

East Herts Council Report

District Planning Executive Panel

Date of meeting: Tuesday 19 May 2026

Report by: Councillor Vicky Glover-Ward – Executive Member for Planning and Growth

Report title: East Herts District Wide Employment Land Review

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- Members have agreed to prepare a new Local Plan, including an update of the evidence documents needed to support the new Plan. The Employment Land Review provides an assessment of the district’s employment sites, and makes recommendations about each as to their ongoing contribution to the district’s jobs and economy. This information is crucial to the new Local Plan in determining how this land fits into the overall strategy for the district as set out within the new Local Plan. Therefore, this report summarises key priorities of the assessment and seeks agreement to use the document as part of the new Local Plan evidence base, and to inform Development Management decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL: that the Executive be advised that:

- A) The Employment Land Review, attached as Appendix A, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to agree that the Employment Land Review can be used as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan and as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Local planning authorities are required to complete a review of their local plans at least once every 5 years from the adoption date to ensure that plans remain relevant. In October 2023, the Council agreed that East Herts District Plan 2018 needs updating, and that work should commence on updating the technical studies and other preparatory work required to provide a robust evidence base to support this Review. The intention to formally start plan-making is the subject of a separate paper on this agenda.
- 2.2 A clear, relevant and proportionate evidence base is essential for efficient and sound plan-making to ensure that all future planning policy and decisions are based on up-to-date information. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024) sets out the requirement for the preparation and review of all policies to be, *'underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence'* (paragraph 32).
- 2.3 The evidence base consists of supporting documents that will help inform the future policies and site allocations in the new Local Plan. It will cover a range of social, economic, and environmental topics and help identify local needs, constraints and opportunities.
- 2.4 The evidence base will be developed throughout the preparation of the new Local Plan, and the planning policy team will seek agreement from Executive via the District Planning Executive Panel to include relevant studies as part of the evidence base. Because of the nature of the Employment Land Review (ELR), and its potential to influence policy formulation, it is considered appropriate to include it within the Council's evidence base.
- 2.5 The Council undertook an ELR for the previous District Plan in 2013, conducted by Halcrow. The work undertook a visual

inspection of the employment areas that were then operating within the district and provided an assessment of these against the previous work from 2008, indicating how the sites compared. The report summarised the findings and made recommendations for each in respect of the emerging District Plan.

2.6 The current ELR updates this work and has been undertaken by officers combining site visits and desktop analysis over a period between November 2024 and April 2026.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 Since the previous ELR, there have been notable changes in the stock of allocated employment land across the district, and relevant planning policy context has evolved significantly. In addition, major societal changes have occurred, including the Covid pandemic and Brexit, which have shaped the way business and industry both structures itself and operates. The purpose of this review is to provide an updated assessment of the district's employment land, which considers those changes in the context of this district and informs the emerging Local Plan.

3.2 Whilst the ELR is effectively an audit of the way in which employment sites across the district are meeting the needs of the district's businesses and employers at a snapshot in time, it is also an essential part of providing a wider picture of land use for the Local Plan strategy. The work conducted during the Review has:

- informed the individual employment studies for each of the main towns;
- been cross-referenced for the (forthcoming) retail and town centres evidence, and
- will inform decisions about the location of new housing development by ensuring that land needed for employment uses will be protected as such.

3.3 The ELR therefore provides a key piece of evidence in understanding and tracking change in the sector, highlighting trends such as the movement of employers from town centres to industrial estates and out-of-centre locations (including rural areas), technological change and the role and function of

traditional industrial estates in the context of changes to use classes in the way people work.

3.4 The ELR is attached to this report at Appendix A. It is structured through a series of chapters:

- policy context, which covers the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG), the existing District Plan 2018, and the major Use Class Changes implemented in 2020;
- methodology, which discusses the process by which the review was undertaken;
- the assessment of employment land, which is broken down into sections by settlement, and
- conclusions and recommendations, which are to be considered during the preparation of the new Local Plan, specifically the allocation of employment land.

3.5 The ELR assessed 33 designated Employment Areas within the district, alongside the new employment provision allocated at Bishop's Stortford South (BISH5), which has been developed since the adoption of the District Plan. The information included within each individual site assessment is accurate to the date it was collected as certain sites have been more recently assessed than others (see para 2.6 above). Each employment site was reviewed in the same manner, using a pro forma template which was created to break up the assessment into key attributes. Each of these attributes is fully defined in the report and ensures consistency, but are summarised below:

- Quality - the physical and environmental quality of the employment area evaluated through a visual assessment of numerous physical attributes including standard of buildings and sufficiency of parking;
- Occupancy – vacancy, when there is clear evidence or signage of the unit being currently vacant and/or marketed to let;
- Accessibility – access to the site via varied forms of transport, including walking and cycling;
- Planning history - to establish important context and form understanding of recent, current, and future developments;

- Use classes – to present an overview of which use classes are being fulfilled;
- Constraints – physical factors that impact the site;
- Boundary issues – such as where a parcel of allocated employment land has been developed or redeveloped for a purpose other than employment use, such as housing, or where a site has been developed to extend beyond the area of its existing designation.

3.6 The assessments are set out alphabetically by main settlement followed by village sites, each containing a general overview of both the settlement and the employment land position, before describing changes between the previous update and the current time. This sets the context for the individual site assessments, which are set out in a standard template form with an aerial photo, basic site information, a site description and the assessment based on the aspects discussed at para 3.5 above. This approach is intended to make the report easy to read and comprehend.

3.7 The conclusions and recommendations in the final section are based upon the evaluation of each respective Employment Area, and the assessment of how sites have evolved or changed since the 2013 Employment Land Review. Broadly, there are three types of recommendation:

- where parcels or the entirety of an Employment Area has been lost to a non-employment land use, it is recommended that the pertinent area be excluded from any employment designation within the emerging Local Plan.
- where an employment land use has extended beyond the existing Employment Area boundaries, it is recommended that the emerging Local Plan updates the boundaries to incorporate new employment land.
- where an employment site has seen no significant changes and continues to serve its purpose, it is recommended that the site be safeguarded as employment land within the emerging Local Plan.

3.8 The conclusions and recommendations are set out in a summary table by settlement in the corresponding order to the site

assessments.

- 3.9 The conclusions and recommendations will be important in informing the strategy for the new Local Plan, ensuring that a good understanding of the employment land situation is available and up to date, and that this supports the decisions that need to be made with respect to the location of employment and non-employment uses. It is expected that more details on the Local Plan strategy will be presented to Members through the DPEP and Executive later in the year.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 The Council could choose not to agree to endorse the ELR as part of the new Local Plan evidence base. This would mean that the Local Plan would not be able to rely on this evidence to inform emerging policy and strategy, and would compromise the progression of the plan. It would also likely cause difficulties during the plan-making process, particularly when the Council defends its strategy at the Examination stage.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 If the ELR is not agreed as part of the evidence base, it may be considered as having reduced weight in informing the strategy and the policy in the new Local Plan. This would mean that significant information about employment areas could be undervalued. This would be contrary to Government policy to have a robust evidence base and could undermine the Council's position in terms of successfully bringing forward the update of the East Herts District Plan, 2018.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 The ELR was informed by consultation with officers where necessary (e.g. to inform planning history and provide background information for sites where necessary. It has been shared with consultants working on related evidence in the production of the new Local Plan where this is relevant. There has been no public consultation on the ELR, but the study will be made available on the Council's website in due course as part of the background evidence that has informed the plan.

Community Safety

There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

Data Protection

There are no data protection implications arising from this report.

Equalities

There are no direct equality, diversity, or inclusion implications in this report. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) will be carried out of the new Local Plan in accordance with The Equality Act 2010.

Environmental Sustainability

The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Evidence to support provision and location of employment land has a range of implications for environmental sustainability including how people choose to travel to work and how far they need to travel, the impact of noise and other disturbance from employment uses on other uses and the ability of communities to find the services and facilities they need in the places they live.

Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Health and Safety

There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Human Rights

There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Legal

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Specific Wards

All

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix A: East Herts Employment Land Review (2026)

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