



ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
EXAMINATION OF THE ELMBRIDGE LOCAL PLAN

MATTER 8: MEETING EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

PRE-HEARING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF
ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

March 2024

Matter 8: Meeting Employment Needs

Issue 13 : Whether the Local Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to establishing the scale of employment floorspace needed over the Plan period.

Questions:

7.1 The evidence base identifies that the borough requires an additional 58,000 sqm of employment floorspace between 2015 and 2035. What is the total employment floorspace requirement to 2039?

Council response

7.1.1 The Council does not have the expertise to extend the Borough's employment floorspace need to 2039 and would need to procure a full review and update of its employment evidence to do so. The Council has prepared a tender brief, which is on standby if the Inspector is minded to agree that the Council should proceed with this piece of work.

7.2 The evidence base refers to the pattern of prior approvals within the borough and the loss of employment floorspace which has taken place as a result. Does the employment floorspace requirement for the Plan period to 2039 take this position into account?

Council response

7.2.1 As outlined in the response to 7.1 above, the Council would need to procure a full review and update of its employment evidence in order to extend the Borough's employment floorspace need to 2039. The pattern of prior approvals within the Borough would be taken into account if this updated evidence is prepared.

7.3 Paragraph 82 of the Framework sets out that planning policies should set out a clear economic vision and strategy. Part B goes on to states that planning policies should set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the Plan period. In light of this, should the employment floorspace requirement over the Plan period be defined within policy SS3 which has been identified as a strategic policy and purports to identify the scale and location of good growth?

Council response

7.3.1 The Council considers that it would not be justified or effective to define a quantum of development for employment floorspace in Policy SS3. Whilst this may be contrary to what is stated in paragraph 82 of the NPPF (2021). There is a lack of available sites to address the need for additional employment floorspace in the Borough. This is demonstrated by the Council's most recent Land Availability Assessment (LAA) (base date 31 March 2023) identifies a limited number of sites that would only deliver 19,479 sq. m of additional employment floorspace. As such, the Council considers the Borough does not have the land supply to address the need identified in the evidence base and it would not be appropriate to define a quantum of employment floorspace in this context.

7.4 The Strategic Employment Land Review Addendum, November 2021 (ECO001) contains appendix 6 draft SEL proformas however these do not appear to be attached – please could the Council provide these.

Council response

7.4.1 The Council has provided the missing proformas as an additional evidence document with the reference ECO001a.

7.5 Document ECO03 recommends a more flexible approach to employment uses on SEL sites to take account of changing future uses of employment accommodation. Has the Council taken this recommendation into account in terms of the Plan policies and if not why not?

Council response

7.5.1 The Council has taken the recommended flexible approach to employment uses on SEL sites into account within Policy ECO2. Policy ECO2 seeks to safeguard SEL sites for employment uses and specifically states support for a range of employment uses to come forward at Part 1 of the policy. Part (2) (c) of Policy ECO2 in particular requires new development to deliver flexible employment floorspace suitable for different types of uses.

7.5.2 Policy ECO2 has been drafted bearing in mind that Use Class E and Permitted Development Rights (PD) allow a range of commercial and employment uses, such as office to change use within Class E and to Class C3 residential without planning permission. This already builds in a significant degree of flexibility allowing employment uses to change that is outside the influence of Local Plan policy.

Policy ECON1 – Supporting the economy

7.6 How does policy ECON1 which seeks to protect sites in existing employment use apply to the proposed site allocations which are currently in employment use?

Council response

7.6.1 The Council considers that the site allocations proposed in the Local Plan that are currently in employment use and are allocated for additional employment floorspace would accord with the objective of protecting the Borough's sites in existing employment use set out in ECO1.

7.6.2 Policy ECO1 takes into account that Use Class E and PD enable some employment uses (most notably office uses) to change to other Class E uses and Class C3 residential without planning permission. As such, Policy ECO1 would not apply to proposed changes of uses that are within Use Class E or PD. Including the site allocations proposed in the Local Plan that fall into this category.

7.6.3 Part (3) of Policy ECO1 sets out criteria for how proposals for the loss of employment uses (that do not fall within Use Class E or PD), including site allocations that are allocated for a change of use from employment to residential, will be considered. Policy ECO1 (3) states that "*Outside of Strategic Employment Land (SEL) (as defined on the Policies Map) the loss of floorspace occupied by employment-generating uses will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that:*

- a) There is no reasonable prospect of the site being retained in employment use;*
- b) The site is no longer suitable for its existing use or other employment uses;*
- c) The existing use creates (or any other employment use would create) significant amenity issues for neighbouring occupiers, best remedied by encouraging a replacement with a nonemployment use; and*
- d) The development provides opportunities for sustainable co-location with other nonemployment uses".*

7.6.4 Where site allocations have been proposed in the Plan that include a change of use from employment to residential that falls outside PD, the Council considers the criteria detailed in ECO1 (3) will be satisfied.

7.7 In relation to policy ECON1 3 part a, is it clear how this will be assessed? Paragraph 7.11 refers to a defined marketing period. Should these requirements be outlined within the policy?

Council response

7.7.1 As detailed in paragraph 7.11 of the supporting text to ECO1, the Council will assess whether part (3) (a) of the Policy has been satisfied by requiring proposals to demonstrate a minimum level of marketing has been undertaken that has not resulted in any interest in taking up the space. The marketing period will be required to be no less than one year and up to three years depending on the location, use and quality of the unit.

7.7.2 The Council considers that the policy and supporting text as drafted are appropriate and clear. The length of the marketing period required is intended to be proportionate to the scale of development.

7.8 Does the policy approach to protecting employment land outside of the Strategic Employment Areas provide an appropriate balance between protecting employment land and supporting economic growth?

Council response

7.8.1 At part (3) Policy ECO1 sets out that the Council will protect employment uses outside of SEL sites. This is considered to be a justified approach in the context of the Borough. PD has resulted in the loss of significant employment floorspace, inside and outside of SEL sites. The Council's recent monitoring data shows that from March 2019 to present the Council has lost more than 8,300 sq. m of employment floorspace at least, with the loss of a further circa 7,000 sq. m expected as a result of extant permission over the same period.

Table 1: Completions resulting in the loss of employment floorspace since 2019

Application Ref.	Address	Description	Loss of employment floorspace (sq. m)
2019/1047	Claygate House Littleworth Road Esher KT10 9PN	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3)	4052
2021/0904	Clive House 12-18 Queens Road Weybridge KT13 9XE	Prior Approval Schedule 2, Part 3, Class O: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3).	769
2013/4255	Riverside Church Walk Weybridge Surrey KT13 8JT	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Office to Residential	172

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2015/4578	Unit 5 The Manor Estate 124 Manor Road North Thames Ditton Surrey KT7 0BH	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from B1(a) to (Residential) C3	190
2016/2106	296A Walton Road West Molesey Surrey KT8 2HY	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Office (B1a) to Residential (C3)	68
2016/2247	83 High Street Walton-On- Thames Surrey KT12 1DU	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Office (B1a) to Residential (C3)	326
2017/1757	Mole Villa 23 Creek Road East Molesey Surrey KT8 9BE	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from offices (B1a) to residential (C3)	73
2017/3171	Surrey House Pleasant Place Hersham Walton- On-Thames Surrey KT12 4HR	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3).	146
2017/3408	Albermarle House 79 High Street Thames Ditton Surrey KT7 0SF	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3)	253
2018/0424	Land north of 281 Hersham Road Hersham Walton-On- Thames Surrey KT12 5PZ	PD Prior Approval: Change of use from Light Industry (B1c) to Residential (C3).	35
2018/0860	Hayloft, 61D Bridge Road, East Molesey, Surrey, KT8 9ER	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3).	116
2018/1761	6A High Street Claygate Esher KT10 0JG	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Premises in Light Industrial Use (B1c) to Residential (C3)	61
2018/2262	Brookwood House 1 Churchfield Road Walton- On-Thames KT12 2TW	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Office (B1a) to Residential (C3).	200
2019/2403	125B Queens Road Weybridge KT13 9UN	Prior Approval Schedule 2, Part 3 Class O: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3).	56
2018/0640	111 Queens Road Weybridge KT13 9UW	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Office (B1a) to Residential (C3).	308
2018/0862	19 Baker Street Weybridge Surrey KT13 8AE	PD Prior Approval: Change of use from Light Industry (B1c) to Residential (C3).	320
2016/3378	70 Baker Street Weybridge Surrey KT13 8AL	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Office (B1a) to Residential (C3)	253
2019/2702	Barnet House, Quadrant Way, Weybridge, KT13 8DT	Prior Approval Schedule 2, Part 3 Class O: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3).	260
2021/3596	6 AC Court High Street Thames Ditton KT7 0SR	Prior Approval Schedule 2, Part 3, Class MA: Change	331

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		of Use from Commercial, Business and Service (E) to Residential (C3).	
2020/0737	52 High Street Esher KT10 9QY	Prior Approval Schedule 2, Part 3 Class O: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3).	177
2021/0415	40 Baker Street Weybridge KT13 8AR	Prior Approval Schedule 2, Part 3, Class O: Change of Use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3).	171
Total			8,337

Table 2: Extant permissions expected to result in the loss of employment floorspace since 2019

Application Ref.	Address	SEL designation	Description	Loss of employment floorspace (sq. m)
2021/1950	Building C 207 Brooklands Road Elder House Weybridge KT13 0RH	SEL	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3)	1253
2021/2626	Members Hill Brooklands Road Weybridge KT13 0QU	SEL	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3)	1298
2021/2695	Abbey House Wellington Way Weybridge KT13 0TT		PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3)	938
2021/2807	241 Brooklands Road Weybridge KT13 0RH	SEL	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3)	1144
2021/2808	243 Brooklands Road Weybridge KT13 0RH	SEL	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Offices (B1a) to Residential (C3)	1440
2023/0714	Building B 205 St Georges Business Park Brooklands Road Weybridge Surrey KT13 0BG	SEL	PD Prior Notification: Change of use from Commercial, business and services to Residential (C3)	898
Total				6,971

7.8.2 The evidence is clear that the Borough's employment land is being heavily eroded and there is a strong justification for protecting the remaining

employment uses outside of designated SEL sites, particularly in light of the unmet need for employment floorspace over the Plan Period and the lack of available sites identified to contribute to addressing that unmet need.

Policy ECO2 – Strategic Employment Land

7.9 Policy ECO2 seeks to safeguard strategic employment land. These are listed within the supporting text as in the following locations:

- The Heights ,Weybridge,
- Hersham Place Technology Park, Hersham
- Brooklands Industrial Estate, Weybridge
- Hersham Trading Estate, Walton-on-Thames
- Molesey Industrial Estate, West Molesey

I understand the Plans strategy to meeting the floorspace requirement over the Plan period is through the intensification of the 5 Strategic Employment Land (SEL) sites. As far as I can see, the following allocations would contribute to this intensification strategy:

H14 – Hersham Technology Park 4350sqm

WEY10 – 8 Sopwith Drive, Brooklands Industrial Park 1404sqm

WEY26 – The Heights, Weybridge 9500sqm

WEY35 – Horizon Business Village, Weybridge 6000sqm

Is this correct? How does this provision related to the overall requirements for employment floorspace for the Plan period and how does the Plan propose to address any shortfall?

Council response

7.9.1 The contribution of each of the five SEL sites to the provision of employment floorspace listed under 7.9 is correct. Combined these sites will deliver 21,254 sq. m of additional employment floorspace in the Borough. This represents 37% of the 58,000 sq. m of employment floorspace need identified in the Council's evidence base and a shortfall of 36,746 sq. m.

7.9.2 The Local Plan does not propose an approach to address the shortfall in meeting identified employment floorspace need. However, the Council considers this to be a sound and justified approach in light of the context of the Borough.

7.9.3 Elmbridge has a very limited supply of available unconstrained land that can be brought forward to meet the Borough's identified development needs and as outlined in response to Question 7.3 above, there is a lack of identified available sites to address the need for additional employment floorspace in the Borough. This is demonstrated by the Council's latest LAA, which identifies a limited number of sites that would deliver 19,479 sq. m of additional employment floorspace. As such, the Council considers the Borough does not have the land supply to address the need identified in the evidence base in full.

7.9.4 In addition, due to the expansion of PD Elmbridge has lost a significant amount of employment floorspace that has eroded its SEL site designations. As outlined in response to Question 7.8 above, the Council's recent monitoring data shows that from March 2019 to present the Council has lost more than 8,300 sq. m of employment floorspace at least, with the loss of a further circa 7,000 sq. m expected as a result of extant permission over the same period. Of the expected loss of 7,000 sq. m in extant permission, over 6,000 sq. m is located within the Borough's SEL sites. This demonstrates the eroding effect of PD on the Borough's SEL designations and how it is undermining the Council's ability to address the identified need for additional employment floorspace in the Borough.

7.10 In light of the representations received from the Environment Agency, are sites WEY10, WEY26 and WEY35 effective and deliverable over the Plan Period? Does the SFRA work in relation to these sites support their inclusion within the Plan?

Council response

7.10.1 The Council's Level 2 SFRA [INF013] and Sequential Test [INF014] found that the proposed sites allocations WEY10, WEY26 and WEY35 are suitable development not requiring exception testing. The Council considers that the Level 2 SFRA And Sequential Test confirm that the allocations proposed on the three sites are effective and deliverable.

7.10.2 The Level 2 SFRA identified that the three sites were, or may not be, able to accommodate flood compensation storage to accommodate an increase in built footprint. The Council considers that as the sites are already mostly covered in built footprint, it would not be necessary to increase the built footprint to deliver the quantum of development allocated on these sites in the Local Plan. As such, the Council considers that these sites are still deliverable but will require site specific flood risk assessments to be submitted that demonstrates the development will be safe now and in the future.

7.10.3 The Level 2 SFRA also found that safe access and/or egress may not be achievable on the three sites and safe refuge will be required to be designed into the development of these sites to the level outlined in the Level 2 SFRA. The Council considers the sites affected by this issue to still be deliverable but will again require site specific flood risk assessments to be submitted that demonstrates the development will be safe now and in the future.

7.11 In relation to part 2 (a) how will this capacity be assessed? Is the policy effective in this regard?

Council response

7.11.1 The intention is that a comparison would be made between the existing provision of employment floorspace and the proposed provision of employment floorspace. If there is a net loss resulting from the proposal, it would not be permitted. The Council considers this to be an effective assessment.

7.12 Is the policy justified by the evidence base? Should alternative uses be permitted within these SEL areas?

Council responses

7.12.1 PD already allows the change of use of some employment uses, such as office to other Class E uses and Class C3 residential and this is taken into account within Policy ECO2. As outlined in response to Question 7.10 above, Elmbridge has lost a significant amount of employment floorspace that has eroded its SEL site designations through PD and it considers there is strong evidence that supports the need to protect the employment uses on its few remaining SEL sites. This is considered to be even more important in light of the shortfall in employment floorspace need that will occur over the Plan Period and the lack of sites coming forward that could contribute to addressing that need.