

LDF PMB and MAG Combined Group

Core Strategy Workshop 8

Policy EP3 Safeguarding Employment Land Report by Jo Manley Policy Planner

Purpose of Report: Concern was raised through the consultation responses, that Policy EP3 was not strong enough to protect existing employment land, sites and premises. This concern was reinforced during the Area Workshop discussions in July 2011, particularly in Area East.

Recommendations: That the PMB

1. endorse Policy EP3 as below
2. Authorise the Spatial Policy Manager to undertake a survey of local estate agents in due course over issues relating to cumulative impact of changes of use on established employment areas.

Report:

The National Planning Policy Framework recommends that local authorities do not safeguard employment land, however as stated in previous report to the PMB, there has been a significant loss of employment land in recent years across the District (monitoring illustrates that between 1st April 2006 and 31st March 2010, 10.14 hectares of employment land has been lost to other uses and planning permission has been granted for 6.68 hectares of employment land to change use to other uses) and therefore to prevent the further loss and subsequent replacement with Greenfield sites, Policy EP3, which is aimed at safeguarding land, should be strengthened from the previous South Somerset Local Plan Policy.

The Council is currently considering whether to seek that the Government change the National Planning Policy Framework by re instigating its requirement where appropriate to safeguard employment land.

The combined loss of a number of sites can change the nature of a given location and potentially harm the attractiveness of a location for employment use. Additionally, in some instances, the presence of a number of non-B uses can result in these uses 'pushing out' the employment use as it becomes viewed as the 'bad neighbour' by the surrounding users.

Despite the Government's suggested approach to employment land and subject to the prospect of their changing their position, given local concern, employment land should continue to be safeguarded, see suggested revised Policy wording below:

Policy EP3 Safeguarding Employment Land

Employment land will be safeguarded. Planning Permission will not be granted for development, which would result in the loss of land or premises used for:

- **Class B1 Business Use,**
- **Class B2 General Industrial Use, and**
- **Class B8 Storage or Distribution Use,**

unless it can be demonstrated that:

- **It is no longer required by the market, and/or**

- It's loss would not demonstrably harm the settlement's supply of employment land and premises, and/or
- It results in significant environmental benefits.

Following acceptance of the above, sites and premises should be considered for redevelopment for alternative uses in the following sequence:

- Non B use-class employment generating uses
- Mixed-use (incorporating element of employment uses)
- Community use
- Mixed-use (incorporating element of residential)
- Residential.

Changes of use will not be permitted unless:

- A marketing statement is submitted with the planning application, which demonstrates that the site/premises has been actively marketed for at least 18 months (or a period agreed by the Local Planning Authority) prior to application submission.
- It is clear that the above sequence for redevelopment to an alternative use has been applied.
- The proposed use is compatible with existing surrounding uses.
- The site is not in an unsustainable location for the alternative land use proposed.

The recommended changes seek to strengthen the policy by:

1. refining the uses to which it applies (B1, B2 & B8),
2. introducing a clause which prevents a change of use occurring if the alternative use is incompatible with the surrounding area and detrimental to the operation of existing businesses, and
3. simplifying and clarifying the criteria.

The issue of cumulative impact was explored, the suggested wording being:

“On established business parks and trading estates, the loss of land and premises to alternative uses would not result in a number or coalescence of such uses to the extent that they would undermine the dominant employment function of the area.”

The problem with including such a cumulative impact clause is however, that there is no clear evidence of the need to include such a clause. Evidence is needed of latent need or demand for sites and premises, which cannot be met by the existing available units as they are being used by non-B uses, hence these change of use permissions are stifling the market. At the moment, there is no evidence of this.

One could argue however that this concern is covered by the clause in the proposed policy that states that Employment land loss to other uses will be approved where

“It's loss would not demonstrably harm the settlement's supply of employment land and premises”

It is suggested that a survey of local estate agents be undertaken in due course but that in the interim the policy as proposed is considered appropriate.

Research into this policy has highlighted a number of issues surrounding the use of sequential tests and monitoring. These matters are to be pursued by the Spatial

Policy Manager with the Development Management and Economic Development Managers.