

Chapter 8

Business

Context

8.1 As a largely rural district, Wealden's economy is dominated by the service sector, notably retailing, tourism, catering and public services. The manufacturing sector, although relatively small, has grown over recent years against wider trends, reflecting the proximity of the District to the prosperous Gatwick and Crawley economies. It has good representation in food and drink, several forms of engineering, plastics, data processing and publishing, with a growing high-tech sector, particularly at Uckfield.

8.2 While Wealden's economy is characterised by high levels of employment (less than 2% unemployment within the District overall), remuneration levels are relatively low, reflecting the high proportion of service sector jobs. This has been a significant contributory factor in the high levels of out-commuting, mainly to the nearby larger towns of Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells.

8.3 Wealden has a predominantly small firm economy, with 90% of companies in the District employing less than ten people. While the District has few larger employers, there is evidence that a significant proportion of local businesses have plans to grow and expand in the longer term.

8.4 The resident workforce of the District, is expected to grow during the plan period by almost 6%. Ensuring that adequate provision for new business development, to provide local jobs for the expanding workforce and help to reduce out-commuting, as well as fostering a diverse and healthy economy are therefore important considerations for the Plan.

8.5 The Government expects the planning system to support the development of a prosperous economy. National planning guidance encourages business development in locations that minimise the need to travel, especially by car. This applies particularly to activities that attract a large number of trips. A better balance between homes and jobs is sought in both urban and rural areas.

8.6 Regional Planning Guidance for the South East gives priority to regenerating the East Sussex coastal towns, within a sustainable

development framework. The South East of England Regional Development Agency's Regional Economic Strategy published in 2002 also supports this priority and seeks to promote measures to attract new investment in to the Sussex sub-region. The Structure Plan sets out the basis for providing business land and floorspace, including provision for new allocations in the towns where major growth is planned, and specifically at Polegate, which is identified in the Structure Plan as a location for a new high quality business park.

Strategy

8.7 The Plan's objectives in relation to the provision of business land and premises, have regard to the wider aims of the Plan the Council's objectives for economic development, planning policy, the Structure Plan requirements and local economic conditions. The main business related objectives are:

- (1) *to increase the opportunities for residents to work locally and reduce the need for commuting;*
- (2) *to provide a range of business sites to meet the needs of local businesses, including small firms, and to attract inward investment that would help broaden the economic base;*
- (3) *to provide for the majority of new business development in towns, well related to planned housing development, consistent with environmental objectives and reducing the need to travel especially by car;*
- (4) *to assist the economy of rural areas by allowing business opportunities in the villages where appropriate;*
- (5) *to encourage the retention and effective use of existing business sites, particularly in locations accessible by public transport, walking and cycling; and*
- (6) *to foster high quality and accessible business environments in both new and existing business areas through careful attention to the layout and design of development and to the provision of ancillary facilities.*

8.8 The strategy recognises that it will be vital to ensure that there are sufficient business sites and premises across the District. Taking account of sustainability objectives, the towns should continue to be the main locations for employment in the District. Even so, it is appropriate to continue to provide for employment within the rural areas themselves, especially in “service centre” villages, in order to support the rural economy and prevent settlements becoming dormitory in nature. The need to allow for farm diversification to maintain a living and working countryside is also recognised in the Plan.

Criteria Applicable to all Business Developments

8.9 The Council aims for a high standard of design in all business development and seeks to achieve this through Policy BS1. Proposals should combine fitness for purpose with quality buildings and spaces around them, including landscape treatments, to the benefit of both occupiers and the wider environment. Proposals should take account of the general nature of adjacent development and have regard to a site's prominence. Where external storage is acceptable, this should be well screened from public vantage points and should not interfere with areas set aside for parking or manoeuvring.

8.10 Transport policies elaborate on the importance of good access by a variety of modes of transport. Business development must comply with Policies TR1 and TR2 of this Plan and should make provision for sufficient parking and manoeuvring space within the site in accordance with prevailing standards. Developments likely to have significant transport implications should be accompanied by a transport assessment and a travel plan.

8.11 All proposals for business development will be assessed against Policy BS1, including new development, changes of use, extensions and intensification, irrespective of the site's location. The remainder of this chapter sets out separate policies guiding the location of business development and the importance of protecting existing business sites: these will be applied in conjunction with Policy BS1.

Policy BS1

All development proposals for business, industrial and warehousing purposes falling within Use Classes B1, B2 and B8, together with similar and complimentary ‘sui generis’* commercial uses, should meet the following criteria, as applicable:

- (1) be of a nature and scale appropriate to the function and character of the settlement and its local environment;**
- (2) not create or perpetuate unacceptable highway, safety or environmental conditions by virtue of additional traffic, vehicular routings, congestion, pollution, access or parking;**
- (3) not have an adverse impact on the amenities of nearby properties or the immediate locality by virtue of the scale and nature of use, noise, dust, fumes or the general level and nature of activities;**
- (4) make provision for access by means of transport other than the car;**
- (5) the design and scale of the development, its siting and layout and the proposed access arrangements, parking and landscaping are appropriate to the site and, where appropriate, assist its enhancement;**
- (6) in respect of warehousing or sui generis uses, it would not unduly prejudice the availability of land or premises for B1 and B2 uses.**

Matters such as the nature of the proposed use, hours of operation, noise levels, use of external areas, including parking and access arrangements, may be controlled by planning conditions and in some circumstances, planning obligations will also be required.

*The Use Classes and the term 'sui generis' are explained in Appendix 3.

Business Areas in Towns and Villages

Main Business Areas

8.12 It is considered appropriate to clearly identify the main locations for business activity in the District. For accessibility and environmental reasons, offices, industry and warehousing uses should be focussed within towns and villages and not in the surrounding countryside.

8.13 As discussed above, the towns are also regarded as the most sustainable locations for new business development, particularly as most new housing development will occur there. At the same time, the allocations in the villages are consistent with their service centre function, ensuring the availability of employment opportunities and a diversity of business sites across the District. Policy BS2 defines the main business areas within the District's towns and villages, which are also shown in Figure 8.1.

New Business Allocations

8.14 The need to allocate additional land for business development is determined in the Structure Plan. For the purposes of planning for future business growth, the Structure Plan divides Wealden District into two policy areas. The north of the District, including Crowborough and Uckfield and surrounding areas are classified as the North Central Area (North Wealden). The south of the District, including Heathfield, Hailsham, Polegate and Willingdon and surrounding areas are combined with Eastbourne in recognition of the strong functional relationships between the two areas and is referred to as the South Central Area. The Structure Plan includes guidance on the total requirement for business floorspace and land within these policy areas together with the requirement for additional floorspace to be met through new allocations, having regard to existing commitments, completions and workforce growth.

8.15 A key task of the Local Plan is therefore to ensure that there is sufficient land for business development to meet these Structure Plan guidelines. Table 8.1 indicates the progress made towards meeting the Structure Plan in each of the two policy areas. Table 8.1 also shows the total amount of additional new business development proposed in this Plan to meet the Structure Plan, taking account of the amount of

business development that has taken place since 1996, sites with planning permission, allocations in the current Adopted Local Plan and proposed de-allocations.

8.16 The way in which new business development has been allocated in the District has been determined with regard to:

1. the needs arising from planned housing growth and other employment trends, including the objective to secure a reduction in net out-commuting and to broaden the economic base of the local economy.
2. Commercial property market analysis and assessments of demand, drawing on published studies and historic development trends.

8.17 The principal new allocation of business land in the District is proposed at Polegate (see Policy PW3). A total of about 7ha of land has been identified adjacent to the A27 Polegate Bypass for a major new high quality business park. As set out in chapter 9 and Policy PW3, the Polegate Business Park will be phased in line with improvements which need to be carried out to the A27 trunk road as well as other improvements to the County road network and public transport facilities.

**Table 8.1 Structure Plan Business Floorspace Requirements
Position as at April 2001 by Structure Plan Policy Area**

	North Wealden (North Central Area)	South Wealden (South Central Area)		
		Wealden	Eastbourne	Total
Completions (1.4.96-31.3.01) (m ²)	6,515	18,175	8,131	26,306
Commitments (m ²)	17,051	27,900	36,580	64,480
Allocations in current adopted plans	28,995	22,188	48,700	70,888
Proposed De-allocations (m ²)	0	-13,451	0	-13,451
Proposed New Allocations (m ²)	0	25,000	20,000	45,000
Total (m²)	52,561	79,812	113,411	193,223
Total Structure Plan Requirement (m²)	50,000-60,000	175,000-200,000		
Additional Structure Plan Requirement (m²)	0	30,000-50,000		

Proposed Deletions of Existing Allocations

8.18 In line with Government advice it is proposed to delete those business allocations in the current adopted Local Plan with little prospect of being implemented, notably:

- (1) Land at Old Swan Lane, Hailsham (see chapter 15);
- (2) Land at Station Road, Hailsham (see chapter 15); and
- (3) Land at Mountney Bridge, Westham (see chapter 19).

8.19 The existing business allocation at Ghyll Road, Heathfield in the current adopted Local Plan has been amended to allow for a mixed business and residential scheme in recognition of the exceptional constraints in developing the site solely for business purposes (see Policy HE1). This Plan also proposes to reallocate the existing business area at East Hoathly for a mix of business, residential and community uses, in view of the constraints which have limited take-up of the vacant parts of the site in recent years.

Range of Business Activities within the Main Business Areas

8.20 The range of uses that would be acceptable within the main business areas is defined in Policy BS2, although some business areas will also be subject to site-specific policies.

8.21 A particular objective of the East Sussex Structure Plan is to improve both the range and quality of jobs in the area. The availability of high quality sites and premises is considered to be a key element in attracting the necessary inward investment to achieve this. The Ashdown Business Park at Maresfield and the proposed new allocation for the Polegate business park are identified in the Structure Plan as important locations for major high quality business development. The range of uses that would be acceptable includes offices, research and development and light industry. Planning permission will be granted only for proposals which accord with the Ashdown Business Park Planning and Development Brief, which was published as supplementary planning guidance in March 2000 or which accords with Policy PW3 in the case of the Polegate Business Park. The Ashdown Business Park is defined as a main business area in this plan on the basis that in October 2001 the District Council resolved to grant planning permission for development of the site subject to completion of a Section 106 agreement.

8.22 As Wealden's economy is comprised predominantly of small firms, the Council seeks to support the small firm sector and to stimulate the development of additional small business units. Most of the main business areas identified in Policy BS2 are suitable for a variety of premises sizes, including accommodation for small firms. The proposed new business

allocation at Polegate and the new mixed use allocations at East Hoathly (Policy V2) and Buxted (Policy V3) will also offer opportunities for the provision of small business units consistent with the particular aims for these sites.

8.23 Policies E5 and W9 (a) of the Structure Plan allow in exceptional cases for waste management facilities to be established on existing industrial and commercial sites within or adjoining built-up areas or on sites where industrial or semi-industrial forms of development (including allocations) would be acceptable. Those policies would not however apply to the proposed new allocation at Polegate or to the proposed Ashdown Business Park where the aim is to achieve a high quality business environment in line with the Structure Plan. The identification of sites for waste management facilities is a matter for the East Sussex Waste Local Plan. Such uses would only be accepted within the other main business areas where a strategic need has been demonstrated and subject to the criteria in Policy BS1 and other relevant site specific policies of this Plan.

Policy BS2

The sites listed below, and defined on the Proposals Map, are allocated as main business areas.

1. Millbrook, Crowborough
2. Farningham Road, Crowborough
3. Lexden Lodge, Crowborough
4. Park Road, Crowborough
5. Diplocks Way, Hailsham
6. Station Road, Hailsham
7. Station Road/Old Swan Lane, Hailsham
8. Browning Road, Heathfield
9. Ghyll Road, Heathfield
10. Burwash Road, Heathfield
11. Polegate Business Park, Polegate
12. Chaucer, Polegate
13. Ashdown Business Park, Maresfield
14. Bellbrook, Uckfield
15. Ridgewood, Uckfield
16. Hackhurst Lane, Lower Dicker
17. Station Road, Forest Row
18. Merrydown, Horam
19. Durgates, Wadhurst
20. Wadhurst Business Park, Wadhurst
21. Mountney Bridge, Westham

Within these sites, proposals for development falling within Use Class B1 will be permitted. Proposals for uses falling within Use Classes B2 and B8, together with similar and

complimentary 'sui generis'* uses, will only be permitted subject to the criteria in Policy BS1 and other relevant site specific policies. Other uses will not be permitted unless specifically provided for by other policies of the Plan.

* The Use Classes and the term 'sui generis' are explained in Appendix 3.

Proposals for Other New Business Sites within Development Boundaries

8.24 Government policy is not to seek a rigid separation of residential and business activities. It also encourages mixed-use development both within town centres and in areas of major new development, to help create vitality and diversity and to reduce the need to travel. It states that a wide range of businesses may be satisfactorily undertaken within residential or rural areas without unreasonably interfering with the enjoyment of amenities or prejudicing the character of the area.

8.25 It is considered consistent with sustainability principles and local economic circumstances to allow other employment proposals to come forward elsewhere in towns and villages, as defined by their development boundaries. To be acceptable, these should be compatible with local environmental and amenity considerations, and of an appropriate scale

8.26 New business development, both buildings and use of land, can rarely be satisfactorily incorporated in open countryside because of the landscape impact and because the introduction of commercial activity, including traffic, is generally intrusive in the rural scene. There is specific provision for the reuse of rural buildings in the countryside for business purposes and for the expansion of existing business sites in limited circumstances in Policies DC7 and BS4 respectively.

Policy BS3

Proposals to establish business activities or to expand existing activities will be allowed on sites outside the main business areas but still within development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, subject to the criteria at Policy BS1. New business sites will not be allowed outside development

boundaries unless specifically provided for by other policies of the Plan.

Business Sites in the Countryside

8.27 The main thrust of the Council's general policies relating to the countryside is to continue to restrain new development and to maintain its essential environment and landscape character, with particularly careful control in the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty together with other designated areas and especially vulnerable landscapes. New industrial and commercial development outside development boundaries is resisted in accordance with Policy BS3 above.

8.28 Notwithstanding this, there are already a number of industrial and commercial concerns located outside of settlements. To help promote the rural economy and, where appropriate, to retain key employers, proposals for expansion, redevelopment or intensification will be permitted within existing sites, subject to certain criteria. Environmental considerations remain critical and such development should only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the landscape and rural character of the countryside would be conserved or improved and that other environmental, local amenity, traffic, access, layout and design considerations are satisfactorily handled in keeping with the surroundings.

Policy BS4

Proposals for redevelopment or intensification of existing business sites outside development boundaries will be permitted for business purposes where the following criteria are met:-

(1) it would not detract from the distinctive rural environmental qualities or the amenities of local residents by virtue of the use of the site, the siting, design and scale of the development or its access or associated traffic generation;

(2) in respect of proposals likely to create a significant number of jobs, should be well located in relation to towns or villages and be readily accessible by public transport.

Exceptionally, the outward expansion of an existing business site outside development boundaries will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that it would guarantee the retention of an employment use which is important to the local economy, subject to the above criteria and there being no suitable alternative site available.

Safeguarding of Existing Business and Commercial Sites/Premises

8.29 The need for a policy to retain existing business sites and premises is supported by recent business surveys which show that there is a need for readily available business accommodation, particularly small units. Such a policy will ensure that the need for greenfield land allocations is minimised in achieving a better balance between homes and jobs. This is consistent with Regional and Structure Plan policies.

8.30 There are many existing business sites scattered throughout the towns, villages and in the countryside that, collectively, are important to the range of available accommodation, provide a significant number of local jobs and contribute to the vitality and prosperity of the area. The loss of such sites to other uses may not be readily compensated for by provision elsewhere, would lessen employment opportunities for local people and may add to the dormitory nature of settlements. Business premises close to town and village centres are particularly valuable in supporting their commercial role.

8.31 The loss of existing business sites to other non-employment uses will therefore be resisted provided that their retention would not perpetuate local environmental or amenity problems or where it can be demonstrated that it would no longer be a viable proposition. In applying Policy BS5, the term "existing business land and premises" is taken to mean that which is or was last used for any use falling within Use Classes B1-8 or any vacant site which has a valid planning permission for employment uses. It is also taken to include other similar sui generis commercial uses that can be typically found on an industrial estate, including petrol filling stations.

8.32 In assessing the viability of retaining land and premises for business use, consideration will be given to the length of time a site or premises has remained vacant and the effectiveness of marketing efforts, including the appropriateness of the price for the property for the relevant business uses.

8.33 Exceptionally, the Structure Plan allows existing business sites located within or adjoining built-up areas or where industrial or semi-industrial forms of development would generally be acceptable, to be used for waste recycling, transfer or treatment facilities. Such uses will only be accepted where a strategic need has been demonstrated and subject to the criteria in Policy BS1 and other relevant policies of the Plan. Planning for new sites for waste recycling facilities is normally a matter for the Waste Local Plan produced by East Sussex County Council.

Policy BS5

Existing business land and premises shall be safeguarded for their employment potential and their change of use to other purposes will not be permitted, except where:

- (1) it is satisfactorily demonstrated that the site or premises, with or without adaptation, are:**
 - a) no longer capable of economic re-use for the present use or an appropriate alternative employment use; and**
 - b) that there is no demand at present or likely to arise in the future to justify the site's retention for employment use; or**
- (2) continued use or any alternative employment use would be likely to cause demonstrable harm to the environment or the amenities of local people.**

Home-based Business Activities

8.34 In Wealden, there are several thousand people who work from home. It is assumed that this will increase as communications technologies, including the wider use of broad band, develop.

8.35 This is generally welcomed since it helps to retain more employment locally to the benefit of the District's economy, as well as bring about reduced commuting. However, if a business does become unduly dominant or intrusive to local amenities as a consequence of either the nature of the operations or its expansion, then the Council would properly seek to restrict such activity. It follows that suitable business activities will generally be small scale, not noisy in nature and not generate abnormal traffic flows.

Policy BS6

Proposals for home-based business activities will be permitted where the following criteria are met:-

- (1) the business is not likely to have a detrimental effect on the amenities of properties or the character of the area by virtue of its nature and scale of operation or its access and traffic generation;**
- (2) the accommodation, including parking, is likely to meet the long term needs of the business.**

Map

