

Planning & Development Committee Report Cover:

Report name:

Review of Article 4 Directions and Employment Sites in Stevenage

Officer(s) presenting:

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Reason for it being before Planning & Development Committee:

To provide Members with a summary of the new arrangements imposed by Government relating to planning use class changes, and change of use from commercial and employment use to residential use, via permitted development rights.

To give Members an overview of the existing Article 4 Directions the Borough has in place.

To provide Members an outline of the key employment sites in the Borough and emerging work to identify opportunities for protection of employment space into the future.

That Members note the extended period that the existing Article 4 Directions in Stevenage are in force and to agree to develop the emerging evidence base relating to employment sites.

It is recommended that the Executive note the extended period that existing Article 4 Directions in Stevenage are in force, to 31 July 2022, relating to change of use from light industrial to residential use and change of use from office to residential use. It is also recommended that the Executive agree that the evidence base relating to employment sites in the Borough be developed to support the existing Article 4 Directions and further support protection of employment space in the Borough.

The comments of the Planning & Development Committee are invited regarding the content of the report before it goes to Executive.

In May 2013, the Government announced a series of planning reforms in order to make the process easier to secure residential development, through “permitted development rights”. A permitted development right is the carrying out of certain types of work or development, without needing to apply for planning permission.

From this date, various changes of use can be made without the need for a formal planning consent. The most prominent of these was from office, commercial and employment use (previous Use Class B1) to residential use (Use Class C3).

As a response to these reforms, many local authorities across the country began to designate areas to protect against the loss of office, commercial and employment space to residential areas. This

included imposing Article 4 Directions on additional areas in which the local authority deemed worthy of additional protection from change of use from office, commercial and employment to residential.

An Article 4 Direction is a Direction under Article 4 of the General Permitted Development Order by which a local planning authority can bring within planning control certain types of development, or changes of use, which would normally be “permitted development” (i.e. not require an application for planning permission).

There have, however, been two recent Government announcements:

1. On 1 September 2020, the Government made a series of changes to the “Use Classes Order”, which categorises different types of building uses for planning purposes such as applications to change the use of a building.
2. On 31 March 2021, the Government announced new rules allowing commercial premises to be converted into homes, through a “prior approval” process, from 1 August 2021. This is part of a package of measures to “revitalise” high streets and town centres. Where there is an existing Article 4 Direction in force as at 31 July 2021 in respect of the change of use from offices to residential, it will continue to have effect until 31 July 2022.

Stevenage currently has three Article 4 Directions in force, two of which remove permitted development rights for changes of use from office and light industrial to residential use.

In addition to the Article 4 Directions in force, the Planning Policy team is progressing work on Employment Sites. This work highlights the designated employment sites in the Stevenage Borough Local Plan as well as any vacant employment sites, to show the potential for maximising commercial and employment space in the Borough and seek to future-proof space for likely future demand for grow-on space. This will seek to strengthen the argument for protecting Stevenage’s employment land from change to alternative uses, such as residential, into the future.

Other briefings:

Senior Leadership Team (15th June 2021)

Clearance Board (25th June 2021)

Executive (14th July 2021)

Overview & Scrutiny Committee (22nd July 2021)

Likely next steps:

It may be necessary that there will need to be amendments to wording on the Council’s website relating to Article 4 Directions, to reflect the changes in Use Classes Order from September 2020 and the Government announcements from March 2021.

Officers will continue to develop the Council’s employment evidence base to provide a strong a position as possible to protect employment sites in the future – from potential conversion to other uses.

