‘Meeting Demands for Employment Land and Premises in South East Dorset’
Dudsbury Golf Course
Tuesday 24th October 2006

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The following questions were addressed during discussion sessions run at an event organised by South East Dorset local authorities to examine future requirements for employment land and premises. The points raised in the discussion sessions will help to inform the employment land review process currently being undertaken by local authorities in South East Dorset.

2.0 What types of sites and premises will be required to meet the future needs of businesses in the conurbation?

Accurately assessing requirements

2.1 The employment land review process needs to accurately assess requirements for individual business sectors and to determine capacity for employment land development across the sub region. The requirements of all business sectors and priority sectors in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) need to be adequately assessed.
(RES priority sectors: Advanced Engineering, ICT, Marine, Food and Drink, Tourism, Creative industries, Environmental technologies, Bio-medical)

General requirements for sites and premises

2.2 A requirement for a choice of sites was identified to meet the needs of a diverse range of business sectors. Units in a range of sizes are required to enable businesses to expand. The provision of nursery / incubation units and larger “grow-space” is seen as essential to facilitate incremental growth. A particular need for high quality office space was recognised.

2.3 Employment sites need to be able to accommodate a variety of employment uses (B1, B2 & B8). Mixes of employment uses may include multi-storey offices, affordable workspace and warehousing. There is a particular demand in the sub region for smaller premises in the range of 150 – 250sqm.

Locational requirements

2.4 It was considered that the business parks located across the conurbation were failing to meet the infrastructure needs of emerging sectors. There needs to be a fundamental upgrading of infrastructure on existing sites, alternatively land should be allocated elsewhere that provides the necessary infrastructure. In order to attract inward investment there is a necessity to provide employment land that is immediately available with the appropriate infrastructure.

2.5 Examples of specific locational requirements for individual business sectors include:

- Aerospace – airside access
- Marine sector – waterside access
- Distribution – access to strategic highway network

2.6 Proximity to transport infrastructure is a common locational requirement for a number of business sectors represented in the sub region.

2.7 Employment sites are required that provide good connectivity with the South East. Without good accessibility between regions investment is likely to remain concentrated in the South East. It is still considered valid to market the South Coast (South Coast Metropole Area).

3.0 How and where can these needs be met?

3.1 This section sets out issues raised concerning current constraints in meeting demands for employment land and premises in South East Dorset. The constraints section is followed by measures identified to address these needs.

Issues constraining future employment development

3.2 The following constraints on existing employment sites and the provision of new sites were raised:

- Infrastructure
- Greenbelt
- Environmental designations.
- Political opposition
- Permitted scale of new development

3.3 Poole and Bournemouth recognise the need for the provision of new employment land. However, the issue of perceived political opposition to the allocation of employment development sites in designated Green Belt locations was raised. This was also linked to a perceived lack of

political willingness to understand and address the employment development needs of the South East Dorset sub region.

3.4 The scale of development permitted by planning authorities is very significant, particularly with the current shortage of available employment land. Height restrictions applied to new development is seen as a significant issue and regarded as a major factor in the loss of investment to other areas.

Competing demands for land

3.5 Demand for residential development has placed pressure on existing employment sites and the provision of new employment land. The level of housing proposed in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy poses issues for bringing forward the quantity of employment land required to support sustainable economic development. There is a need to strike the right balance in the provision of new housing and employment land. The shortage of available employment land and premises is pushing investment out of the sub region into the South East where there are far greater resources of employment land.

Barriers to business growth

3.6 Over Regulation was seen as one of the biggest issues preventing the growth of local business. It was noted that changes in government policy could assist the growth of companies, particularly small and medium sized enterprises.

4.0 Measures to Meet Need

General land provision

4.1 In broad terms, a need was expressed for the provision of a number of larger employment sites of the approximate size and scale of Ferndown Industrial Estate to meet requirements over the next 20 years.

Making best use of urban sites

4.2 The shortage of employment land in the South East Dorset Sub Region illustrates the importance of making best use of urban sites / brownfield sites, particularly in respect of achieving higher densities of development and looking at the potential for the redevelopment and recycling of existing sites and premises.

4.3 The shortage of sites also pointed toward the need to consider Greenfield options. In particular it was suggested that extensions to existing employment sites be considered which could involve Greenfield development. The release of Greenfield land was seen as particularly significant for the economic growth of the region.

Funding for infrastructure provision

4.4 In order to meet the infrastructure requirements of businesses appropriate levels of funding need to be obtained. The following sources of funding were discussed as a means of delivering infrastructure:

- Regional fund for infrastructure
- Contributions from new housing provision
- EU cohesion funding – to support the 'competitiveness agenda' and rural diversification

Creating an attractive place to live

4.5 The quality of the local environment and the provision of good quality public facilities act as an incentive to attract people to live and work in the local area.

4.6 The lack of affordable market housing in South East Dorset is a deterrent in attracting key workers to live and work in the local area. There is also the issue of the quality of the existing housing stock and the supply of housing. The provision of appropriate levels of housing can be addressed through the planning system.

High quality employment opportunities

4.7 There is a recognised need for a greater range of high quality employment opportunities in the sub region. At present there is also a mismatch between skills and jobs with a shortage of appropriately skilled workers. Further investment is required to raise skill levels to assist economic growth.

Local development framework employment policies

4.8 Panning and the political climate could be more 'creative' in taking the necessary steps to enable the sub region to be more economically competitive. The primary focus needs to concern the provision of sufficient employment land served by the necessary infrastructure.

4.9 Reference was made to the need for planning to adopt a more joined up approach to address requirements for employment land, residential land, transport infrastructure and the provision of facilities.

4.10 It was felt that LDF policies should not be overly prescriptive with regard to employment uses. The changing nature of the market poses potential issues for employment policies becoming outdated. However, the need for some level of prescription was noted in order to promote the requirements of key business sectors and complementary clusters of employment development.

4.11 A requirement for greater flexibility in employment policies was noted. Flexibility in land use allocations would allow for necessary onsite facilities that don't fall under the traditional employment land use classes. E.g. gym facilities. Future employment allocations need to be realistic and realisable in respect of the businesses that can be attracted to the local area.

4.12 Increased confidence needs to be generated amongst the business community with regard to the ability of the planning process and new local development frameworks to create favourable conditions for investment.

Governance structures

4.13 The nature of existing governance structures in South East Dorset was raised as an issue potentially restricting a co-ordinated approach. Potential was identified for a single unitary authority to plan effectively for the future of South East Dorset.

Transport policy

4.14 The requirement for local authority run and publicly subsidised transport services was identified to provide the necessary links between residential and employment areas.

4.15 Travel plans requested from employment developments need to be 'realistic' and tailored to specific business types.

5.0 Site Specific Discussions

Complementary clusters of employment

5.1 The need was expressed to maintain existing complementary clusters of employment development such as aerospace clusters located at Bournemouth International Airport (BIA).

5.2 BIA represents the vast majority of remaining allocated employment land for the sub region and is highly significant in facilitating the economic growth of South East Dorset. However, due to infrastructure constraints the majority of land is only available in the medium to long term. Specific focus is required on overcoming these constraints to enable land to come forward.

5.3 The Airport is also significant in bringing in tourists to the local area and the contribution this makes to the local economy and job creation.

5.4 Areas identified in discussion groups as suitable for employment development:

i. Holton Heath (This site is strategically placed to serve the needs of the conurbation)

ii. Blunts Farm (Only Greenfield allocation to be included in the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West)

iii. North Bournemouth – Yeomans Road (Demand has been noted for new sites specifically within the Bournemouth area)

iv. Poole Bridge Regeneration Area

v. Winfrith - The potential of a science park at Winfrith has been considered however, it is not a site that can serve the needs of the conurbation.

vi. Possible MOD land in Purbeck

vii. Windfall developments

viii. Areas of search for the RSS can be considered for mixed use with an employment element.

6.0 How is the present supply of employment land in the sub region meeting business needs?

6.1 The present supply of employment land and premises was generally seen as not meeting existing and future requirements. It was also noted that demand is commensurate with the quality of available premises and the provision of the appropriate infrastructure. In this respect there is significant scope for increased demand for land and premises in the region with improvements in premises and infrastructure provision.

6.2 A significant number of businesses in South East Dorset have been compromised by the lack of available employment land fulfilling their desired locational requirements. The manufacturing sector is strongly represented in Poole and businesses in this sector have expressed concern about possibly needing to relocate if sufficient land is not brought forward.

6.3 The lack of appropriate sites and premises has resulted in a number of businesses locating out of the area. There is a far greater supply of employment land provided to the South East and in areas such as Southampton which is taking investment out of the local area and contributing to unsustainable commuting patterns.

6.4 A lack of available sites and competing demands for land has increased the need to protect existing employment sites and prevent them being lost to non employment uses.