Economic and Employment Needs Assessment

Appendix B – Site assessment approach

June 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 This Appendix is in support of the Huntingdonshire Economic and Employment Needs Assessment. Specifically, the Appendix complements the supply assessment within Section 10 of the main report. The Appendix sets out the approach to the assessment of, firstly the Established Employment Areas, and secondly the potential future supply sites, given these methodologies differ slightly. For each of the respective assessments, the indicators which comprise the domains for Red-Amber-Green (RAG) assessment are set out and justified.

2. Established Employment Areas

Assessment criteria

2.1 The RAG assessment employs the use of four domains which aim to capture the range of conditions and characteristics of the Established Employment Areas to allow for comparison of their relative performance and appropriateness as allocations. The domains selected are:

- **Neighbour interactions and compatibility**: this domain relates to the appropriateness of the site in comparison to neighbouring potentially sensitive land uses, and therefore how compatible the use of the site is;
- **Accessibility and functional suitability**: employment sites require the movement of people and goods as part of their functioning, therefore this domain describes how accessible and suitable the EEA is in that regard;
- **Strategic fit and opportunity**: this domain considers how the ongoing use of the EEA contributes to economic development aspirations and capitalise on new infrastructure; and
- **Physical condition and infrastructure**: this domain considers the physical qualities of the existing employment floorspace.

Table 1 - Each of the domains which are assessed are comprised of a number of indicators

Domain	Indicators	Rationale
Neighbour interactions and compatibility	Proximity to sensitive land uses	Some sensitive uses (schools, parks, cemeteries, residences) are not compatible with the types of activities and environmental impacts of some employment uses. For EEAs this considers those sensitive uses which are directly adjacent.
	Negative effects on surrounding land uses	Employment uses should not negatively impact on surrounding land uses where possible.
	Suitability for 24 hour working	The ability for some employment uses to work 24/7 is a key operational requirement and employment sites should be located in places that facilitate/do not inhibit this, where relevant to the particular industrial activities undertaken.

Domain	Indicators	Rationale
Accessibility and functional suitability	Access to road network	Access to the SRN/MRN is favourable for the facilitation of goods and workforce.
	Parking adequacy	The site should have sufficient parking in relation to its accessibility by alternative means, and in proportion to the levels of employment being supported.
	Public transport accessibility	Sites which can be accessed via public transport is conducive to sustainable transport.
	Active travel	Sites which facilitate active travel are conducive to achieving sustainable development and health ambitions.
	Vacancy	Very high levels of vacancy are suggestive of unsuitable stock or low demand.
	Recent loss to alternative uses	The fragmentation of land parcels through development of alternative uses could threaten the functional suitability of the site to support employment in future.
Strategic fit and opportunity	Physical constraints and opportunities for expansion	Sites which have the potential to expand in future allow for flexible growth and ability to adapt/respond to demand
	Opportunities for redevelopment and intensification	The likelihood of future (increased) employment floorspace coming forward is indicative of ongoing suitability of the site for employment use.
	Interactions with new infrastructure	Sites which can benefit from, or capitalise on, new infrastructure projects through unlocking of functions, align with wider development trajectory.
Physical condition and infrastructure	Average age of buildings	Buildings which are ageing may be unsuitable for supporting modern occupier requirements.
	Average quality of buildings	Buildings which are of low quality may be unsuitable for supporting modern occupier requirements.
	Loading facilities	Some employment uses require loading facilities to support their industrial functions.
	Sustainability credentials and future capacity	Sustainable buildings are increasingly sought after and required by emerging policy on MEES.

2.2 To assess the relative performance of each of the EEAs, scores are awarded against each of the indicators based on quantitative and qualitative appraisal. A weighting to each indicator is applied reflecting its perceived contribution/importance to the overall theme of the domain. These scores are then combined to

give an overall score for the domain. The standard deviation of these scores is then analysed to produce the 'bins' for the overall red, amber or green rating to be assigned.

3. Potential future supply

Assessment criteria

3.1 The assessment of potential future supply sites has been designed to mirror that for existing sites, although is adapted to reflect that in many cases these sites have not yet come forward for employment use, and therefore have slightly different applicable characteristics. A framework for the site analysis has been developed, ranking sites within three key domains (broadly similar to the existing sites assessment) relevant for the successful delivery of employment floorspace. Each of these factors considers a number of underlying indicators, with an overall ranking provided for each factor on the combined basis of the underlying indicators.

3.2 The domains ranked within the framework, and the considerations making up each of the factors are as follows:

- **Neighbourhood interactions and compatibility**: this domain takes into account the proximity of (potential) future supply locations to sensitive uses whereby activities could result in a negative impact. It also takes into account the proximity of sites to existing development and areas of deprivation where employment opportunities have the potential to result in positive impacts.
- **Accessibility and functional suitability**: this domain assesses how accessible the site is and takes into account how the Land Availability Assessments finds the site to be in terms of suitability, availability, achievability, and deliverability.
- **Strategic fit and strategic opportunity**: this domain measures the potential of the site to capitalise on existing and forthcoming infrastructure projects and emerging economic opportunities for Huntingdonshire.

Table 2 – Factors considered in this framework

Domain	Underlying indicators	Rationale
Neighbourhood interactions and compatibility	Contiguous development	Favouring sites near existing built-up areas supports compact, sustainable development that efficiently uses infrastructure and limits countryside encroachment.
	Proximity to sensitive land uses	Sensitive land uses considered include schools, cemeteries, parks, religious grounds, play space, and allotments among others. Sites further from schools reduce potential conflicts with sensitive land uses, such as noise, traffic, or safeguarding issues during construction and operation. Distance from publicly valued and sensitive open spaces reduces risks of community opposition and protects the amenity value of these areas.

Domain	Underlying indicators	Rationale
	Adjacency to areas of deprivation	Sites closer to areas of deprivation are well-placed to deliver inclusive employment opportunities and socio-economic uplift to communities most in need.
Accessibility and functional suitability	Access to SRN	Proximity to key road corridors supports freight and commuting efficiency, especially for logistics and manufacturing sectors which are important to the district.
	Existing public transport accessibility	Close proximity to public transport improves site accessibility, supports modal shift away from car use, and aligns with net-zero goals.
	Previous assessment score	Incorporating the Council's prior assessment of suitability, availability, achievability, and deliverability ensures alignment with local planning judgement and helps prioritise sites with a realistic prospect of development.
Strategic fit and strategic opportunity	Proximity to existing development sites	Sites adjacent to existing employment areas can enable logical extension of business clusters and benefit from shared infrastructure and agglomeration.
	Proximity to planned nationally significant infrastructure projects, infrastructure improvements, and East West Rail	Sites closer to future infrastructure investments are strategically positioned to benefit from improved connectivity and economic uplift.
	Proximity to the planned Universal Studios Bedford	Sites nearer to this major new economic hub are better positioned to benefit from supply chain activity and regional economic spillovers.
	Proximity to strategic scale housing developments in Huntingdonshire and neighbouring local authorities	Locating employment sites near major housing growth areas maximises access to labour supply and enables cross-boundary commuting opportunities.

How these metrics are assessed

3.3 The indicators in the assessment have been designed to be quantifiable using spatial analysis. GIS has been utilised for this purpose. The respective scores against each of the metrics considered are combined to give an overall RAG rating per domain. The table below outlines the sources used to map these items, and any considerations that must be taken into account.

Table 3 – Sources used to map respective metrics

Metric	Source
Contiguous development	Office for National Statistics, 2025. Built Up Areas (December 2024) Boundaries EW BGG.

Metric	Source
Proximity to sensitive land uses	Department for Education, 2025. Get Information about Schools. Ordnance Survey, 2025. OS Open Greenspace.
Adjacency to areas of deprivation	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019. English indices of deprivation 2019.
Access to strategic road network	National Highways, 2025. Network Model.
Existing public transport accessibility	UK GOV, 2025. Download National Public Transport Access Nodes (NaPTAN) data.
Previous assessment score	Huntingdonshire District Council. Land Availability Assessment.
Proximity to existing development sites	Existing employment locations shapefile provided by Huntingdonshire District Council.
Proximity to planned nationally strategic infrastructure projects, infrastructure improvements, and East West Rail	Planning Inspectorate, 2025. Projects. East West Rail, 2025. Route update.
Proximity to the planned Universal Studios Bedford	Universal Destinations and Experiences, 2025. Universal UK Project.
Proximity to strategic scale housing developments in neighbouring local authority areas	Huntingdonshire District Council, 2019. Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036. Peterborough City Council, 2019. Peterborough Local Plan 2016 to 2016. Fenland District Council, 2014. Fenland Local Plan. North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit, 2016. North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011 – 2031. Bedford Borough Council, 2020. Local Plan 2030. Bedford Borough Council, 2022. Local Plan 2040 Plan for submission. Central Bedfordshire, 2021. Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015 – 2035. South Cambridgeshire District Council, 2018. South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018. East Cambridgeshire District Council, 2015. East Cambridgeshire Local Plan.

3.4 **Table 4** provides a breakdown of the criteria by which the underlying indicators under each domain in this assessment are assessed. Each site is assigned a RAG score for each underlying indicator.

3.5 Each potential employment site has been assessed for each domain using three or four underlying indicators. These underlying indicators use a RAG scoring system. To generate an overall RAG rating for the domain, each underlying indicator is converted into a numerical score (Green = 1, Amber = 2, Red = 3), and the average of these scores is calculated. Sites with an average score of 1.75 or below are assigned an overall Green rating, those between 1.76 and 2.4 are Amber, and those above 2.4 are Red. There is a weighting towards Green rankings to highlight the sites with legitimate potential, rather than narrowly eliminating those sites with only minor weaknesses. This approach should support a proactive planning stance, aligned with national policy ambitions, outlined in the newly authored National Planning Policy

Framework.[1] This slight weighting towards Green rankings also accounts for uncertainty. Red and Amber scores reflect current conditions that are capable of mitigation over time.

3.6 Every underlying indicator is given equal weighting in contributing to the overall RAG score for each domain. This is because all underlying metrics are considered important at this stage. This reflects the early-stage nature of these sites and the need for balanced, well-rounded performance across all assessment areas. Given the large pool of potential employment sites in Huntingdonshire, this approach ensures that only those demonstrating consistent strength across multiple criteria are prioritised for safeguarding or allocation through the Local Plan. The slight weighting towards green provided in the overall domain RAG score mitigates against over-penalisation that may occur as a result of poor performance on one underlying indicator, especially when the broader picture is positive.

3.7 It is important to note that the assessment of the potential future supply is limited to the indicators and domains under consideration and that there will be a number of other factors and evidence base studies which will inform their appraisal by HDC in the round. The overall rating does therefore not indicate that a site necessarily will be further protected, but the evidence shown represents a starting point for further consideration.

[1] MHCLG, 2024. National Planning Policy Framework

Table 4 - Criteria by which underlying indicators are assessed

Domain	Underlying indicator	Rationale	Green	Amber	Red
Neighbourhood interactions and compatibility	Contiguous development	This metric favours sites that are adjacent to near or existing settlements to support compact, logical expansion, minimise the loss of green land, and align with sustainable land use objectives.	**≤ 250 metres** These sites are judged to be located nearby existing built-up areas.	**> 250 metres to ≤ 750 metres** These sites are judged to be located within a moderate proximity to built-up areas.	**> 750 metres** These sites are considered as distanced from existing built up areas.
	Proximity to sensitive land uses - schools	Preference is given to sites that do not have the potential to negatively impact schools. Schools are fairly evenly distributed, therefore this method will still produce a natural spread, while highlighting outliers near schools.	**≥ 1.5 km** This threshold distinguishes those genuinely distant sites that should be clearly preferred.	**0.5 – 1.49 km** This captures sites will not necessarily cause direct disruption to schools, but are located relatively nearby.	**< 0.5 km** This threshold captures the sites where construction noise, traffic, or land use change could cause the most concern.
	Proximity to sensitive land uses – green space	The OS Greenspace shapefile covers several sensitive uses such as parks, cemeteries, playgrounds, and tennis courts. A greater distance is favourable. Some urban clusters are naturally closer to areas of green space. This threshold therefore flags the most potentially problematic cases and does not penalise normal proximity.	**≥ 0.75 km** This threshold provides a strong buffer from sensitive uses, limiting the risk of disturbance.	**0.25 – 0.74 km** This represents sites that are within moderate proximity to areas of green space. Disturbance would be management with light mitigation measures.	**< 0.25 km** This threshold ensures the closest sites are flagged as Red due to adjacency concerns. These sites have the potential to cause disturbance through noise, traffic, and visual impacts.

Domain	Underlying indicator	Rationale	Green	Amber	Red
	Adjacency to areas of deprivation	This aims metric aims to support include growth by prioritising sites that are closer to deprived communities. Sites do not need to be ranked poorly just because other sites are closer. If many sites are in deprived areas, many sites should score well.	**≤ 3.0 km** These sites are well-positioned to serve deprived communities.	**> 3.0 to ≤ 6.0 km** These sites are within reasonable reach, but not optimal.	**> 6.0 km** These sites would be considered remote from deprived areas and would be unlikely to deliver community benefits directly.
Accessibility and functional suitability	Access to SRN	This metric aims to favour sites with easy access to the SRN, which improves commercial attractiveness, reduces further infrastructure needs. The lower the distance the better.	**≤ 2.0 km** This illustrates strong logistics connectivity with minimal further infrastructure investment needed.	**> 2.0 km to ≤ 3.5 km** This is an acceptable distance with some potential mitigation required. Some access investment may be required.	**> 3.5 km** These sites would be deemed as having poor access. Substantial improvements to road infrastructure required.
	Existing public transport accessibility	To promote sustainable, accessible employment locations, sites that are nearby public transport access nodes are favourable.	**≤ 0.5 km** This represents excellent access, with sites approximately a 5 – 7 minute walk.	**> 0.5 km to ≤ 1.0 km** This represents an acceptable, however not ideal walking distance to the site from the closest public transport access node.	**> 1.0 km** Weak public transport access. Sites over 1km from public transport access nodes are likely to encourage car dependence.
	Previous assessment score	Incorporating the Council's prior assessment of suitability, availability, achievability, and deliverability ensures alignment with local planning judgement	Under the four assessment areas of suitability, availability, achievability, and deliverability the council has previously assigned these sites RAG ratings. This assessment provides a score of 3 for each green rating, 2 for each amber rating, and 1 for every red rating. Each site is then given		

Domain	Underlying indicator	Rationale	Green	Amber	Red
		and helps prioritise sites with a realistic prospect of development.	an overall score out of 12 and assigned a resultant overall RAG rating based on where it ranks on average relative to the full cohort of sites.		
Strategic fit and strategic opportunity	Proximity to existing development sites	This metric prioritises sites that that are close to existing employment uses, supporting strategic expansion of current employment sites. The lower the value here the better. Because many sites are close, these thresholds reward all sites within a functional expansion range.	**≤ 2.5 km** These represent strong expansion potential. There are chances for shared infrastructure use.	**> 2.5 to ≤ 5.0 km** These sites are deemed to be within practical but not optimal reach of existing employment ecosystems.	**> 5.0 km** These sites would be deemed peripheral to existing employment ecosystems. They would require standalone infrastructure and new cluster formation.
	Proximity to planned nationally significant infrastructure projects, infrastructure improvements, and East West Rail	This metric prioritises sites that will benefit from upcoming infrastructure investment, particularly where those improvements enhance market appeal and accessibility. The lower the distance the better.	**≤ 2.5 km** Sites are well-positioned to benefit directly from planned strategic investment. These sites are within the 'first-catchment' of improvement. The proximity here can amply benefits associated with the sites.	**> 2.5 to ≤ 6.0 km** These sites may benefit indirectly or require further enabling works.	**> 6.0 km** This threshold isolates the true outliers who will miss out on the benefits on planned infrastructure investments.
	Proximity to the planned	This metric prioritises sites that are better placed to benefit from supply chain and labour market impacts associated with the	**≤30 km**	**> 30 km to ≤ 42 km**	**>42 km**

Domain	Underlying indicator	Rationale	Green	Amber	Red
	Universal Studios Bedford	large scale employment opportunity forthcoming with the arrival of Universal Studios Bedford. As the scheme is in Bedford, no sites are close, but some are noticeably less far and therefore better placed.	This captures the best-positioned sites relative to a regional game-changer. While not "close" in urban terms, they're the best relative options in Huntingdonshire.	These sites are deemed to have moderate access and are likely to benefit indirectly.	These sites are likely to be beyond practicable labour catchments and unlikely to benefit significantly without future supporting infrastructure.
	Proximity to strategic scale housing developments in Huntingdonshire and neighbouring local authorities	This metric prioritises sites that are well positioned to access the new labour supply that will come with the delivery of surrounding strategic scale housing developments. Most sites are quite far away with few sites located nearby a strategic scale housing development.	**≤ 5.0 km** These sites are in close proximity to major housing and labour pool growth. They have the opportunity of capitalising on the cross boundary opportunity.	**> 5.0 km to ≤ 10.0 km** Will likely benefit somewhat from new large labour pools, but in a limited capacity.	**> 10.0 km** At this distance, even car based commuting is less attractive without major transport links.

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