

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **EMPLOYMENT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- 6.1. The Borough is situated in a relatively prosperous economic region of the United Kingdom. Whilst the recession of the late 1980's and early 1990's caused increases in both unemployment and vacant premises to levels not previously experienced the economic position has now recovered. There is a strong economic base centred in the service and transport sectors with proximity to Heathrow, West London generally and good communication via the M3, M4 and M25 making the Borough an attractive and strong location.
- 6.2. Within the Plan area are 12 main industrial and warehousing estates, a major office and retail centre at Staines and well established service sectors in Ashford, Shepperton and Sunbury Cross. On the borders of the Plan area are also substantial areas of employment development notably Poyle Industrial Estate (transferred from Spelthorne to Slough Borough in April 1995) and Heathrow Airport. These provide a significant amount of employment for Spelthorne residents.
- 6.3. The policies of the Plan on employment development must take account of national, regional and Structure Plan Policy guidance as well as any other relevant local circumstances. The relevant policy guidance of these higher order plans is set out in the following paragraphs. This chapter of the Plan only seeks to deal with offices, industry and warehousing, however, there are of course important employment implications arising from retailing and aviation.

#### **POLICY CONTEXT**

- 6.4. The most recent statement of Government guidance towards employment generating development is PPG4 "Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms" (1992). This identified one of the Government's key aims to be to encourage continued economic development in a way which is compatible with its stated environmental objectives. The guidance states that development plans should give industrial and commercial developers and local communities greater certainty about types of development that will or will not be permitted in a given location. Such plans should contain positive policies to provide for the needs of small businesses, aim to ensure there is sufficient land available and where possible identify under used or vacant land, and take account of the opportunities in locating new development where travel costs might be reduced and more energy efficient modes of transport encouraged. Some guidance on employment development in rural areas is also given in PPG7 "The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development". During 1999 the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)

finalised its economic development plan for the region. Its plans represent a further material consideration to be taken into account by the Council.

6.5. In March 1994 the then Department of the Environment published its Regional Guidance for the South East<sup>1</sup>. This document followed closely work prepared by SERPLAN. So far as employment is concerned it recognised as imperative the need for the South East region as a whole to facilitate new development for industry and commerce if it is to spearhead the UK's economic success. However, it recognised the limitations imposed by the environment, and infrastructure, to the contribution possible from the area to the west and south of London. The Strategy recognises that a reducing rate of development in this part of the region is appropriate providing a period of adjustment enabling infrastructure and services to catch up with rapid growth in the recent past. It nevertheless recognises the existing stock of unimplemented planning permissions. These areas can no longer absorb continuing net outward migration throughout the 1990's. The Strategy identifies the particular scope of areas east of London with available land, improved communications and opportunities associated with the Channel Tunnel, and a need for development led environmental improvements. There is recognition generally within all parts of the region of the scope, as at 1992, for economic activity in the substantial volumes of vacant office and other commercial property and further committed development.

6.6. In April 1993 the County Council published its "Economic Strategy for Surrey" which has been the subject of public consultation. The stated 'vision' of the strategy is:-

"To encourage and support the maintenance and renewal of a sustainable economy for the County, in order to improve the quality of life for all those living and working in Surrey, particularly by encouraging wealth creating activity which is compatible with the quality and value of Surrey's environment, infrastructure and services".

Five aims in support of this vision are set out, although certain aspects of these go beyond the scope of land-use planning:

- a) to create the conditions for existing firms to expand within the environmental, infrastructure and labour constraints on the County
- b) to encourage and support inward investment by those firms which will most contribute to wealth creation in the County and the diversity of its economy whilst enhancing the quality and value of the County's environment, infrastructure and services

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<sup>1</sup> RPG9 was revised in 2001. The revised document identifies a Western Policy Area to the west and south of London for which the economic development strategy should build on its strengths, to ensure that the economy continues to grow in a sustainable way with minimum additional pressure on limited labour or land resources. The regeneration of the Thames Gateway east of London remains a priority and other potential growth areas are identified.

- c) to encourage and support enterprise and economic growth in new and small firms within the County
  - d) to encourage and support economic activity within rural areas, which contributes to the maintenance and enhancement of the countryside and to rural service provision
  - e) to encourage and support the provision of a highly qualified and trained labour force and an efficient labour market within the County.
- 6.7. The Policies of the Surrey Structure Plan (1994) generally continue the policy approach of the previous Structure Plan adopted in 1989 toward employment provision. The general approach seeks to encourage development which contributes to the maintenance and renewal of the economy within environmental and infrastructure constraints (Objective 6) - this reflects the thrust of the land use planning aspect of the Economic Strategy. This is to be achieved by the re-use of existing land and resisting the loss of that which is suitably sited (Policies DP9 and DP10), provision for small firms, expansion of existing firms and those meeting local needs, and relocation of non-conforming users (Policy DP12). Additional land can be made available where needs are not met so long as there is no loss of land for other needed uses (Policy DP11). In making provision account is to be taken of existing floorspace, outstanding commitments, labour market, economic and housing market considerations (Policy DP13). There is a specific presumption against large distribution centres, over 5,000 sq.metres (Policy DP14).
- 6.8. The Plan deals specifically with business use in town centres requiring in Policy DP20 appropriate provision to be made in major centres in the County including Staines. By reference to 'business use' in town centres Structure Plan Policy DP20 is concerned with office development. Such use in town centres must, however, be subject to the cumulative effect of provision under Policies DP9-13 and the suitability of further business development proposals generally on a town having regard to accessibility and transport needs. Policy DP20 precludes further development in any other town centre in Spelthorne except for redevelopment on sites already in business use, and provision in Staines must take account of the character of the town, its role, and the other consequential needs and requirements in Policy DP18. These require specific consideration of improvements to environment, amenity, transport provision including needs of traffic management generally, pedestrians, cyclists and people with disabilities; and the need for opportunities for small scale activities, business providing local services and development with mixed uses including residential. Policy DP21 has a presumption against business use in large towns such as Staines unless the development is of an appropriate scale, type and design, makes a particular contribution to the town, additional residential development is also normally provided, and planning benefits are provided in the context of Policy EN4. Proposals providing major infrastructure improvements at Staines Station are expressly encouraged - this is further elaborated on in Policy MT15. Policy EN4 makes clear that such benefits are appropriate given the cumulative impact even small schemes

may have on the transport network and also that environment benefits should not be secured where a development is otherwise unacceptable.

## **EMPLOYMENT POSITION IN THE BOROUGH**

6.9. In formulating appropriate policies and proposals account must not only be taken of the policy context referred to above but also the particular circumstances of the Borough and the area of which it is part including the specific factors identified in Policy DP13 of the Structure Plan. The policy requires account to be taken of:-

- a) availability of existing industrial and commercial land and premises
- b) local plan allocations
- c) outstanding planning permissions and their rate of completion and density of occupation
- d) state of the (i) labour market, (ii) housing market, (iii) the economy, (iv) the environment, (v) infrastructure.

6.10. Within the Plan area there was approximately 709,000 sq.metres at March 1998 (744,200 at March 2000) of industrial, warehouse and office floorspace representing about 10% of the total floorspace in Surrey. Heathrow Airport to the north of the Borough employs around 5,000 local residents (just over 10% of the Borough's economically active population). Poyle Trading Estate and other commercial floorspace in Poyle and Colnbrook which is also just outside the Borough contain a further 250,000 sq.metres employment floorspace. At 1st April 1998 there was approximately 49,347 sq. metres of vacant floorspace in the Borough. New sites for employment development are very limited although there is scope for the intensification of floorspace on existing sites - a process which produced a net increase in floorspace of 42,000 sq.metres between 1982 and 1998 within the Borough. As at 1st April 1998 there was outstanding planning permission for 51,719 sq.metres net (99,386 sq.metres gross) of industrial, warehouse and office floorspace. Generally there is a fairly rapid turnover of planning permissions as most are submitted by commercial developers anticipating early implementation. At 1st April 1998 unemployment in Spelthorne was 811 (1.7%). (By March 2001 it was 518 or 0.7%). The vacant employment floorspace and net floorspace potential from unimplemented planning permissions together represent a significant job creation potential. An indication of this potential can be gained by applying the following worker floorspace rates:

Industrial	1 to 29.8 sq m
Warehousing.	1 to 60.8 sq m
Offices	1 to 23.9 sq m

Source: Surrey County Council

After deducting for a minimum vacant floorspace figure of 45,000 sq.metres and adding registered job vacancies of 726 (April 1998 figure for the Staines area), a

potential for at least 4000 jobs exists. Over the Plan period the economically active population of the Borough is likely to be stable. The difference between current unemployment levels and existing job creation potential demonstrates that no additional floorspace is required for employment reasons.

## **PROVISION FOR EMPLOYMENT IN THE PLAN PERIOD**

- 6.11. This replacement Local Plan is being prepared at a time of relatively low unemployment. The figures in paragraph 6.10 above demonstrate the considerable amount of employment floorspace in the Borough and the employment potential of existing vacant or permitted floorspace. Further reductions in the already low levels of unemployment are considered to be dependant more on training to resolve the mismatch of skills and available jobs rather than the creation of more employment floorspace.
- 6.12. Scope for major additional employment floorspace is constrained by the Green Belt, there being no 'greenfield' sites (this is land not previously developed) suitable for employment development within the urban area. The Council is however satisfied that aside from the strong environmental case for protecting the Green Belt, the foregoing information shows that no exceptional circumstances exist for even contemplating releasing such land for employment development. This approach is wholly consistent with the regional strategy and the Structure Plan. Given these constraints and circumstances the provision of new land for employment is not justified. Nevertheless there remains scope for continuing the pattern of increasing floorspace in a limited way by redevelopment.
- 6.13. From the above analysis the Borough Council has set the following aim from which the policies and proposals for employment development follow and on which its other initiatives with the business community are based:-

**'To maintain a buoyant economy which meets the needs of the Borough whilst opposing additional employment growth of a scale which would place unacceptable pressure on the Green Belt, housing supply, transport infrastructure and the environment generally'.**

- 6.14. In November 1993 the Borough Council established the Spelthorne Business Forum as part of its commitment to working closely with the business community. The aims of the Forum are to:-
- a) facilitate an exchange of ideas and information between local businesses, the Council and other organisations and to promote a greater understanding of the local economy;
  - b) promote Spelthorne as an attractive location for businesses, with excellent communications and ideally located near to Heathrow;

- c) raise awareness of the needs of local businesses and factors affecting local economic growth and prosperity;
- d) develop links with schools, adult education establishments and the Surrey Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to ensure that local skills closely match the needs of local businesses;
- e) attract sponsorship for 'Partnership' schemes to enable Companies to invest in improving the quality of life for local residents; and
- f) take account of local 'Businesses' views in future planning policies.

The role of the Surrey TEC is also recognised in assisting businesses and individuals, particularly in ensuring appropriate training is available.

- 6.15. In September 1995 the Spelthorne Chamber of Commerce was established to further assist businesses in the Borough. The Borough Council supports the Chamber whose office is located within the Council Offices in Staines.
- 6.16. In the following paragraphs the Council sets out its policies which seek to achieve the employment aim of the Local Plan. In 1987 the Government brought into place a new Use Classes Order which no longer reflected the previous distinction between Office, Industry and Warehouse uses. The intention was to allow greater freedom between uses. Whilst warehousing remains a distinct use the distinction between industry, offices and research is defined not by the activity itself but rather its environmental effect and can all come within Use Class B1. Whilst local plans are allowed to prepare policies and proposals to provide for specific business use activities within Use Classes B1 and B2 such as those causing particular adverse impacts e.g. chemicals, there are no such businesses locally and therefore no special reasons for doing so in the Borough. Accordingly no distinction is made between office, light industrial and high technology uses (Use Class B1) so far as the application of policies are concerned. In the preceding sections the old terms of office, industry and warehousing have been used in certain tables where the extent of business floorspace is concerned so as to assist an understanding of the nature of such accommodation in the Borough. However a variety of employment proposals will be encouraged reflecting the existing diverse nature of the economy in the Borough and the support for business activity generally. Business activity in the more general sense, as against the technical meaning of 'business use' embraces uses in the 'business use' classes as well as uses involving the purchase of goods and services including Use Classes A1, A2, A3 and D2 (hotels). In the context of Policy EM4 and EM5 'business use' applies particularly to offices (Use Class B1(a)).
- 6.17. In maintaining a buoyant economy it will be important to encourage a continuation of the process of renewal of floorspace so the ever changing needs of business, both in terms of the use to which the space can be put and also the facilities and services provided can best be met. It is important to not only provide the right overall quantity of floorspace but also to meet the specific needs of the local economy. One important

aspect of the economy and its continued renewal is scope for small firms to establish and develop. This not only requires a range of floorspace type including both modern and older premises, but also sufficient space available on either a short term basis or requiring no long term financial outlay by the businesses. There are no estates specifically established with the needs of small firms in mind, although there are several premises in the Borough which are divided up and managed to provide serviced accommodation for small businesses.

- 6.18. Scope for contributing to reductions in the need to travel generally and encouraging increased use of public transport, in order to reduce the impact on the environment, may be limited because the areas of business activity already exist. However, there may be scope for this where redevelopment sites arise adjacent or near to the public transport network, particularly railway stations.
- 6.19. Policy EM1 sets out the overall approach to employment development and the factors the Council will consider where increases in floorspace are proposed.

#### **POLICY EM1**

**A variety of business activity and development proposals will, subject to the other policies of this Plan, be encouraged in order to maintain a diverse and buoyant economy and employment opportunities subject to:-**

- (a) no material increase in the demand for housing in the Borough**
- (b) no material reduction in employment opportunities**
- (c) not leading to an increase in travel demand by virtue of its location**
- (d) no adverse impact on the amenities of nearby residential properties.**

**Proposals which are likely to enable a greater use of public transport and are compatible with the other parts of the Plan will be particularly welcome.**

The employment implications of new development will be assessed against their impact on the total jobs available and whether any change in the nature of those jobs would adversely affect employment opportunities for those working in the Borough. This may be of particular relevance when considering proposals for new large storage or distribution facilities.

- 6.20. Within the context of Policy EM1 employment development will be encouraged ensuring the renewal of floorspace and meeting, wherever possible, the particular needs of existing firms.

- 6.21. Proposals for new developments or extensions must meet the Borough Council's parking standards (see Policy M8), and the layout and external design will be expected to make a positive contribution to improving the local environment and have no adverse impact on adjoining areas or uses. The particular need to provide access and facilities for people with disabilities is covered primarily in paragraphs 10.20 to 10.24 and Policy SC3 of this Plan. Specific Proposals of the Plan are set out in Chapter 12 - Implementation.

## **POLICY EM2**

**Proposals for development of appropriate layout and design to meet the needs of business activity will be encouraged, where they are consistent with Policy EM1 and the Built Environment and Movement policies of this Plan, by:-**

- (a) retaining existing appropriately sited employment land**
  - (b) permitting the change of use of land and buildings, for business activity**
  - (c) subject to Policy EM7, encouraging the refurbishment and or redevelopment of existing premises used for business activity to meet needs and ensure the optimum use of such sites**
  - (d) permitting extensions to existing premises.**
- 6.22. Many business activities are located close or next to residential areas. Proposals for their extension or redevelopment can give rise to concern because of the impact on residential amenity or where they adjoin other environmentally sensitive areas such as the River Thames, listed buildings, conservation areas and sites of landscape and or nature conservation importance. Opportunity will be taken to improve the existing situation. However, where continued use of such sites in their present form would be inappropriate, proposals for redevelopment for business use will normally be opposed and alternative uses sought. Such alternative use should normally be residential in accordance with Policy H3, however, in certain circumstances redevelopment for alternative business purposes may be appropriate as the only means in financial terms of removing a use having an adverse effect on the area. Circumstances do arise where an existing commercial use in an adjoining residential area may cause nuisance by reason of noise, smell or general disturbance or visual intrusion. The Council will use its enforcement powers under Planning, Environmental Health and Highways legislation to deal with these problems. It will also seek to avoid the creation of new problems by firmly resisting new employment proposals likely to have an adverse impact on residential areas.

### **POLICY EM3**

**There will be no objection to proposals for redevelopment of existing commercial sites for business use where it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that, subject to appropriate layout, design, access, any necessary controls on hours of operation and measures to protect amenity, there will be no adverse impact, especially on the amenities of nearby residential properties.**

**Where business causes an adverse impact on adjoining land uses the Borough Council will:-**

- (a) encourage the relocation of the business concerned to a suitable alternative site and otherwise seek to secure, where appropriate, residential use of the site**
  - (b) use its statutory powers to control any nuisance being caused.**
- 6.23. Chapter 5 - Housing - sets out the specific housing requirements of the Borough and the need to prevent the loss of dwellings or residential land to other uses. Policy H3 makes clear the opposition of the Borough Council to proposals that would result in this.
- 6.24. Chapter 8 - Shopping and Town Centres sets out in paragraphs 8.14 to 8.30 the character and role of the four town centres in the Plan area and summarises their needs in terms of shopping, movement, social and community facilities and their present role in terms of business activity.
- 6.25. Staines Town Centre is identified in Structure Plan Policy DP20 as appropriate for business use (Use Class B1 - particularly offices) subject to a balance with other such activities provided in the Borough as a whole and the assessed suitability of the Centre having regard to other required uses and movement issues. Paragraph 6.10 above identifies the extent of business development in Spelthorne in recent years, which has been particularly in the construction of offices. In accordance with Policies EM1 and EM2 above, proposals for redevelopment of existing sites will be encouraged, however, these will be required, in accordance with Structure Plan Policy DP21, to contribute as appropriate to the town as defined in the following Policy.

### **POLICY EM4**

**Proposals for business use in the defined commercial area of Staines will not be permitted unless the development:-**

- (a) is of a scale, type and design appropriate to the site**
- (b) enhances the character and role of the town centre**

- (c) **contributes positively to achieving the movement policies of this Plan**
- (d) **includes a residential element where this is environmentally suitable**
- (e) **is compatible with the shopping policies and proposals of this Plan and meets the criteria of Policy EM6.**

6.26. Structure Plan Policy DP20 precludes business use in Ashford, Sunbury Cross and Shepperton except where, in accordance with Structure Plan Policy DP9 (i-iii), proposals involve the expansion of an existing firm, changes of use, or redevelopment of suitably located existing industrial and commercial premises. There is no identifiable scope for redevelopment in these centres over and above that which is identified in the circumstances outlined above and no specific proposals are made in this Plan.

#### **POLICY EM5**

**Proposals for business use in the defined commercial areas of Ashford, Shepperton and Sunbury Cross will only be permitted, to the extent that they are consistent with other policies of this Plan, for:-**

- (a) **the expansion needs of an existing firm where it can be satisfactorily accommodated within the existing premises or incorporating adjoining land, or**
- (b) **for changes of use, or**
- (c) **the redevelopment of suitably located existing industrial and commercial premises.**

6.27. It is recognised that within the defined commercial areas of Staines, Ashford, Sunbury Cross and Shepperton, sites appropriate for housing may come forward for development during the Plan period but, for reasons of environmental suitability housing development may not be possible for the whole site. Development for primarily office purposes may, therefore, be accepted on part of a site. There may also be circumstances where the use of a site for housing, or other non-business uses may be appropriate or necessary but an element of development for primarily office purposes is nevertheless essential to ensure economic viability. Such development will only be accepted to the extent sufficient to secure the non-business uses and where other needed uses would not be more appropriate such as retail, social, community or recreational uses. Where applications are made for such schemes applicants will be expected to submit valuation evidence. In addition to employment Policy EM6 which follows, reference should be made to housing Policy H4.

## **POLICY EM6**

**On those sites within the defined commercial areas considered generally appropriate for residential or social and community uses, an element of office (B1(a)) use may be permitted as part of a comprehensive scheme where:-**

- (a) residential development is not possible for the whole of the site for reasons of environmental suitability or economic viability of the particular scheme proposed, or**
- (b) social and community uses, or other uses agreed by the Borough Council as necessary, cannot, for reasons of economic viability of the particular scheme proposed, be secured,**

**and, as appropriate, such development is:-**

- (c) normally confined to that part of the site not appropriate for the preferred use,**
- (d) only to an extent necessary to ensure economic viability of the particular scheme proposed,**
- (e) consistent with other policies and proposals of the Plan.**

6.28. The needs of small firms and their contribution to the economy has been a prominent theme in Government guidance in recent years. Structure Plan Policy DP18 also specifically refers to the need in town centres for opportunities to be provided for small scale activities and businesses providing needed local services. This is also addressed in the Shopping Chapter. The supply of small units arising from speculative development has, however, been limited and has not necessarily reflected the demand that exists. The number of self employed people in Spelthorne at 1995 is 8.7% of the total in employment compared to a national average of 10.8%. To the extent that the number of self-employed people reflects the number of small businesses, this might suggest that this part of the local economy is not realising its full potential. The Council recognises the role of small firms and the importance of taking such steps as are possible in planning terms to encourage the market to respond to requirements. It is therefore proposed to deal with this matter firstly by seeking the provision of small units within larger schemes. In schemes of 2,000 square metres of floorspace and above 5% of floor area will normally be expected to be in small units in a range of sizes up to 100 square metres. In applying the policy the Council will have due regard to the individual circumstances of the site and the demand for premises in the area.

## **POLICY EM7**

**The Borough Council will seek to assist the establishment and continuation of small businesses by:-**

- (a) where appropriate requiring in development proposals for business use floorspace exceeding 2,000 sq m, the provision of small units to form not less than 5% of the total floorspace, in sizes up to 100 sq m**
- (b) resisting the loss of appropriately sited buildings used for or suitable for use by small businesses**
- (c) encouraging developments specifically aimed at meeting the needs of small businesses to the extent consistent with the policies of this Plan.**

6.29. For the purposes of the above policy business floorspace covers uses within Use Class B1, B2 and B8.

## **STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION**

6.30. Structure Plan Policy DP14 requires authorities to not normally permit storage or distribution facilities in excess of 5,000 sq.metres, including regional distribution centres. However, the lower case text following the Structure Plan policy recognises the need to retain existing facilities in order that services may be provided to meet the needs of people living in Surrey - this is covered in Policy EM2 of this Plan. By their nature such facilities are normally so located to best meet the needs of the area they are intended to serve albeit that area may extend well beyond a given District or even County. In assessing such proposals, in addition to access/traffic issues, the Council consider that the employment implications are likely to be the most important as such uses may involve a material loss of jobs. In this respect Policy EM1(b) above is relevant.

## **SUMMARY OF EMPLOYMENT PROPOSALS**

6.31. Chapter 12 - Implementation contains a schedule of all proposals contained in this Plan with relevant additional background information. Proposals which will create additional employment opportunities and therefore relevant to the Employment chapter are sites:

- P15 Nos 2-16 London Road, Staines
- P16 Land north of Staines High Street
- P17 Land west of Elmsleigh Centre, Staines
- P27 Site of Cinema and Riverside Restaurant, Clarence Street, Staines.