

Mid Bedfordshire Employment Sites Study

Final Report

6 August 2007

Contents

1: Introduction	1
2: Draft Employment Land Review	3
3: Review of demand	6
4: Employment site survey	12
5: Conclusions	20
Annex A: Study brief.....	A-1
Annex B: Employment forecasts.....	B-1
Annex C: Property market review	C-1
Annex D: Employment site survey forms.....	D-1
Annex E: Employment site survey photos	E-1
Annex F: Employment site survey analysis.....	F-1

Contact:	Richard Summers	Tel:	01223-209400	email:	rjsummers@sqw.co.uk
-----------------	-----------------	------	--------------	--------	---------------------

Approved by:	Christine Doel	Date:	6 August 2007
	Director		

1: Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the workings, findings and recommendations of a study of the fitness for purpose of 40 selected employment sites in Mid Bedfordshire as an input to the preparation of the Employment Land Review and the Local Development Framework for the district. It has been undertaken by SQW Consulting for Mid Bedfordshire District Council.

Study brief

- 1.2 The study brief requested an assessment of the fitness for purpose of 50 employment sites in the district but the number of sites to be surveyed was later reduced to 40 (see Annex A) because Mid Beds DC considered that 10 of the original sites were already clearly fit for purpose. The brief called for an assessment of each selected site based on criteria such as occupier satisfaction, sustainability of location, links to an A Road or Motorway, occupancy rate, site condition and provision for specialist accommodation. This meant examining the fitness for purpose of individual selected employment sites out of their wider context.
- 1.3 The study brief referred to the Draft Employment Land Review (ELR) that had been prepared by Mid Beds DC to provide for the quantitative assessment of employment land that would be needed to provide for B1 (office), B2 (industrial) and B8 (warehousing) activities in the district to 2021 derived from the Draft East of England Plan. It called for a site by site assessment of the selected employment sites to validate the robustness of the assessment of all employment sites which the District Council had undertaken in preparing the Draft ELR.
- 1.4 The study brief required an assessment of the selected employment sites including a review of the original fitness for purpose considerations and any others that appeared relevant. It required consultations with local property agents to assess their views on the selected sites and the commercial property market in the area. Finally, it required an assessment of whether each site is appropriate for its current employment use, whether it would be appropriate for a future employment use with some improvement, whether it should have policy protection for employment use or whether it should be considered for alternative use.
- 1.5 The project aims identified by the study brief were therefore to :
- assess the “fitness for purpose” of 40 B1, B2 and B8 employment sites
 - validate the criteria and conclusions of the Mid Beds DC Draft ELR
 - review the quantitative assessment of demand for employment land to 2021.

Study method

- 1.6 The study method proposed by SQW acknowledged that the “fitness for purpose” of employment sites is simple in concept but complex in practice because there is a mix of supply and demand factors which influence the suitability of a particular site in a particular demand situation. It therefore suggested a more comprehensive range of employment land

and sustainability criteria drawn from national planning guidance as the basis for the assessment of the fitness for purpose of the selected 40 sites in Mid Bedfordshire.

1.7 The study method proposed by SQW comprised eleven key tasks :

- Inception meeting
- Review Draft ELR
- Review of demand
- Develop site assessment template
- Progress meeting
- Site by site assessment
- Review survey findings
- Draft report
- Workshop meeting
- Progress meeting
- Final report.

1.8 The study followed the originally proposed method except that the review of demand was limited by the absence of employment forecasts from the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study which was being undertaken at the same time.

Report structure

1.9 The report comprises four further sections

- Draft Employment Land Review
- Review of demand
- Employment site survey
- Conclusions.

1.10 This report is supported by a series of annexes (see contents page) which provide the detailed background to the workings, findings and recommendations of the study.

2: Draft Employment Land Review

- 2.1 This section of the report summarises SQW’s general and more specific comments on the Draft Employment Land Review (ELR) which was prepared by Mid Beds District Council before the study began. SQW was provided with a copy of the Draft ELR at the inception meeting for the study. The Draft ELR was later updated by Mid Beds DC to reflect the results of the fitness for purpose assessments of the 40 sites surveyed as part of this study.
- 2.2 The Fitness for Purpose assessment forms for the 50 employment sites assessed by Mid Beds DC were omitted from para 6.18 of the Draft ELR provided at the inception meeting and the text for each of the ten issues itemised in the final section was also omitted to avoid preconditioning the validation review.

General comments

- 2.3 The Draft ELR is clearly and tightly written. It provided a useful account of the desk studies, site surveys, occupier surveys and other consultations undertaken by Mid Beds DC. The policy context and economic snapshot in Sections 2 and 3 of the report, the key findings in Section 6 and the headings for the ten issues itemised in the final Section 7 provided a useful basis for the SQW Employment Sites study.

ELR methodology

- 2.4 The “future growth requirements” method of estimating employment land requirements (balancing the Draft East of England Plan housing requirements with corresponding employment growth requirements) adopted in the Draft ELR should be supplemented by the “economic forecasts” method. The Bedford ELR (Halcrow, June 2006), for example, was based on economic forecasts as a basis for estimating employment land requirements. It would be prudent to adopt a mix of both methods for the Mid Beds ELR to provide a more realistic and more detailed assessment of need (see the next section of this report).
- 2.5 It is implied but not made clear that the Draft ELR addresses mainly the first stage of the three-stage Employment Land Review methodology outlined in the ELR Guidance (ODPM, 2004). Section 6 of the Draft ELR provides a useful summary of the findings of the first stage “taking stock” studies and Section 4 provides a preliminary assessment of the second stage “future requirements” work. We suggest how the assessment of the second stage “future requirements” work could be refined with the Experian employment forecasts from the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study in the next section of this report. We assume that the results of the validation of the “fitness for purpose” of selected key sites undertaken by this study will inform the third “future portfolio” stage of the Draft ELR.

- 2.6 The employment site “fitness for purpose” assessment factors outlined in the Draft ELR (Section 5) and included in the blank assessment table provided are :
- occupier satisfaction
 - sustainable location
 - link to A road or motorway
 - occupancy rate
 - site condition
 - specialist or niche accommodation.
- 2.7 The method and useful findings of the desk studies, site surveys, occupier surveys and other consultations that were undertaken to inform the first “taking stock” stage of the Draft ELR (Sections 5 and 6) were systematically presented. However, the Draft ELR did not make it entirely clear how all the factors were assessed or scored (para 5.24) and it did not fully explain the assessment of factors shown on the table. We reviewed this methodology for our “fitness for purpose” assessment in our employment site survey to restructure and extend the assessment factors because we considered that a more comprehensive mix of supply and demand and of quantitative and qualitative issues should be adopted (see later in this report).
- 2.8 The factors to be assessed by the fitness for purpose assessment of employment sites to be undertaken by this study was extended beyond the factors considered in the Draft ELR assessment (para 5.4 of the brief) to include :
- whether the site is appropriate for the current employment use
 - whether the site is appropriate for future employment use with some renovation or redevelopment
 - whether the site should qualify for protection as a B1-B8 employment use by an appropriately worded policy
 - whether the site should be considered for an alternative use.
- 2.9 The first two of these additional factors indicated a need for the “fitness for purpose” assessment of employment sites to be undertaken by this study to indicate the suitability of individual sites for B1 (office), B2 (industrial) and/or B8 (warehousing) uses. The second two factors indicated a need for an overview assessment on each site which we incorporated as a “traffic light” assessment of clearly “fit for purpose”, potentially “fit for purpose” and clearly not “fit for purpose” in our employment site assessment methodology.

Key issues for Mid Beds LDF

- 2.10 The key findings of the stage one “taking stock” part of the Draft ELR (paras 6.28 to 6.35) provided some very useful information for the assessment of “fitness for purpose” of the selected 40 individual employment sites. The key challenges that followed indicated a useful link through to the key issues in Section 7.

- 2.11 The Draft ELR demonstrated clear linkages between some of the key findings and some of the key challenges identified in Section 6 and onward onto some of the key issues identified for the LDF identified in Section 7 but not all of them.
- 2.12 The logic chain of the Draft ELR might benefit from some further explanation.
- Key Issues 1 and 2 (safeguarding key employment sites and other employment sites) could be linked back to Key Finding 3 (sites protected by Policy EMP1 in the Adopted Local Plan)
 - Key Issues 3 and 4 (safeguarding new rural sites and converting agricultural buildings) could be linked back to Key Finding 2 (agricultural buildings converted for employment use)
 - Key Issue 5 (releasing employment for residential development) could be linked back to Key Finding 4 (employment sites no longer “fit for purpose”)
 - Key Issue 6 (mix of type and scale of premises in new employment developments) could be linked back to Key Finding 3 (sites protected by Policy EMP1 in the Adopted Local Plan)
 - Key Issue 9 (availability to meet RSS job targets to 2021) could be linked back to Key Challenges (employment land needs – see comments above).
- 2.13 Particular points where the logic chain of the Draft ELR would benefit from further explanation include :
- Key Issue 7 (mixed use development on new land allocations) does not appear to be linked back to any of the Key Findings and needs a logic chain into the evidence base
 - Key Issue 8 (flexibility of use on employment sites) does not appear to be clearly linked back to any of the Key Findings and needs a logic chain into the evidence base
 - Key Issue 10 (further work) does not appear to be linked back to any of the Key Findings or Key Challenges but could suggest a structure of employment and employment land policies.
- 2.14 Overall, we concluded that the Draft ELR would benefit from some further strengthening of the logic chain between the employment site assessments and the “key issues” and the “key findings”. We also concluded that the fitness for purpose assessments of individual employment sites should be linked into an overall assessment of demand and supply.

3: Review of demand

- 3.1 This section of the report reviews the demand for employment land in Mid Bedfordshire by assessing the employment land requirements from the Draft East of England Plan and by assessing the local property market for office, industrial and warehouse development. The employment forecasts for the district, subdivided by Business Use Classes, which had been expected from the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study, which was being undertaken at the same time, were not available at the time this report was prepared.

RSS employment allocations

- 3.2 The Draft Employment Land Review (ELR) for Mid Bedfordshire assessed in the previous section of this report outlined a rationale for three estimates of employment growth in the district from 2001 to 2021 based on the preferred “future growth requirements” method.
- The Proposed Changes to the East of England Plan imply a requirement for 11,000 additional jobs in Mid Beds from 2001 to 2021. This has been established from work by Bedfordshire County Council to inform the Draft East of England Plan.
 - The Panel Report on the Draft East of England Plan proposed an increase in the requirement for additional housing in Mid Beds. The Draft ELR therefore suggests an equivalent revision in the employment requirement to 14,000 jobs.
 - Mid Beds DC has also considered a projection of recent employment growth trends in the district which implies a growth of 17,440 jobs to 2021.
- 3.3 An analysis of the sectoral structure of the 14,000 employment requirement (mentioned above) was provided from the Non-B1-8 Employment Study which was being undertaken at the same time as this study (see Annex C and below) although it does not provide a subdivision by Business Use Class. It shows that employment growth can be anticipated in the food, drink & tobacco, paper, printing & publishing, electrical & optical equipment, construction, wholesaling, retailing, hotels & catering, transport, other financial & business services, business services, education, health and other services sectors.
- 3.4 The recent report by TBR on Economic Growth, Growth Sectors and Growth Businesses in Bedfordshire & Luton has found no statistical evidence to suggest that the wider area economy has made significant strides in the last five years towards the 2021 target of another 50,000 net new jobs in the area. It has recommended that an economic development strategy for the area should be based around identified strengths and known activities which deliver high value added results for successful participants. However, the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) shows that some 5,000 additional jobs were created in Mid Beds from 2001 to 2005.
- 3.5 The estimates of future employment growth for B1 (business), B2 (industrial) and B8 (warehousing) uses in the Draft ELR for Mid Bedfordshire would benefit from a more sophisticated assessment than the relatively crude apportionment of the three employment growth estimates (above) and the adoption of ratios for Bedfordshire & Luton (CB Hillier

Parker study) and Bedford & Marston Vale (GHK consultants). This could be made by analysing the Experian employment forecasts which were being prepared for the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study as this study was undertaken. However, this may have limited relevance because nearly all employment sites in Mid Beds have been allocated for any mix of B1-B8 activities unless the employment land policies of the forthcoming LDF offer a more specific assignment of business class uses to particular sites.

- 3.6 The employment densities and plot ratios assumed for B1, B2 and B8 uses in the Mid Beds ELR seem generally reasonable although the B1 density (30 sqm/worker) is lower than assumed in some other situations (eg 20-30 sqm/worker in Bedford and 15-20 sqm/worker in York and Winchester from other SQW studies). The final table of employment land requirements (Table 8) indicates a range of land needs (based on CB Hillier Parker and GHK Consultants assumptions) for each of the three estimates of employment growth. We suggest that the 50% margin for developer choice and employment growth variation (para 4.18) is added and that employment land requirements are rounded to the nearest hectare.
- 3.7 Finally, we suggest that the Draft ELR should separately identify the role of the northern Marston Vale area in the Bedford and Marston Vale Growth Area. The recent report on Stage One of the Long Term Prospectus for the Growth Area implies that 3,800 to 8,400 jobs of the 11,400 to 16,000 jobs target in the Milton Keynes South Midlands Subregional Strategy are in Mid Bedfordshire. Liaison with Renaissance Bedford on this would be helpful.

Mid Beds employment forecasts

- 3.8 We commented in the previous section of this report that the “future growth requirements” method of estimating employment land requirements (balancing Draft East of England Plan housing requirements with corresponding employment growth requirements) should be supplemented by the “economic forecasts” method. We concluded that it would be prudent to adopt a mix of both methods for the Mid Beds ELR to provide a more realistic and more detailed assessment of need.
- 3.9 It was agreed at the inception meeting for this study that Mid Beds DC would provide the Experian employment forecasts which were being prepared as part of the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study which was being undertaken at the same time as this study in order to enable us to assess the changing scale and structure of local employment as a context for this study. We were provided with an analysis of the sectoral structure of the 14,000 employment growth that would correspond with the additional housing requirement proposed in the Panel Report on the Draft East of England Plan (mentioned above). This was subdivided between 30 economic sectors (see Annex C) but unfortunately a further subdivision between Business Use Classes (B1, B2 and B8) was not available at the time this report was prepared.
- 3.10 We recommend that the employment forecast for Mid Bedfordshire from 2001 to 2021 subdivided between Business Use Classes should be assessed when it is available to review the overall employment growth, the sectoral composition and the use class breakdown. This would provide a useful additional perspective on the likely scale and structure of employment growth and the corresponding employment land needs to complement the employment land requirements from the Draft East of England Plan and our local property market review. This

in turn would help to inform a review of the three estimates of employment growth presented in the Draft ELR outlined earlier in this report.

Property market review

- 3.11 We undertook a local property market review (see Annex D) to complement the available information on the employment land requirements from the Draft East of England Plan and the employment forecasts for Mid Bedfordshire being prepared for the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study (see above). The property market review provided a useful context for the assessments of the 40 selected employment sites undertaken for this study (see next section of this report).
- 3.12 Our local property market review assessed the demand for office, industrial and warehousing land and property in Mid Bedfordshire. We drew on various sources of information about the local property market in undertaking this review :
- review of Commercial Land and Property in Bedfordshire & Luton by CB Hillier Parker in 2003
 - discussions with local property agents in the various property markets in Mid Beds
 - discussions with planning and economic development officers at Mid Beds DC
 - comments by local property agents in response to a survey by Mid Beds DC in 2005
 - SQW's knowledge of the property market in the district and its experience in assessing property markets in various parts of the UK.

CB Hillier Parker Report

- 3.13 The CB Hillier Park report identifies two separate market areas within Mid Beds : an area influenced by the M1 and an area influenced by the A1.
- The area influenced by the M1 was reported to have strong demand from distribution companies particularly in the area around Junction 13 and demand for office space. There is a limited supply of office space at Ampthill and Flitwick town centres where demand is mainly for smaller premises. Locations at Cranfield University, the Silsoe Institute and Millbrook provide specialist employment areas for a range of research and development activities.
 - The area influenced by the A1 was reported to have industrial demand alongside the A1, particularly at Biggleswade and Sandy, which is strongly influenced by the supply of available land in nearby Stevenage and Letchworth to the south. Industrial development in recent years includes the take-up of B1 and B8 space at the Stratton Business Park in Biggleswade. Office demand along the A1 corridor is limited and is mainly for small amounts of office space.

SQW market findings

- 3.14 Our research shows some changes since the CB Hillier Parker report was published 4 years ago but broadly supports the identification of two separate market areas, influenced by the M1 and A1. We found a strong demand for distribution space in the M1 corridor and some demand mainly industrial space along the A1 corridor. Our discussions with local property agents found that :
- the A6, which runs from north to south through Mid Bedfordshire, is broadly the dividing line between the two market areas
 - some demand is generated by the remaining A roads in the district (A6, A507 and A421) but their influence is far less than the pull of the major M1 and A1 roads.

Western area influenced by the M1

- 3.15 Ampthill and Flitwick are the two main urban centres in the western area influenced by the M1. Cranfield draws on the Milton Keynes market and has a special position because of its educational base. Local property agents generally consider that the present supply of office space is adequate for the time being but the continuing move towards office and knowledge based work could lead to a need for further space over the medium and longer term.
- 3.16 Agents report a supply of office accommodation centred mainly on Ampthill and Cranfield. The stock of office space has been increased by a number of office conversion schemes in many parts of the Mid Beds area. Some 45,000 sq ft of offices have been developed at Ampthill and office space is also available at Cranfield. Rents for offices are around £16 per sq ft and can be up to £18 per sq ft for small units.
- 3.17 Agents report a real shortage of industrial land and floorspace (as opposed to large distribution units) in the Ampthill and Flitwick areas. A number of established firms have moved away from the area. In recent times there has been little new development and so the existing industrial stock is dated.
- 3.18 Demand for industrial land and floorspace is strong. Rents are around £6 - £7 per sq ft and capital values are around £100 per sq ft. One agent reports a particularly strong demand in Ampthill and Flitwick and believes he could let 30,000 sq ft of small workspace straight away and, perhaps 80,000 sq ft over a longer time scale.
- 3.19 Like many other parts of the UK, new industrial development in Mid Beds has been priced out of the market by the higher land values achieved from residential development, distribution schemes and, to a lesser extent, B1 office development. Agents report land values of around £375,000 per acre for industrial land and residential values as high as £1.5 - £2.0 million per acre.
- 3.20 Demand for large scale warehouse and distribution units is extremely strong but it is difficult to find sites where planning permission can be obtained near a good access point to the M1.
- 3.21 Mid Beds has a strong and growing demand for freehold office and industrial land and premises rather than for leasehold arrangements. Much of this demand has been stimulated

by relatively low interest rates over recent years and the preference of owner occupiers to place their premises within their individual pension scheme.

Eastern area influenced by the A1

- 3.22 Agents report that the property market covering the A1 corridor and westwards to the A6 is lower key than the M1 corridor and is influenced by Milton Keynes. The A1 corridor market is influenced by Stevenage and Letchworth to the south. Bedford's influence has diminished and is secondary to Milton Keynes and even Luton.
- 3.23 The main urban centres along the A1 corridor within Mid Beds are Biggleswade and Sandy. Demand along the A1 decreases northwards from Stevenage until it picks up again at St Neots, just to the north of Mid Beds district, because of the availability of modern offices.
- 3.24 Demand for industrial space is fair but not strong. Stratton Business Park at Biggleswade is seen by local agents as the premier industrial site. It is mainly occupied by companies involved in distribution and services. The business park is nearly fully developed and will soon be extended. The Middlefield Industrial Estate at Sandy is also seen by local agents as an established business location.
- 3.25 Agents report demand for industrial property firstly for industrial units up to 10,000 sq ft and secondly for large distribution units at good locations such as Stratton Park. A few small industrial units have been developed in the area and achieved rents of around £5 - £6 per sq ft. However, as in the area influenced by the M1, there is a preference for freehold premises.
- 3.26 Agents report a considerable supply of industrial space in the area influenced by the A1. One agent reported that there has been an increase in vacant industrial space. Part of this may result from various large industrial buildings that have recently come onto the market. Other factors may include the availability of leasehold rather than freehold space and the likelihood that much of the available space has become dated.
- 3.27 There has been little new office development although agents report a number of small office conversion schemes in rural areas and smaller settlements. Office rents in the area are only around £10 per sq ft which does not make development viable. However, local agents believe a "quality business park" on the A1 could be successful. However, public sector support would probably be required. We believe that a "quality business park" such as this could help to alleviate the currently high level of commuting out of the area.
- 3.28 Land values in the eastern area of Mid Beds district are reported to be around £350,000 per acre for industrial land and £1.0 million or more per acre for residential land. Again, it is not difficult to see that there is pressure from the market to change industrial uses to residential uses where planning permission can be achieved.

Summary and conclusions

- 3.29 The Draft Employment Land Review (ELR) for Mid Bedfordshire outlined a rationale for three estimates of employment growth in the district based on the "future growth requirements" method. The East of England Plan implies a requirement for 11,000 jobs in

Mid Beds from 2001 to 2021, an equivalent of the revised housing targets implies 14,230 jobs and Mid Beds DC's projection of recent employment growth trends implies 17,440 jobs.

- 3.30 The outlook for employment growth in Mid Bedfordshire is uncertain. The Mid Bedfordshire draft Employment Land Review identified three possible scales of future employment growth from 2001 to 2021. The Experian employment forecasts prepared for the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study were not available for this study as originally expected. The recent Economic Growth Study of Bedfordshire & Luton by TBR found no statistical evidence that the wider area economy could achieve another 50,000 net new jobs by 2021 but there is evidence that some 5,000 additional jobs were created in Mid Beds from 2001 to 2005 (ABI).
- 3.31 Our property market review has shown that there is a continuing need for office space, a severe shortage of industrial land, a need for small industrial workspace accommodation and strong demand for warehousing space in the western area of Mid Beds influenced by the M1. There is a fair demand for industrial land but little demand for office space in the eastern area influenced by the A1 and there may be an opportunity to stimulate demand by the development of a high quality business park.
- 3.32 In both areas there is a continuing pressure to change sites from industrial use to residential use, particularly in the western area. Like many areas in the UK, owners are reluctant to sell land for industrial use when there is half a chance of achieving a residential consent and obtaining a much higher price. There is also a growing demand from prospective occupiers of employment land and floorspace for freehold premises in both property market areas.

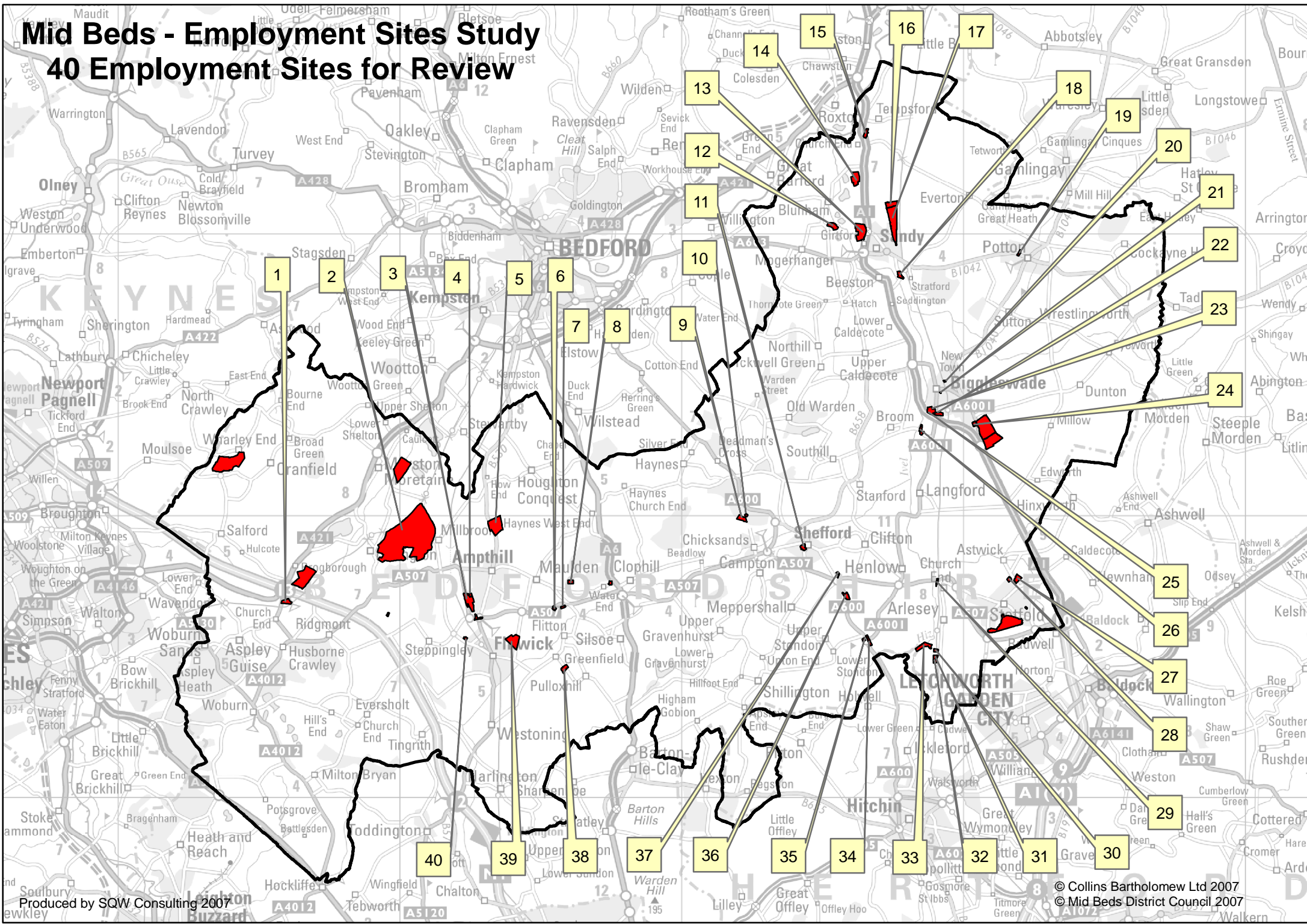
4: Employment site survey

- 4.1 This section of the report explains the methodology and results of the employment site survey of 40 selected sites within Mid Bedfordshire that was undertaken as the central element of this study. It then presents the employment site allocations that are suggested from the overall analysis of the results of the fitness for purpose assessments of the individual sites.
- 4.2 The 40 selected employment sites represented a wide variety of types and location of B1 (business), B2 (industry) and B8 (warehousing) sites across the district. They are listed below and shown by the key map on the next page.

SQW Map Ref	Mid Beds Database Ref	Site name
1	Husborne 1	Crawley Crossing
2	Millbrook 2	Proving Ground
3	Amphill 3	Station Road Industrial Estate
4	Amphill 4	Amphill Business Park
5	Amphill 13	Reddings Wood
6	Maulden 1	Black Moor Farm
7	Maulden 2	Russell Farm
8	Maulden 7	29 Clophill Road
9	Chicksands 3	Parripak site
10	Chicksands 1 & 2	Warren Court
11	Shefford 8	Industrial Estate
12	Moggerhanger 1	Abbey Corrugated Site
13	Sandy 16	Land West of Girtford Bridge
14	Tempsford 3	Zwetsloots Site
15	Tempsford 1	Tempsford Hall
16	Sandy 15	Land North of Sunderland Road
17	Sandy 10, 11 & 13	Middlefield Industrial Estate
18	Sandy 4 & 4a	Station Road
19	Potton 2	Shannon Place
20	Biggs 27	Acorn Centre
21	Biggs 16	Baystrait House
22	Biggs 18	JK Engineering Site
23	Biggs 31	Eldon Way
24	Biggs 14	London Road Trading Estate
25	Biggs 17	Albone Way
26	Biggs 20	Holme Mills
27	Stotfold 5	Taylor's Road/Motorola Site
28	Stotfold 4	Fen End Industrial Estate
29	Arlesey 2	Old Oak Close
30	Arlesey 7	Hitchin Road/Hampton House
31	Arlesey 6	Crossways
32	Arlesey 5	Portland Industrial Estate
33	Arlesey 4 & 4a	Business Park
34	Henlow 1	Trading Estate
35	Stondon 1	Peckworth Industrial Estate
36	Meppershall 1	ACO Site
37	Clifton 1	Wren Park
38	Pulloxhill 1	Pulloxhill Business Park
39	Flitwick 9 & 10	Maulden Road Industrial Estate
40	Flitwick 7	Rufus Centre

Mid Beds - Employment Sites Study

40 Employment Sites for Review



Survey method

- 4.3 Mid Beds DC clarified that the purpose of the employment site assessments was to “assess the fitness for purpose of each individual site in its existing or allocated employment use to determine the need for the Local Development Framework to safeguard it from pressure to change it to an alternative use.”
- 4.4 SQW prepared a site survey template (see Annex E) which was agreed with Mid Beds DC in advance of the survey to enable each site to be assessed against 10 agreed site assessment criteria. The employment site fitness for purpose criteria were drawn from the ODPM Employment Land Review (Site Appraisal Criteria Annex E) (ODPM, December 2004)¹ and the ODPM Sustainability Appraisal Guidance (Economic Objectives Appendix 9) (ODPM, April 2005)² and adjusted to suit the local characteristics of Mid Bedfordshire. The criteria were also adjusted to reflect and incorporate the employment site assessment factors that had been used in the Mid Beds Draft ELR.
- 4.5 The employment site fitness for purpose assessment criteria comprised :
- 1 Site characteristics
(inc site condition and occupancy rate)
 - 2 Market demand
(inc occupier satisfaction and specialist role)
 - 3 Environmental quality
(inc site condition)
 - 4 Site development constraints
(inc site condition)
 - 5 Site access and accessibility
(inc distance from transport routes)
 - 6 Movement and commuting
(inc likely labour catchment)
 - 7 Local development policy
(inc role in current planning policy)
 - 8 Economic development policy
(inc role in JEDS and RES)
 - 9 Sequential development test
(inc role in sustainable development)
 - 10 Other policy objectives
(inc role in MKSM Growth Area)
- 4.6 The employment site survey template provided for basic information about the type, size and location of the site and enabled each criterion to be scored (1 = poor, 5 = norm and 10 = good) and then totalled for each site. It then enabled the site to be allocated to a “traffic light” assessment of “fitness for purpose” ranging from “green” clearly fit for purpose (needs safeguarding), through “amber” potentially fit for purpose (with improvement) to “red” clearly not fit for purpose (consider alternative use).
- 4.7 The “traffic light” allocations were based on the scores against the criteria and the key facts brought together from the various information sources and business survey results provided

¹ Documents published by the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) can now be found on the website of the successor Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (www.communities.gov.uk)

² As above

by Mid Beds DC which were entered into a later section of the template. The allocations were set in context of property market review but individual sites were considered in isolation limited from the wider planning policy context.

4.8 The “traffic light” allocation called for a further additional assessment as follows :

SQW “traffic light assessment” :		
Category :	Total site comment and score :	
Green : clearly “fit for purpose”		
• Existing employment use		
• Future employment use		
• Need for policy protection		
• Viability for future employment use		
Amber : potentially “fit for purpose”		
• Existing employment use		
• Future employment use		
• Need for policy protection		
• Viability for future employment use		
• Improvements required		
Red : clearly not “fit for purpose”		
• Existing employment use		
• Possible alternative use		

4.9 The “fitness for purpose” survey of the selected 40 employment sites was undertaken in April 2007. The site surveys were carried out by visual inspection and were informed by the location map, site maps and the selected background Land Survey, Employment Sites, User Survey and Occupier information provided by Mid Beds DC and included in each site survey form. The survey inspections were carried out by a planning specialist and a property specialist working together to collate information, make assessments, allocate scores against each criterion and to take site photographs. The assessment results were therefore co-validated during the course of the survey work. The site survey forms are presented in Annex E and the site photographs are presented in Annex F.

Analysis of survey

4.10 The results of the employment site survey were entered into a draft spreadsheet to show the scores for each assessment criterion, the total score, the rank order and the “traffic light” allocation for each of the 40 selected sites. Three versions of the draft spreadsheet were then prepared to show the survey results in Traffic Light and Rank order, Total Score order and SQW Site Reference order (see Annex G).

4.11 The consultancy team met to cross-validate the results of the employment site survey overall and they then met the client team to discuss and agree several further adjustments. The adjustments to several individual scores from this cross-validation process resulted in some further adjustments to the total scores, rank order and “traffic light” allocations of particular sites. The survey forms were revised and the analysis spreadsheet was then finalised (see the table on the next page and Annex G).

Mid Beds Employment Land Review : Employment Site Assessment Summary and Allocation

Sites scored from 10 = high to 1 = low for site suitability for employment development (5 = neutral)

Sites are sorted by 'Traffic Light' and Rank

Revised 23 July 2007

SQW Map Ref	Mid Beds Database Ref	Site name	Site Chctstcs	Market Demand	Env Quality	Site dev constnts	Site access	Movemt & comtg	Local dev policy	Econ dev policy	Seqtl dev test	Other policies	Total score	Rank order	Traffic light assmnt
11	Shefford 8	Industrial Estate	8	8	7	8	6	6	8	8	8	6	73	1	Green
20	Biggs 27	Acorn Centre	8	7	7	8	6	7	8	7	8	6	72	2=	Green
39	Flitwick 9 &10	Maulden Road Industrial Estate	8	7	6	8	7	7	8	8	7	6	72	2=	Green
4	Amphill 4	Amphill Business Park	8	8	7	8	6	7	7	7	7	6	71	3=	Green
36	Meppershall 1	ACO Site	8	7	8	8	7	6	8	7	5	7	71	3=	Green
34	Henlow 1	Trading Estate	7	7	6	8	7	7	7	7	8	6	70	4=	Green
14	Tempsford 3	Zwetsloots Site	8	7	7	8	7	5	7	7	4	8	68	5=	Green
17	Sandy 10, 11 &13	Middlefield Industrial Estate	7	7	6	8	6	7	8	8	7	4	68	5=	Green
23	Biggs 31	Eldon Way	8	6	6	8	6	7	8	7	7	5	68	5=	Green
8	Maulden 7	29 Clophill Road	7	7	7	8	6	7	7	6	6	6	67	6=	Green
15	Tempsford 1	Tempsford Hall	8	7	8	8	7	5	6	7	4	7	67	6=	Green
21	Biggs 16	Baystrait House	8	6	5	7	8	7	7	6	8	5	67	6=	Green
25	Biggs 17	Albone Way	8	6	5	8	6	7	8	7	7	5	67	6=	Green
5	Amphill 13	Reddings Wood	8	6	7	8	7	6	5	7	4	6	64	8=	Green
28	Stotfold 4	Fen End Industrial Estate	8	6	6	7	5	7	8	7	6	4	64	8=	Green
6	Maulden 1	Black Moor Farm	8	7	6	8	6	6	7	6	4	5	63	9=	Green
31	Arlesey 6	Crossways	7	6	6	8	5	6	7	6	7	5	63	9=	Green
37	Clifton 1	Wren Park	7	7	7	8	7	6	6	6	4	5	63	9=	Green
40	Flitwick 7	Rufus Centre	8	7	8	8	7	6	5	6	3	5	63	9=	Green
1	Husborne 1	Crawley Crossing	6	8	5	7	7	6	7	7	5	4	62	10=	Green
16	Sandy 15	Land North of Sunderland Road	8	6	6	8	5	6	8	6	5	4	62	10=	Green
19	Potton 2	Shannon Place	7	6	5	6	6	7	7	7	7	4	62	10=	Green
29	Arlesey 2	Old Oak Close	6	7	5	7	5	6	7	7	7	5	62	10=	Green
10	Chicksands 1 & 2	Warren Court	7	6	8	8	6	5	6	6	3	5	60	11=	Green
2	Millbrook 2	Proving Ground	8	5	8	8	6	4	5	6	4	6	60	11=	Green
7	Maulden 2	Russell Farm	7	7	6	8	6	6	6	6	4	4	60	11=	Green
12	Moggerhanger 1	Abbey Corrugated Site	7	7	7	8	6	5	5	5	4	4	58	13=	Green
22	Biggs 18	JK Engineering Site	6	6	4	6	5	7	6	7	7	4	58	13=	Green
24	Biggs 14	London Road Trading Estate	7	7	6	8	8	7	7	7	7	6	70	4=	Amber
13	Sandy 16	Land West of Girtford Bridge	7	7	4	6	7	6	8	7	7	6	65	7	Amber
3	Amphill 3	Station Road Industrial Estate	7	8	3	7	4	7	8	7	7	4	62	10=	Amber
18	Sandy 4 & 4a	Station Road	6	5	5	6	6	7	7	7	6	4	59	12=	Amber
26	Biggs 20	Holme Mills	7	6	7	6	6	5	6	6	4	6	59	12=	Amber
32	Arlesey 5	Portland Industrial Estate	7	5	4	7	5	6	7	6	6	5	58	13=	Amber
30	Arlesey 7	Hitchin Road/Hampton House	7	5	4	7	5	6	7	6	6	4	57	14=	Amber
35	Stondon 1	Peckworth Industrial Estate	7	5	6	7	3	6	6	6	7	5	58	13=	Red
27	Stotfold 5	Taylor's Road/Motorola Site	8	5	6	8	4	5	6	6	5	4	57	14=	Red
38	Pulloxhill 1	Pulloxhill Business Park	7	8	7	8	6	4	5	4	4	2	55	15	Red
9	Chicksands 3	Parripak site	7	5	7	7	4	4	6	5	3	3	51	16	Red
33	Arlesey 4 &4a	Business Park	7	5	3	7	3	6	6	4	5	3	49	17	Red

SQW Map Ref	Existing employment use	Future employment use	Improvements required	Need for policy protection	Viability for future emp use
11	Very well suited	Very well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP 1 & EMP 4 (10)	Good
20	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Fair
39	Well suited	Well suited B2, B8	N/A	Key site- EMP 1	Good
4	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Good
36	Very well suited	Very well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP 1	Good
34	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP 1	Fair
14	Site part developed	Potential business park	N/A	Key site- SQW	Good viability
17	Established industrial estate	Limited land for development	N/A	Key site- SQW	Fair
23	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP 1	Under threat from residential
8	Fairly well suited	Fairly well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP1 & EMP4 (10A)	Fair
15	Very well suited	Very well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Fair to good
21	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Fair
25	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP 1	Under threat from residential
5	Well suited	Suited to B1	N/A	Key site- SQW	Good for B1
28	Fairly well suited	Fairly well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP 1	Marginal to fair
6	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Moderate to good
31	Fairly well suited	Fairly well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Marginal
37	Fairly well suited	Fairly well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Fair - better for B1
40	Well suited	Well suited B1	N/A	Key site- SQW	Moderate to good
1	Well suited	Well suited to B8	N/A	Key site- SQW	Good
16	Site part developed	Potential for B2	N/A	Key site- EMP 1 & EMP 4 (2)	Fair
19	Fairly well suited	Fairly well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP 1	Fair
29	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- EMP 1	Moderate to good
10	Fairly well suited	Fairly well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Marginal
2	Well suited	Only suited to existing use	N/A	Key site- SQW	Unknown
7	Fairly well suited	Fairly well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Marginal
12	Not ideal	Employment but filling	N/A	Key site- SQW	? Need to be tested
22	Well suited	Well suited	N/A	Key site- SQW	Under threat from residential
24	Well suited	Well suited	Comprehensive redevelopment later	Key site- SQW	Moderate to good
13	Some uses established	Other uses needed	Proactive comprehensive redevelopment	Key site- EMP 1 & EMP 4 (3)	Site in good location-needs improvement
3	Well suited	Well suited	Comprehensive redevelopment later	Key site- EMP 1	Moderate to good
18	Maybe ripe for redevelopment	Employment and other uses	Comprehensive redevelopment	Key site- EMP 1	Marginal
26	Poorly suited	Potentially fair B1, B2	Selective redevelopment	Key site- SQW	Marginal except speciality user
32	Fairly well suited	Fairly well suited	Comprehensive redevelopment	Key site- EMP 1	Marginal
30	Marginal	Potential but marginal	Comprehensive redevelopment	Key site- EMP1	Marginal
35	Not well suited	Not well suited	Alternative use - possibly residential	No Need for Policy Protection *	Not viable
27	Poorly suited	Not suited	Mix B1 small offices and residential	No Need for Policy Protection *	Marginal
38	Unsuited to location	Small B1, B2	Redevelop for more appropriate smaller employment use	No Need for Policy Protection *	Good viability
9	Poorly suited	Poorly suited	Screening and tidying	No Need for Policy Protection	Not viable
33	Fairly well suited	Poorly suited	Screening and tidying	No Need for Policy Protection *	Very marginal

Notes

Sites Allocated by MBDC as:

* - Key Site EMP 1

† - Key Site EMP 1 & EMP 4

Employment site allocations

- 4.12 The rationale for the allocation of employment sites to the “traffic light” categories of “fitness of purpose” was to select sites that were “well suited to employment use that would meet employment needs and promote economic development at the local and subregional levels.” The basis for this approach was to identify sites for employment use for these positive reasons rather than for negative reasons such as any potential competition for alternative use of a site.
- 4.13 The headline result of this site assessment and allocation process was that 28 of the 40 employment sites selected for the survey were allocated as “green sites” that were clearly fit for purpose. The highest ranked amongst the “green” employment sites are the high quality employment sites within settlements. The medium ranked “green” allocated sites include several high quality sites outside settlements and the lower ranked “green” allocated sites include a variety of utilitarian industrial sites and some “one off” special purpose sites both within and outside settlements.
- 4.14 Seven of the employment sites were “amber” as potentially fit for purpose with some improvement. Two of these were well-ranked sites within settlements (Site 24 : London Road Trading Estate, Biggleswade and Site 13 : Land West of Girtford Bridge, Sandy). The other five of these were medium to low ranked sites (Site 3 : Station Road Industrial Estate, Ampthill , Site 18 : Station Road, Sandy, Site 26 : Holme Milles, Biggleswade, Site 32 : Portland Industrial Estate and Site 30 : Hitchin Road / Hampton House, Arlesey). These sites were all within settlements except for Holme Mills which is a rural area outside Biggleswade.
- 4.15 The remaining five employment sites are “red” allocated, low-ranked employment sites mainly on the edge of or outside settlements. They are all unsuited to employment use because of their location and other characteristics. One of these “red” sites (Site 35 : Peckworth Industrial Estate, Stondon) is inappropriately located within a settlement and shows signs of under-occupation. Three of the other “red” sites are located on the edge of settlements and are generally underused and/or are in poor condition (Site 27 : Taylor’s Road, Stotfold, Site 38 : Pulloxhill Business Park, Pulloxhill and Site 33 : Arlesey Business Park, Arlesey). The location of the fifth “red” site (Site 9 : the Parripak site, Chicksands) in a rural area is inappropriate for this particular food processing and packing activity.
- 4.16 The key findings of the employment site survey are that the “green” allocated sites which are clearly fit for purpose provide a wide range of type, quality and location that is well suited to the local characteristics of the Mid Beds area and its local and wider economy. Not surprisingly, there are several “amber” allocated sites which are potentially fit for purpose that would need improvement (in some cases with concerted public sector intervention) to help extend and diversify the range of employment sites and premises available in the area.
- 4.17 There are also several “red” allocated sites which are clearly not fit for purpose for employment use which could be considered for allocation to an alternative use in the Local Development Framework if their current uses cease. These sites are essentially in the wrong place for effective employment use and they may also be considered to be in the wrong place in the wider spatial planning context. Most of these sites are suited to an alternative housing use but two of them (Site 9 : the Parripak site and Site 33 : Arlesey Business Park) are outside

a settlement, need landscape screening and might be more suited to an open use. We do not suggest that these sites should be proposed for a change of use in the Local Development Framework, not least because of the possible compensation implications, but we do suggest that the opportunity should be taken to promote alternative uses for them if for some reason they cease to be required by the owners for employment uses during the period of the LDF.

Conclusion

- 4.18 The approach to the allocation of employment sites to the “traffic light” categories of “fitness of purpose” has highlighted some apparent inconsistencies in the present allocation of the selected employment sites to current Local Plan Policies EMP1 and EMP4. Policy EMP1 “safeguards” 29 identified employment sites (some of them not included in the present “fitness for purpose” survey) and states that development or redevelopment for other uses will not be permitted. Policy EMP4 provides development guidelines for 8 of the EMP1 employment sites (plus Elstow Storage Depot).
- 4.19 It appears from these inconsistencies of principle and application that the formulation of employment land policies and the allocation of employment sites to any further “safeguarding policy” should be fundamentally reviewed in the preparation of the forthcoming Local Development Framework. In particular, we suggest that future policy should be guided by economic development objectives.
- 4.20 The spreadsheet summary of the employment site survey results shows 11 of the “green” allocated sites are already allocated to Policy EMP1 and/or Policy EMP4 but that the other 17 sites are not. Five of the “amber” allocated sites are allocated to Policy EMP1 and/or Policy EMP4 but the other two are not. None of the five “red” allocated sites are allocated to Policy EMP1 and/or Policy EMP4 and we see no need for any future policy protection for employment use for any of these sites.
- 4.21 These conclusions must be treated with some caution because the employment sites survey was commissioned to look at the fitness for purpose of individual selected employment sites out of their wider context. This has limited the scope of the exercise to consider the sites in isolation from other employment sites, other land uses and wider spatial planning issues. It has also been undertaken in the absence of the employment forecasts subdivided into Business Use Classes that were expected to be available from the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study and has had to rely on a local property market assessment which can only provide a partial picture of employment land needs.

5: Conclusions

- 5.1 This final section of the report draws together the overall findings and recommendations of the Mid Beds Employment Sites Study. It examines the draft Employment Land Review for Mid Bedfordshire. It then assesses the requirements of Draft East of England Plan requirements and other employment forecasts and it reviews the local property market to gauge demand for office, industrial and warehouse development.
- 5.2 The conclusions of the study then focus on the results of the survey and assessment of 40 selected employment sites across the district to provide a validation review of the fitness for purpose assessments previously undertaken for the Draft ELR. The findings and recommendations of the study will provide an input into the finalisation of the Draft Employment Land Review (ELR) which will be undertaken by Mid Beds District Council as part of the preparation of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for the district.

Employment Land Review

- 5.3 The Draft ELR is clearly and tightly written and provided a useful account of the desk studies, site surveys, occupier surveys and other consultations undertaken by Mid Beds DC. However, the “future growth requirements” method of estimating employment land requirements adopted in the Draft ELR (balancing the Draft East of England Plan housing requirements with corresponding employment growth requirements) should be supplemented by the “economic forecasts” method using a Business Use Class breakdown of the Experian forecasts which are being prepared for the Non-B1-B8 Employment Study.
- 5.4 It is implied but not made clear that the Draft ELR addresses mainly the first stage of the three-stage Employment Land Review methodology outlined in the ELR Guidance (2004). The Draft ELR demonstrated clear linkages between some of the key findings and some of the key challenges identified in Section 6 and onward onto some of the key issues identified for the LDF identified in Section 7 but not all of them. The logic chain of the Draft ELR would benefit from some further explanation.

Employment land demand

- 5.5 The Draft Employment Land Review (ELR) outlined a rationale for three estimates of employment growth in the district based on the “future growth requirements” method. The East of England Plan implies a requirement for 11,000 jobs in Mid Beds from 2001 to 2021, an equivalent of the revised housing targets implies 14,230 jobs and Mid Beds DC’s projection of recent employment growth trends implies 17,440 jobs. The outlook for employment growth in Mid Bedfordshire is uncertain because the Experian forecasts suggest employment growth of 14,000 jobs from 2001 to 2021 and, although Mid Beds gained some 5,000 jobs between 2001 and 2005, another study doubts whether the wider area economy could achieve another 50,000 new jobs by 2021.

- 5.6 Our property market review has shown a stronger demand for office, industrial and warehousing space in the western area of Mid Beds influenced by the M1 than in the eastern area influenced by the A1. There is a need for smaller industrial workspace in the western area and there may be an opportunity for a high quality business park in the eastern area. In both areas there is a continuing pressure to change sites from industrial use to residential use, particularly in the western area. Like many areas in the UK, owners are reluctant to sell land for industrial use when there is half a chance of achieving a residential consent and obtaining a much higher price.

Employment site allocations

- 5.7 The central element of this study was an employment site survey to assess the fitness for purpose of 40 selected employment sites of various types and sizes across the district. The purpose of the employment site assessments was to “assess the fitness for purpose of each individual site in its existing or allocated employment use to determine the need for the Local Development Framework to safeguard it from pressure to change it to an alternative use.” The analysis of the survey allocated the sites to “traffic light” categories of “fitness of purpose” to identify sites that were “well suited to employment use that would meet employment needs and promote economic development at the local and subregional levels.”
- 5.8 The headline results of this site assessment and allocation process are that 28 of the 40 employment sites selected for the survey were allocated as “green sites” that were clearly fit for purpose. Seven of the employment sites were “amber” as potentially fit for purpose with some improvement and the remaining five employment sites are “red” allocated, low-ranked employment sites mainly on the edge of or outside settlements. The allocation of employment sites to the “traffic light” categories highlighted some apparent inconsistencies in the present allocation of the selected sites to the current Local Plan Policies EMP1 and EMP4.
- 5.9 We recommend that there should be a fundamental review of the principles and application of any future safeguarding policy to protect employment sites from other development in the preparation of the Mid Beds Local Development Framework (LDF). Sites should be allocated for economic development purposes rather than for protection from competing uses. This employment site survey covered only a selection of sites and was undertaken for each site in isolation from its wider planning context and a full assessment of employment land need and demand across the district. We recommend that it is extended to cover all the significant employment sites over the ELR Guidance threshold of 0.25 hectares to provide a more robust basis for the ELR and the LDF in Mid Bedfordshire.