



Economic Needs Study - 2025 Update

By Ramidus Consulting Limited & CAG Consultants

For Sevenoaks District Council



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1.0 Introduction

In 2022 Ramidus Consulting completed an Economic Needs Study (ENS) for Sevenoaks District Council (SDC). The study updated the Council's existing economic evidence base, particularly regarding the role of the District economy and commercial property market; and the future business space requirements of the District.

The project set out the District's economic land needs to 2040 (in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Government's latest advice contained within the National Planning Practice Guidance. The report reviewed spatial planning, the commercial property market, the rural economy, tourism and the visitor economy, placemaking and supply and demand forecasts. It provided evidence and commentary on the emerging economic trends in commercial floorspace with a particular focus on office accommodation, and made recommendations for the Local Plan to support and enhance the District's economic value and competitiveness and identify opportunities for growth.

The 2022 Study made 23 policy recommendations and identified a need for 5.7 ha of additional employment land (of which 4.1 ha was recommended for office use). SDC has been working on a new Local Plan since 2022, and the report was used to inform the draft policies within the economic section of it, draft versions of which were publicly consulted on through two Regulation 18 consultations in the winters of 2022/23 and 2023/24.

In July 2024 the new Labour Government presaged a fresh approach to planning with the overall objectives of speeding up processes and bringing about more certainty. In December 2024, the Government published its revisions to the NPPF and other elements of the planning system, which have widespread implications for spatial planning policy.

For example, in Sevenoaks District, the Government's renewed focus on housing delivery has resulted in a 63% increase in the local housing need figure from 704 to 1,149 dwellings per annum. The new targets came with a requirement to review Green Belt boundaries if this figure cannot be met through other means.

At the same time, proposals for new development and changes of use on existing sites have continued to take place. In particular, SDC receives many 'prior approval' applications to convert land to residential uses, and there is limited scope for objecting to these. The Project Brief highlights that fact that of the implemented permissions involving commercial land in the year 2022-23, there was a net loss of 2,575 sq m of commercial floorspace.

Taking all of this into account, and given that the submission date for the new Local Plan has been pushed back to 2026, SDC has taken the prudent step of reviewing the recommendations of earlier evidence-based work.

SDC thus decided to undertake a 2025 Update of the 2022 Study for four specific reasons.

- A revision to the Local Development Scheme has been agreed, extending the plan preparation timetable, with submission now planned for late-2026,

when the ENS will be over four years old and at risk of being considered out of date. The new Plan will cover the period 2027 to 2042.

- The 63% increase in the local housing need figure will have implications for SDC's proposed spatial strategy and the future of employment need in the District.
- The changes to Chapter 6 of the NPPF ('Building a strong, competitive economy'), and any updates to the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), require consideration.
- Since the 2022 Study, proposals for new economic development and changes of use on existing employment land continue to have gained planning permission. The impacts of this (and any other trends since 2022) on the quantity and quality of the District's economic baseline require consideration.

This 2025 Update report is intended as an addendum to the 2022 report, rather than a replacement for it and should, therefore be read in conjunction with the earlier report.

2.0 Changes to National Planning Policy

Since 2022, there have been no material changes to regional or local planning policy. However, with a new Government elected in July 2024, there have been material changes to national policy. In this section we review the specific and general implications of recent changes to National Planning Policy and Guidance, spelling out particular implications for SDC. We also review other relevant policy documents both local and national that have been published since completion of the 2022 Study.

2.1 National Planning Policy Framework

The Government published a revised *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) on 12th December 2024.¹ The framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The key changes set out in the framework, effective immediately, include the following.

- Mandatory housing targets for principal authorities to drive housebuilding, with increased targets in areas facing the highest levels of unaffordability.
- Measures to ensure that principal authorities develop or update local plans that cater to the needs of their communities.
- Principal authorities must identify and prioritise lower-quality Grey Belt land to meet housing targets.
- New Golden Rules for Green Belt development require developers to provide essential infrastructure for local communities, such as nurseries, GP surgeries, transportation, and a higher proportion of affordable housing.
- Increased emphasis on affordable housing, particularly social rent.

While the main thrust of the alterations is aimed at increasing the delivery of new housing, a very significant component of the NPPF seeks to address economic planning, specifically, growth. The latest Guidance relating to commercial development has not changed substantially, but it remains critical to local plan preparation and implementation. Here we outline the key elements of the revised NPPF as they bear upon the 2022 report and Sevenoaks generally.

Section 2. Achieving sustainable development This section maintains the overall objectives of the previous NPPF, in so far as it states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, and that this means that the planning system has three overarching objectives:

a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

¹ MHCLG (2024) *National Planning Policy Framework* December 2024

b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations ... with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) an environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change ... (Para 8)

The new Framework reinforces the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which means that all plans

should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects. (Para 11a)

For decision-taking this means “*approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay*” (Para 11c).

Section 3. Plan-making This section highlights the new Government’s emphasis on the value of strategic planning in national policy. The changes re-affirm the role of strategic planning and state that

Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places and make sufficient provision for:

a) homes (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development. (Para 20)

This element of the NPPF underscores the importance of SDC dovetailing its policies for housing and employment provision to support integrated growth. The NPPF also calls for effective strategic co-operation between local authorities. It states that

Effective strategic planning across local planning authority boundaries will play a vital and increasing role in how sustainable growth is delivered and key spatial issues, including meeting housing needs, delivering strategic infrastructure, and building economic and climate resilience, are addressed. (Para 24)

There is also guidance on how cross boundary working will be encouraged. The NPPF states that in order to demonstrate effective and on-going joint working,

strategic policy-making authorities should prepare and maintain one or more statements of common ground, documenting the cross-boundary matters being addressed and progress in cooperating to address these. These should be produced using the approach set out in national planning practice guidance, and be made publicly available throughout the plan-making process to provide transparency. (Para 28)

Section 6. Building a strong, competitive economy The NPPF seeks to ensure sufficient land is made available to “*support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development*”. (Para 85) The NPPF further states that planning policies should:

- a) set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth, having regard to the national industrial strategy and any relevant Local Industrial Strategies and other local policies for economic development and regeneration;*
- b) set criteria, and identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period;*
- c) pay particular regard to facilitating development to meet the needs of a modern economy, including by identifying suitable locations for uses such as laboratories, gigafactories, data centres, digital infrastructure, freight and logistics;*
- d) seek to address potential barriers to investment, such as inadequate infrastructure, services or housing, or a poor environment; and*
- e) be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, and allow for new and flexible working practices and spaces to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances. (Para 86)*

Paragraph 87 states that planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for

- a) clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries; and for new, expanded or upgraded facilities and infrastructure that are needed to support the growth of these industries (including data centres and grid connections).*
- b) storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations that allow for the efficient and reliable handling of goods, especially where this is needed to support the supply chain, transport innovation and decarbonisation; and*
- c) the expansion or modernisation of other industries of local, regional or national importance to support economic growth and resilience.*

The final area of the NPPF with specific application to SDC is the section related to ‘supporting a prosperous rural economy’. For example, Para 88 states that planning policies should enable

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, new buildings;
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;

c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and

d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship. (Para 88)

Finally, the revised NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport (Para 89).

In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

This policy context reinforces SDC's active encouragement of its rural economy as set out in the 2022 report.

2.2 Industrial Strategy

In June 2025, the Government published its *Industrial Strategy Green Paper* (the Strategy), a critical part of how the Government intends to deliver its growth mission.² The Strategy is a ten-year plan focused on increasing business investment and growing key sectors to boost the UK economy. It aims to create good jobs, increase incomes and spread prosperity across the country by targeting specific growth sectors and addressing the root causes of low growth. The strategy emphasises long-term investment, stability and global collaboration, with a focus on sectors where the UK has a competitive advantage.

The Strategy addresses what the Government views as the leading causes of the UK's low growth and makes a deliberate choice to focus on sectors that have the greatest potential to raise national levels of investment and productivity, spread prosperity to all parts of the country and contribute towards net zero. The Government believes that the Strategy will create a strong economy, delivering better jobs that offer security, fair pay and opportunities to progress. The Strategy identifies eight key growth sectors.

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Clean Energy Industries
- Creative Industries
- Defence
- Digital and Technologies
- Financial Services
- Life Sciences
- Professional and Business Services

² HMG (2025) *The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy* June 2025

As far as spatial planning in local government is concerned, there are a number of implications.

- Local authorities have a critical role in supporting the Strategy's Key Growth sectors. The Government will work with councils to deliver the interventions set out in the Industrial Strategy, from maximising the potential of Industrial Strategy Zones to identifying, developing and securing the right finance for investible projects on strategic industrial sites.
- The Government will enhance the Industrial Strategy Zones with streamlined planning processes, better-targeted investment promotion, support for accessing concessionary finance, and coordinated support on skills.
- The Government will launch the Local Innovation Partnerships Fund, which will provide up to £500m to grow high-potential innovation clusters. The fund will aim to generate £1bn of co-investment and £700m of additional value to local economies, including through new jobs, products and services.
- The Government will introduce the National Data Library, backed by over £100m of government funding.

2.3 The Budget Red Book

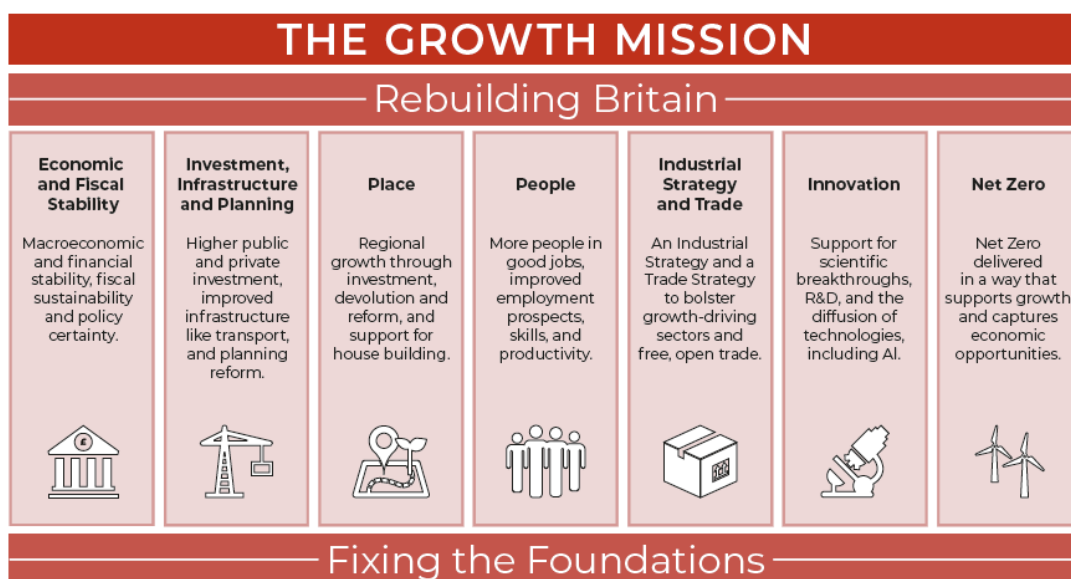
Published on 30th October 2024, the Red Book ³ sets out the Labour Government's fiscal framework and policy priorities for delivering those fiscal policies, and the central theme is growth. The new Government has been very clear that all national and local government decision-making must (and will) come from the understanding that growth must (and will) be delivered. The *Budget Red Book* is therefore an important reference point.

The relationship of the Budget Red Book to the critical role of planning is explicit. The Budget 2024 sets out planning under 'Place' within the *Growth Mission*, alongside 'Investment, Infrastructure and Planning' and 'Industrial Strategy and Trade'. This will bring strategy and structure to Town & Country Planning, with the Conservative doctrine of Localism playing less of a role, as evidenced by recent ministerial decisions.

The government's growth policy priorities, under the framework of stability, investment and reform, are structured into seven pillars, as illustrated above. These priorities will be developed in partnership with business, and backed by a continuous focus on delivery, supported by a new Growth Delivery Unit established in HM Treasury.

³ HM Treasury (2024) *Autumn Budget 2024: Fixing the Foundations to Deliver Change* 30th Oct 2024

Figure 2.1 The Autumn 2024 Budget Growth Mission



The Innovation section of the Red Book begins at paragraph 2.67 with the following.

Supporting scientific breakthroughs and spurring innovation are central to progressing the government’s missions to rebuild Britain and to delivering the Industrial Strategy. The UK has extraordinary strengths in science and innovation, however we are not doing enough to capitalise on these strengths. The government will support R&D and the adoption and diffusion of innovation across the country to drive a sustained increase in productivity and improve citizens’ lives.

3.0 Economic context and prior approvals

In this section we review and update the principal property market and economic indicators since publication of the 2022 Study. We also review the market trends and drivers identified in the 2022 report, including a fresh assessment of the impact of Permitted Development conversions using data provided by SDC.

3.1 Issues facing spatial planning

The 2022 Study drew attention to the wider forces of change affecting spatial planning, the combined impact of which was raising enormous questions around the future of work, the future of the high street, the future of the office and the growth of logistics, with the main knock-on from that being a rapidly evolving property market in terms of the nature and quantum of buildings needed going forward. This situation remains unchanged.

The report highlighted that, in land use planning terms, all Use Class categories have been affected and the nature of change will have a growing impact on the value and utility of existing stock. We suggested local planning needed to be cognisant of the wider changes not least because the simplistic ‘shops, offices and industrials’ is becoming obsolete as a descriptor of the commercial sector. The key implication here is that a Local Plan, which takes a 20+ year horizon, must be cognisant of current changes taking place and their known or likely impact on the demand-supply balance. This remains the case.

Use Classes Order

The 2022 Study also highlighted the impact of changes to the Use Classes Order, notably the creation of the new ‘E’ Class. As was noted, landowners, occupiers and other business operators with the benefit of Class E uses now have a much broader array of options available to them in terms of possible uses of their sites. In terms of the new permitted development rights, the ability to demolish and replace office and light industrial buildings with dwellings provides another avenue to enhance value.

While in some cases this might result in properties without any other viable use being creatively repurposed as residential accommodation, in other cases it will simply denude the available stock of employment space. As was stated, in this context, Sevenoaks does not have any large concentrations of corporate office buildings in its main centres and in this sense, at least, the impact will be softened.

We suggested that what was more likely, was that there would be a disproportionate impact on small and affordable space in cases where there is less critical mass of commercial stock. Furthermore, the smaller and more marginal light industrial activities are likely to come under increasing pressure for conversion. This remains our belief.

3.2 Economic context

The government’s most recent *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*⁴ forecasts growth for the UK economy of 1.0% in 2025, 1.9% in 2026, then 1.75% for the remainder of the decade. Thus the outlook for the medium-term is one of quite modest growth.

⁴ Office for Budget Responsibility *Economic and Fiscal Outlook* March 2025

Our observations on both the sub-regional and the District economy remain largely unchanged since the 2022 Study. We described an economy that was, overall, functioning well, with relatively high levels of skills, occupations and earnings. The District has a strong business base and is well supplied with small and growing businesses. The Study suggested that the District is well-placed within the county and region to take advantage of evolving changes in the economy, with opportunities for the rural economy to diversify and contribute even more to the District's output.

Despite this very positive picture, the District needs to continue to evolve its approach to spatial planning to support further economic growth. For example, there is uneven distribution of jobs and opportunity in the District, and in this sense, there is an opportunity to consider regeneration and economic stimulus in Swanley and New Ash Green, and high streets more generally.

Chapter 4.0 considers the commercial property market, and the evidence here suggests a very constrained market. Competition for land generally, and for housing in particular, is both reducing the amount of land available and pushing up values in what remains. Weaknesses in the commercial property market present a real and present danger for the Council in terms of planning for growth.

The District cannot continue to maintain its relatively positive socio-economic position in the long-term if the physical resources of the employment market continue to be eroded and made more unaffordable.

Employee jobs The number of employee jobs in Sevenoaks has remained relatively stable in recent years at around 50,000. The number of jobs dipped slightly during the Covid pandemic but has since recovered. This was the pattern assumed in the projections used for 2022 Study. The total number of jobs, including self-employed and government supported trainees, has remained at around 60,000 (Figure 3.1). Fluctuations around this figure are as likely to be due to the quality of the data estimates as to any real change.

The data for local authority employment are too volatile to read too much into year on year changes, but pre- and post-Covid employment levels by sector looks very similar except there has been an increase in construction employment of over 1,000 jobs and a reduction of over -1,000 jobs in the financial and business services sector.

The most recent claimant count data ⁵ show an unemployment rate of 2.3% for Sevenoaks compared to a national figure of 4.2% and 3.5% for Kent. The rate is marginally up on the previous year, but still shows a tight labour market in Sevenoaks and hence no need to stimulate large numbers of additional jobs to account for high levels of unemployment.

Forecasts compared Figure 3.2 compares the Cambridge Econometrics employment projections for Sevenoaks used in the 2022 Study with their current forecasts prepared for the 2025 Update. As can be seen there has been no significant change in their outlook with both projections showing growth in employment of 0.5% per year for Sevenoaks.

⁵ March 2025

Figure 3.1 Number of jobs in Sevenoaks

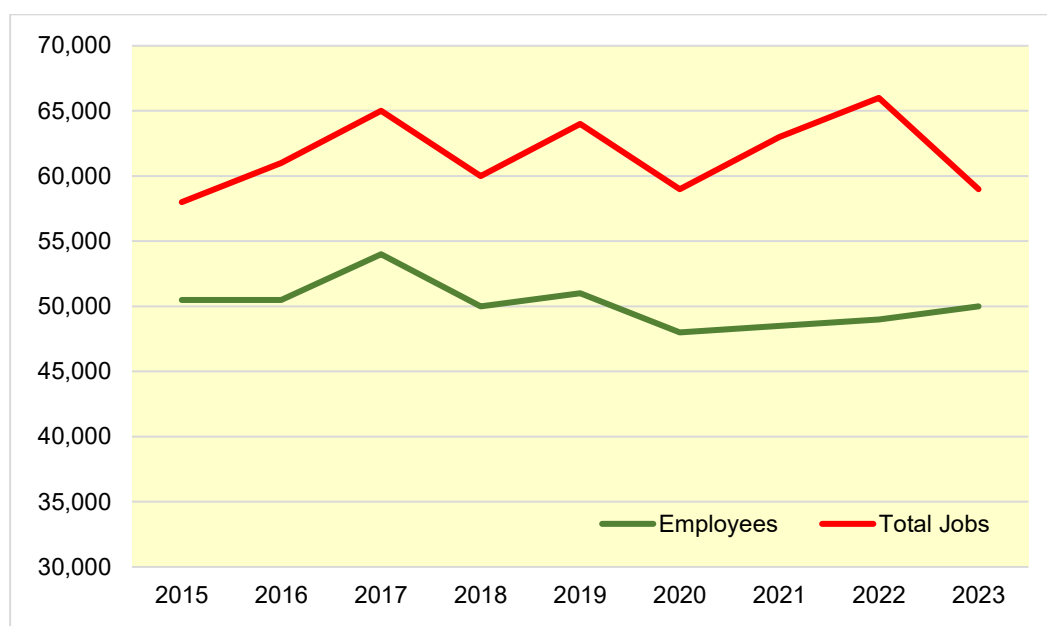
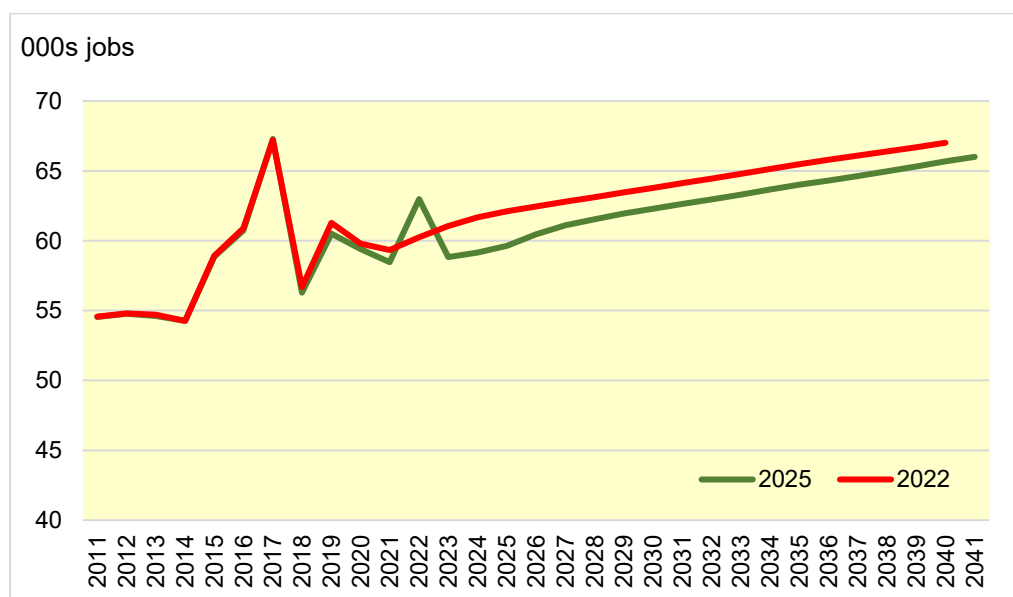


Figure 3.2 Jobs projections, 2022 and 2025 compared



3.3 Prior approvals

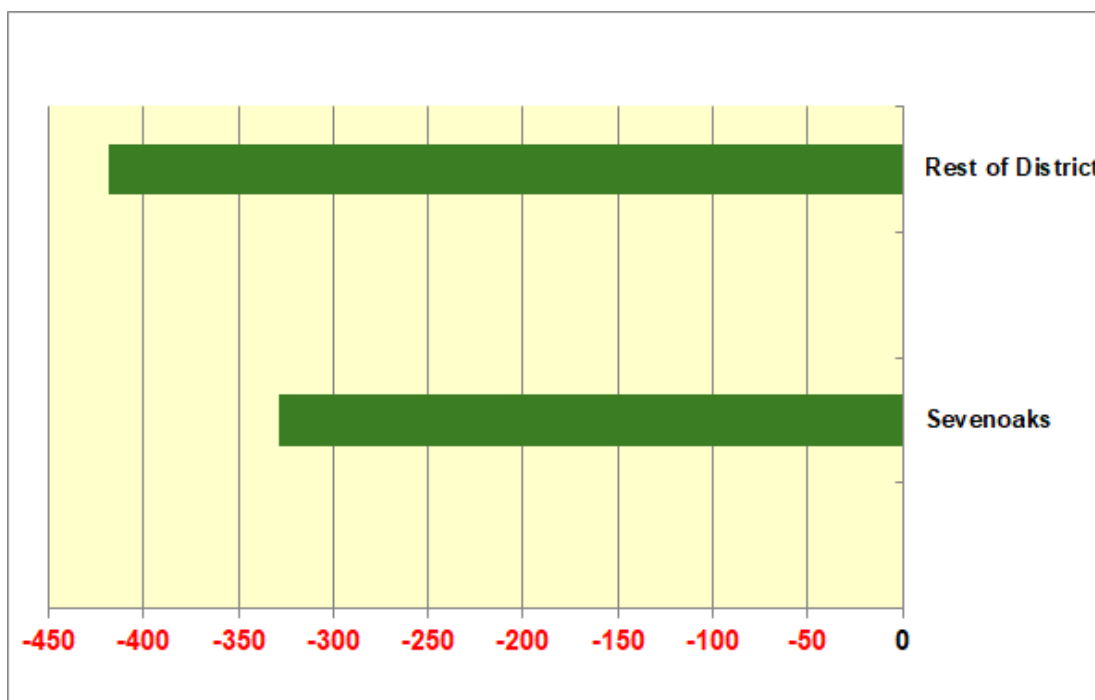
Achieving economic and jobs growth in West Kent and Sevenoaks District is made problematic in the context of the District’s broader features of extensive Green Belt, National Landscapes (formerly AONBs) and generally very attractive environment. Thus housing affordability and available workspace have been identified as particularly challenging issues that there “are a range of constraints on development across West Kent which are part of what makes the area so attractive to live within, but at the same time have the potential to hold it back economically”. This has been

exacerbated by the loss of employment space through PDR and the acute challenges in identifying new sites.⁶ This situation has not changed since 2022.

Figure 3.3 shows that, in terms of completions, the loss of space has been relatively modest, with a net loss of employment space of just 747 sq m. However, on its own this is misleading. Figure 3.4 shows consented schemes that are either under construction or not yet started, highlighting a much greater issue.

However, care is needed when interpreting the data. When excluding a single scheme, namely 160 London Road in Sevenoaks, the impact is dramatic. Figure 3.5 shows consolidated completions and outstanding consents, while Figure 3.6 shows the same data without 160 London Road. The impact is obvious.

Figure 3.3 Net loss of employment stock to prior approvals since 2022 – completed schemes⁷

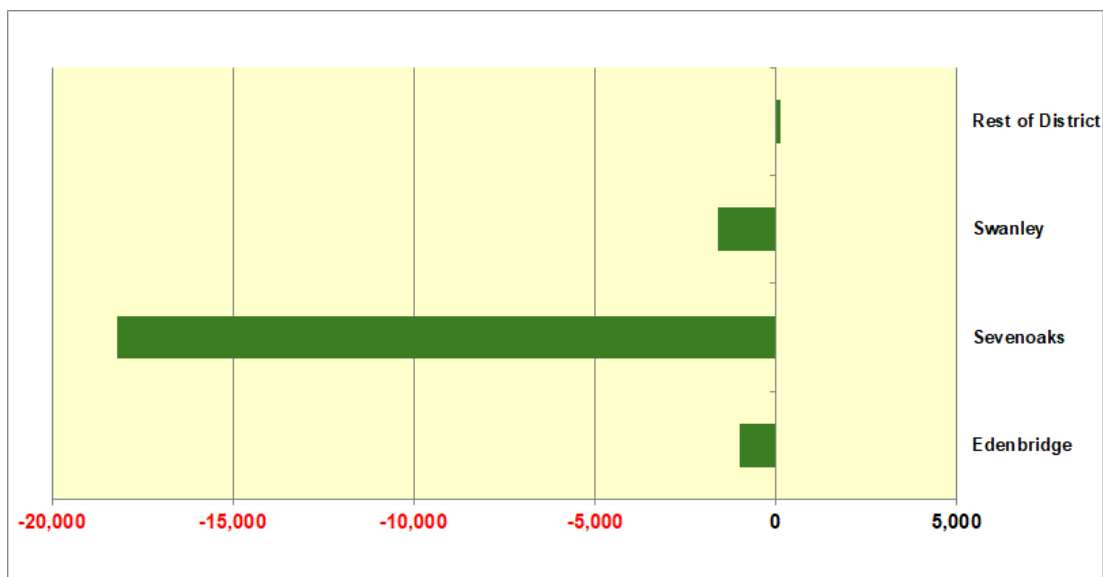


Source: Sevenoaks District Council

⁶ Hardisty Jones Associates (2022) *The Case for West Kent* West Kent Partnership June 2022

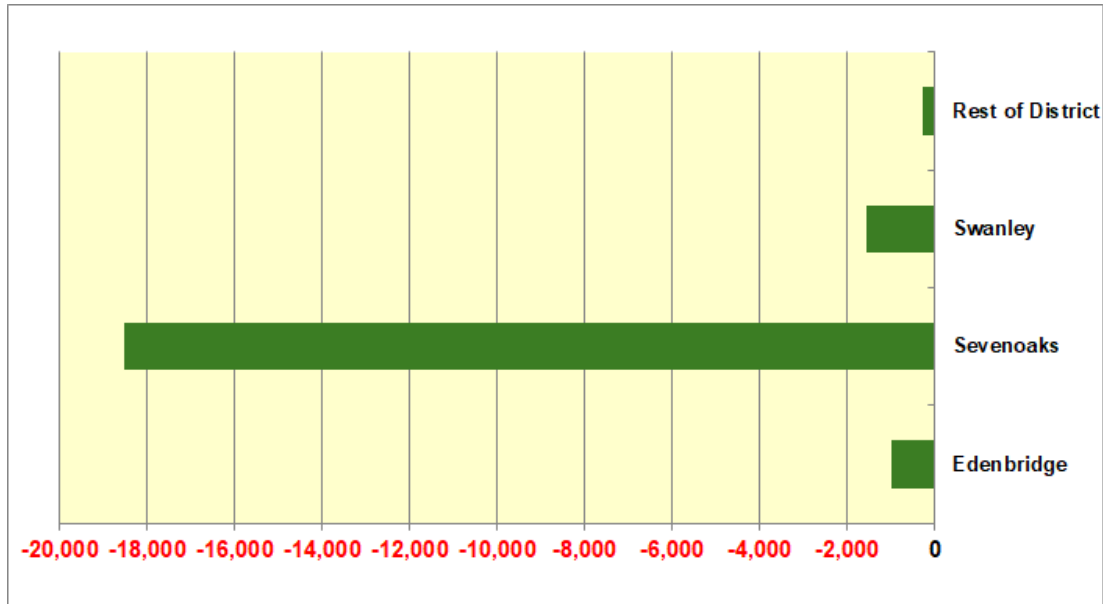
⁷ Rest of District refers to locations outside of Sevenoaks, Swanley, Edenbridge and Westerham.

Figure 3.4 Net loss of employment stock to prior approvals since 2022 – outstanding consents



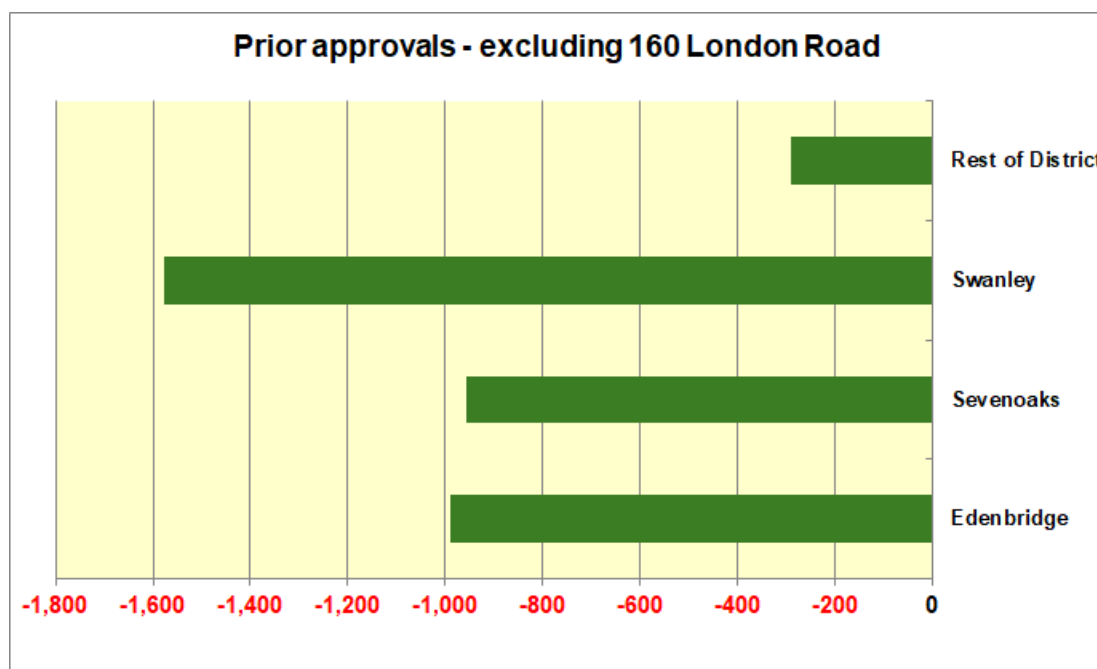
Source: Sevenoaks District Council

Figure 3.5 Net loss of employment stock to prior approvals since 2022 – consolidated



Source: Sevenoaks District Council

Figure 3.6 Net loss of employment stock to prior approvals since 2022 – consolidated, less 160 London Road



Source: Sevenoaks District Council

This illustrates that, in the round, loss of employment space to residential via prior approvals is highly attritional. 3,800 sq m may not seem significant, but it represents 34 small business units that are no longer available to serve the local economy. Further, 18 of those units are outside the main placemaking zones, largely in rural areas.

Not all losses are to prior approval, and when this element is placed in the context of all applications, at first glance the picture appears quite encouraging. Figure 3.7 shows the impact of all consents since 2022.

Figure 3.7 Change in employment stock, all consents, completed and outstanding since 2022

Placemaking zone	Existing (sq m)	Proposed (sq m)	Net change (sq m)
Edenbridge	8,761	6,960	(1,801)
Rest of District	16,317	57,029	40,712
Sevenoaks	27,070	4,921	(22,150)
Swanley	3,205	19,275	16,070
Westerham	44	0	(44)
Total	55,397	88,185	32,788

Source: Sevenoaks District Council

This does point to a picture of substantially increased stock and if all schemes go ahead that is a net benefit. However, Figure 3.8 illustrates the significance of just

three projects – the employment hub at the Fort Halstead proposed garden village; the Broom Hill site in Swanley, and the completed schemes at Morleys Farm.

Figure 3.8 Change in employment stock, all consents, completed and outstanding since 2022 – less Morleys Farm, Fort Halstead and Broomhill

Placemaking zone	Existing (sq m)	Proposed (sq m)	Net change (sq m)
Edenbridge	8,761	6,960	(1,801)
Rural	16,317	21,556	5,239
Sevenoaks	27,070	4,921	(22,150)
Swanley	3,205	4,208	1,003
Westerham	44	0	(44)
Total	55,397	37,645	(17,752)

Source: Sevenoaks District Council

While the completed B2 and B8 space at Morleys Farm is welcome, in context it helps illustrate that the overall stock of employment space in Sevenoaks District is very reliant on the success of a small number of large schemes, especially when compared with the overall loss at 160 London Road.

Great care needs to be taken when considering aggregate figures, to ensure that a false sense of security does not lead to failure to monitor and ensure appropriate replacement for small units lost to the attrition of prior approvals. This would be a challenging situation for any area, but is even more so for Sevenoaks District, with its environmental and operational constraints.

4.0 Commercial property market

Here we review the main commercial property market dynamics to identify any material changes since the 2022 Study. We begin with a county-level overview before a more local analysis of the Sevenoaks market.

4.1 County of Kent

The commercial property market across the UK, with the exception of central London, has been relatively 'flat' over the past few years, and since the pandemic. As is well-established, national economic growth has been minimal in the context of on-going domestic political uncertainty, as well as wider geo-political influences. Some sectors have continued to perform well, such as distribution, life sciences and green industries; but overall the industrial and office markets have been quiet.

As was stated in the 2022 report, Kent has a relatively small commercial property market, and even in buoyant economic times, this factor alone limits the scale of activity. In this review of activity since 2022, we have found no evidence of material changes to the supply-demand dynamic in Kent generally, and Sevenoaks specifically. What is clear, is that the County and District continue to lose commercial stock as the pressure for conversion to residential use remains high.

Property consultants Caxtons produce an annual review of the Kent commercial property market. Their 2024 report highlights economic turmoil and political uncertainty as having hampered the property market over the past few years.⁸ Subdued demand from office occupiers has taken its toll and vacancy levels remain stubbornly high, "*though the office market continues to improve*". The industrial and distribution has performed better, with much of the demand being "*for Grade A space with high levels of sustainability*". In parts of Kent rents continue to rise.

Caxtons note that Discovery Park, the science and technology hub near Sandwich, continues to perform well. Following Pfizer's decision to streamline its operations there while continuing to keep 400 roles based at the site, global contract development and manufacturing organisation Asymchem selected the site for as its 115,000 sq ft (10,684 sq m) European headquarters.

Other business parks, including Kings Hill, Crossways and Gillingham Business Park, have seen letting activity, though clearly not sufficient to materially lower the overall vacancy level. As Caxtons note, despite local successes, office take-up in Kent has been slow, and over 500,000 sq ft (46,452 sq m) of accommodation over 5,000 sq ft (465 sq m) is available for leasing. Of this, 40% is centred around Maidstone. Caxtons note that this figure would be higher if it was not for the permitted development rights for conversion to residential.

Although lack of demand and increasing build costs have curbed any appetite for developers to develop speculatively, Jubilee House, Salters Heath Business Centre, at Salters Heath Farm on the B2042 on the edge of Sevenoaks, which was constructed in 2023 has 2,242 sq ft (327.58 sq m) available at quoting terms of £25 sq ft.

⁸ Caxtons (2024) *Kent Property Market Report*

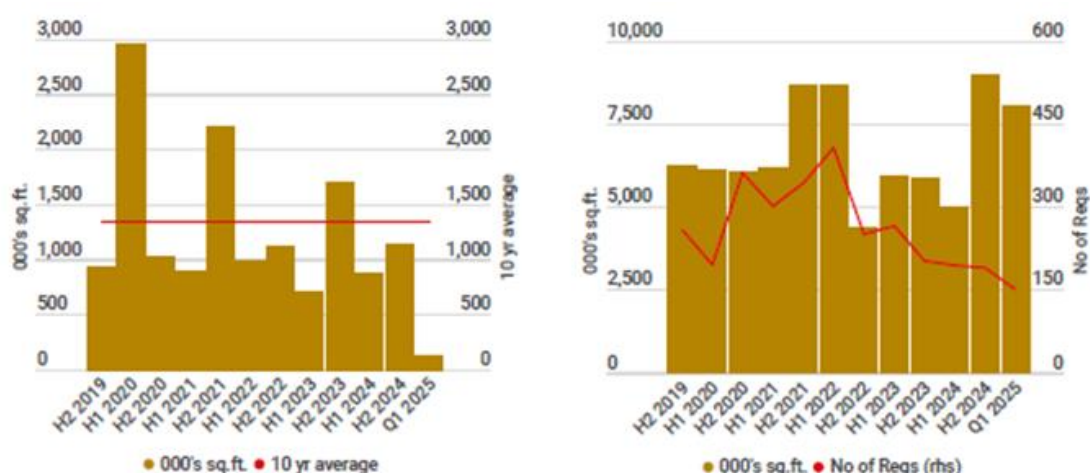
Caxtons note a few lettings, in western Kent, including Chapel House, Sevenoaks 2,185 sq ft (203 sq m) let to Roddy New Homes, and the 2,376 sq ft (221 sq m) ground floor of Eclipse House, Maidstone let to Capital Concrete Ltd. But in the wider context of the M25 and motorway corridor markets of the South East, these are small deals and illustrate the small scale of the office market in the area.

According to Caxtons, the industrial and distribution sector has been faring much better than the office sector. The research suggests that, in parts of Kent and the South East, there remains a lack of space although there is plenty under construction, particularly in Maidstone/Aylesford and Sittingbourne areas. Kent industrial rents continue to rise, driven by lack of supply and lower rental levels compared to the South East. Maidstone and Medway in particular have seen significant rental growth this year, and other towns have shown smaller increases.

According to commercial property specialists Glenny, take up in the South East London & Kent industrial market remained above 2m sq ft for the sixth successive year in 2024, with total transactions of 2.01m sq ft.⁹ Leasing activity was boosted in H2 with two so-called Big Box deals, the 108,025 sq ft letting to Kent-based fruit group AC Goatham at Bysing Wood Road Faversham, whilst Speciality Breads is expanding into a new 180,000 sq ft facility at Manston Business Park, Ramsgate. But this highlights that Sevenoaks District is, to a large extent, conspicuous by its absence from commentary. Put simply, the largest enquires are not arriving in the District, because most new development is happening elsewhere.

Supply has risen since 2022 and now stands at 7.5m sq ft an increase of 2.4m sq ft over the past 12 months. Grade A supply accounts for 31% (2.4m sq ft) of overall supply, with seven Big Box units accounting for 1.5m sq ft of availability. Two new units have recently completed at Panattoni Park in Sittingbourne adding 440,167 sq ft and 205,788 sq ft. The availability rate moved up to 7.6%, the highest across the Eastern M25 region.

South East London and Kent office market take-up (left) and demand (right)



Source: Glenny, 2025

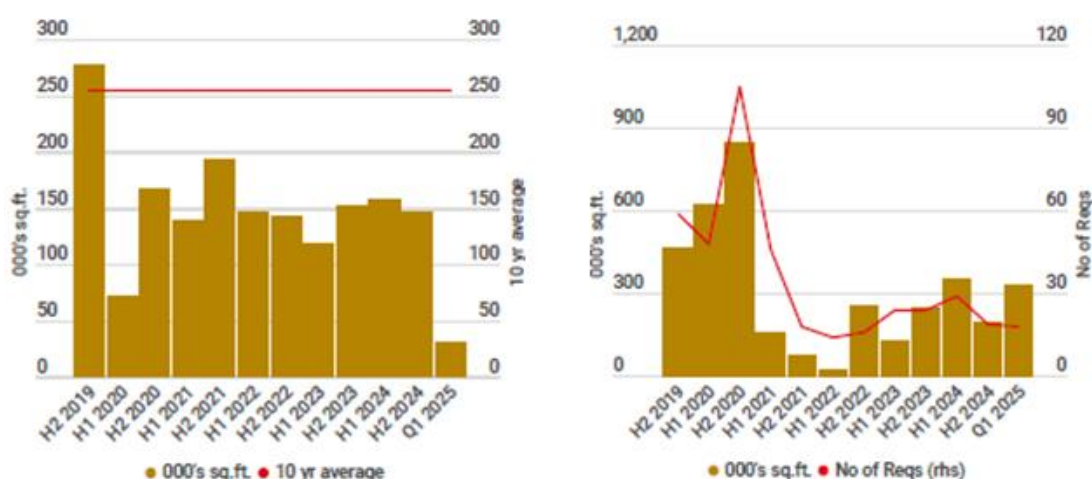
⁹ Glenny Databook Q1 2025

Glenny show that demand in the South East London & Kent market eased back by 10% from the peak levels set at the end of 2024, standing at 8.0m sq ft in the six months to the end of March 2025. Requirements have eased across most sectors of the market, with the only areas of strengthening demand being in the 10,000-25,000 sq ft size band, where requirements are up by 32%, and the Mid Box sector, where requirements are up by 55%.

Take up in the South East London & Kent office market showed an improvement on the previous 12 months, rising by 13% to 305,300 sq ft in 2024, although only four lettings were above 10,000 sq ft during the year. The largest of these was the 20,000 sq ft letting to Kuehne & Nagel at Crossways Business Park, Dartford, whilst housebuilder Chartway Group took 14,530 sq ft at Kings Hill Business Park in West Malling. In principle it could be expected that Sevenoaks would be able to compete at this scale of demand, but there is little specific evidence of this happening, despite some decent quality units.

Activity has been slow in the first three months of 2025. Most transactions in the early part of the year have been in locations outside the M25, showing that activity in this area of the market has improved. Supply moved up by 26.6% in the early part of 2025, rising to 1.8m sq ft. The availability rate in the South East London & Kent market stands at 8.5%.

South East London and Kent office market take-up (left) and demand (right)



Source: Glenny, 2025

Demand for office accommodation softened in the South East London & Kent market and remains muted with only 332,400 sq ft of requirements registered on the Glenny systems. There is a relatively even spread of demand for buildings above and below 25,000 sq ft although some of the larger requirements may be relative. The practical reality is that, in the immediate future, Sevenoaks is out of the running for larger enquiries.

4.2 Sevenoaks

In July 2024, the District Council approved a £435,000 budget to advance a major regeneration project east of Sevenoaks High Street. Following various changes, a revised project was approved focusing on the delivery of a leisure centre, cultural

hub, market hall, new homes, and enhanced public spaces, with the aim of appointing a development partner by the end of 2025.

Recent news stories suggest notices have been issued seeking private firms to help build the proposed £120m mixed scheme. Once finalised, the plans could include 264-300 homes. The project is expected to commence in January 2026, before a planning application is submitted. The whole project is expected to take at least four years.

It is notable that the opportunity is not being taken to include incubator space for start-up business and coworking/managed space for small, local businesses.

Launched in June 2024, the Sevenoaks Business Improvement District (BID) aims to enhance the town's commercial environment. Following positive feedback from local businesses, a Steering Group is developing a Business Plan to outline the BID's objectives and initiatives. The BID seeks to provide local businesses with a stronger voice in town development and to deliver improvements that benefit both businesses and residents.

The office market

The 2022 Study found that, although small, the Sevenoaks office market was mainly well functioning, with its core strength in the 2,000-5,000 sq ft (185-465 sq m) range, and in which a 'flight to quality' was evident. This remains largely the case and, despite the feeling that the past six months has seen something of a slowdown, 2024 saw a new rental record of £38 per sq ft achieved for refurbished space at Suffolk House, Sevenoaks. There was a suggestion that further growth may be possible as good quality space becomes available. More generally, rents in the mid- to high-£20s are typical.

It was also noted that the impact of the Covid pandemic has still not fully worked through and that this may take some time as the balance between working from home and working in the office is resolved. However, this was not seen as affecting rents, which are determined more by quality than marginal changes in aggregate demand. Given the impending removal of 160 London Road from stock, larger users are even more likely to go to Bromley.

The industrial market

The industrial market nationally has benefited in recent years from a rise in demand for distribution facilities, driven in large part by the growth in online retailing. This trend has been reinforced by the pandemic with its associated lock downs and working from home. Caxtons noted that the continued expansion and upgrading of facilities by retailers, parcel delivery operators and third-party logistics businesses has driven the pace of growth, with large floorplate space in particularly high demand

The 2022 Study found that industrial property has been showing strong rental performance over the previous few years, and this is evident in Kent, where average quarterly rents had moved from £6.46 per sq ft (£69 sq m) in Q1 2016 to a peak of nearly £11 per sq ft (£118 sq m) in Q3 2021, although they eased back somewhat later, possibly due to most new space being absorbed.

Driven on the one hand by the market for very large warehouses, and on the other for so-called 'last mile' logistics, this had created a position in Sevenoaks where, as one agent put it: "*There is absolutely minimal vacancy.*"

For smaller industrial units, the supply situation has improved significantly – to the extent that it was suggested that the Otford Depot scheme might be better served by opting for leisure uses. This is not a universally held view, and it was also argued that it is rarely unwise to provide small units. It was also suggested that the extension of Vestry Road northwards would be helpful, because it would enable the delivery some larger units.

It was noted that, for good quality space in Swanley, that rents had risen by 50% over the past five years, but that it had "turned a bit flat" in the last six months so, similarly, to experience in the office market.

4.3 Summary

As was noted in the 2022 report, the Sevenoaks District has a small commercial property market, one that is constrained by environmental protections, posing severe challenges for unlocking opportunities for growth. This situation was compounded by pressure for residential conversion. Nevertheless, at that time, both the office and the industrial markets were in good health, with minimal vacancy and robust rents.

The 2022 report highlighted the vacant, former BT building at 160 London Road, "*which is out of scale and poorly configured for the local market*". This building has since been consented for conversion to residential use which, given its scale, is helpful to the mainstream market.

The 2022 Study emphasised the overarching need for existing commercial property to be protected, while at the same time seeking sustainable and environmentally acceptable opportunities to provide more employment land. This remains the case in 2025.

Overall, the picture for the commercial property market across Sevenoaks District is somewhat subdued, in common with the wider region, and has a premium on the best quality space. Fundamentally, it remains a small market that is essentially local in its nature but where good quality space of all employment types, will find a market.

5.0 A review of the 2022 site recommendations

Here we review the town centres and base line sites discussed in 2022 in light of the new housing targets, to understand whether any of the earlier recommendations require revising or if there is a need to explore the potential for co-location of commercial and residential uses on appropriate sites.

5.1 Location and town centre overview

Sevenoaks Town Centre The 2022 Study supported efforts to raise the profile of the town centre's key assets, including its heritage, array of independent shops and the impressive Knole Park, alongside an expansion of the cultural scene and provision of more affordable homes. It also supported proposals to improve connections to Knole Park; the potential relocation of the market; revitalising the eastern part of the town centre and development of the Post Office and telephone exchange site. These aims remain important today.

Sevenoaks Station Area and Tubs Hill The 2022 Study supported the potential for redevelopment here, through a combination of replacement of stock and development of brownfield land. There is clearly an opportunity to create more residential stock with, for example, medium-rise flats. But the report noted that the case for commercial development is more nuanced, suggesting that while there remains the possibility that a large occupier might choose to take a large office building in Sevenoaks, this would be against the grain of the overall demand picture.

By contrast, there is demand from SMEs, largely from professional services businesses that take advantage of cheap and ubiquitous technology to establish agile businesses in areas such as finance, accounting, legal, real estate, personnel, design, media, technology and so on.

Westerham This is a compact centre, where niche retail predominates. Collectively, the buildings here are of good quality, with a range of ages, sizes and specification. The edge-of-centre location is well-managed, and the buildings maintained. There is very little evidence of vacancy. Access is good, as is parking and turning space. There might be opportunities for intensification.

The 2022 Study noted the potentially detrimental piecemeal loss of employment stock (leading to loss of long-term viability) and supported SDC policies to improve the public realm to reduce car dominance and create more enjoyable streets and spaces; while improving the High Street streetscape; improving connections to the countryside; enhancing sustainable transport connections, and nurturing a better visitor economy – all measures that this study would endorse to enhance attractiveness to business.

Edenbridge This is another compact centre surrounded by Green Belt land, comprising largely two-storey buildings, with a wide mix of ages, with ground floor retail and services. The main concentration of employment land sits between Station Road and Edenbridge rail station, focused on Enterprise Way, Station Road, Commercial Way and Fircroft Way, the industrial estate is a classic of its type: diverse occupiers, diverse premises (age, size and condition) and diverse activities.

Overall, the whole commercial area shows very few signs of vacancy, and the quality of the built stock is generally good. The main opportunities for the commercial district are intensification in redevelopment. The 2022 Study supported SDC strategy to encourage investment and renewal of the historic High Street; a transformed Leather Market area as a focus for markets, events and activity in the heart of the town, and a stronger food, drink, cultural and leisure offer. It also recommends redeveloping the Leather Market and back land sites; relocating the market; and shopfront renewal. These are recommendations with which this study would concur.

Swanley The physical character of Swanley is quite distinct from Sevenoaks, Edenbridge and Westerham. It is located on the edge of Greater London, close to Dartford, and reflects the economic structure of industrial Outer London more than it does the Green Belt areas of Sevenoaks District. Town centre employment space is relatively limited. By far the largest employment site is the Swan Mill site, largely B2 and occupied by the single owner, Swan Mill Paper Company. There is also the Park Road industrial estate, which is a well-managed, relatively modern and almost fully occupied B1(c).

In front of Park Road Industrial Estate, fronting the High Street, is the 'Meeting Point', an SDC asset. The 'business hub' element comprises c2,690 sq ft (250 sq m) of flexible co-working spaces, private offices, meeting rooms and networking space aimed at start-ups, home workers and people who might otherwise have to commute for work.

The 2022 Study supported SDC strategy to expand the retail offer with an emphasis on independents, food and drink, alongside an expanded community, leisure and civic offer; as well as the ambition to create more space for small businesses and coworking.

5.2 Allocated sites recommendations

Figure 5.1 summarises the 2022 baseline sites, with remarks regarding any developments since 2022 and a 2025 recommendation. As might be expected, given just a three year lapse since the 2022 Study, most of the earlier recommendations remain unchanged. However, there are a number of significant changes. For example, two sites in Sevenoaks (Emp1(b) and Emp1(c)) have since been lost to residential development.

5.3 Key applications and consents since 2022

Fort Halstead

This project will be a mixed use development including 650 homes and over 27,500 sq m of employment space in the form of an Innovation & Education hub to contribute to the existing employment opportunities in the area. The Innovation & Education hub will provide a variety of employment space including office, R&D and light industrial uses. This is a significant addition of modern space and, along with the Broom Hill development in Swanley, offsets the loss of space elsewhere. The continued presence of QinetiQ on-site should help create critical mass.

Figure 5.1 Review of 2022 base line sites by place making area

Site	Recommendations		
	2022	Remarks	2025
Sevenoaks			
Emp1(a) – Vestry Road	Retain and protect.	Proposal to extend area north to the M26.	Retain and extend.
Emp1(b) Bat & Ball Enterprise centre	Retain, extend area and protect.		No change.
Emp1(c) 160 London Road	Consider allocation for mixed-use development.	Lost to residential when implemented.	Delete.
Emp1(d) Erskine House, Oak Hill Road	Release if vacated.	Lost to residential.	Delete.
Emp1(e) Hardy's Yard, Riverhead	Retain.	Unit E lost to residential.	Retain. Consider strong protections.
Emp1(f) High Street, Suffolk Way	Retain.	Vacant site subject to resi pressure. Site being developed immediately to the south for resi-led mixed use.	Retain and extend to cover new development. Land East of High Street could be added if employment space is proposed.
Emp1(g) London Road	Retain and protect via Article 4 Direction.	Reported of loss of several units to resi – risk of this was basis A4 recommendation.	Retain, continue to seek Article 4 protection.
Emp1(h) Morewood Close	Retain.		No change.
Emp1(i) South Park	Retain and integrate with adjacent plans.		No change.
Emp1(k) Lime Tree Walk	Retain and protect.	Some parking space lost to flats, but employment space intact.	No change.
Swanley Town Centre			
Emp1(m) Swanley Town Council Offices	Release if vacated.	Town council sublets spare space to local businesses.	No change.
Emp1(u) The Technology Centre	Retain.		No change.
Emp1(p) Media House	Release.		No change.
Emp1(r) Park Road	Retain.	Meeting Point immediately adjacent.	Retain and Extend to include Meeting

Figure 5.1 (cont'd) Review of 2022 base line sites by place making area

Emp1(r) Park Road	Retain.	Meeting Point immediately adjacent.	Retain and Extend to include Meeting Point. Actively manage Meeting Point to ensure optimum use mix.
M25 J3 Sites, Swanley			
Emp1(l) Wested Land and Mark Way	Retain.		No change.
Emp1(s) Southern Cross Industrial Estate	Retain.		No change.
Emp1(t) Teardrop Industrial Estate	Retain.		No change.
Emp1(q) and Emp4 Moreton/ Gateway Industrial Estate	Retain and consider coordinating redevelopment.	Would possibly make Broom Hill more accessible if redeveloped as one.	No change.
Edenbridge			
Emp1(v) Station Road	Retain and protect.	Request by planning to tighten boundaries.	No change, but ensure boundaries are correct.
H2(d) Station Approach	Release.	Developed for resi with 588 sq m Class E.	Delete.
Emp1(w) Warsop and Edenbridge Trading centre	Release.		No change.
Westerham			
Emp1(x) Westerham Trading Centre	Retain and protect.		No change.
Rural & Village			
Emp1(y) Blue Chalet Industrial West Kingsdown	Retain.		No change.
Emp1(z) West Kingsdown Industrial Estate	Retain.	Erroneously listed as Emp1(w) in 2022 report.	No change.
Emp1(zz) Horton Kirby/ Mills Trading Estate	Retain.		No change.
Emp2 MDES2S North Downs Business Park	Retain.		No change.

This type of space is very popular and, when proactively managed, can be very successful. One note of caution is that southern access to the M26 and M25 is somewhat sub-optimal, and it is worth exploring if there is scope for modifying M25 J5 at Chevening to improve this. Overall, the project should diversify employment at the location.

Land South of Hockenden Farm, Swanley

This site proposes slightly over 10,000 sq m of B2, B8 and E(g) space on open land, as an extension of existing, but unallocated, employment space. The site was proposed for allocation in the draft local plan. In principle, proximity to the junction of the A20 and B2173 makes this a reasonable location of B8 style uses. One concern is that the junction is not very well designed and whether it has the capacity to accommodate this much space should be carefully considered to ensure appropriate scales of development are accommodated.

Hockenden Farm, Swanley

This consent at Hockenden Farm itself is, essentially, an upgrade and minor expansion to existing facilities with a relatively modest, but welcome, addition to stock, with no wider implications.

Sevenoaks Quarry

This residential consent, south of a railway and east of the Vestry Road industrial area, includes around 2,000 sq m of class E space. This level of provision seems at a scale appropriate to service the newly created residential area of 800 homes, with retail and other local services likely to feature significantly.

Land East of High Street, Sevenoaks

This site, noted in Figure 5.1, is a logical extension to an existing employment designation (Emp1(f)) and, together with the redevelopment at the Tesco site, should be incorporated within Emp1(f).

Otford Road Depot, Sevenoaks

This Council scheme incorporates a site promoted for employment uses at the time of the 2022 Study. Currently used as open air B8 storage, the proposal is for three small units for E(g)ii, iii or B8. This would, on the face of it, be a reasonable upgrade to current uses, despite some scepticism in the market. Potentially, it would enable the Council to directly supply inexpensive space.

5.4 Other sites of interest

Land at Pedham Place

This site was being promoted at the time of the 2022 Study. It is noted here only because, notwithstanding environmental and other constraints that may exist, if it were allocated for development as part of the Local Plan's development strategy, its combination of scale, at 25 ha, and adjacency to M25 J3 would potentially create the only inward-investor class development site in the District.

New Ash Green

Although visited during the 2022 Study, the lack of an employment allocation meant that no recommendation was given. It is included here to note that the only significant office building, Ash House, is subject to a Prior Approval consent for conversion to residential, with a loss of over 1,000 sq m of office space. Discussions around the refurbishment of the neglected space above the shopping area need to take this into account.

5.5 Summary

The 2022 Study found that good quality development sites in Sevenoaks District are few and far between, and that those allocations with existing occupiers are mostly worth retaining, with only a couple of exceptions where poor access or being overtaken by redevelopment have necessitated a change. Mostly these lead to deletion, but for some – especially in Sevenoaks Town Centre – there is a good case for firmer protection. Another such site is London Road Edenbridge, some ‘eating away at the edge’ has occurred. In this case a firm line needs to be taken, since Edenbridge provides a significant stock of affordable space of the sort that is fairly rare around the M25.

6.0 Updated forecasts

In this section we review the new housing numbers and quantify the implications for employment land and jobs planning. We also present an updated estimate of the quantitative demand for employment land. As in the 2022 Study, this report analyses alternative approaches to forecasting demand for land and incorporates sensitivity tests around key assumptions such as employment density ratios.

6.1 Implications of the revised housing growth target

The level of new housing impacts on the local economy in three ways. It provides a source of demand, through construction activity and also consumer demand; it acts as a potentially competing land use for commercial activity, and it impacts on the level of future labour supply. Each of these factors can impact on the demand for employment land.

The new standard method for calculating housing targets, which is based on housing stock levels and affordability ratios, is not directly related to either labour demand forecasts or labour supply projections.

The current Sevenoaks housing target of 1,149 dwellings per annum generates a total of 17,235 dwellings over the Plan period. Adjusting for current vacancy rates (1.5%) and second homes (2.5%) this generates 16,552 dwellings to be occupied by additional population. Assuming current household size of 2.46, that would produce an additional population of 40,718.

However, the intention of the new housing targets is not to stimulate an increase in population growth but to meet existing need, so we would not expect this level of additional population rise. For example, at the national level, the ONS household formation rate of 164,000 a year is significantly lower than the government's 300,000 a year housing target. This suggests the government is aiming not just to meet new demand, but also to:

- address existing shortages and backlog and
- improve affordability by increasing supply.

For example, one of the objectives would be to enable younger people who might otherwise be living at home with their parents to have their own home in their local area. This would create an increase in housing and households but not of population.

Increased housing targets do not automatically equate to increased population growth, but they can enable population growth by removing constraints.

Population projections might be revised upward if:

- increased housing supply leads to higher net migration into the area;
- there is a policy shift that encourages population growth (e.g. new transport links, economic zones), or
- household formation rates rise due to improved affordability or availability.

In conclusion, we would expect that the higher housing targets would, if met, create some increase in population growth for Sevenoaks, over and above current

projections, but that this would not be anything like as high as the 40,718 implied by applying current household size to dwellings figures.

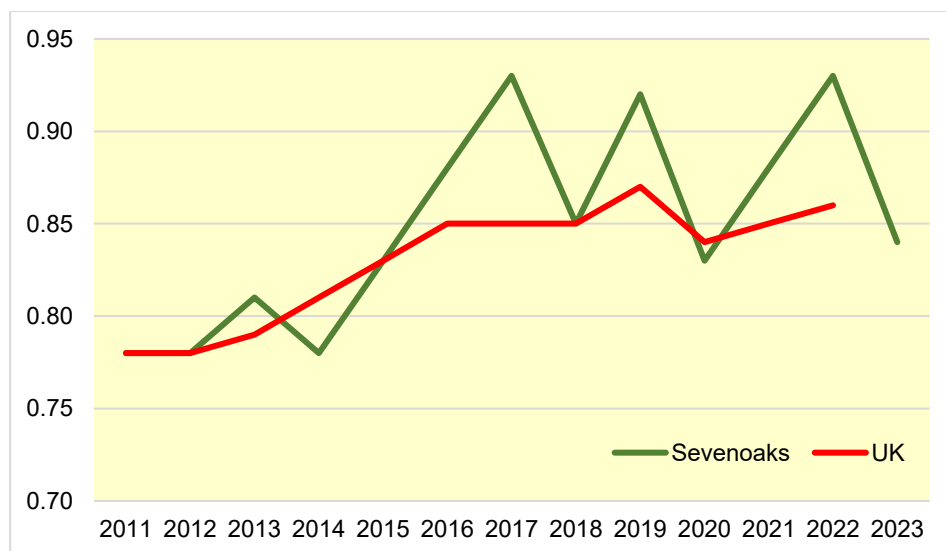
The 2022-based Sub-national Population Projections (SNPP) show a projected increase in population for Sevenoaks of 8,367 over the period 2026-41, an increase of 6.8%. The majority of this is accounted for by the cohort aged 65+, which is projected to grow by 5,528. The population of children aged 0-14 is projected to decline by -346, whilst the working age population aged 15-64 is projected to increase by 3,185, or 4.3%.

Applying the current Sevenoaks economic activity rates for males (83.1%) and females (81.8%) produces a projected increase of 2,627 people in the Sevenoaks workforce. If the dwellings target is met then on the assumptions set out above this would imply a much higher population than the SNPP, as set out above. We set out the implications of this below in terms of an alternative employment land use scenario.

The percentage of working age population in Sevenoaks who are economically active, is around, or slightly higher than the national average. Despite the perception of Sevenoaks as a commuter district the number of jobs in the district is actually higher than the number of workers. This is illustrated in Figure 6.1, which shows the jobs density ratio for Sevenoaks and the UK.

The jobs density ratio is the number of jobs in an area divided by the working aged population of that area. At the national level the ratio is around 0.85. Due to economic inactivity and unemployment not everyone of working age will have a job, but the national ratio provides a good benchmark of what a balance between jobs and workers at a local level would look like. Sevenoaks is at or above the national average.¹⁰

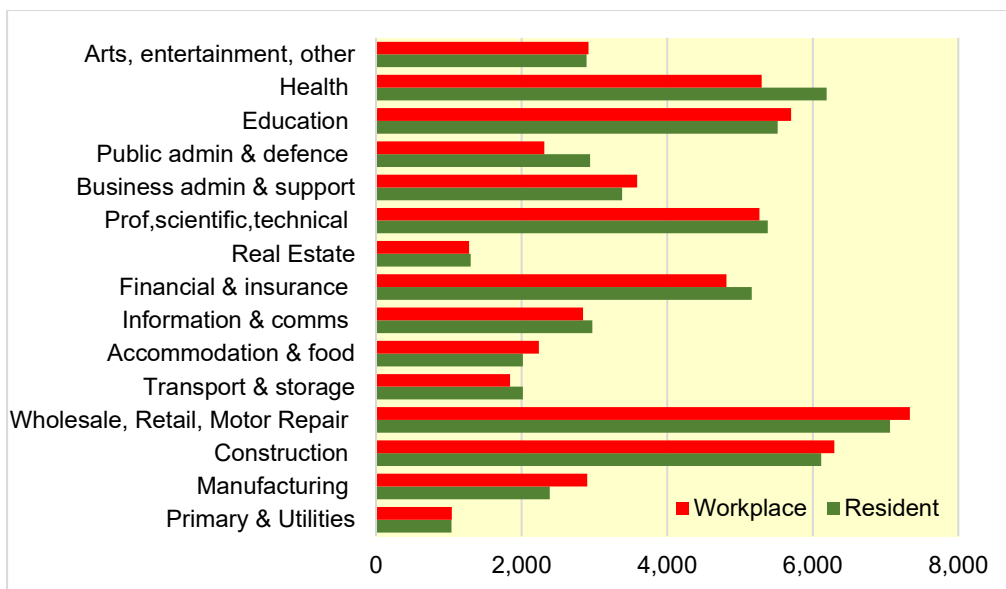
Figure 6.1 Jobs density ratio Sevenoaks and UK



¹⁰ The apparent volatility of the Sevenoaks ratio is likely to reflect the robustness of the estimates at the spatial scale rather than actual year on year change.

Figure 6.2 shows the balance between workplace and resident jobs by sector from the 2021 Census data. Unfortunately the 2021 Census data is atypical because, due to the covid pandemic, an unusually high number of people were working from home. But there is some evidence of net out-commuting in professional services sectors offset by net in-commuting in industrial sectors.

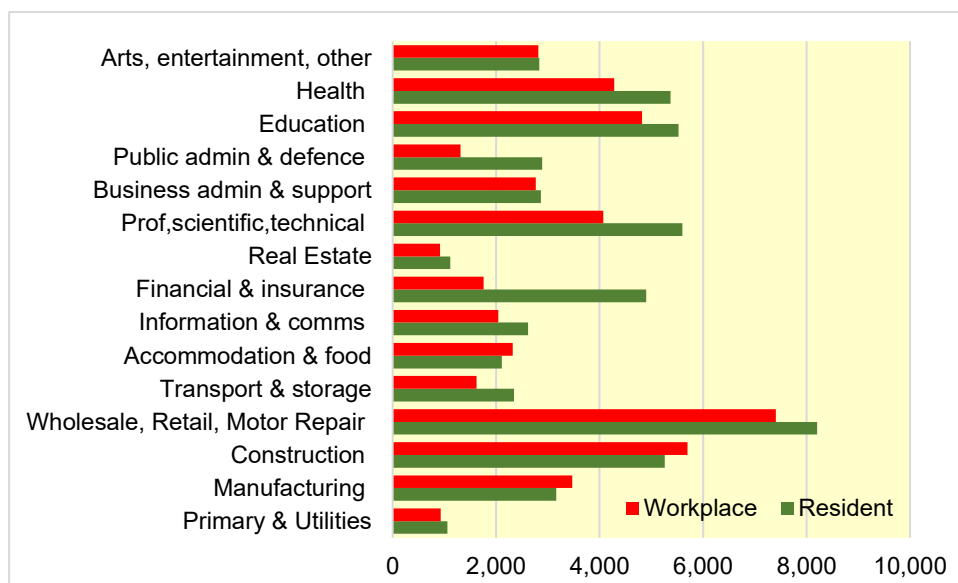
Figure 6.2 Workplace and resident jobs by sector, 2021



Source: Census 2021

The outflow of workers in office sectors is more clearly seen from the 2011 census data, though since 2011 the number of jobs in Sevenoaks has increased to bring it into balance with the number of workers (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3 Workplace and resident jobs by sector, 2011

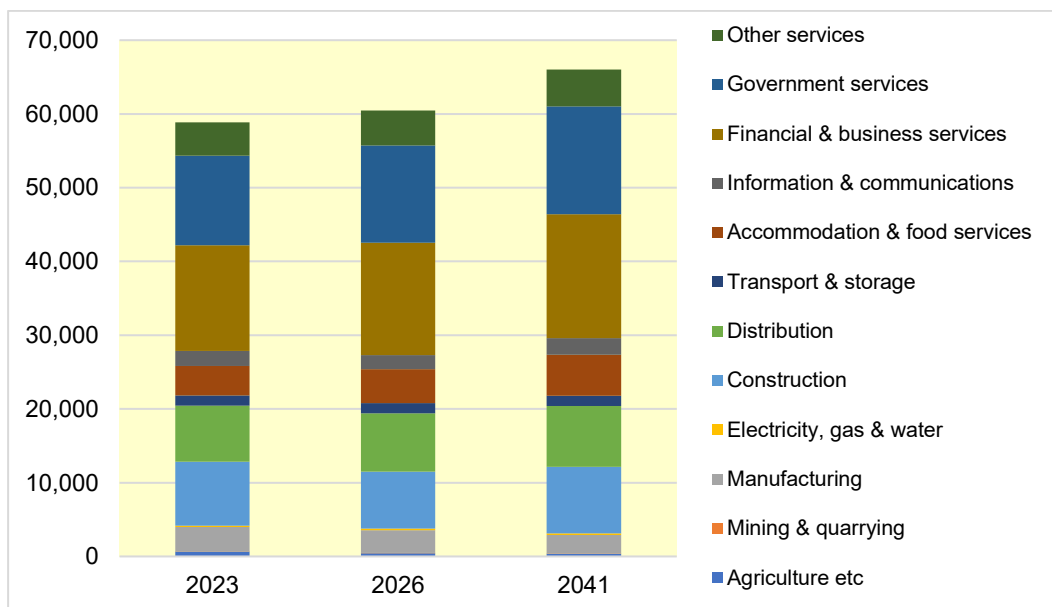


Source: Census 2011

6.2 Sector-based projections

Figure 6.4 shows the Cambridge Econometrics projected employment change by sector. Employment is projected to increase from 58,800 in 2023 to 60,500 by the start of the Plan period in 2026. It is then projected to increase to 66,000 by 2041, an increase of 5,500 over the plan period or an increase of 9.2%.

Figure 6.4 Cambridge Econometrics forecast, by sector, 2023-2041



Over the plan period employment in the financial and business services sector is projected to grow by 1,600 jobs (10.3%); government services, which includes health and education, is projected to grow by 1,500 jobs (11%); and construction is projected to grow by 1,300 jobs (17%). There is projected to be a loss of 600 jobs in the manufacturing sector.

Following the same method as the 2022 Study, we classify activities at fine grained SIC 5-digit level as to whether they are likely to occupy office or industrial floorspace – or neither.

Applying this to the Cambridge Econometrics forecast by sector we project the future change in employment by office and industrial (manufacturing, warehousing and other) occupiers, over the plan period 2026 to 2041. To this projected change in jobs, we then apply a standard employment density ratio. Projected change in jobs and employment density ratios are set out in Figure 6.5.

These projections show demand for a net additional 17,900 sq m of office floorspace and a net additional 2,300 sq m of industrial floorspace. To translate this into a demand for land we apply a standard plot density ratio of 0.4 (4,000 sq m of floorspace per hectare). This produces an overall need for 5.1 ha of employment land if a low density (business park) plot ratio of (0.4) is used for office floorspace or 2.8 ha of floorspace if a town centre plot ratio of 1 is applied.

Figure 6.5 Jobs change, density and additional demand, 2026-2041

Land use	Jobs change	Density ratio (sq m per worker)	Net additional floorspace (sq m)	Land (ha)	Land (ha) with office plot ratio of 1
Manufacturing	-602	36	-21,700	-5.4	
Other industrial	527	36	19,000	4.8	
Distribution	84	60	5,000	1.3	
Office	1,584	11.3	17,900	4.5	1.8
Total land				5.1	2.4

Compared to the 2022 Study the projections are for slightly lower employment growth in these sectors, and hence lower demand for floorspace and land. However, when comparing with Figure 8.3 in the 2022 report, it should be noted that was for a twenty-year period (2020-40), compared to the fifteen-year period in Figure 6.5.

Another explanation for the difference is that as noted above there has been a loss of around 1,000 jobs in the financial and business services sector, which has provided a lower starting point for the office employment projections.

As in the 2022 Study, we have carried out sensitivity tests around the central density ratio assumptions. The results of this analysis are set out in Figure 6.6.

Figure 6.6 Jobs change, high and low density sensitivity, 2026-2041

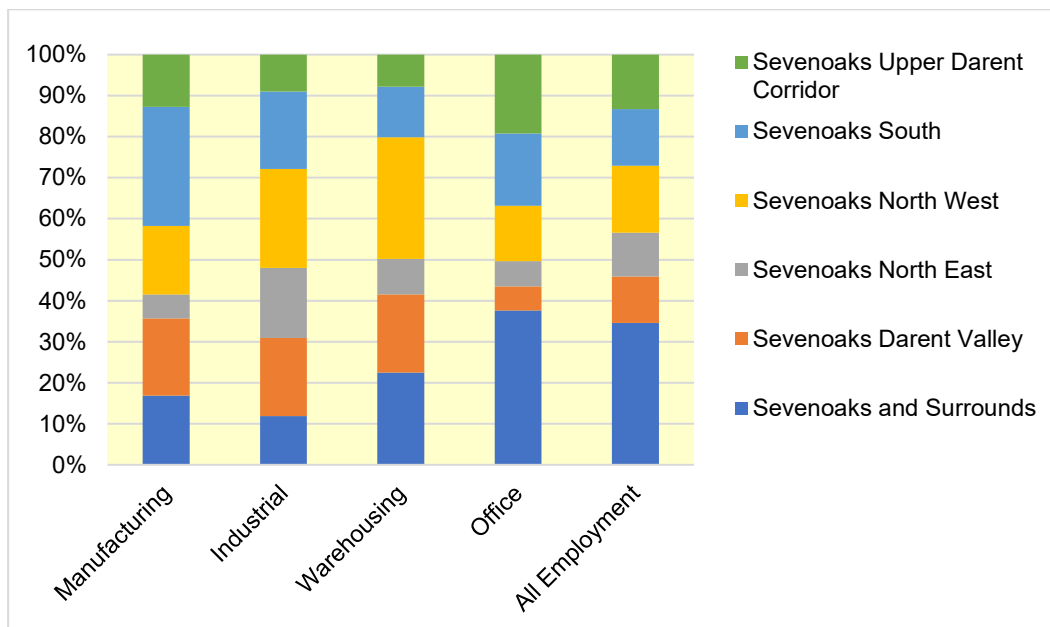
Land use	Jobs change	Density ratio (sq m per worker)	Net additional floorspace (sq m)	Land (ha)	Land (ha) with office plot ratio of 1
High density					
Manufacturing	-602	30	-18,100	-4.5	
Other industrial	527	30	15,800	4.0	
Distribution	84	50	4,200	1.1	
Office	1,584	9	14,300	3.6	1.4
Total land				4.1	1.9
Low density					
Manufacturing	-602	40	-24,100	-6.0	
Other industrial	527	40	21,100	5.3	
Distribution	84	80	6,700	1.7	
Office	1,584	13.5	21,400	5.4	2.1
Total land				6.3	3.1

6.3 Sub-area employment

Figure 6.7 shows the distribution of employment by the six placemaking areas of the District. Just over a third of total employment (34.6%) is in Sevenoaks and Surrounds. The remainder of employment is fairly evenly distributed between the other sub areas. The next largest is in the North West with 16.3% whilst the smallest

is the North East with 10.7%. Industrial and Warehousing employment is most prominent in the North West, whilst the largest share of manufacturing employment can be found in the South. Sevenoaks and Surrounds accounts for 37.6% of office employment.

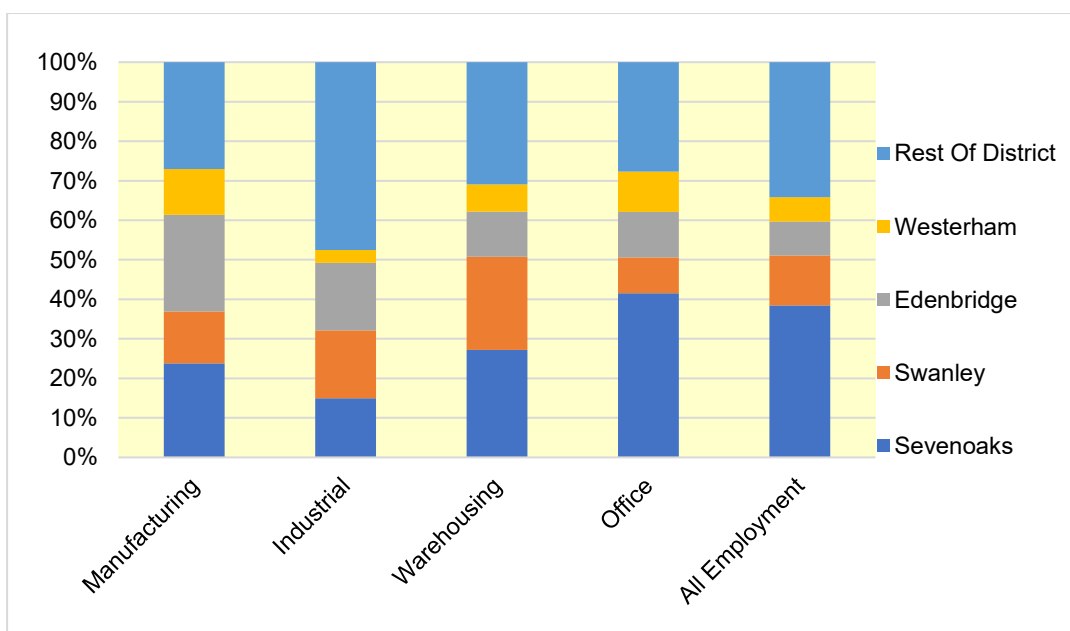
Figure 6.7 Distribution of employment by sector and sub-area



Figures 4.14-4.17 in the 2022 report give a more fine-grained indication of where employment is clustered.

For the purposes of planning for employment land our sub-areas of interest are the four main towns and the remainder of the District. The distribution of employment by these areas is shown in Figure 6.8.

Figure 6.8 Distribution of employment by sector and sub-area



38.4% of all employment is located in the Sevenoaks built up area, 12.6% in Swanley, 8.6% in Edenbridge and 6.2% in Westerham. That leaves just over a third of employment (34.2%) outside of these four main towns. Sevenoaks has the largest proportion of office employment at just over 40%.

In terms of all industrial employment taken together (manufacturing, industrial and warehousing) then 21.8% is in Sevenoaks, 18.0% in Swanley, 17.6% in Edenbridge and 7.1% in Westerham. That leaves 35.5% of industrial employment outside of these four main towns.

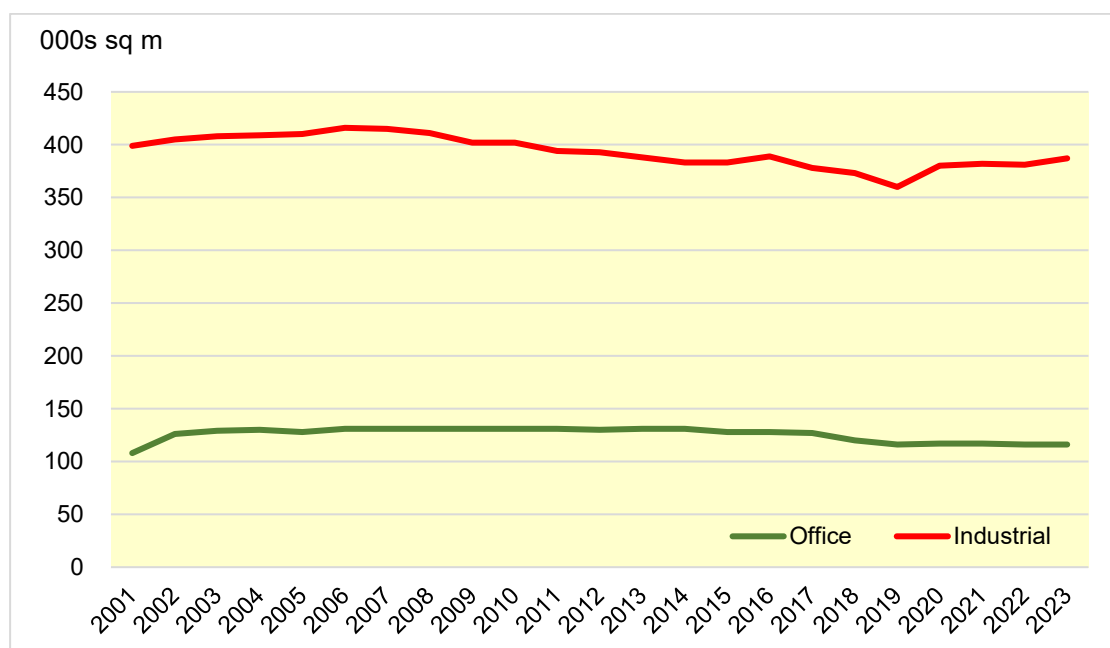
Other things being equal we would anticipate that the forecast jobs change by land-use type set out in Figure 6.5 would be spatially distributed according to the proportions shown in Figure 6.8.

6.4 Floorspace trends

We have also revisited the projections made based on past trends in floorspace.

Office floorspace in Sevenoaks declined from a peak of 131,000 sq m in 2014, but since 2019 has been broadly flat at 116,000 sq m (Figure 6.9). A ten-year trend shows floorspace declining at a rate of 1,500 sq m p.a., but arguably the pattern now is for stock levels to remain constant.

Figure 6.9 Office and industrial floorspace change, 2001-2023



Source: VOA

Industrial floorspace stock had been in steady decline until 2019, since when there has been an increase in floorspace stock levels to the 2023 level of 387,000 sq m. Four years is too short a period to establish a robust trend, but since 2019 industrial floorspace stock has increased in all Kent district with the exceptions of Canterbury and Gravesham where there have been small declines. We suspect at least in part this is due to substitution of activity from London where industrial land has been under intense pressure from residential development. This point has been reinforced

anecdotally through consultations we have held with Council officers and property market agents.

Office floorspace stock by contrast has continued to decline across most Kent districts with eight seeing a fall and just three experiencing a small increase over this same time period.

Based on the above evidence we therefore think that the appropriate trend-based projection for Sevenoaks is for zero net change in office floorspace stock over the Plan period. This does not mean there should be no new office floorspace. New premises will need to be built to meet the needs of contemporary occupiers. But this will be offset by losses in the types of stock which are no longer suited to current demand.

By contrast we believe there is now evidence of positive demand for industrial space. The last three years data 2020-23 shows industrial floorspace stock growing at an average of 2,300 sq m per annum, which represents around 0.6% of stock. Projected forward over the 15-year Plan period would give a figure of 35,000 sq m.

6.5 Demand forecasts

Having analysed the two different projection methods and triangulated these with the property market data and qualitative insights from agents, we conclude that demand for net additional space for offices should be 9,000 sq m. That is the mid-point of the sector-based and trend-based projections.

For industrial floorspace we recommend that the trend-based projection of 35,000 sq m is adopted, taking account of the NPPF requirement to plan for the needs of the logistics industry.

Vacancy rates

Whilst having no definitive data on vacancy rates, these remain observationally very low. We have therefore applied the same approach as in the 2022 Study and added demand for additional floorspace to achieve a normal frictional vacancy rate.

Unplanned losses

We also anticipate continued losses to the commercial floorspace stock through permitted development rights. This is in addition to the unimplemented consents that are already in the pipeline. We have made a small allowance for further additional loss of office space. This needs to be monitored and additional replacement floorspace identified as required.

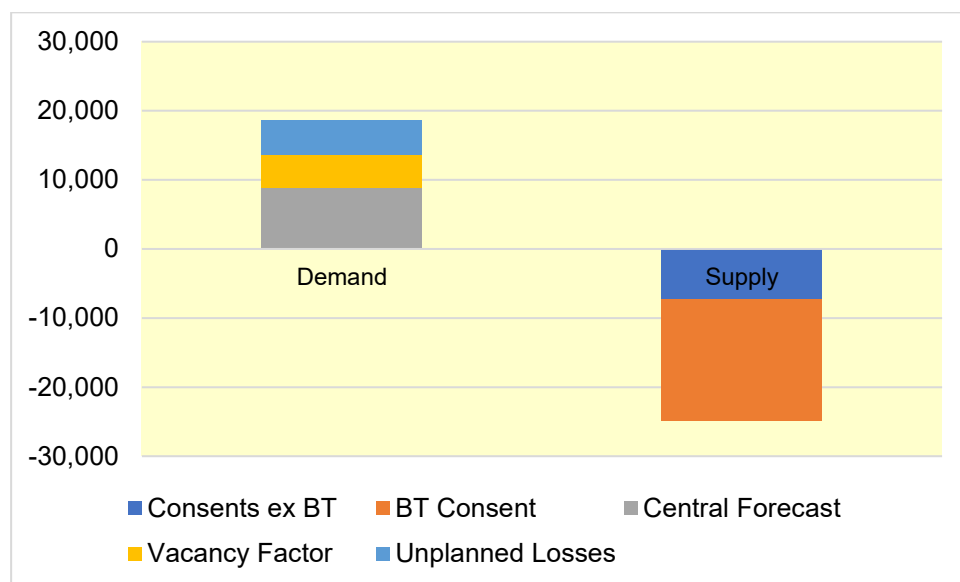
Supply

There is an existing pipeline of recent completions and unimplemented consents as set out in Chapter 3. This creates a loss of supply for offices and an addition to supply for industrial.

6.6 Demand and supply balance

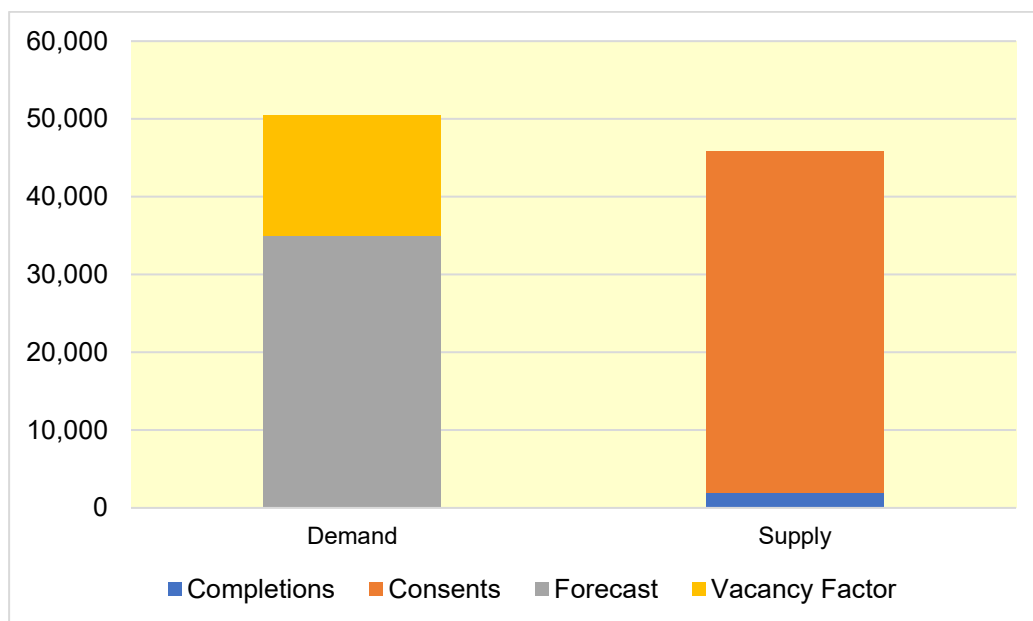
Figures 6.10 and 6.11 show the demand-supply balances for offices and industrial property, respectively.

Figure 6.10 Demand and supply balance for offices (sq m)



Most of the reduction in office supply is accounted for by the 160 London Road development. We have not identified high levels of demand for office floorspace from our research so would not recommend trying to replace all of this. The result is the need to plan for 25,800 sq m of office floorspace over the Plan period. A lot of this will be replacement demand which will predominantly be in the form of small flexible space to be found in town centre locations with good amenities.

Figure 6.11 Demand and supply balance for industrial (sq m)



For industrial demand there is a projected shortfall of 4,600 sq m of additional floorspace that needs to be identified. However, a large proportion of the identified is on a single site and hence we would recommend some additional contingency is identified to allow for:

- uncertainty in the demand forecast;
- over-dependency on a single site, and
- a wider distribution of employment land opportunities in the District.

In addition to replacing any of the existing pipeline that does not come through we recommend a buffer of 20% above projected demand, that is an additional 10,000 sq m.

6.7 Alternative housing target scenario

As noted above, the proposed housing targets could imply a substantial increase in labour supply. We therefore present an alternative scenario that calculates how much employment land would be required in order to accommodate the number of additional jobs that would be required in order to retain a balance between workplace jobs and the resident workforce with a higher workforce.

Before setting out this alternative scenario it is important to set out a few caveats about this approach.

- Firstly, it is not a demand-based projection. An increased level of population would be expected to generate additional local demand, but this would be predominantly for consumer services such as retail and leisure, or public services such as health and education.
- Secondly, as noted earlier, the housing targets have been developed not to stimulate an increase in population but to accommodate existing demand for housing.
- Thirdly, whilst there is currently a broad balance between jobs and workers in Sevenoaks, there is no requirement for this to be the case.

To provide an estimate of the number of additional households if the housing targets are met, we have applied the national ratio of household formation/housing targets (184,000/300,000), which gives a ratio of 54.7%. So, 16,522 additional dwellings will generate an increase in households of 9.048.

Applying the current average household size for Sevenoaks of 2.64, gives an additional population of 22,259.

Applying the current proportion of population of working age (58.7%) and current economic activity rate (82.4%), produces an increase in the economically active population of 10.767 over the period 2026-41.

At present 41.7% of jobs in the District are estimated to be in B-class sectors. This would imply planning for an additional 4.490 jobs in B-Class sectors.

In order to provide an illustration of the amount of employment land that might be required to support this level of additional jobs we have used existing levels of employment. The preceding forecast and demand analysis would not support this level of growth, so this is set out more as a planning scenario. This is illustrated in Figure 6.12.

Figure 6.12 Alternative housing target scenario

Use sector	Per cent	Number	Density ratio (sq m per worker)	Net additional floorspace (sq m)	Land (ha) ¹¹
Manufacturing	5.9%	636	36	22,900	5.7
Other Industrial	6.5%	705	36	25,400	6.4
Distribution	6.2%	664	60	39,900	10.0
Office	23.0%	2,481	11.3	28,000	2.8
Total				116,200	24.9

¹¹ Using plot ratio of 1 for offices.

7.0 Update of 2022 Recommendations

7.1 The revised NPPF

The Government's revised NPPF sets out its planning policies and how these are expected to be applied. The changes include mandatory housing targets with increased targets in areas facing the highest levels of unaffordability and measures to ensure that local authorities develop or update local plans that cater to the needs of their communities. The changes also incorporate a priority to identify and prioritise lower-quality Grey Belt land to meet housing targets.

While mostly aimed at increasing housing provision, the changes also address economic planning and growth. The new Framework reinforces the presumption in favour of sustainable development, such that all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development to meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment and mitigate climate change.

The changes re-affirm the role of strategic planning, stating that strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places and make sufficient provision for homes (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development. This element of the NPPF underscores the importance of SDC dovetailing its policies for housing and employment provision to support integrated growth. The NPPF also calls for effective strategic co-operation between local authorities.

Finally the revised Guidance states that planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. These include clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries; storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations, and the expansion or modernisation of other industries of local, regional or national importance to support economic growth and resilience.

In light of changes to the NPPF, our 2022 Recommendations 1-3 remain unchanged.

Rec #1 *Work with neighbouring authorities to meet economic needs. This will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's broader development strategy and may involve an assessment of whether exceptional circumstances exist to justify the release of Green Belt land.*

Rec #2 *Retain commercial land and premises unless it can be demonstrated that the use is no longer feasible or viable.*

Rec #3 *Continue to work with rural landowners to develop a deeper understanding of the rural economy and the issues therein, in order to formulate specific policies that will encourage the growth and development of the rural economy, reflecting its key role in the District.*

7.2 Economic context and prior approvals

There have been no material changes to the regional or district economy since 2022. However, we re-iterate the comments we made regarding the scale and pace of change.

The economic, business and technological landscapes are evolving at accelerating rates, bringing in their wake enormous change and uncertainty. The combined

impact has led to enormous questions around the future of work, the future of the high street, the future of the office and the growth of logistics. And, of course, the knock-on from all of these is a rapidly evolving property market in terms of the nature and quantum of buildings needed going forward.

Given this, we continue to encourage Sevenoaks District to approach its employment land and buildings with flexibility and creativity, to respond to the great uncertainties in the economy. In this sense we repeat Recommendations 4 to 8.

Rec #4 *Seek, as a policy objective, to be a leader in sympathetic, deliverable and sustainable development.*

Rec #5 *Combine the various sites around J3 at Swanley into a single policy area, perhaps via a Special Policy Guidance, to bring forward comprehensive solutions.*

Rec #6 *Encourage development that gives visitors a reason to stay in the District, not just pass through. Start by providing more accommodation.*

Rec #7 *Provide policy guidance on decarbonising existing and new commercial building stock.*

Rec #8 *Beware of blue sky thinking, but welcome well thought out and evidence-led innovation.*

Furthermore, in order to address economic development and placemaking, we repeat, Recommendations 9 to 12.

Rec #9 *Recognise that farming is not, in itself, economically sustainable enough to effect protection of the rural character and natural beauty of the Green Belt and other protected areas. Support rural diversification that is consistent with other emerging policies in the Council's Local Plan.*

Rec #10 *Be open to mixed-use developments while guarding against such proposals being used as a backdoor way to bring about housing development.*

Rec #11 *Invite proposals to improve the sense of place and vitality of Swanley town centre.*

Rec #12 *Actively seek a way to rehabilitate and rejuvenate New Ash Green town centre.*

This update study did not review the Tourist Economy element of the 2022 study, and Recommendations 13-17 from the earlier study can be taken as remaining unchanged.

7.3 Commercial property market

There have been no material changes to the commercial property market since 2022. The single biggest event has been the resolution to the use of the ex-BT building on London Road, which means that Recommendation 19 can be disregarded.

In other areas, there remains a need for a more proactive approach to the provision of start-up and grow-on office space in Sevenoaks, Swanley and perhaps Edenbridge; along with a growing need for the District to protect and nurture the remaining concentrations of industrial property. There is also relatively strong demand for general industrial and logistics space in the District. We recommend that the Council seeks to find ways to

enhance provision particularly in the north of the District, while safeguarding space in Edenbridge and Westerham.

In terms of the 2022 recommendations, we repeat numbers 18, 20 and 21.

Rec #18 *In terms of the office market, take a more proactive approach to the provision of start-up and grow-on space in Sevenoaks, Swanley and perhaps Edenbridge, including the provision of affordable workspace.*

Rec #20 *In terms of the industrial market, seek to protect the integrity of the major concentrations of space by resisting any conversions to other uses. As with offices, we further recommend a more proactive approach to the provision of start-up space for maker businesses in Sevenoaks, Swanley and perhaps Edenbridge, including the provision of affordable workspace.*

Rec #21 *Work with neighbouring authorities to deal with demand for industrial and logistics space, particularly in the northern part of the District in and around Swanley.*

We have in this 2025 Update made a number of revisions to the Allocated Sites assessment.

7.4 Demand and supply forecasts

Overall, we conclude that there is need to find a small additional amount of land to accommodate forecast demand, but that further allocations may be required if existing consents do not materialise or there are further losses of employment land.

Provided there are no further losses of employment land and the existing consents are delivered then we recommend there is a requirement for an additional 2.6 ha of land for offices in town centre locations and an additional 3.7 ha of land for industrial activity. Additional allocations should be made equivalent to any existing consents that are not implemented, or there is uncertainty about whether they will be delivered in the Plan period.

Rec #22 *Identify and allocate a small area of additional land for employment use. In total this should be of the order of 6.3 ha, although the precise total will depend on site configuration, mix of uses and other factors.*

Rec #23 *Monitor gains and losses in employment use and vacancy rate to ensure planned land use allocations remain up-to-date and relevant.*