

BILLINGSHURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The state of the commercial sector in Billingshurst – DRAFT 1 - APRIL 2018

Introduction

1. This report explores the current state of the commercial sector in Billingshurst, identifying whether there is a market demand for office space and commercial units. The regeneration of the village centre is dealt with in a separate report, however this report does touch on demand for retail in the parish.
2. The report considers the technical evidence base and policy context and also information gained through interviews with local agents. It combines this with the input of the local community and local business owners to set out a range of potential policies that might be considered in Billingshurst.

Billingshurst Workforce Profile

3. The 2011 census provides some useful information about the working population in Billingshurst. The main points are:
 - Billingshurst parish has 8,232 residents living in 3,452 households. This equates to approximately 8% of the district population.
 - Of the residents aged between 16 and 74 years (70% of the overall population), 75% of these people are classified as ‘economically active’. As shown in Figure 1, just over half are employees, with 40% working full time and 14% working part time. 9% of local people are self-employed, which is greater than compared to the district-wide number.

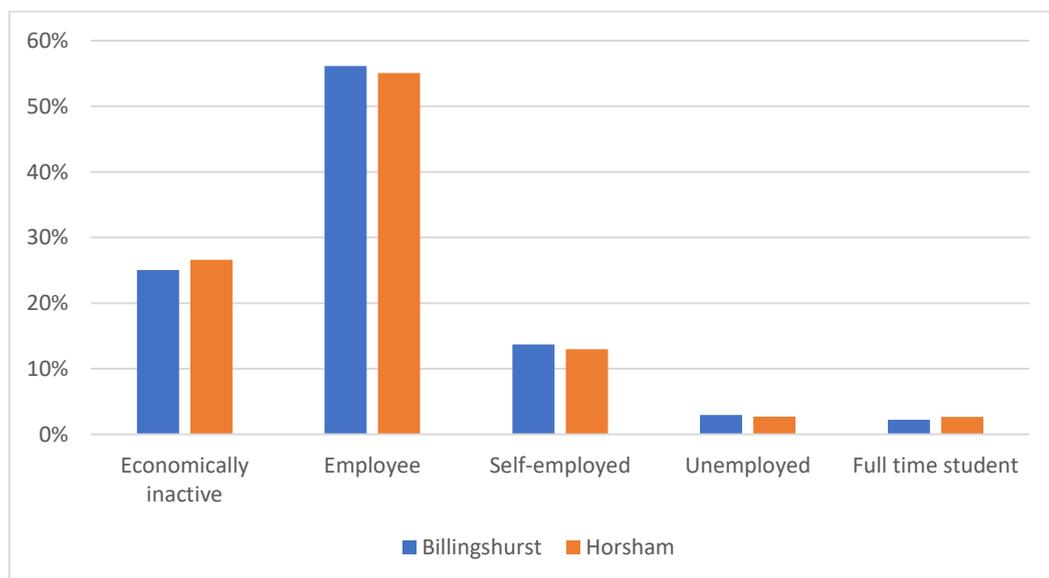


Figure 1: Economic activity

- 6% of residents work from home and it is likely that many of these fall within the ‘self-employed’ bracket. Of the remaining workers, the vast majority use their cars to get to work, with 6% using the train and 7% walking. This is show in Figure 2.

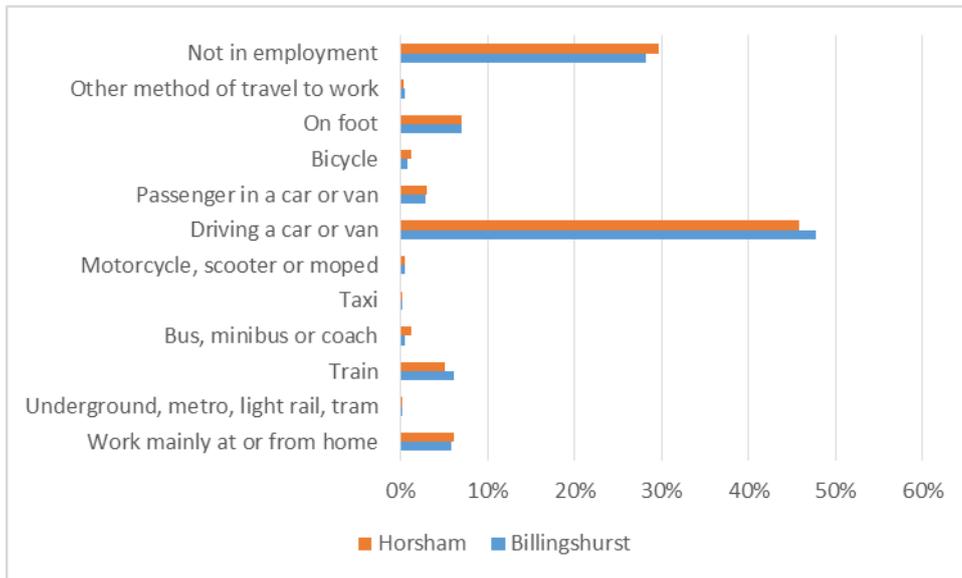


Figure 2: Method of travel to work

- In terms of distance travelled to work, 12% of residents work locally, travelling less than 2km to their place of work. 4% of residents travel less than 5km to work. The majority of residents, however, travel further afield; 38% travel between 10km and 40km, a distance that reaches some of the large nearby employment centres such as Crawley, Brighton and Guildford. 10% travel further, which includes to London. This is reflected on Figure 3.

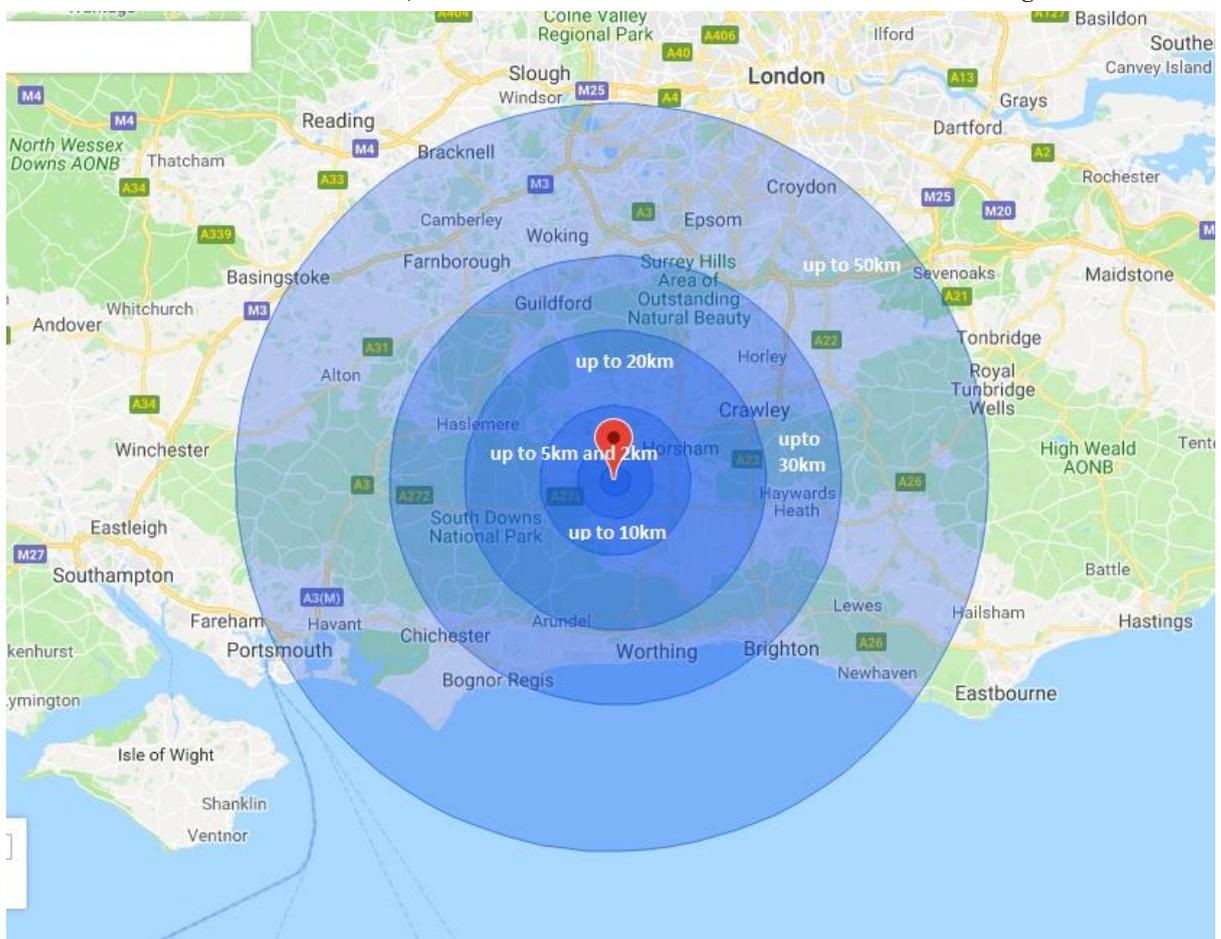


Figure 3: Distance travelled to work (source: Googlemaps)

- Figure 4 shows the different sectors that Billingshurst residents work within.

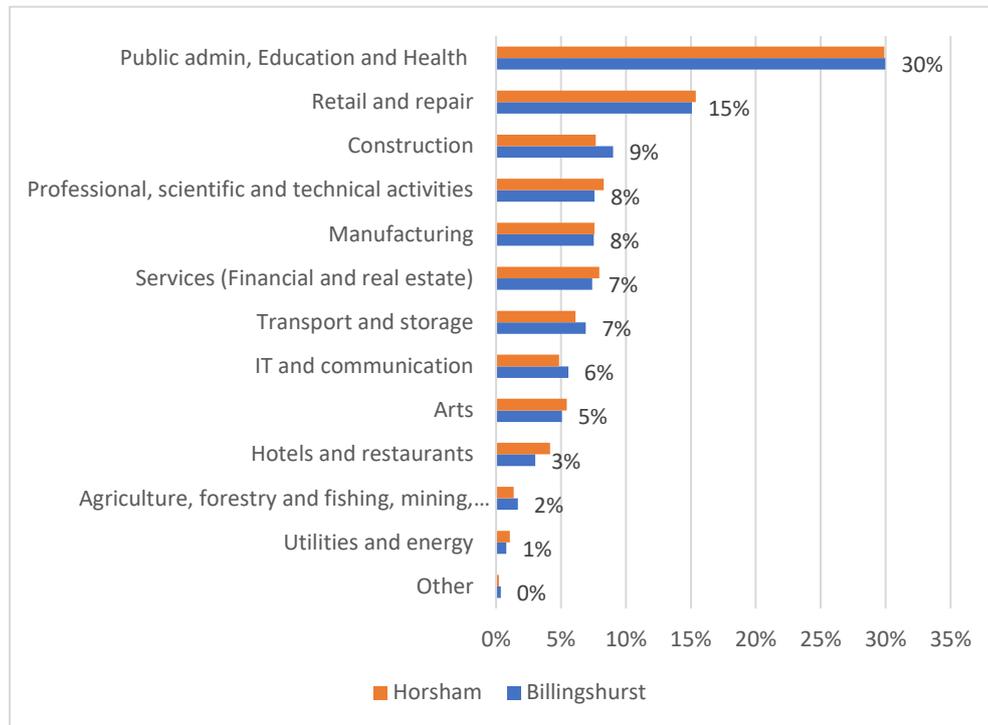


Figure 4: % of workers in each industry sectors

- Like the district as a whole, the workforce is well qualified, as shown in Figure 5.

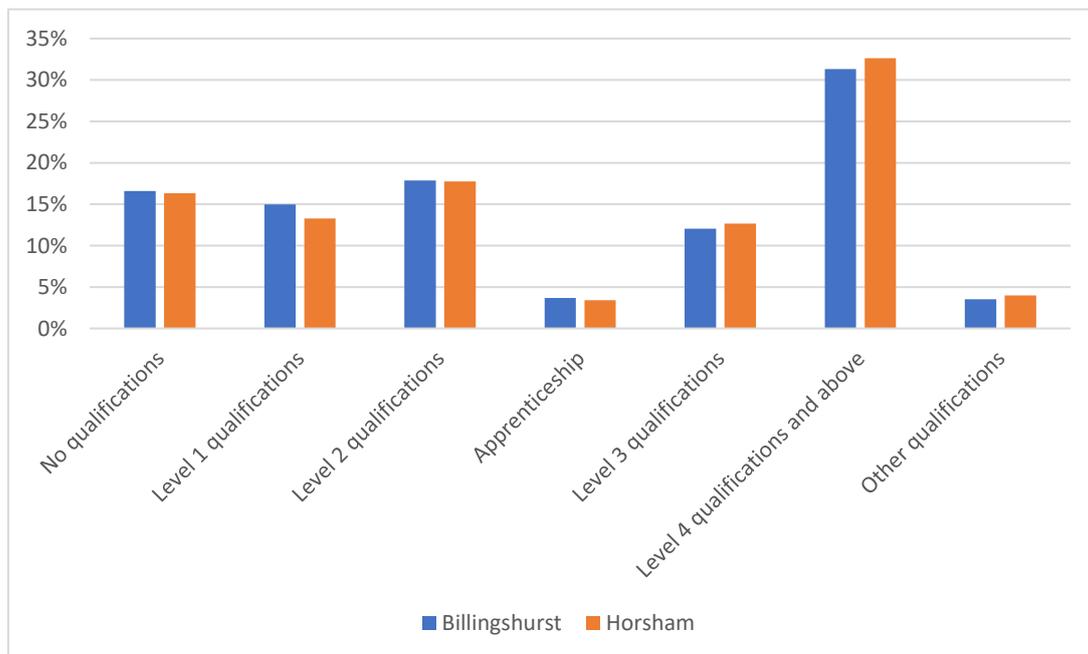


Figure 5: Qualifications of the local population

4. **Implications for the Neighbourhood Plan** – the local data suggests a well-qualified workforce, but with the majority working outside the parish, more specialised job opportunities in Billingshurst are potentially restricted. This suggests a need to consider whether existing specialist companies

can be attracted to the parish or encourage new start-ups. The higher than average number of home-workers suggests scope for considering how to ensure that any new housing development offers sufficient office space and superfast broadband connectivity. There may also be a need to consider providing additional workspace units for those wishing to expand. Additionally, the provision of flexible working space, perhaps in the centre of town, might be attractive to homeworkers looking for a space on an adhoc basis that enables them to meet other like-minded workers, even if operating in different sectors.

What is the supply and demand for commercial space locally?

5. The 2016 Assessment of the Commercial Property Market commissioned by Horsham District provides a helpful starting point, providing a market appraisal of current and potential demand for commercial floor space across the district and a review of vacant premises, on estates or industrial developments, within the south of the District and the adjoining area.
6. The report concluded that there was an overall lack of office and industrial/warehouse provision across the district as a whole. Key issues facing the district were:
 - There has been a modest uplift in demand for such space
 - There has been a lack of land allocated/ delivered through the local plan, often due to lack of viability due to low historic values compared with high land and construction costs
 - Some of the existing stock is not in good condition, making it less attractive
 - Some existing stock has poor access to the road network as well as utilities and broadband.
7. The report examined three commercial spaces in Billingshurst and the findings are illustrated below, along with an updated appraisal on availability:

Name / type	Description	Availability, April 2018
Rosier Farm Commercial Centre (industrial/ start-up/ office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial property at competitive rental prices, available to let on long or short term agreements. • Tastefully converted traditional farm buildings and barns situated within beautiful rural surroundings. • Immediate and easy access to rail network and major road links: A272, A29, A24 and A23, near Horsham and Gatwick Airport, and an easy drive to M23, M25 or M3 in West Sussex. • Offices, warehousing, workshops and open area fenced compounds available. • 100sq feet up to 3000+sq feet office spaces within an 18-acre site. • Suitable for start-ups, small and medium sized local business enterprises. • Small Business Rate Relief may be available. 	1 unit
Eagle Trading Estates (industrial)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern business units within an established trading estate, close to Billingshurst Station. • Small business rates relief available. 	None
Gillmans Industrial Estate (industrial)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial and warehousing units, ranging in size from 14,751 – 30,700 sq ft. • Situated just off Stane Street (A29) and within close proximity to Billingshurst railway station. 	None

8. In addition to industrial space, there are some retail opportunities in the village centre and Jengers Mead. Limited office space is available, including above retail units, in dedicated premises (such as Grooms Court) and also in converted farm buildings, but it is not in great supply.
9. In order to better understand the local market today, telephone interviews were undertaken with commercial agents – CrickMay, Colyer and Henry Adams - serving the Billingshurst area. The key points they raised are summarised below:

General

- There has been very little availability of commercial property within Billingshurst over the last year.
- Freehold properties generally sell more quickly because there are so few available.
- The rural location can be seen as a challenge for businesses looking to move the area, even with the road links in the parish.
- Small start-up units are in short supply; these are often the next step on from home-working.
- New housing development in the parish is seen as helpful in increasing the local workforce and providing a greater footfall into the village centre, which might make the retail offer more sustainable.
- Due to the limited supply of commercial space, it is difficult to match demand (including size of space and associated services) with suitable properties. As a result, demand has diminished as the parish is not seen as having a great deal to offer.
- Those unable to find space in Billingshurst tend to consider surrounding villages or the towns, mainly Horsham, although rents are higher in the latter.
- The majority of properties are owned by private landlords.

Offices

- Rents are similar to the rest of the district, bar the major settlements.
- The stock in Billingshurst is largely aging, making it less attractive to renters.
- There has been a rise in office space being converted to residential as a result of changes to the planning system. This has not only displaced tenants (where landlords are seeking to redevelop), but has limited the number of available options for prospective tenants seeking office accommodation generally.
- The number of enquiries about office space has dwindled, largely due to the lack of supply/ ageing stock.
- It's vital that offices have access to superfast broadband to remain competitive and offer car parking. This has been an issue for those wishing to rent offices above retail units in the centre of the village.

Industrial

- Rents are similar compared to the rest of the district.
- There is particular demand for units of 1,500 to 2,000 sq ft. Eagle trading, which offers smaller units, is always fully tenanted for instance.

- New industrial space would be helpful.

Retail

- Retail generally is facing difficulties as shopping patterns change and online shopping continues to grow. Services tend to do better than retail. As a result, whilst shops let well and retail availability is therefore limited, there is often a high turnover.
- Jengers Mead provides the majority of opportunities, but the lack of free car parking and its general 'look and feel' has impacted greatly on its attractiveness to clients.
- Rents are similar to other villages nearby, but lower than the main town centres.

What is the feedback from local residents on commercial space?

10. The Neighbourhood Plan survey sought views on employment and industry in Billingham. The key points were:

Industrial

- Some existing industrial estates are in the wrong place, for example those near the station. This creates additional traffic. Many residents felt that instead, they should be located on the perimeter of the village and housing should be developed in their former space. This would help to reduce traffic issues in the village centre. The increase in housing within walking distance of the centre would increase footfall to the retail units.
- New housing developments should incorporate some small start-up units to encourage new businesses.
- New housing should enable a better live/work environment, possibly incorporating dedicated office space, superfast broadband, storage space and adequate car parking.
- Commercial space should be developed near to the main road routes.

Retail

- There needs to be a better mix of shops. There are too many charity shops. Lots of ideas shared about the types of shops and eating places desired in the village, although this is not something that the Neighbourhood Plan could easily influence.
- Jengers Mead needs redeveloping and a free car park.
- More entertainment offerings – including a cinema.
- Better disabled access required.
- Can we develop spaces for young people to meet?
- We could do with an 'anchor' store that might encourage other retailers to come to the village centre.

What is the feedback from local businesses?

11. The Neighbourhood Plan Business Consultation took place between October 2016 and January 2017. 62 responses were collected and the main points were:

- The majority of respondents operated in retail, the professional sector and services.
- Half the businesses classified themselves as operating from 'small' units. The second largest segment were retailers, which amounted to a third of respondents. 27% operated from medium to large units, 19% were office based, while 13% worked from home.
- The split of employees working in locally based businesses was split approximately 50:50 from within and beyond the parish. Those coming from beyond the parish generally travelled no more than 20 miles.
- A quarter of respondents felt that being located in Billingshurst would constrain the ability to grow their business. The most cited constraints were lack of car parking, poor broadband coverage and speed, high business rates, lack of suitable office space and high rents.
- In terms of infrastructure constraints, car parking was cited as a major problem, particularly in the centre of town. This should be either affordable or free. Additionally, the quality of the road network, the rail service and telephone connectivity were mentioned. Individual comments were made about the electricity supply, which was felt to be volatile. A petrol station was also mentioned as needed.
- There was a call for more business premises, ideally near to the road network and outside the village, although some respondents were content to stay put.
- A range of units were cited as needed – light industrial units, shops and offices.
- Many respondents called for more start-up units.
- Encouragingly, the majority of respondents felt that their business would continue to flourish in the parish over the next 15 years.

What is the policy context we are working within?

Horsham District Planning Framework, 2015

12. At the Horsham-wide level, the objectives for economic development, many of which are very relevant to Billingshurst, are as follows:
 - There is a **lack of employment land** in the district and much of the business accommodation stock does not meet the requirements of existing businesses or attract new businesses.
 - **Freehold and leasehold employment land in the district is scarce** and much of the business accommodation stock is low grade and does not meet the requirements of existing businesses or attract new businesses.
 - There is a **shortage of business floorspace** in terms of both the types and sizes needed.
 - **Office stock is outdated** and is unsuitable for modern business needs.
 - There is a **need to provide suitable high quality space for business that wish to move into the district.**
 - There need to be **opportunities for existing businesses to grow expand** and change to meet modern business demands (e.g. design of industrial estates and offices).
 - Opportunities for small and medium businesses and **business start-ups need to be provided** in settlements across the district.

- There is a need to ensure that **communications and technologies** in the district (e.g. high speed broadband) are present in order to meet business demands.
- There is a need to ensure that Horsham District **contributes to the role of the Gatwick Diamond**. This includes providing support for development and training opportunities.
- There is an on-going need to **enhance the rural economy**. This includes enabling diversification of rural employment space and **maximising visitor spending** through tourism across the district.
- Horsham has an ageing population and house prices are high making it **difficult to retain young people** in the district and for businesses to attract skilled employees.
- Social changes such as the internet and out of town shopping, have the potential to **change the role of town and village centres**.

13. The relevant policies relating to Billingshurst are as follows:

Policy	Relevance to Billingshurst
Policy 7: Economic Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages new business start-up units to assist homeworkers in expanding. • Encourages high speed broadband in both commercial and residential development to support local business. • Promotion of tourism. • Encourages neighbourhood plans to support sustainable local employment opportunities
Policy 9: Employment development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any redevelopment of existing employment sites should only be enabled if they can be proved unviable. • Existing commercial can be relocated, providing it is done sustainably. • Small start-up business units are supported.
Policy 10: Rural economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development must be appropriate to its countryside location. • Result in substantial environmental improvement and reduce the impact on the countryside particularly if there are exceptional cases where new or replacement buildings are involved. New buildings or development in the rural area will be acceptable provided that it supports sustainable economic growth towards balanced living and working communities and criteria a) has been considered first. • Provide adequate car parking. • Proposals for the conversion of rural buildings to business and commercial uses will be considered favourably over residential in the first instance.

Summary of findings and potential policies

14. The evidence on commercial needs – office and industrial - in Billingshurst can be summarised in the following table. The retail opportunities are considered in the separate Retail and Village Centre paper. Examples of policies from neighbourhood plans elsewhere are shown to illustrate how the policy might be phrased.

Issue	Options to consider
<p>It will be important to sustain local employment opportunities</p> <p>It's important that existing businesses are retained in the parish.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retaining existing businesses – Policy example: <p>Protection of existing commercial premises or land: There will be a strong presumption against the loss of commercial premises (A-class or B-class) or land which provides employment or future potential employment opportunities. Applications for a change of use to an activity that does not provide employment opportunities will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The commercial premises or land in question has no potential for either reoccupation or redevelopment for employment generating uses and as demonstrated through the results both of a full valuation report and a marketing campaign lasting for a continuous period of at least 6 months.
<p>The local population is highly qualified, but the majority are not working in the parish.</p> <p>The Plan might seek to encourage relocation of businesses from elsewhere into the parish.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocating new sites for employment – subject to the sites work and stipulating criteria for each site. Policy example from Melton (for mixed industrial/residential): <p>Allocation of Land off X: Land off X shown on the Proposals Map of 9.7 hectares is allocated for a mixed use development of business, residential and open space uses, subject to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the provision of at least 9,000m² of serviced B1 floorspace; and • ancillary retail to support the B-class commercial development; and • the provision of approximately 55 dwellings which provides a mix of dwelling sizes (market and affordable) that meets the needs of Local Plan Policy SP3; and • affordable housing which meets the requirements of Local Plan Policy DM2; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that no direct access is provided to the public right of way on the northern boundary of the site from the residential development; and • community uses, including a public green space for community use, a lake, communal gardens, allotments/community growing spaces, café, a children’s play area and potentially a community farm and After-School and Holiday Club (see policy MEL10); and • in order to minimise activity on the Deben Estuary, ensuring that the publicly accessible open space provided on-site is located between the residential area and any access point to the Deben Estuary; and • landscaping; and Melton Neighbourhood Plan Submission Stage Consultation (Regulation 16) 53 • ensuring that development does not have an unacceptable impact on the Special Landscape Area; and • access, ensuring that options are explored to avoid a single vehicular access onto the A1152 subject to demonstrating that this would not have a detrimental impact on access for residents adjacent to the development; and • the provision of a flood risk assessment; and • the provision of appropriate utilities infrastructure, including drainage, in order to service the development once it is occupied; and • the retention where possible of protected trees; and • a project level Habitats Regulation Assessment should be carried out and measures should be secured to ensure that the development does not have an adverse impact on international habitats. Where appropriate, developer contributions should be secured through a planning agreement towards the strategic mitigation scheme for impacts on international sites; and
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development should avoid having an adverse impact on Protected Species and Priority Species and Habitats. <p>• Supporting new employment developments: Example from Sherington neighbourhood plan:</p> <p>Local Economy and Employment Development proposals will be supported that allow existing and suitable new, small-scale service businesses to thrive in Sherington parish. In particular, the Neighbourhood Plan will support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applications to change land use or use of buildings to accommodate existing businesses experiencing growth or displaced by development elsewhere in the parish; • proposals for developing new businesses or expanding existing businesses provided they are appropriate to their rural setting, reflect as appropriate the character of the village, and/or the countryside within the parish; • proposals that provide premises suitable for use by start-up or incubator businesses; and • proposals that will result in no more than a minimal increase in light, noise and air pollution.
<p>There are a high number of home-workers and it will be important to address their specific needs.</p> <p>Opportunities for business start-ups should be actively sought, to encourage local residents, perhaps working from home, to expand locally.</p> <p>New shared flexible working space for co-working should be encouraged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocating sites to include new start-up units • Ensuring that residential and commercial development incorporates broadband – Policy example <p>High speed broadband: On sites allocated for development in the Plan all new developments should be served by a superfast broadband (fibre optic) connection installed on an open access basis, unless it can be demonstrated through consultation with British Telecom that this would not be either possible, practical or economically viable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote small flexible workspace: Policy example:

	<p>Small-scale commercial development: Development proposals to provide small-scale and/or light industrial (B1 class) employment opportunities will be supported. This could through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of a new facility as part of x site allocation; or • Conversion of existing buildings across the Neighbourhood Plan area, subject to the impact of provision on the highway network and parking.
<p>Protecting and enhancing public car parking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that new development makes provision for car parking: Policy example: <p>Parking: Development proposals to provide uses that will generate vehicular parking will be expected to assess the expected levels of parking that will be generated and ensure that sufficient vehicular parking is provided to address this need.</p>
<p>Discouraging HGV traffic from the village centre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigating inappropriate traffic: Policy example from Sunninghill: <p>Development likely to increase the frequency of HGV or large vehicle deliveries to retail premises or businesses in or around the centre of Sunninghill will not be permitted, unless the applicant can demonstrate through an independent traffic impact assessment that mitigating measures can be put in place which will result in no severe independent or cumulative impact on traffic congestion or on the amenity of local residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocating existing employment sites – this will require some co-ordination with existing sites and tenants to enable a shift in location.