, with the flexibility afforded by Use class E having been beneficial in accommodating a broad range of uses in smaller units at Watermill Industrial Estate.
- 8.2.8 There was viewed to be some potential for warehousing and storage uses in Buntingford, given transport improvements such as the Little Hadham bypass improving access to Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Airport and the M11. However, larger industrial and logistics uses would be expected to come forward in locations with superior access to the strategic road network, such as Bishop's Stortford. Conversely, despite limited spare capacity, there was viewed to be more limited demand for office space in Buntingford due to the impact of Covid-19 on demand, and this type of employment being concentrated in the larger settlements such as Bishop's Stortford and Hertford.
- 8.2.9 As set out in the NPPF, the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes, commercial development and supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner. In this regard, it is important to support an appropriate mix of uses across an area, and within larger scale sites, to minimise the number and length of journeys needed for employment, shopping, leisure, education and other activities.
- 8.2.10 As demonstrated in Figure 8-1, recent years have shown a notable disparity between population and employment growth in the town, suggesting a need for greater balance to support sustainable development, while the loss of employment land and lack of spare capacity in the property market also support the need for additional employment space in Buntingford. In this regard, the analysis suggests that the development of vacant land at Buntingford Business Park and land to the east of the A10 in Buntingford (Ref 3/23/1447/OUT) could result in the generation of between 275 and 707 FTE jobs, representing growth of 12-33% on current employment in Buntingford.
- 8.2.11 As recognised in the previous Buntingford Employment Study, the specialist nature of many jobs means that it is worth people travelling some distance to work, since by so doing they can secure a much better paid job, than they could if they worked locally. People are willing to commute, both because the salary they can command in a job more than outweighs the

³³ Land North of Hare Street Road secured a resolution to grant planning permission, subject to S106, at January 2025 Development Management Committee.

³⁴ Household and resident characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021

cost of commuting, and because they have reasons why they wish to live where they are, be that family connections, children in local schools, a preference to live in a market town rather than a bigger settlement.

- 8.2.12 As such, there is no certainty that an increase in the number of jobs located in Buntingford will reduce the level of out-commuting set out in Section 4.4, with workers drawn to elsewhere in the District, North Hertfordshire, Broxbourne, and Welwyn Hatfield. Moreover, it is important to recognise that wider commercial development in competing locations in East Herts may satisfy some demand from the resident population in Buntingford. However, increasing the number of jobs in Buntingford would create enhanced opportunity for people to live and work locally, and support a diversified mix of activities locally. Furthermore, should the provision of employment space fail to keep up with growth in the working age population in Buntingford, there will inevitably be an increase in outward-commuting, notwithstanding the increase in home working that has resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic.

8.3 What sort of jobs could be attracted or developed in Buntingford?

- 8.3.1 In general, Buntingford was viewed to act as relatively self-contained from a commercial property market perspective, being too far away to gain a bounce/spillover demand from other, larger markets. In this regard, sectors such as construction, manufacturing and wholesale and retail trades, as well as wider foundational sectors delivering the goods and services required by the local population, are likely to remain prominent in the local economy.
- 8.3.2 As set out in Section 4.4, the business base in Buntingford is dominated by microbusinesses (companies employing up to nine employees), which account for 92.4% of local businesses. It would be anticipated that these types of businesses would continue to drive demand for floorspace in Buntingford, with demand for smaller, flexible units (~1,500 sqft) that can accommodate E class uses ratified through engagement with the local agent, as highlighted above. However, reflecting the presence of some small and medium sized businesses in the town and demand for larger units remaining robust over the past 15 years, the provision of a range of unit sizes that provide flexibility and can support the growth aspirations of local businesses is recommended.

8.4 What actions need to be taken to achieve the desired outcomes?

- 8.4.1 In order to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy in Buntingford, there is a need to ensure that sufficient land of the right types is available in suitable places to attract occupiers and support growth, innovation and improved productivity.
- 8.4.2 This Study has identified that future demand for employment land floorspace in Buntingford is likely to centre on the industrial use classes, with demand at various scales to suit micro and small to medium sized enterprises. As such, there is a need to provide choice in order to accommodate a range of potential occupiers and unit sizes, and to support the potential growth requirements of local businesses. In general, the majority of demand is anticipated in the 0-250 sqm bracket for E(g) uses and 0-1,000 sqm for B class uses; though there is evidence of demand for larger units as seen at Buntingford Business Park.
- 8.4.3 It is appropriate for the Council to encourage the completion of remaining permissions and safeguard existing sites where possible, thereby maximising their contribution to local economic development. In this regard, the Council should continue to work proactively with the landowner at Buntingford Business Park to ensure the site remains available for development for employment uses, as well as engaging with the developer of the of land to the east of the A10 (Ref 3/23/1447/OUT) to ensure the provision of employment space closely aligns with requirements in Buntingford. This is of particular importance given the challenge associated with the conversion of employment land to residential use, as

highlighted through this Study. Whereupon existing employment land is lost to residential or other uses, or permissions including employment space do not come forward, or are developed in whole or in part for different uses than have currently been consented, this land or floorspace should be re-provided to a similar or improved quantity and quality specification.

8.4.4 It is recommended that the Council continues to regularly monitor changes to existing and newly delivered employment space to identify evolving occupier/developer patterns and inform any policy responses that will be required. This is important given that much newly delivered employment space may come forward within the E Use class where there is flexibility for space assigned to E(g) use to later switch to other, non-employment land, uses such as retail, albeit that this can still result in employment generation. It is also important given that, as discussed, delivery of employment floorspace has not matched housing delivery and if this were to continue, the propensity of change of use within Class E and potentially permitted development rights may result in what modest space is being delivered not remaining in employment use long-term, exacerbating this trend.

8.4.5 It is important to recognise that this Study is part of a wider evidence base for the District Plan Review, and the strategy for supporting employment in Buntingford will be informed by wider employment market and land supply assessments at the East Herts level, which will determine the overall quantity of employment land that is required over the District Plan period, alongside consideration of housing, infrastructure and environmental needs and constraints in the town and wider district. Should this wider evidence base support the need for additional employment land at the district level, the evidence presented suggests the potential requirement for additional employment land in Buntingford to align with growth in the residential population of the town. In considering additional employment land, or whether the existing supply of employment land is fit for purpose, a number of criteria should be considered. These include:

- Accessibility and sustainable transport needs;
- The provision of essential infrastructure e.g. access to utilities;
- Segregation from sensitive neighbouring uses (e.g. residential); and
- Site size, access, shape and topography.
- Deliverability and/or ownership.

8.4.6 The Conclusions and Recommendations of this Study are summarised in Table 8-1 below.

Table 8-1 Conclusions and Recommendations

Topic	Conclusion/Recommendation
Is it desirable to increase the number of jobs in Buntingford?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The analysis has demonstrated that additional employment space is required in Buntingford to address a notable disparity between population and employment growth in the Buntingford, suggesting a need for greater balance to support sustainable development. • The loss of employment land and lack of spare capacity in the property market also support the need for additional employment space in Buntingford.
What sort of jobs could be attracted or developed in Buntingford? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buntingford was viewed to act as relatively self-contained from a commercial property market perspective. Sectors such as construction, manufacturing and wholesale and retail trades, as well as wider foundational sectors delivering the goods and services required by the local population are likely to remain prominent in the local economy. • Micro and small businesses are anticipated to continue to drive demand for floorspace in the town.
What actions need to be taken to achieve the desired outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a need to provide choice in order to accommodate a range of potential occupiers and unit sizes, and to support the potential growth requirements of local businesses. In general, the majority of demand is anticipated in the 0-250 sqm bracket for E(g) uses and 0-1,000 sqm for B class uses.

Topic**Conclusion/Recommendation**

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- The Council should encourage the completion of approved planning permissions and safeguard existing sites where possible.
 - The Council should continue to work proactively with the landowner at Buntingford Business Park to ensure the site remains available for development for employment uses, as well as engaging with the developer of the of land to the east of the A10 to ensure the provision of employment space closely aligns with requirements in Buntingford.
 - The Council should continue to regularly monitor changes to existing and newly delivered employment space to identify evolving occupier/developer patterns and inform any policy responses that will be required. This is important given that much newly delivered employment space may come forward within the E Use class where there is flexibility for space assigned to E(g) use to later switch to other, non-employment land, uses.
 - Should existing employment land be lost to other uses, or permissions including employment space do not come forward, or are developed for different uses than have been consented, this land or floorspace should be re-provided to a similar or improved quantity and quality specification.
 - Should the wider evidence base support the need for additional employment land at the District level, the evidence presented suggests a potential requirement for additional employment land in Buntingford. In considering additional employment land, or whether the existing supply of employment land is fit for purpose, a number of criteria should be considered, including those set out in Section 8.4.5.