

## West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

## 12 Development Management Policies: Fostering Economic Growth and Supporting Local Communities

### Policy DM31

#### Designated Employment Areas

Designated Employment Areas (DEA), as defined on the Policies Map and listed in Appendix 4, are specific locations designated for business uses (office, industry, storage and distribution). These areas are safeguarded for such uses and for the role they play in meeting the future economic needs of the District.

The redevelopment and regeneration of land within DEAs to provide additional business development that meets the needs of the District will be supported.

Proposals for appropriate alternative employment generating uses which support and complement the primary function of DEAs will be considered favourably, subject to the application of the sequential test if required.

New office proposals located within a DEA will not be required to satisfy the sequential test.

Development which, either individually or cumulatively, would undermine the integrity or function of the DEA will not be permitted.

### Supporting Text

**12.1** Designated Employment Areas (DEA) are specific locations across the District designated for business uses/development providing a range of sites and locations to promote sustainable economic growth. These areas host a diverse range of businesses from large multi-national companies to small and medium sized enterprises (SME), all of which contribute to a strong and resilient local economy. Such areas contribute significantly to the supply of employment land across the District and provide further opportunities for regeneration and intensification of use. The aim of this policy is therefore to protect and strengthen the function and integrity of these areas.

**12.2** For the purposes of this Plan business uses/development are offices (Egi and Egii), industrial, storage and warehousing and distribution (Egiii/B2/B8), and the term employment land refers to the land on which these uses are located.

**12.3** The Local Plan designates a number of areas for business development, previously known as Protected Employment Areas (PEA), and through this Local Plan Review (LPR) these have been renamed DEA. The Council reviewed the designated areas, taking the Employment Land Review (ELR)<sup>(132)</sup> as the starting point in considering how each area performs including any key issues or opportunities, and any changes in circumstances, in particular where there has been a loss of office space to residential through permitted development rights, or new development adjacent to existing areas. This work also took into account allocations set out within this Plan and additional DEA designations.

**12.4** The Council's evidence (ELR 2020<sup>(133)</sup> and ELR 2022<sup>(134)</sup>) highlights high occupancy rates for industrial uses and high to moderate occupancy for office space and given the balance between supply and demand, the ELR recommends safeguarding all DEAs for business uses/development. It is important to safeguard the District's DEAs for the role they play in providing a supply of employment land to meet the existing and future needs of businesses. Maintaining a supply of employment land is essential to ensure the economic competitiveness of the District and to deliver sustainable economic growth.

**12.5** However, the Council does recognise the need to allow for some diversity of uses within DEA to create the right conditions for businesses to invest, expand and adapt and so the policy does allow for appropriate alternative employment generating uses to locate within DEAs where, subject to the sequential test if required, they are complementary to the existing business use in that location, support the primary function of the DEA, and individually and/or cumulatively would not undermine the integrity or function of the DEA.

132 Employment Land Review: <https://westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence#employment>

133 ELR 2020: <https://westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence#employment>

134 ELR 2022: <https://westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence#employment>

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**12.6** For the purposes of this policy appropriate alternative employment generating uses are those not classed as business uses within this Plan, but are uses that serve the businesses and employees in these locations and which support the function and operation of DEAs without compromising their integrity. Where such proposals would result in the loss of employment land and/or floorspace the applicant will be required to provide justification for the loss, including marketing evidence (minimum six months) to demonstrate that the site is no longer attractive for business uses. Each DEA has its own identity and the differing nature of the existing uses contributes to the individuality and function, and therefore it should be recognised that what is appropriate in one location may not be appropriate in another.

**12.7** The redevelopment and regeneration of DEAs to provide additional business development that meets the needs of the District will be supported to allow businesses to expand, attract inward investment and respond to modern business requirements.

**12.8** Changes in planning legislation in 2013 and in 2020 have reduced the Council's ability to protect the integrity of the District's DEAs as offices can be converted to residential under permitted development rights subject to a prior approval process. In addition, the changes to the Use Classes Order means offices now fall within Class E, and changes of use between the different uses within Class E do not constitute development and therefore do not require planning permission. The Council will monitor the DEAs and may consider the use of conditions and/or planning obligations to restrict permitted development rights on new development to ensure the integrity and function of a DEA is not undermined and to maintain the supply of employment land for business uses.

**12.9** The NPPF requires main town centre uses, which includes offices, to satisfy the sequential test. The sequential test ensures such uses are directed to town centres in the first instance, followed by edge of centre then out of centre sites where there are no sequentially preferable suitable or available sites. Given the DEAs are designated for business uses including offices, and in the interest of promoting a supply of office space to meet the District's future requirements, proposals for offices within DEAs will be exempt from the sequential test.

**12.10** This policy applies to all DEA across the District. A full list can be found at Appendix 4 and all DEAs are defined on the Policies Map.