

EMPLOYMENT LAND

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EMPLOYMENT LAND

Introduction

- 5.01 Unemployment in Hastings in August 2003 was 3.6% compared to East Sussex (2.0%) and the South East (1.5%). Within the town, some wards had exceptionally high rates, particularly the central wards of Castle and Central St Leonards.
- 5.02 In 1993, Hastings Travel to Work Area was granted Assisted Area Status by the Government in recognition of its economic difficulties. The Government reviewed the UK Assisted Areas during 1999 and Hastings was granted Enterprise Grant Area Status from January 2000, which means that Government grants are available for some classes of projects which create jobs.
- 5.03 Also from 2000, some wards within the Borough have been included within the European Community's Objective 2 Programme. The South East Programme includes a spatial development priority to facilitate the development of key strategic sites for business and employment use.
- 5.04 The Borough Council seeks to tackle these economic problems through a range of programmes set out in the Hastings Regeneration Strategy, including supporting local enterprise, reducing unemployment, improving job skills and developing land and buildings. The Hastings and Bexhill Task Force will play a major role in providing new employment opportunities in the town. The main role of the Local Plan is to ensure the provision of sufficient land and premises to provide for local employment needs over the Plan period. The town has a shortage of good quality sites and premises to serve both the expansion needs of local firms and to attract new businesses. The Local Plan needs to tackle the problem of lack of suitable sites and premises, and the Borough Council has been proactive in providing employment land

as part of its efforts to support the local economy and will continue to do so.

- 5.05 Although this chapter is concerned primarily with the provision of land and buildings for manufacturing and office based businesses (falling within Use Classes B1–B8), it is recognised that other sectors will also play an important role in providing employment and regenerating the town. These include tourism and leisure activities, the arts and cultural industries, and IT and learning-based activities. The Borough Council will provide strong support for appropriate development benefiting these sectors. Relevant policies are included elsewhere in the Plan.

Employment Land Availability

- 5.06 Although Hastings has five designated industrial estates and several smaller industrial areas, it is likely that during the Plan period, there will be a shortfall of industrial land in the Borough unless new sites are brought forward. The recession in the 1990s greatly depressed demand for land or premises, but had it not been for that, the few remaining available sites would have been quickly taken up. However, with an improving economy, demand will return. Several important local firms are known to have expansion requirements which could not be fulfilled by available sites because they are too small or otherwise unsuitable.
- 5.07 Employment derived from the industrial estates is very important to the local economy. Manufacturing provides 12% of the jobs in the town.
- A survey of the town's industrial areas by the Borough Council in June 1999 found just over 230,000 sq.m of occupied floorspace on 66 hectares of land.
 - There was a further 7.6 hectares of undeveloped greenfield sites on the industrial estates, representing 9% of the total industrial land. Of this total some 6.83 hectares remained available in August 2003.
- 5.08 However, the survey also found that there was a further 20,400 sq.m of vacant industrial floorspace in the town, suggesting that many of the existing units available may not fully satisfy the market's requirements both in terms of access and good quality accommodation. This was also the conclusion of 'A Study of Vacant Industrial and Commercial Premises in East Sussex' undertaken in June 1994 by Gerald Eve (Chartered Surveyors) for East Sussex County Council. This found that the stock of vacant industrial property was generally of poor quality in Hastings.
- 5.09 This view was restated in a study of the local industrial property market undertaken by Drivers Jonas in early 1998. Their study concluded that there is significant local demand, particularly for smaller units, but that the supply of quality industrial property in

the town is very limited. The Hastings Local Economic Review (prepared by Sussex Enterprise in 1998) highlighted sites and premises as a major constraint on business growth. The lack of suitable opportunities for development is also cited in the South East Objective 2 Single Programme Document (SPD).

- 5.10 With existing employment land in Hastings Borough nearly all taken up, the most important new land release within the Hastings Travel to Work Area will be the proposed North Bexhill Business Park which is allocated in the draft Rother District Local Plan. Development of the site is dependent on construction of the Hastings to Bexhill Link Road. Following the recommendations of the South Coast Multi Modal Study (SoCoMMS), the Secretary of State for Transport has invited East Sussex County Council to prepare designs for the scheme. No programme is yet available for the construction of the road.

New Employment Land

- 5.11 With the above circumstances in mind, the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan 1991–2011 reviewed the options available for attracting new investment into the Hastings Travel to Work Area, together with a means of satisfying the demand for sites from existing local firms. It concluded that the early release of land for employment use was required to provide an incentive for potential inward investment and counter the disadvantages to the town arising from the poor strategic road and rail links. Structure Plan Policy E10(b) states:–

“Early Land Release

To boost the local economy and redress acknowledged shortages of suitable sites in the Hastings and Bexhill area, it is proposed to release up to 15 hectares of land in the short term for high quality business development, subject to the outcome of studies to examine the potential and location of sites.”

- 5.12 The Structure Plan also identifies a longer term requirement within the plan period for 20–25 hectares of employment land in

Hastings and Rother District. This total would include any new allocations brought forward to meet the requirement for early land release, but is not disaggregated between Hastings and Rother. However, in view of the greater economic problems and higher levels of unemployment experienced in Hastings, it is considered that up to 15 hectares of employment land should be allocated in Hastings Borough, of which up to 10 hectares should ideally be capable of early release.

Location of Development

- 5.13 The town is tightly constrained by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the north and east, and the Combe Haven Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to the west. Government Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 (PPG7) sets out strict policy safeguards against inappropriate development in areas covered by such environmental designations.
- 5.14 The Structure Plan makes it clear that any sites proposed in the AONB would need to meet the normal very strict requirements for development in those areas. The Structure Plan therefore proposes that a sequential approach should be adopted in identifying employment sites to be included in the Local Plan. It is intended that sites within the urban area should be sought first, followed by greenfield sites without formal protective environmental designations, and only then, if necessary, should greenfield sites with protective environmental designations be considered.
- 5.15 As a consequence of the Structure Plan employment land policy, Rother District Council in co-operation with the Borough Council and the County Council, commissioned a study to examine the potential for greenfield employment development along a broad corridor of land either side of the A21. This study proposed 3 new sites in the Hastings and Bexhill area. It also supported further study of the Broomgrove site and promotion of the opportunities at the Churchfields Industrial Estate.

5.16 In accordance with the approach outlined in the Structure Plan, the Borough Council has re-examined the potential for providing new employment land within the town, both on the few remaining greenfield sites, and on existing and vacant industrial sites. As well as contributing towards meeting the Structure Plan requirements in the area, the town needs to provide a range of sites and buildings suitable for different industrial and business uses.

5.17 In seeking to meet the requirement for further employment provision, the Borough Council has examined the potential development opportunities as set out below.

(a) Existing Industrial Estates

5.18 There are a few remaining opportunities for development on the existing industrial estates in the town, in the form of infill sites. However, all of these sites are small (under 2 hectares in size) and several are subject to access and ownership constraints, including a number that are retained by existing businesses. The number of sites immediately available on the town's five established industrial estates is now very limited, amounting to less than 2 hectares of land.

(b) Vacant Premises

5.19 As stated above, there is a reasonable supply of existing vacant industrial and business floorspace in the town. However, as indicated by the 1994 Gerald Eve Study and other subsequent work, much of this property is of poor quality and does not meet the standards sought by modern business activities. Refurbishing or redeveloping existing buildings to modern requirements is often expensive in relation to the likely return from investment in terms of commercial rents. Where suitable opportunities exist, the Hastings Regeneration Partnership is committed to work with other public agencies and the private sector to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use.

(c) Previously Developed Land

- 5.20 The most significant 'brownfield' development opportunity in the Borough is that at Broomgrove, comprising the site of the former power station and land adjacent to the railway at Ore station. However, this site has major access problems which restrict the amount and type of employment which can be located there. A proposal to provide a new access road, which would have overcome this problem, was investigated but was found to be prohibitively expensive. It is therefore considered that the site is only suitable to provide small-scale employment uses designed to meet local needs.
- 5.21 The site of the former West St Leonards Primary School was also investigated as a possible site for small-scale employment uses. However, following public consultation, preference has been given to the allocation of the site for housing.

(d) Greenfield Sites

- 5.22 As stated above, there are few available greenfield sites in the Borough which lie outside the AONB or other areas with environmental designations. In addition, there are also competing demands for land, in particular the need to provide sufficient land for housing to meet the Structure Plan provision figure.
- 5.23 Opportunities for new employment development were identified on two greenfield sites in the Borough:-
- (i) Land at Holmhurst St Mary, in conjunction with the development of housing on the site;
 - (ii) Land west of Queensway on land previously allocated for housing, and an area safeguarded for a possible school.
- 5.24 Following a detailed feasibility study commissioned by the Council, it was concluded that employment development at Holmhurst St Mary would not be viable, but that development west of Queensway should be proceeded with.
- 5.25 The Queensway sites together would provide around 5.7 hectares of new strategic employment land. The land at Broomgrove would provide a further 2 hectares for employment uses, although aimed at meeting local rather than strategic needs. In addition a small area of 0.4 hectares to the east of the Ivyhouse Lane Industrial Estate at the end of Burgess Road has been allocated for employment use. However, in view of the importance attached to economic regeneration, it is considered that these sites alone would not be sufficient to provide for the Borough's needs over the whole of the Plan period.
- 5.26 The Borough Council has therefore allocated a further employment site at Ivyhouse Lane. The proposed development would form a northward extension to the existing industrial estate, extending into Rother District. The land lies on the edge of the existing built-up area and within the AONB, but it is considered that the environmental and visual impact of development would be acceptable and will be minimised.

- 5.27 It is intended that development on each of the sites allocated for employment should be guided by a Planning and Development Brief or similar planning guidelines which will outline the amount and type of development which is acceptable.
- 5.28 Further details of the sites listed in Policy E1 are included in the table below that policy.

New Employment Sites

- 5.29 Policies E1 and E3 set out the sites allocated for employment use in Hastings. The Borough Council will take action to increase employment by:-
- (i) Encouraging manufacturing industries to locate in Hastings;
 - (ii) Allowing for the expansion requirements of manufacturing and service sectors already in Hastings;
 - (iii) The provision of new or converted small workshops/managed workspaces; and
 - (iv) Giving particular support for more sustainable industries.

POLICY E1

Sites for Employment Development

The following sites are identified for employment development. In each case, the amount of employment land available for development will be informed by a Planning and Development Brief or similar planning guidelines prior to any proposals for development being considered by the Council:-

- (a) Land at Broomgrove (up to 2 hectares) (Use Classes B1 and B2);
- (b) Land west of Queensway (up to 5.7 hectares) (Use Classes B1, B2 and B8);
- (c) Land at Ivyhouse Lane, as an extension to the existing industrial estate, (up to 3 hectares in Hastings Borough). (Use Classes B1, B2 and B8).

Summary of Allocated Employment Sites

(a) Land at Broomgrove (up to 2 hectares)

Employment uses are proposed as part of a mixed use development, now forming part of the Ore Valley Millennium Community, comprising housing and employment, and possibly other facilities, linked to improvements to Ore station. The site includes the former Broomgrove power station site and adjacent railway land, and represents the largest 'brownfield' redevelopment opportunity in the Borough. In view of access and traffic considerations and the mix of housing and employment uses proposed for the site, it is considered that the emphasis should be on provision for small businesses.

(b) Land West of Queensway (up to 5.7 hectares)

The allocation consists of three sites, two sites previously allocated for housing development, known as Marline Fields and Highdown, and an area previously allocated for a possible school. The sites are currently greenfield land, but are considered suitable for employment development, having direct access onto Queensway and being located opposite the existing Castleham employment area. The proximity of the sites to residential development and holiday chalets at High Beech and to the Marline Valley SSSI requires that care is taken in the design and layout of development. This should have full regard to landscape, ecological and any neighbour considerations.

(c) Land at Ivyhouse Lane (up to 3 hectares in Hastings Borough)

The site includes land to the north of the existing Ivyhouse Lane industrial estate, and extends outside the Borough into Rother District. The opportunity for development was

identified in the 'A21 Corridor' study and is also supported in the South East Objective 2 SPD. The site is currently greenfield land on the edge of the built-up area and lies within the High Weald AONB. However, the site has been identified as suitable for employment development, in view of the limited potential sites elsewhere. It is considered that the land proposed for development would have limited visual impact, especially from views from the north within the AONB itself. In addition, development would be well landscaped in order to soften views from the Rye Road area.

Policies for Industrial Estates

- 5.30 There are five established industrial estates in Hastings, namely the Castleham, Churchfields, Ponswood, Ivyhouse Lane and West Ridge/Ashdown estates. These estates are typified by mainly light industrial and warehousing uses with some office accommodation and limited wholesale and retail activities.
- 5.31 There is a general presumption against purely retail activities on the industrial estates. The reason for this is to prevent the loss of primarily industrial use to retail warehouses.

POLICY E2

Industrial Development – Established Estates

Industrial and commercial development (Use Classes B1, B2 and B8) will be granted planning permission within established industrial estates at Ponswood, Ivyhouse Lane, Castleham, Churchfields and West Ridge/Ashdown. Preference will be given to Class B1 uses on the Ashdown Estate. Retail uses (Use Class A1) will not be granted planning permission in these estates.

5.32 A small area of land at the end of Burgess Road on the existing Ivyhouse Lane Industrial Estate is allocated for employment use to enable a connection to be made between Burgess Road and Hayward Way, in order to resolve existing circulation problems on the estate. This will involve land in Rother District. The land to the north of the allocated land mainly comprises ancient woodland and the developer will be expected to enter into a planning agreement with the Council to secure the ongoing maintenance of the part within Hastings Borough. It is anticipated that Rother Council will have a similar requirement.

POLICY E3

Ivyhouse Lane – Land at Burgess Road

Planning permission will be granted for the development of 0.4 hectares of land at the end of Burgess Road on the Ivyhouse Lane Industrial Estate to enable a road connection to be made to Hayward Way, provided that a planning agreement is entered into with the Borough Council to secure the ongoing maintenance of the ancient woodland to the north of the site.

Retention of Existing Employment Uses

5.33 Approximately 11% of the floorspace devoted to industrial and related uses is located outside the five principal industrial estates.

The main concentrations are at:-

- (i) Broomgrove;
- (ii) Bridge Way;
- (iii) Roebuck Centre (Old Town);
- (iv) Earl Street.

5.34 Other smaller areas of workshops and light industry are in areas such as Harold Mews (off Mews Road), Salisbury Yard (off Salisbury Road) and at various other locations throughout the town. They add up to a significant pool of employment within the town.

However, because of the common perception that such locations can cause bad neighbour problems for residents, current planning policies tend to discourage such activities. From the sustainability perspective, the principle of employment close to where people live is to be encouraged.

POLICY E4

Retaining Employment Uses

Employment land within the built-up area will be safeguarded. Planning permission will not be granted for development which would result in loss of land used or held for:-

- (a) Class B1 Business Use;
- (b) Class B2 General Industrial Use;
- (c) Class B8 Storage or Distribution Use;
- (d) Any uses of a similar character to those above, but not falling within the specified Use Classes, e.g. depot, builder's yard.

5.35 Exceptions to Policy E4 may occur where continued use of the site for such purposes would have an unacceptable impact on the amenities of neighbouring residents, or where the character of the area has changed over time, such that industrial/employment uses would be detrimental in that location. In order to sustain employment, the Council will seek to help businesses which are non-conforming uses or detrimental to a residential area to relocate to a more suitable location.

POLICY E5

Relocation of Non-Conforming Uses

Planning permission will be granted for the relocation to suitable sites of non-conforming uses that cause serious harm to their residential or other surroundings as a result of noise, fumes, traffic generation and/or other disturbance.

5.36 Provided that the expansion or introduction of small scale industrial activities within the built-up area would not be seriously detrimental to the amenities of the surrounding area, it is considered that they should be given sympathetic consideration. The relocation requirements of those firms unable to expand at their existing premises, and the need for space of those firms that provide increased employment, will be met where possible.

POLICY E6

Small Industrial Firms

Planning permission will be granted for the conversion and use of buildings suitable for workshop purposes, and for the development of land for small workshops, provided that:-

- (a) any increase in traffic would not cause serious inconvenience and/or danger on the public highway; and**

- (b) the development would not cause serious harm to the amenities of local residents as a result of, for example, noise or other disturbance.

Green Businesses

5.37 The Borough Council supports the Hastings Sustainable Business Partnership which aims to promote the use of sustainable principles whilst encouraging economic growth for all aspects of industrial and economic activity and development in the Hastings area.

- 5.38 The Partnership has initially targeted the Ponswood Industrial Estate with the aim of ‘greening’ the existing businesses on the estate regarding such issues as waste minimisation, recycling, packaging, energy efficiency, purchasing and transport. It is intended that this initiative will eventually be expanded to include all businesses in the Borough.
- 5.39 The Borough Council is also supporting the production of Green Transport Plans by employers through its support of the County Council’s Local Transport Plan.

Class B1(a) Office Development

- 5.40 Office activities are an important growth area within the national economy and can potentially provide opportunities for new employment generation in Hastings Borough. At present, office activities are relatively under-represented in the town and the market for office development has historically been weak. However, it is anticipated that there will be improved opportunities for office employment (which falls within Use Class B1(a)) in the Hastings area during the Plan period. With the revitalisation of the town centre being undertaken by the Hastings and Bexhill Task Force (see Chapter 11a ‘Hastings Town Centre’) and implementation of the Hastings Regeneration Strategy, the attractions of Hastings for office development should increase.
- 5.41 Hastings town centre and central St Leonards are the most obvious locations for office development, but sites elsewhere may be appropriate depending on the requirements of proposed or potential occupiers. In accordance with government guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 ‘Transport’, a key consideration will be the accessibility of any proposed development to public transport.
- 5.42 The Council will support office development because of the employment generated.

POLICY E7

Class B1(a) Office Development

Planning permission will be granted for development for or change of use to Class B1(a) offices in suitable locations, including:-

- (a) Hastings town centre;
- (b) Central St Leonards;
- (c) Other locations which are convenient for access by public transport.

Regulating New Development

- 5.43 For development to be sustainable, it is desirable to provide employment opportunities in close proximity to people's homes. Development involving a mix of employment, housing and other facilities can help to reduce the need to travel and car use overall, whilst also contributing to lively and vibrant neighbourhoods and therefore accords strongly with the aims of regeneration and urban renaissance. However, it is important that a balance is struck, and that new business uses do not detract from the amenities of the residential properties nearby, either by increasing noise and disturbance or by creating a form of development out of keeping with the area. For example, in the more central urban areas new industrial units could be created similar to those at the Roebuck Centre, but open storage or uses such as car sales which would leave a gap in the street frontage would not be appropriate in townscape terms.
- 5.44 Outside the central areas where background noise levels are low, care will need to be taken to ensure that noise levels are not increased.

POLICY E8

Location of Business Uses

Planning permission will be granted for Use Class B1 Business Uses close to existing or planned residential areas where these would not have an adverse environmental impact – to reduce the need for long journeys to work. However, uses which would generate unreasonable noise or other nuisance, or which would require a form of development out of keeping with the area, will not be permitted.

POLICY E9

Locating Employment Sustainably

Proposals for industrial and commercial development should be able to demonstrate that:-

- (a) Any increase in traffic has been minimised and can be accommodated by surrounding roads and would not disrupt the neighbouring environment. Developers may be required to undertake small scale road improvements, such as traffic calming in order to ameliorate the effects of development;**
- (b) Adequate facilities for parking and servicing are made within the site in accordance with the prevailing standards;**
- (c) Improvements to public transport access are achieved where needed and where possible; and**
- (d) Provision has been made for facilities to encourage cycling.**

