

Farnham Neighbourhood Plan

Farnham Employment Land Review

August 2014

Introduction

The Farnham Employment Land Review (ELR) is a study of existing business sites (B1; B2 and B8 Uses) within the Neighbourhood Plan area.

This report sets out the method used to undertake the ELR assessment. Whilst this is not a District/Borough based Strategic Employment Land Review, it will inform the Waverley Borough ELR.

The ELR is a background paper only and it is not a statement of Town Council policy and does not allocate land. It will form a part of the evidence base for the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan and will be used to help inform judgements on the future development of land for business uses.

The ELR does not pre-empt or prejudice any decision the Town Council may make in the future on any particular site and does not alter any policies or land use designations as set out in the Neighbourhood Plan. It is the role of the ELR to provide information on the range of sites which are available to meet need, but it is for the development plan itself to determine which of those sites are the most suitable to meet those needs.

Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework states that every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the business needs of an area. At the strategic level, the Waverley Employment Land Review Update, September 2011, is the most recent evidence available in respect of business needs. Within this Update, the base scenario (which it is recommended should be the basis for employment land policy targets) forecasts that within the Borough B1 land demand will grow by 4.5 ha (19.3%) over the period 2010-2027 while need for B2 and B8 land will decline by 1.4 and 2.3 ha respectively (-7.0% and -3.3% in terms of percentage change). The overall employment land need in the Borough will increase by 0.8 ha. But this assumes that all surplus B2 and B8 land will be re-used for B1 purposes. It is possible that some of the surplus B2 and B8 land could be used to accommodate demand in the growing B1 sector but it is likely that the poorer quality industrial sites would not be fit for B1 purposes. The Update therefore indicates that it is likely that the actual need for new employment land (predominantly B1) by 2027 throughout the Borough will be in the region of 0.8 to 4.5 ha.

The Employment Land Review Update concludes that the loss of employment land in recent years, the low vacancy rate of approximately 2% recorded at Farnham and the demand forecasts suggest that the Borough needs to:

- Safeguard its existing supply of employment land, protecting sites that are fit for purpose and redeveloping sites for continued employment use where improvements are necessary or redevelopment at higher density is possible;
- Encourage intensification of uses within existing employment locations where possible; and
- Provide additional employment sites over the Core Strategy period (from the list of identified opportunity land sites), particularly to meet the growing need for B1 land and premises.

The Neighbourhood Plan should plan positively to help accommodate identified strategic business need unless:

- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole; or
- specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted (for example, those policies relating to sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, designated heritage assets; and locations at risk of flooding).

The NPPF advises that neighbourhoods should:

- develop plans that support the strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, including policies for economic development
- plan positively to support local development, shaping and directing development in their area that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan

This assessment identifies all sites regardless of the amount of development needed in order to provide an audit of available land.

3 The Assessment

Assessment purpose

The purpose of the ELR is to:

- assess existing business sites
- assess their suitability for business use and potential longer term use

Assessment has been based on the suggested methodology outlined in the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) but, as this guidance recommends, the assessment for the Neighbourhood Plan has been proportionate.

Sites to be Assessed

The Farnham Neighbourhood Plan ELR is based on sites identified in the Waverley Employment Land Review Update, September 2011.

Site Assessment

A comprehensive set of sites derived from the Employment Land Review Update was assessed against national and local policies and designations to establish which have reasonable potential for development and should be included in the site survey.

Site Appraisals

ELR template

An assessment template (see Appendix 1) was devised to provide a consistent approach to the assessment of each site.

Site Suitability

Site surveys were undertaken to record site characteristics such as:

- site topography and boundaries;
- current land uses and neighbouring uses
- potential physical constraints (e.g. vehicular access to site and servicing within the site; location of infrastructure / utilities);
- parking facilities (onsite parking availability or over spilling into surrounding area);
- potential environmental constraints (eg woodland, hedges, water bodies).

In addition site surveys noted the site condition and the number of vacant units.

Site visits were supplemented by reference to Ordnance Survey maps; aerial photography and local knowledge from Neighbourhood Plan team.

Assessing the suitability of sites for retention, intensification and regeneration was guided by the development plan and national policy. When assessing the sites against the adopted development plan, account was taken of how up to date the plan policies are and whether

they remain consistent with national policy. It was considered that the following policies were becoming superseded by more up to date evidence¹:

- Countryside beyond the Green Belt
- Areas of Strategic Visual Importance
- Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) only
- AGLV treated as being within the Surrey Hills AONB

For this reason, the more up to date evidence was used for the site assessments.

The NPPF sets out specific policies which indicate development should be restricted. For example, those policies relating to sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; designated heritage assets; and locations at risk of flooding. Such factors were recorded for each site. In addition, given recent evidence, candidate areas for Green Belt and the Surrey Hills AONB were also considered as part of the assessment.

As well as assessing the impact on the strategic gap between Farnham and Aldershot (a designation within the adopted Local Plan), the assessment also considered the impact of potential development on the gaps between Badshot Lea and Weybourne; Rowledge and Wrecclesham and Rowledge and Frensham which had been identified as important through early engagement on the Neighbourhood Plan.

Site availability

The intentions of landowners were recorded where known. The draft Neighbourhood Plan consultation gives the opportunity for landowners to clarify their intentions.

Site Achievability

This is essentially a judgement about the economic viability of a site. This assessment was supplemented by a detailed survey of agents in the town (see Appendix 2) conducted by Farnham Town Council members. The survey provided an insight into the demand for premises generally and for individual sites specifically. The survey was used to determine whether a site continued to meet a market need and was likely to remain economically viable.

Summary

For each site a summary of its suitability, availability and achievability was prepared (see Appendix 1).

¹ • Waverley Green Belt Review Parts 1 and 2 (2014)
• Waverley Landscape Review (2014)
• Surrey Hills AONB Areas of Search (Hankinson Duckett Associates): October 2013