



# **CASTLE POINT EMPLOYMENT SITE REVIEW**

**MAY 2024**

## **1. BACKGROUND: CASTLE POINT BOROUGH COUNCIL'S OBJECTIVES**

Castle Point commissioned Deyton Bell to undertake a review of existing and potential Employment sites across the Borough to inform the Local Plan process.

Site reviews are a critical element of plan making and support the wider objectives of preparing a Local Plan. The core objectives of this review included;

- Evaluating a range of sites across Castle Point, including existing Business Parks to establish their potential to accommodate employment growth or offer the opportunity for increased densification of uses
- Assessing likely site contribution to the economic development within the borough, in terms of accommodating new inward investment and creating new jobs.
- Reviewing each site's ability to be environmentally friendly (e.g. via public transport or design).
- Assessing potential site financial viability in terms of additional infrastructure costs/constraints.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Deyton Bell used 3 core methods to establish the potential for each site, these being

- A visit to each site to understand the context, local environment and assess options
- Consulted local property agents to assess potential demand and the type of demand that could be anticipated for employment sites across the Borough.
- A review of the sustainability contribution each site could make to the Borough's move toward Net Zero

The project was delivered between April and May 2024 with presentation provided to the Castle Point Plan Board on 16 May 2024.

The three elements were developed into an Assessment Model which established a hierarchy of sites, this included

- A review of each of the Borough's 4 major employment sites/ opportunities
  - Charfleets
  - Rayleigh Weir
  - Manor Trading Estate
  - North West Thundersley
- Identification of which of the smaller urban sites have the potential for commercial (re)development and;

The following sections review both of the categories.

### 3. CASTLE POINTS MAJOR SITES

#### i) Charfleets

The estate is situated on Canvey Island. The estate is an important part of the local economy and plays a significant role in the borough's economy. The estate is well-connected, with good transport links to the wider South Essex area, London, and other nearby locations. This makes it an attractive location for businesses.



The review identified that the Estate requires additional investment to upgrade its infrastructure and that there is an opportunity to expand the site beyond the current boundary. The site is currently dominated by cars parking across the estate, this will need to be resolved through improved public transport and active travel measures or delivery of a multi-storey car park.

The recent expansion of the nearby Thamesview130 site is offering 'grow-on' space for businesses. There have been instances by the Council's Economic Development Team where businesses have expanded from Charfleets to this new site.

There is however an opportunity to increase the density of commercial units in discrete areas of Charfleets and to replace decaying premises, although this will require careful choreography with existing tenants. The nearby Thamesview130 site offers the ability to help with this. Expansion of Charfleets will require delivery of new infrastructure, including road and utilities and may take 2-3 years to come forward. The estimated cost of this would be £15-20m<sup>1</sup>. Through consultation with local Property Agents there is demand for new space in the Charfleets area, this includes the landowner.

Charfleets offers the potential for a privately led extension which does not require public investment. This option is the most deliverable of the major sites in Castle Point.

#### ii) Stadium Way, Rayleigh Weir

Stadium Way, Rayleigh Weir Industrial Estate provides significant employment in Castle Point. The estate houses a large number of well-known companies. This makes it a significant business hub in the region. The estate is located south of the A127. It is set next to the Southend Arterial Road at the Rayleigh Weir junction, south of Rayleigh town centre. Rayleigh Weir also contains a neighbouring retail park which has added to the commercial value of the estate.

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<sup>1</sup> Propertypriceadvice.com

The review confirmed that Rayleigh Weir is a successful estate with excellent occupancy. There is however, limited scope to increase commercial space due to existing density in the area. There is the potential to increase densification with Sainsburys currently building a new multi-storey car park. This offers the opportunity to



increase density on the current surface parking uses in the area, which could be replaced with higher density mixed use. This could incorporate an element of employment use as a part of the establishment of a new local centre in the area. Should this option be pursued, much of the infrastructure is in place, there would be a need for demolition, re-routing of existing services. The estimated cost of this package would be £10-15m. While deliverable, the current major unknown factor is negotiation with Sainsburys over the purchase of their land. This presents an unknown cost, although it does present the opportunity for a joint venture.

### **iii) North West Thundersley**

North West Thundersley is a largely greenfield site which is adjacent to the A127. The site has highly fragmented land ownership, with it predominantly formed of “plotlands”. The site offers an opportunity for a new commercial estate but would require a full package of infrastructure investment required which would prove very expensive and would need national funding support to the site forward. Even with support, development would need to be delivered in phases and would require piecemeal land ownership resolving at the earliest opportunity.



### **iv) Manor Trading Estate**

Manor Trading Estate is a significant employment estate located in Castle Point, Essex, England. The estate is located in Benfleet. The estate houses a variety of businesses and is a significant business hub in Castle Point.



The review identified that high level occupancy on the estate providing good employment. The Estate however has poor quality infrastructure, particularly highways, which requires investment. There appears to be limited options for increased capacity and densification on site. However, there is an option to link through to the land at North West Thundersley, which could be the first phase of a wider site.



### **Major sites: Conclusion**

The major sites all offer potential however in each case significant financial investment will be required to support the existing infrastructure and create new space by expanding beyond the existing boundaries. The Charfleets Estate offers the most investable proposition, with potentially less funding required to enable expansion when compared to the other sites (the Assessment of the Major Sites can be found at Annex 1).

All four sites are worthy of further exploration. The Council will need to be creative in dealing with existing tenants, some of whom may need to be temporarily relocated while tired premises are removed and new, modern facilities built. This presents a challenge to the Council, that in relocating tenants they are not tempted to relocate, potentially outside of the Borough on a permanent basis. This needs to be considered and a carefully developed package in place before discussions with business leaders take place. The land at North West Thundersley offers significant growth opportunities but will also require significant investment. In Deyton Bell's view, this site will only come forward with national support. The Council may wish to consider how the site could be developed as mixed use, with some housing elements considered.

## **4. SMALLER DEVELOPABLE SITES**

Some sites were identified as having potential for some kind of employment use through redevelopment. These sites were typically located in and around the Town Centres of Castle Point's four towns. The sites were assessed against key criteria including, proximity to public transport, ability to attract employment uses, the condition of the existing use or land, the likely demand that may come forward, the ability for the site to offer new employment for the Borough's residents, and the infrastructure currently available on site. The review identified that some sites offer;

- Sustainable transport options
- Potential for offices/workshops with potential to add residential units above
- Limited infrastructure requirements as much of it is in place
- An opportunity to redevelop tired and decaying units
- Potential to create new jobs in the Borough
- Potential to help deliver on two Local Plan priorities, jobs and homes

Each of the 4 towns offer sites that can accommodate commercial uses within the Town Centre. There is an opportunity for the council to accommodate the operation of business activity within the Town Centres, either as standalone units, effectively in-fill or within mixed use development with commercial activity located beneath residential units. This approach will require effective policy on noise and nature of commercial waste generated.

There are an increasing number of employment uses being located under residential units. The three examples below demonstrate how this has been accommodated in other locations. The key to success is enabling good quality design. This has an impact on financial viability as these units typically cost more, however the better the design, the increased chances of securing business occupancy and new residents.

There is an increasing move to a wider number of uses being located on ground floor. There is growing evidence of light manufacturing and 'maker' space beneath residential units. This concept is part of a new, integrated typology that brings homes and jobs together to create spaces where people can live and work alongside each other<sup>1</sup>.

Light industrial properties, which include spaces for assembly, production, and storage of goods, often have less environmental impact than heavy industry. For this reason, zoning laws are more likely to permit light industry near residential areas<sup>2</sup>

Common examples of industries that use light manufacturing properties are food packing, furniture production, plastic moulding and bottling. These types of businesses don't cause too much noise, allowing them to stay near neighbourhoods compared to heavy manufacturing properties<sup>3</sup>.

The permitted development order introduced in the UK in 2016 allows a change of use of light industrial units to residential dwellings to take place without the need to apply for planning permission. This could spur interest in creating residential and light industrial neighbourhoods.

The examples overleaf below demonstrate.

- Nottingham has sought to attract a wider range of uses beneath its residential units, the example set out overleaf is a Furniture packing firm on the edge of the city centre.
- Penrith, the previous Eden District Council approved the 'New Squares' Shopping area in 2012. After 5 years stakeholders, including Sainsburys acting as landowner, recognised that retail uses were not likely to come forward. Stakeholders sought to combine three units into high quality office space. This succeeded in attracting National Highways North West regional office into the town, rather than some of the bigger, more traditional city locations in the region.
- Elgin, Moray Council has managed to attract new uses to its mixed use developments, The example overleaf is now housing a small Plastic Moulding company beneath residential units.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://aecom.com/without-limits/article/why-mixing-residential-and-light-industrial-is-good-for-our-cities/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://phoenixandpartners.co.uk/what-is-considered-industrial-property/>

The range of uses is relatively endless, in many senses we are moving back to pre-war arrangements where commercial activity beneath residential was more commonplace. The conditions to have in mind in a policy context are noise and commercial waste.

Picture 1: Nottingham



Picture 2: Penrith



Picture 3: Elgin

While the concept of accommodating commercial uses under residential development is not new – and Castle Point has a number of examples of this, there is an opportunity to increase densification through a renewed approach to this type of development. Two solutions are currently prominent across the country.

- **Horizontal Mixed-Use Development:**

Horizontal mixed-use development refers to each building having its own designated use. More often a single use, but within a complex. In some cases, it can be a development with buildings where each is assigned to a specific use. This complex could contain a mix of buildings of different uses (residential, retail, office building, and entertainment or leisure uses, for example). This approach typically works within larger residential complexes.

There can also be sports facilities, parks, and green spaces inside the complex. This type of mixed-use development will contain some public spaces that are open to all and some private spaces as well. This is usually the preferred choice for sites with significant land to spare.

- **Vertical Mixed-Use Development:**

The vertical type of mixed-use development has many uses in one. Different floors in the vertical mixed-use development have different uses. For example, restaurants and shops on

the ground floor, and office spaces added to the ground floor or the first floor. Residential spaces usually take up the top floor(s) area. Vertical mixed-use developments generally include a public space. This is a place where all occupants of the building can come together for some cooperation or connection. This approach enables a series of wider benefits to accrue through community activity. This may include reduced social isolation or loneliness, an increase in volunteering and the development of skills among volunteers, better understanding of the social assets within the local community. This may also have a positive impact on the Council with less reliance on frontline services and reduced duplication of services.

This type of development brings life into the area and encourages more development of public spaces. This type of mixed-use development is often found in areas, such as Castle Point where land is in short supply and at a premium.

## **5. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL IN DEVELOPING THE LOCAL PLAN**

This Local Plan comes at an important time for the Council. There are a number of macro issues that need to be factored in to thinking, including Climate Change and the UK's economic fortunes and changes that have occurred to Office use and the role of homeworking since the pandemic. These issues concern;

- Castle Point is a dense urban area and there is limited unused land for potential new employment uses. The Council will need to be innovative to create new employment floorspace, and work with existing tenanted businesses to create...
- The Council will need to decide which path to take, whether Castle Point will gradually become a commuter dormitory or whether it can use the Local Plan to grow the economy and encouraging employment for residents by offering a high quality environment for businesses to be attracted to, and invest in.
- The shift in work patterns due to the pandemic need consideration, there will be less need for traditional office space as businesses reduce their in-house liabilities, while retail is also changing across the country's High Streets as more trade moves online. Castle Point is experiencing this change too. The trend around retail closures has not concluded, and we can expect further closures over the plan period.
- The Major sites can all support an increase in employment growth by elements of densification, however all will require significant investment to bring the current infrastructure up to modern standards. Both Charfleets and Manor Trading offer opportunities to expand the footprint of the existing Estate, but will require significant financial investment if this is to be achieved
- The smaller sites offer options to develop on brownfield land in and around the Borough's Town Centres. These sites offer a key advantage as these site will require limited infrastructure as it is currently in place.
- The development of the Local Plan will require the Council to take a brave approach to identify the sites which offer solutions which the business community will take advantage of. Importantly, a number of the sites, in particularly the Major Sites, will require local and, in North West Thundersley's case national investment to support the development of the site.