

## **BUSINESS & EMPLOYMENT EVIDENCE PAPER**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ashford has been designated as an economic growth area since the 1980's and there is continued pressure on land for commercial and residential development along with the associated public services that both those need.

Rapid expansion in the provision of housing in and around Ashford, planned over the next 15-25 years, will be meeting a range of housing demand and need, as the area continues to be earmarked as a centre for expansion in the South East. The overall requirement for housing has increased from 14,680 to 16,120 dwellings. This reflects the review of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) carried out in 2016 to reflect the new national population projections. This extra requirement is proposed to be met by a combination of additional capacity on existing proposed allocations, a series of new allocations, and increased assumptions about delivery from windfall schemes. This is a major programme meeting the needs of demographic change and migration to the Ashford area, as well as various economic growth scenarios.

Within the designated Neighbourhood Plan area there are two elements to consider with Business and Employment; those living in the area and working either in the area or elsewhere and those organisations offering employment in the area. Out of a population of 2,293 aged 16-74 there were 77.9% that were economically active, which is higher than both the overall Ashford area (72.6%), and the Kent County Council area (69.9%).

### **LOCAL EMPLOYMENT**

#### **Eureka Park**

Employment within the designated Neighbourhood Plan area is predominantly located at Eureka Park. Located close to Junction 9 of the M20 motorway, Eureka Park is a major business park comprising 350,000 sq ft of built business, 15,000 sq ft office building built speculatively, currently available with outline consent for a further 1,100,000 sq ft, together with car parking at a ratio of 1:280 sq ft. Both private sector businesses, e.g. the head offices of RIFT Group, Smiths Medical International Ltd, Brakes, Verifone Services UK & Ireland Ltd and public sector e.g. Kent Community Health NHS Foundation, NHS Eastern & Coastal have premises on Eureka Park.

NHS Services based at Eureka Park include:

- Ashford Community Mental Health Team
- Ashford Community Mental Health Team for Older People
- Ashford Memory Assessment Service
- Ashford Day Treatment Service
- Ashford Mental Health Centre
- Ashford and Shepway Mental Health Learning Disability Service
- Ashford Secondary Care Psychology Service

The Eureka Business Park is proposed primarily for B1 office uses. (B1 Business – Offices, research and development of products and processes, light industry appropriate in a residential area.) With

around 800,000 sq. ft. of additional space already earmarked for development Eureka Park has plenty of capacity before it reaches its full potential.

We understand that Basepoint were interested in opening a centre in Eureka Park. Basepoint Business Centres provide a wide range of high quality workspaces to let, including serviced and managed offices, workshops, trade counters and studios. They have a track record which encourages start-up businesses and have 31 centres around the UK. However, following a recent takeover by Regus this may not now be of interest to them as they have a centre in Ashford Town Centre.

Eureka Park has been designed as a low density, highly landscaped environment to blend into the surrounding areas. The character of the site and its role dictates that new development must be of a particularly high quality in respect of its design, layout and materials. The topography of the site varies significantly, generally rising from south to north towards the adjoining residential development. Innovative designs that complement this topography should be considered with the potential for taller buildings (up to 4 storeys) on the lower-lying parts of the site nearest the golf course being an option. (Four story buildings would be out of keeping with the scale of other apartment buildings in Goat Lees, and building in the parishes as a whole.) Conversely, on those parts of the site closest to the Goat Lees housing estate and the properties fronting Sandhurst Lane, proposals must ensure that buildings are orientated to generally face away from nearby dwellings and should be designed and laid out to minimise the potential impact on residential amenity from noise and disturbance from vehicle movements and intrusive lighting.

Known issues at Eureka Park are poor public transport links, which combined with a lack of parking capacity results in cars being parked in nearby residential streets. Lobbying by local people and their representatives led to Ashford Borough Council taking action to ameliorate the situation following a consultation report published in 2014.

Next to Eureka Park is Eureka Place with nine retail outlets (all let) a public house, a crèche, and a medical centre (part let) serving both the business and residential community and Goat Lees Primary School with a capacity for 210 children.

### **Agricultural**

Eastwell Park Estate, Perry Court Farm and Hinxhill Estate farm the agricultural land which covers the majority of the land area of the parishes.

### **Tourism and hospitality**

After Eureka Park, Eastwell Manor, a Champneys Spa Hotel is the next largest employer, which attracts tourists, wedding parties and business people to the area as well as providing local leisure facilities including a 9-hole golf course.

The parishes has two public houses, The Pheasant at Eureka Place, Goat Lees and The Flying Horse Inn at Boughton Lees, which has been designated an Asset of Community Value.

The parishes has a number of holiday rental cottages and B&Bs:

- East Glebe, Faversham Road, Boughton Lees TN25 4HS – offers self-catering and bed and breakfast accommodation.

- Warren Farm B&B, Faversham Road, Boughton Aluph, TN25 4HW – B&B plus a separate holiday cottage.
- Stourview Cottage B&B, White Hill, Boughton Aluph TN25 4HB – B&B, also offers pamper days/spa treatments.
- Plantagenet Cottage, Boughton Lees TN25 – holiday let.
- 3 Malthouse Cottages, Pilgrims Way, Boughton Aluph – holiday let.
- 4 Hobday Cottages – holiday let.

### **Other employers**

There are pockets of small businesses in commercial premises, e.g. at Eastwell Court – a mix of off-road driving, motorcycle training, office furniture and a specialist buildings installer and, Lenacre Hall Barn – graphic designer, and a number of home based businesses throughout the designated Neighbourhood Plan area.

### **Home-based businesses**

Business growth outside of Eureka Park will predominantly be home based businesses. These continue to be popular and will require good connectivity to the Internet. This is a problem for Boughton Lees and Boughton Aluph as Sandyhurst Lane and Goat Lees properties benefit from Virgin and a more comprehensive BT fibre broadband connectivity. Funded by Central Government, Kent County Council is investing £11.2 million to roll out superfast broadband to over 95% of homes and businesses across the County. The project, in partnership with BT Openreach, started in January 2016 and will complete during the summer of 2018. Boughton Lees has been included in the second phase of this programme. Once completed, this will provide connected households with a minimum broadband speed of 25Mbps. While this is a significant improvement, it does not create parity of service across the parishes.

In relation to development at Eureka Park (S20) and future residential development of over 10 dwellings, reliance can be placed on *Policy EMP6 - Promotion of Fibre to the Premises (FTTP)* in Ashford Borough Council's Local Plan 2030.

### **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SURVEY 2016**

83% of respondents felt that large scale industry was unimportant as a new form of business development. 70% of this cohort provided a rating of 1 (not at all important). Over half of respondents felt that it was important to encourage hospitality e.g. café, restaurant or pub (52%) and rural/environmental businesses (50%).

12% of respondents owned a business in the parishes. 91% of those who owned a business in the parishes reported that this was run 'From home'. 26% of business owners in the parishes were based in the 'Professional, scientific and technical' sector.

When asked to think what is important to growing their business within the parishes over the next 15 years, high speed internet connectivity (88%) was by far the most important consideration for business owners with 81% providing a rating of 5 (most important) and 7% a rating of 4. 59% of business owners rated well designed and maintained road infrastructure as important with 40% of this cohort offering a rating of 5 (most important).

## BOUGHTON ALUPH & EASTWELL PARISHES NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

52% of those who responded to the question cited that the type of new premise they required to operate or expand their existing business was an 'Office.' 20% were looking for a storage unit.

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