

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:	Bishop's Stortford Employment Study
Ward(s) affected:	Bishop's Stortford All Saints; Bishop's Stortford Central; Bishop's Stortford North; Bishop's Stortford Parsonage; Bishop's Stortford South; Bishop's Stortford Thorley Manor;

Summary

- Members have agreed to prepare a new Local Plan including an update of the evidence documents needed to support the new Plan. The Bishop's Stortford Employment Study provides an updated assessment of the employment market in the town and makes recommendations about the type of jobs and employment land likely to be required, which will help shape the economic strategy in the new Local Plan. This report summarises the key priorities of the Study 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 Bishop's Stortford Employment Study, 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 for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the completion of the Bishop's Stortford Employment Study, and to agree it 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. 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 Plan Executive Panel to include relevant studies as part of the evidence base. Because of the nature of the Bishop's Stortford Employment Study and its potential to influence policy formulation, it is considered appropriate to include it within the Council's evidence base.
- 2.5 A previous employment study for Bishop's Stortford was published in 2013 to inform the policies and development strategy in the adopted District Plan. It provided information about the local employment market and advice on the economic development of the town and employment site requirements.

2.6 The current Bishop's Stortford Employment Study updates this work. The Council commissioned consultant Aecom to produce the study, using desktop research, officers' employment site visits and feedback from local agents. It forms part of a series of employment studies for each of the towns in East Herts. Buntingford Employment Study was published last year and Hertford & Ware and Sawbridgeworth studies will be finalised in the coming months.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 The relationship between jobs and housing is a key consideration in the delivery of sustainable development. There has been significant growth in Bishop's Stortford over the last ten years. District Plan strategic site allocations have been developed across the town, delivering new dwellings, facilities and a new employment site at Bishop's Stortford South. A number of these sites are still being delivered, which will further change the housing, services and employment opportunities in the town.

3.2 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 Study is to provide an updated assessment of the employment market in Bishop's Stortford, to consider these changes in the local context and provide robust evidence that can inform the emerging Local Plan. The study explores the relationship between people living in the town and local jobs; the function of existing employment sites and the changing role of the town centre as a location for offices. It provides an essential understanding of employment land-use requirements in Bishop's Stortford, which will help shape the economic strategy in the new Local Plan. The focus on offices in the town centre will also contribute to wider evidence about the function and character of the town centre, which will be explored in more detail in the forthcoming retail and towns centres study.

3.3 The main focus of the Study is the town of Bishop's Stortford but given the importance of Stansted Airport to Bishop's Stortford, both in terms of its ability to generate employment opportunities for local residents and influence demand for employment in the town, a wider area comprising Bishop's Stortford and Stansted

Airport is included in the analysis.

3.4 The Bishop's Stortford Employment Study is attached to this report at **Appendix A**.

3.5 The Study comprises of the following sections:

- **Introduction and strategic context** – sets out the approach of the study; describes the local content and the national and local policy framework.
- **Socio-economic profile** – presents the socio-economic characteristics of Bishop's Stortford and the wider Stansted Airport study area, compared against the district and wider geographies.
- **Property market assessment** – provides a review of office and industrial floorspace, with information on building stock, vacancy, rental values and demand. Explores external factors that could influence employment floorspace in the town in the coming years, such as Stansted Airport expansion, the proposed introduction of minimum energy efficiency standards and the continued influence of changing space requirements for office and knowledge work following the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Existing employment sites** – sets out the relative characteristics (including uses, vacancy, unit size and type, rental rates, access, amenity) of the existing employment sites in the town, informed by economic data and information from the Employment Land Review.
- **Land for employment development** – examines the indicative potential of the District Plan allocations in Bishop's Stortford with employment floorspace still to come forward: including vacant land in the eastern neighbourhood at Bishop's Stortford North and the mixed-use allocations at Old River Lane and The Goods Yard.
- **Conclusions and recommendations** – sets out evidence-based conclusions and recommendations and outlines a potential strategy for the development of employment land in Bishop's Stortford.

Study conclusions and recommendations

- 3.6 Based on the analysis of the preceding sections, section 8 presents the conclusions and recommendations of the Study, framed around three questions.

Is it desirable to increase the number of jobs in Bishop's Stortford?

- 3.7 Future population growth associated with existing housing commitments suggests the need to deliver jobs in order to support sustainable development. This need could be increased if further housing growth is allocated in the new Local Plan, although there is no guarantee that providing more jobs in the town will reduce out-commuting as people commute to jobs for numerous reasons. It is important that residential development is balanced with an appropriate quantum of employment land to support opportunities for local residents. This is a particular consideration given the lack of spare capacity in the local property market.

What sort of jobs could be attracted or developed in Bishop's Stortford?

- 3.8 Bishop's Stortford has a high proportion of employment in knowledge intensive business services such as professional, scientific and technical, information & communication, financial and insurance. Its position as part of the UK Innovation Corridor could attract occupiers across the health, life sciences and pharmaceuticals, advanced engineering and aerospace sectors. Stansted expansion could increase interest from transport and storage companies; with warehousing and storage also vital for other sectors across the economy including advanced manufacturing and life sciences.
- 3.9 The analysis demonstrates that additional employment space is required in Bishop's Stortford to meet identified demand for industrial needs and the lack of spare capacity in the market. Demand is more muted for office space; however, the age and quality profile of stock presents potential future challenges in retaining occupants and safeguarding stock given future minimum energy efficiency standards. Overall, it is viewed that future office development would likely be of a smaller scale and be best suited in proximity to the town centre. Sufficient parking was raised by agents as a factor influencing demand so business parks were

also identified as potentially suitable locations.

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

3.10 To ensure a strong, responsive and competitive economy in Bishop's Stortford, the Study recommends that the Council prioritise the following actions:

- Protect existing employment sites and encourage completion of existing permissions. 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.
- Seek to provide a mix of unit sizes to accommodate a range of potential occupiers across light industrial (E(g)(iii)), general industrial (B2) and warehouse and storage (B8) uses. Consider potential to allocate employment land to accommodate industrial demand.
- Delivery of small and medium-sized premises (under 2,000 sqm) should be encouraged reflecting the current mix of provision in the town (and generally the district) across both office and industrial.
- Review opportunities to work with landlords and occupiers to improve office properties in the town centre before they become non-compliant with minimum energy efficiency standards. Also consider the role of more innovative office spaces, for example co-working offices.
- Work with applicants of the allocated sites to encourage the delivery of employment floorspace.
- 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 particularly important where there is flexibility for E (g) uses (e.g. office and light industrial) to later change to non-employment uses classes within the E Use Class.
- Should the wider new Local Plan evidence base support the need for additional employment land at the district level, the evidence presented in this study suggests a potential

requirement for additional employment land in Bishop's Stortford. 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 accessibility, sustainable transport links, infrastructure provision, site constraints and ownership.

- 3.11 These recommendations can usefully inform policy and strategy decisions about future employment land-use within Bishop's Stortford in the emerging Local Plan and in planning application decisions. The Study provides a robust and up-to-date understanding of the local employment market which refreshes the study carried out in 2013. When considered alongside other studies within the evidence base, including a district-wide employment demand assessment and land supply assessments, it will effectively support decisions about the future economic strategy for the town. Therefore, it is recommended the study is agreed as part of the new Local Plan evidence base and as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 The Council could choose not to agree to endorse the Bishop's Stortford Employment Study 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 it could 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 Bishop's Stortford Employment Study is not agreed as part of the evidence base, it may be considered as having reduced weight in informing the new Local Plan and planning application decisions. It would mean the Council would not have a current understanding of the employment market in Bishop's Stortford. This is contrary to Government policy to have an up-to-date evidence base and could undermine the Council's position in terms of successfully bringing forward the new Local Plan.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 As part of their research, the consultants consulted three property market agents active in the Bishop's Stortford market. The study will be made available on the website, in the Local Plan Evidence base section, and be subject to a number of statutory public consultations as part of the production of the new Local 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

Yes - Bishop's Stortford All Saints; Bishop's Stortford Central; Bishop's Stortford North; Bishop's Stortford Parsonage; Bishop's Stortford South; Bishop's Stortford Thorley Manor;

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix A: Bishop's Stortford Employment Study

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