

Provision of Employment Land in and around Duston

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. This note sets out the policy context for employment land provision and reviews key documents within the evidence base of the Northampton Development Plan. The note is provided to inform the preparation of policies within the Duston Neighbourhood Plan.

2. Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework)

- 2.1. The Framework sets out the government's policies for England. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (para. 6). Achieving sustainable development includes contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation (para. 7). In applying the *presumption in favour of sustainable development*, plans should meet objectively assessed needs with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change (unless adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole; or specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted).
- 2.2. Significant weight is placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system (para. 19). However planning policies should avoid the long term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. Land allocations should be regularly reviewed. Where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for the allocated employment use, applications for alternative uses of land or buildings should be treated on their merits having regard to market signals and the relative need for different land uses to support sustainable local communities (para. 22).

West Northamptonshire Core Strategy (2014) (JCS)

- 2.3. The JCS sets out the long-term vision and objectives for West Northamptonshire, including strategic policies for steering and shaping development. Employment growth is a key element of the strategy; policy S7 includes a requirement to provide a minimum net increase of 28,500 jobs in the period 2008 – 2029. In accordance with policy 8, the majority of new job growth will be concentrated within the principal urban area of Northampton through:
 - a) Renewal and regeneration of existing employment sites;

- b) Industrial / mixed / office land within the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone and office and leisure development in Northampton's central area;
- c) Industrial land;
- d) Local employment provision at Sustainable Urban Extensions;
- e) Development within existing business areas including Swan Valley, Lodge Farm, Moulton Park and Brackmills;
- f) The allocation of a strategic employment site at Northampton M1 junction 16.

Northampton Central Area Action Plan (2013) (CAAP)

2.4. The CAAP provides a strategy for the regeneration of Northampton's central area, including the town centre. The CAAP seeks to firmly establish Northampton town centre as the economic and cultural centre of Northamptonshire by 2026. Whilst Duston parish is located outside of the central area, the policies of the CAAP are relevant through influencing the distribution of employment development toward the central area. Policy 15 promotes the central area as an office and business centre by increasing the provision, quality and range of office space and business accommodation; and safeguards existing premises and sites. The CAAP identifies the following key locations for office development:

- St Johns and Angel Street;
- Avon / Nunn Mills / Ransome Road;
- Freeschool Street;
- The Waterside: St Peters Way;
- Castle Station;
- Bridge Street;
- Spring Boroughs.

3. Evidence base documents

West Northamptonshire Employment Land Study – 2012 Review (WNELS)

3.1. The WNELS report was prepared to support the JCS. The WNELS 2012 review provides an update of an earlier assessment undertaken in 2010. The WNELS

review used both quantitative and qualitative methods to identify whether the existing stock of employment land is fit for purpose at present and over the forthcoming plan period.

- 3.2. WNELS found that in West Northamptonshire the levels of long-term vacancy are low. The total amount of vacant floorspace was found to be broadly similar to those seen during earlier assessment, suggesting activity in the market for employment land. Levels of vacancy were considered acceptable to allow for 'churn' and flexibility to meet the changing needs of users. Analysis of planning applications found a significant amount of activity at existing sites, supporting the vitality and viability of existing locations. Take-up of vacant floorspace has occurred across the range of opportunities available, from small and medium sized sites serving more local users to large and recently completed units being successfully leased to new occupiers. The findings do not suggest a problem in terms of long-term vacancy or pronounced levels of availability in particular locations or unit types. Any issues with vacancy and take-up on particular sites are likely to be localised and affected by a particular set of circumstances.
- 3.3. Completions of net additional employment floorspace have been low in recent years compared to those seen in the middle of the last decade. However, the assessment found a substantial 'development pipeline' of sites to be implemented for employment use in the immediate years. Delivery of this new floorspace is considered essential to deliver the net additional jobs figure in the JCS. Most sites are free from constraints and are considered developable in the short term. The WNELS report also recognises that the designation of the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone and adoption of the Northampton CAAP and Daventry Masterplan 2040 are likely to have significant positive effects on employment locations. WNELS suggests that the vast majority of employment sites are likely to continue to remain in employment use in the future.

Employment sites in Duston (WNELS)

- 3.4. The WNELS assessment identifies two sites within the Duston parish Neighbourhood Area, these are:

Harlestone Road, Hopping Hill, New Duston: Map ref. - E43 (3.4ha)

- 3.5. Existing business site E43, Harlestone Road, is a small, local site occupied by Allen Ford car dealer. Its location benefits from being next to the larger Existing Business Site E37, Lodge Farm. The site has adequate strategic access and good local access.

Former British Timken, Main Road, Duston: Map ref. E42 (WNELS 2012 ref. N22) (5.4 ha)

3.6. The site was formerly occupied by the British Timken roller bearing factory. The site has mostly been redeveloped for new housing development, with some land reserved for employment use. The proposed use of the site includes mixed-use office and industrial development. Whilst the site benefits from planning permission, the employment land remains undeveloped.

Major employment sites in locality (WNELS)

3.7. The WNELS study identifies employment areas across West Northamptonshire. The following sites are located in Northampton, and outside Duston parish. Whilst the WNELS study identifies sites in Northampton's Central Area, these have been allocated through the Central Area Action Plan, as discussed in the policy context section (and are therefore not included in the following section).

Lodge Farm Industrial Estate: Map ref: E37 (52.5ha)

3.8. Lodge Farm is a large, local site used for distribution, light engineering, industry and offices. It consists of Existing Business Development site E37 and is occupied by local and national companies. Most of the buildings are well maintained with the exception of a couple of vacant units which are in poor condition, indicating that they may have been vacant for some time. The site benefits from good local access however the strategic access is not as good because the access to the M1 is through Northampton.

Swan Valley: Map ref: P26 (8.72ha), P29 (52.9ha), P30 (26.7ha), P31 (40.8ha), D24 (4.8) & D25 (26.8ha)

3.9. Swan Valley is an existing area of warehousing off junction 15a of the M1. The area is mostly developed with large, modern, strategic warehouses used for distribution with a few modern office developments and is occupied by national businesses. The area is a good employment site due to its high profile location just off the M1 which also allows for excellent strategic access; although this can be adversely affected by congestion. The site benefits from good local access due to the proximity to Northampton as well as public transport links. Swan Valley is a popular employment area, and was found to have few vacant office and warehouse units.

Westgate Industrial Estate: Map ref: E41 (16.1ha)

3.10. Westgate Industrial Estate consists of Existing Business Development site E41 and is a local site lacking in prominence but despite this it is reasonably well

occupied by national businesses. The site has been developed with a mix of medium warehouse units and smaller workshops used for light engineering, offices and some distribution and manufacturing. The units on the site are varied in age with a few modern units alongside older ones.

Kings Heath Industrial Estate: Map ref: E38 (22.8ha)

3.11. Existing Business site E38 is another local site which is lacking in prominence. The strategic access is not very good but the local access is. The site is home to light industrial, engineering, food and office units occupied by national and local businesses. The types of units on the site vary from quite old, small to medium sized general industrial units, larger warehouse units, a few modern general industrial units and a few offices. Many of the units look tired and worn and the environment in places is not very well maintained. Despite this, the majority of the units are occupied.

St James End: Map ref: E63 (29.5ha), E64 (5.7ha), P27 (1.2ha) & P28 (0.6ha)

3.12. St James End is an industrial area near Northampton town centre. The area includes Existing Business sites E63 and E64, Proposed Development sites P27 and P28. These sites have been assessed together as they share many characteristics and are in close proximity. The area is used for light engineering and distribution as well as offices and is occupied by local businesses as well as national ones. The units in the area are a mix of large and medium warehouse units, there are also some small and medium older industrial units and small offices.

Moulton Park: Map ref: E28 (105ha), P3 (0.8ha), P4 (3.7ha), P5 (0.4ha), P6 (3.3ha), P7 (0.6ha), P8 (0.7ha), P9 (1.9ha), P10 (1.2ha)

3.13. Moulton Park is a large industrial area and is made up of Existing Business site E28 and Proposed Development sites P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9 and P10. It is a large area, prominent to Northampton, but does not have very good strategic access. However it has good local access and good public transport links with bus stops located around the site. The predominant market sector of the area is light engineering, distribution, food wholesalers, manufacturing and offices. The area is occupied by national companies as well as a number of local companies.

Round Spinney Industrial Estate: Map ref: E65 (36.5ha), P12 (0.4ha), P13 (0.5ha), P14 (0.3ha)

3.14. Round Spinney Industrial Estate is in close proximity to Moulton Park but is not quite so prominent due to its smaller size. The area consists of Existing Business site E65 and Business Developments sites P12, P13 and P14. Like Moulton Park it

does not have very good strategic access but has good local access and good public transport links. The majority of the site is occupied by local light engineering, storage and manufacturing companies with some national distribution companies. There is a mix of warehouses and general industrial units on the site.

Crow Lane Industrial Estate: Map ref: E52 (11ha), E51 (3.3ha), P15 (6ha), D18 (2.4ha), D19 (0.6ha)

3.15. Crow Lane Industrial Estate is a prominent area just off the A45 and therefore benefits from good strategic access as well as good local access. The area is made up of five different sites; Existing Business sites E52 and E51, Proposed Business Development site P15 and Development sites D18 and D19. Sites E52 and P15 consist of medium general industrial units and warehouses which are occupied by national distribution, manufacturing, car dealerships, a cash and carry company and an office.

Rushmills: Map ref: P16 (2.6ha), P17 (7.7ha), P18 (1.1ha), P19 (3.2ha), E53 (2.7ha), E54 (0.3ha) & E55 (1.5ha)

3.16. Rushmills is an employment area located just off the A45 giving it good strategic access. The area consists of seven sites; Proposed Business Development sites P16, P17, P18 and P19, and Existing Business sites E53, E54 and E55. Rushmills consists of a number of different high quality office developments occupied by local and national companies. Each separate site is quite small but together form a large, prominent business area.

Brackmills North: Map ref: E56 (43.6ha) & D21 (5.1ha)

3.17. Brackmills North is an industrial area located just off the A45 with good strategic access. The area is part of Brackmills Industrial Estate and consists of two sites, Existing Business site E56 and Development site D21. Site D21 is undeveloped land therefore there is potential for further development in this area. Site E56 consists of large warehouses, medium general industrial units and small general industrial units. The units are mostly occupied by national and local distribution and engineering companies.

Brackmills South: Map ref: E66 (122.9ha), P20 (20.1ha), P21 (25.1ha), P22 (36.1ha), P23 (2.5ha), P24 (1.1ha) & P25 (7ha)

3.18. Brackmills South is also part of Brackmills Industrial Estate and consists of seven sites; Existing Development site E66 and Proposed Business Development sites P20, P21, P22, P23, P24 and P25. The area consists of a mix of large, modern, strategic warehouse, medium general industrial units, small general industrial units

and offices. The large strategic warehouses are located to the south east of the site and are occupied by national companies. The north of the area consists of medium and large warehouse units as well as medium and small general industrial units. The occupiers are mostly distribution, light engineering and manufacturing with some notable national occupiers.

Rothersthorpe Industrial Estate: Map ref: E59 (14.3ha)

3.19. Rothersthorpe Avenue consists of Existing Business site E59. It is a small, local industrial site that is lacking in prominence. It has good local access as it is near Northampton town centre but the strategic access is not as good. The site's predominant market sector is light engineering, manufacturing and distribution and is occupied by mostly local companies alongside some national companies. The buildings on the site are a mix of old small, medium and large general industrial units and small, modern warehouse units.

Ransome Road Industrial Estate: Map ref: D30 (17.8ha)

3.20. Ransome Road Industrial site is Development site D30 and is another small, local site that lacks prominence. The predominant market sector is light engineering, distribution and haulage. 4.208 The buildings are mainly old, general industrial units with a few small modern warehouses. The site is mostly occupied by local companies alongside a few national companies.

Studland Road: Map ref: E35 (13.3ha)

3.21. Existing Business site E35 is a small, local site which lacks prominence. It does not have very good strategic access but it does benefit from good local access and good public transport links, with bus stops nearby the site. The buildings on the site are a mix warehouses, general industrial units or offices, varying in size and are occupied by local and national distribution, light engineering and manufacturing companies.

Other sites in proximity of Duston:

- Weedon Road: Map ref: E61 (14.5ha) & D32 (1.2ha)
- Horsley Road: Map ref: E34 (3.9ha)
- Kingsthorpe Hollow: Map ref: E32 (2.4ha)
- Bunting Road/Brockton Street Industry: Map ref: E31 (6.7ha)
- Countess Road Industry: Map ref: E39 (5.2ha)

- Sharman Road Industry: Map ref: E62 (2.5ha)
- Queenswood Offices: Map red: E57 (0.8ha)
- Wootton Hall: Map ref: E67 (10.7ha)
- Hunsbury Hill: Map ref: E58 (1ha)
- Weston Favell: Map ref: E48 (2.2ha) & P11 (0.5ha)
- Grange Park: Map ref: SN15 (31.2ha) (South Northants Council's administrative area)

4. Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone

- 4.1. In 2011 the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) received government backing to launch the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone and regenerate nearly 120 hectares of brownfield land along the town's river front. The EZ includes more than 20 sites, spanning from Sixfields in the west to Avon Nunn Mills in the east. The NWEZ includes a number of sites identified within the CAAP.
- 4.2. The NWEZ is an attractive location for new employment development. By locating in the NWEZ, employers benefit from:
 - Business rate relief;
 - Simplified planning process (three Local Development Orders in place or being prepared);
 - Infrastructure investment;
 - Superfast broadband;
 - 'One stop shop' approach led by Northampton Borough Council's Enterprise Zone team.
- 4.3. A range of employment generating projects are currently in progress or have been completed, including expansion of Carlsberg brewery; redevelopment of rail station; construction of an Innovation Centre; Cosworth's new Advanced Manufacturing Centre; expansion of Freefoam and Cosworth at St James Mill Road; new offices to be constructed at St Peters Waterside; Church's Shoes to expand their factory; £7m committed infrastructure funding for NWEZ; plans being finalised for Northamptonshire County Council's new offices; Albion brewery to be brought back into use; and construction of a hotel at St Johns is underway.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. The *National Planning Policy Framework* recognises the importance of creating employment opportunities to achieve sustainable development. However this national policy promotes a flexible approach and where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for the allocated employment use, applications for alternative uses of land or buildings should be treated on their merits.
- 5.2. The *West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy* places significant weight on the need to support economic growth in west Northamptonshire. The WNJCS promotes the development, renewal and regeneration of existing employment areas (such as Swan Valley, Lodge Farm, Moulton Park and Brackmills) and identifies new strategic sites including the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone and junction 16 employment area.
- 5.3. The *Northampton Central Area Action Plan* seeks to firmly establish Northampton's town centre as the county's economic centre and allocates a range of sites for employment and business use within the central area.
- 5.4. The *Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone* is a recent scheme which not only makes land available for development, but also offers a range of other benefits to businesses. This makes the NWEZ an attractive option for new employment development.
- 5.5. The *West Northamptonshire Employment Land Study* found the market for employment land and floorspace to be active, with limited long term vacancy. The report suggested that issues of long-term vacancy and take-up on particular sites are likely to be localised and affected by a particular set of circumstances.
- 5.6. The WNELS report identified two employment sites within Duston. The Harlestone Road site is a small, local site with good connections to the larger Lodge Farm industrial estate adjacent to the parish boundary. The former British Timken site has predominantly been redeveloped for housing, yet part of the site identified as employment land remains undeveloped.
- 5.7. There are a number of accessible employment sites in and around Northampton, largely accessible to Duston residents. There is a substantial development pipeline across West Northamptonshire. Most sites are free from constraints and considered developable in the short term, and will play an important role in providing new jobs.