

Growing Baldock

Employment Strategy



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Urban&Civic



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Employment and Economic Strategy has been prepared by David Lock Associates on behalf of Urban&Civic (U&C) and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) in support of the Outline Planning Application (OPA) for a mixed use development to the north and east of Baldock, with residential and employment uses together with pedestrian and cycle connections, open space (including areas for play), allotments, surface water drainage and other supporting infrastructure / engineering works and formation of accesses.
- 1.2 This report reviews the background policy context for employment land at Baldock, the rationale for including employment land and articulates how the employment land could come forward and its potential components once permission has been granted. It includes the following chapters:
- Chapter 2 – Proposed development context;
 - Chapter 3 – Rationale for employment land;
 - Chapter 4 – Proposed strategy and next steps;
 - Chapter 5 – Summary and conclusion.

- 2.3 The detailed breakdown of uses proposed for the parcel, which will include up to 84,000 m² of employment uses including a mix of:
- office - Class E, g) i) – up to a maximum of 20,000m²;
 - indoor sport and recreation – Class E, d) – up to a maximum of 5,000m²;
 - research and development - Class E, g) ii) and/or light industrial - Class E, g), iii) – up to a maximum of 26,500m²;
 - industrial – Class B2 - up to a maximum of 26,500m²;
 - Health Hub – Class E, e - up to a maximum of 6,000m².
- 2.4 The OPA also allows for some nursery provision to be made in BA10, as well as in the Local Centre in BA1 (the main allocation parcel, north of the railway).
- 2.5 Outside the main employment allocation (BA10) the OPA proposes a range of other uses that will generate employment, including schools (primary, SEND and potentially secondary) and the mixed uses within the Local Centre.
- 2.6 Pre-application discussions have been undertaken with a range of stakeholders to inform the OPA. In the context of employment, this has included Herts Futures, NHC's economic development officer and HCC. The approved Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan (SMP) was informed by an employment review undertaken by Quod in 2023.

3.0 RATIONALE FOR EMPLOYMENT LAND

Introduction

- 3.1 The previous chapter provides an overview of the proposed employment development at Baldock. This chapter explains the rationale behind the employment land provision in the OPA, which draws on the planning policy context and background, as well as covering the economic drivers for the demand and supply of employment land.

Planning Policy

- 3.2 The adopted Development Plan is comprised of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (2022) and the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan (2021).
- 3.3 Policy SP3 (Employment) is the Local Plan's principal policy on employment land, which says that the Council will:

'...proactively encourage sustainable economic growth, support new and existing businesses and seek to build on the District's strengths, location and offer...We will a) Allocate an adequate supply of employment land to meet the needs of the Functional Economic Market Area over the plan period to 2031. The allocations as shown on the Policies Map are: i. east of Baldock BA10 (19.6ha)...'

- 3.4 The policy adds that an appropriate range of offices, research and development, light industrial, or B class employment uses will be permitted, and that under part (e) of the policy there will be support for expanding the knowledge-based economy.
- 3.5 The uses set out in Policy SP3 are also supported by Policy ETC1 (Appropriate Uses in Employment Areas).
- 3.6 There is a further site-specific policy in relation to allocation BA10 (Royston Road) – see Figure 2, noting its allocation for employment uses, and serves as a development related checklist of requirements, although this doesn't expand on or further elucidate the principle of employment development.

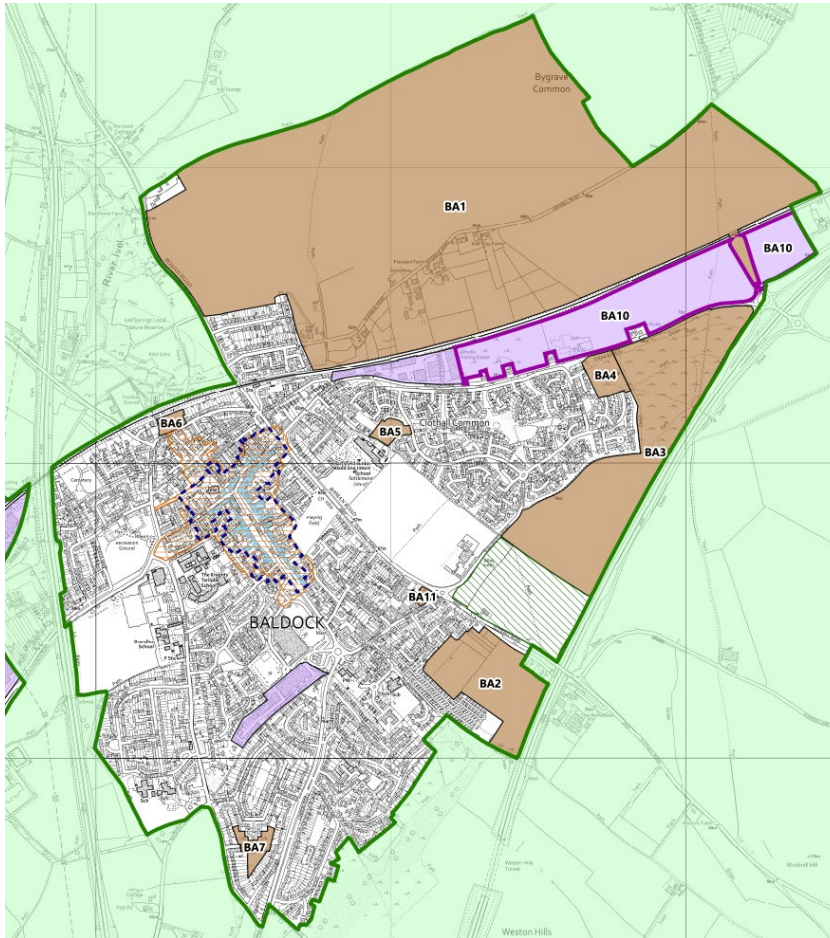


Figure 2: North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

Source: North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

- 3.7 The strategy behind Policy SP3 and for the wider Local Plan is based on three priorities:
1. to increase representation in high skilled and high value sectors;
 2. to reduce out-commuting by providing more work opportunities within the district; and
 3. to align employment with housing growth to promote sustainable patterns of development by non-car modes.
- 3.8 This strategy was supported by the Inspector who examined the Local Plan who concluded that the allocation would support the plan's approach to improving the balance of employment and housing and thereby contribute to sustainable development.

'Around 3,360 new homes are anticipated to be delivered through the Plan's housing allocations in Baldock. Housing Site BA1 alone is expected to deliver a new neighbourhood of around 2,800 new homes incorporating a local centre and is immediately to the north. In this context, Site BA10 represents a clearcut chance to support the Plan's approach of seeking to improve the

geographical balance of employment and housing and in so doing to contribute to sustainable development. Simply put, the co-location of Site BA10 and Baldock's housing sites, especially Site BA1, would help to provide opportunities for people to work near to where they live. The advantages in terms of commuting and the consequent environmental impacts are obvious.'

- 3.9 The Inspector also noted that the evidence base found that Baldock is best placed to support Stevenage's unmet needs for industrial space.

'...the FEMA Study says that "... the key sub-market area that stretches from Stevenage to Letchworth and Baldock along the A1(M) route is considered to be best placed to meet the unmet needs for industrial space from Stevenage". Site BA10 lies squarely within this sub-market area, and 11.5 hectares of it is intended to address Stevenage's unmet need. Its allocation is therefore consistent with the evidence.'

- 3.10 However, since the site was allocated in the Local Plan, Stevenage has delivered substantial areas of employment, far exceeding expectations. As such, NHC officers have confirmed that BA10 is no longer required to accommodate unmet need for industrial space from Stevenage. Nonetheless the site is allocated for employment and there are still a number of drivers for this use in Baldock, and these discussed below.

Employment Land Drivers

Sectors

- 3.11 Baldock is located between two globally influential cities of London and Cambridge, and this brings a range of benefits from access to different economic sectors:
- London – substantial flows of workforce into and out of adjacent outer London boroughs, alongside flows into the centre of London;
 - UK Golden Triangle – world-leading life sciences cluster of London, Oxford, Cambridge and England's greater southeast;
 - UK Innovation corridor – covers geography between London and Peterborough and is one of world's top five global knowledge regions.
- 3.12 Some of the key sectors that benefit from this strategic location are present in areas close to Baldock and from across Hertfordshire are shown in Figure 3 which demonstrates the site's potential to tap into these economic hotspots and emerging clusters.



Sector	Specialism	Location
Life Sciences	Major focus on cell and gene therapy	In and around Stevenage , Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield
Agri-Tech / Enviro-Tech Activities	New technologies in agriculture, horticulture and aquaculture	Synergy to be derived from proximity to Rothamsted Research
Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing	Heritage defence industry operations and more recently IT and IA components	Hatfield
Sustainable Construction	Prefabrication / preassembly of housing office and other building structures	Watford
Creative Industries	Particularly film and TV	Elstree and Borehamwood

Figure 3: Employment Specialisms in proximity to Baldock (coloured text correlates with highlighted area on plan above)

- 3.13 NHC have identified through the Local Plan, potential similar growth sectors for the district including advanced manufacturing, life sciences, research and development, computer related activities and low carbon economy. It is evident that aspirations for North Herts, and BA10 as one of two strategic employment allocations in the District are high, with the aim to secure high calibre occupiers within these types of sectors.

Transport and connectivity

- 3.14 The site is also well located in very close proximity to Baldock Rail Station and the town centre. The OPA proposes active travel improvements to Royston Road that will further enhance accessibility between BA10 and the station. Baldock Rail Station is on the Cambridge Line and provides connections to London Kings Cross, Brighton, Gatwick Airport and Cambridge. Improvements to the station itself are being discussed with Network Rail and a contribution to these works is anticipated to be captured in the S106 agreement.
- 3.15 The site also benefits from excellent strategic road connectivity, being directly accessible from the A505 junction providing onward access to the A1(M). Connectivity within the sub-region and beyond by rail or car is therefore strong (see Figure 4).

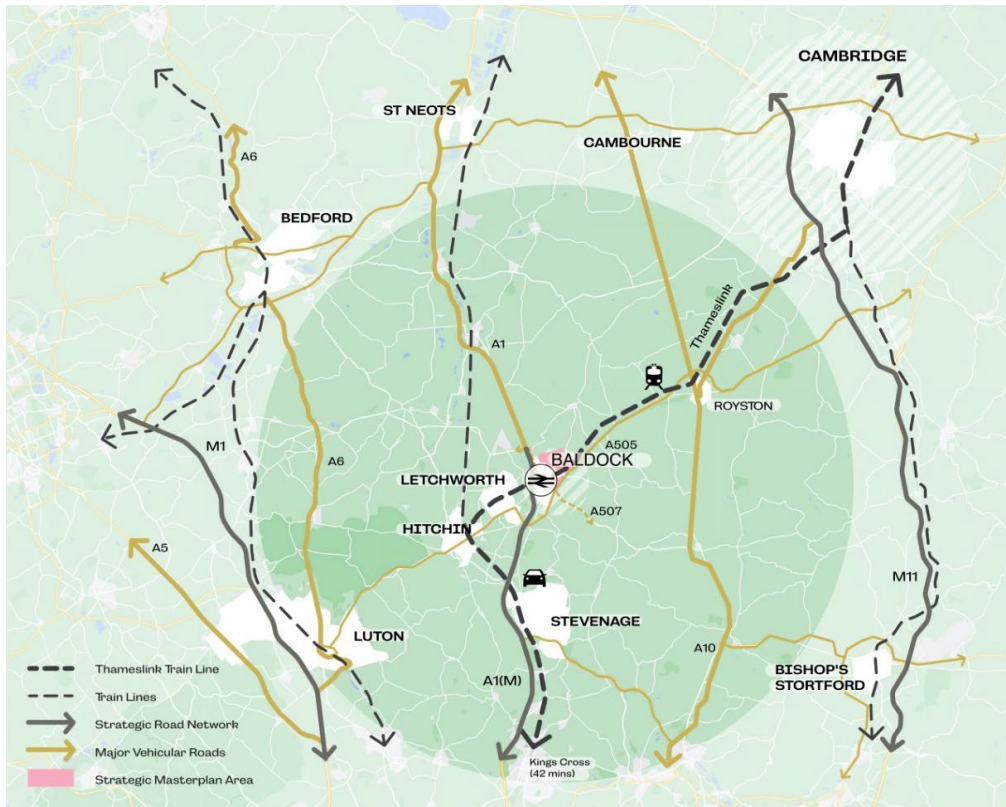


Figure 4: Strategic Location Context

Source: Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan (U&C / Hertfordshire County Council)

Size and Type of Floorspace Demand

- 3.16 Whilst there are no clear sector demands demonstrated in North Hertfordshire, some patterns of demand in terms of scale of employment uses are evident.
- 3.17 There is high demand from micro and small businesses for industrial floorspace – especially in North Herts. Figure 5 shows high demand for 100, 150 and 500 sqm categories of floorspace, which could form part of the mix within BA10.

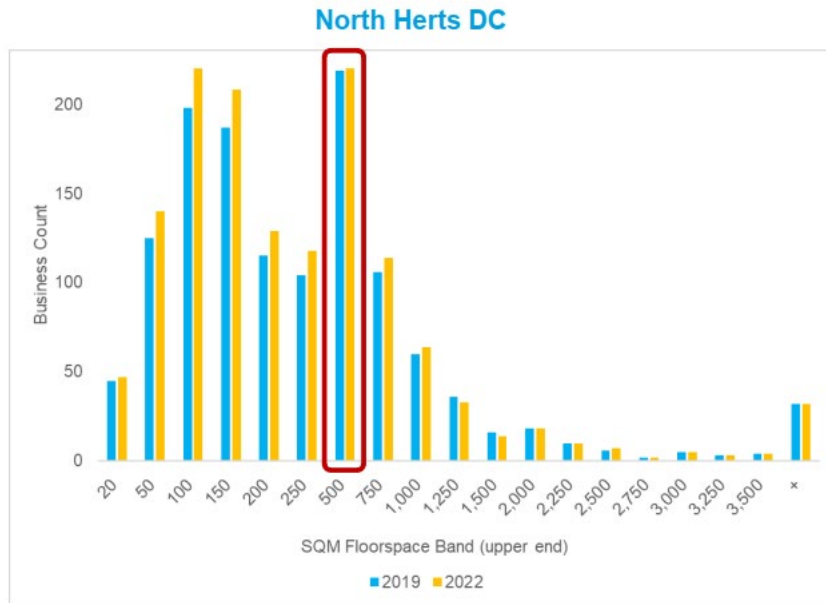


Figure 5: Demand for Industrial Floorspace in North Herts

Source: VOA 2023 – from Quod SMP Baseline Employment Report

- 3.18 Furthermore, over recent years the highest demand for office uses has been for businesses with 1-3 or 5-10 employees as well as 130 employees in North Herts, as shown in Figure 6.

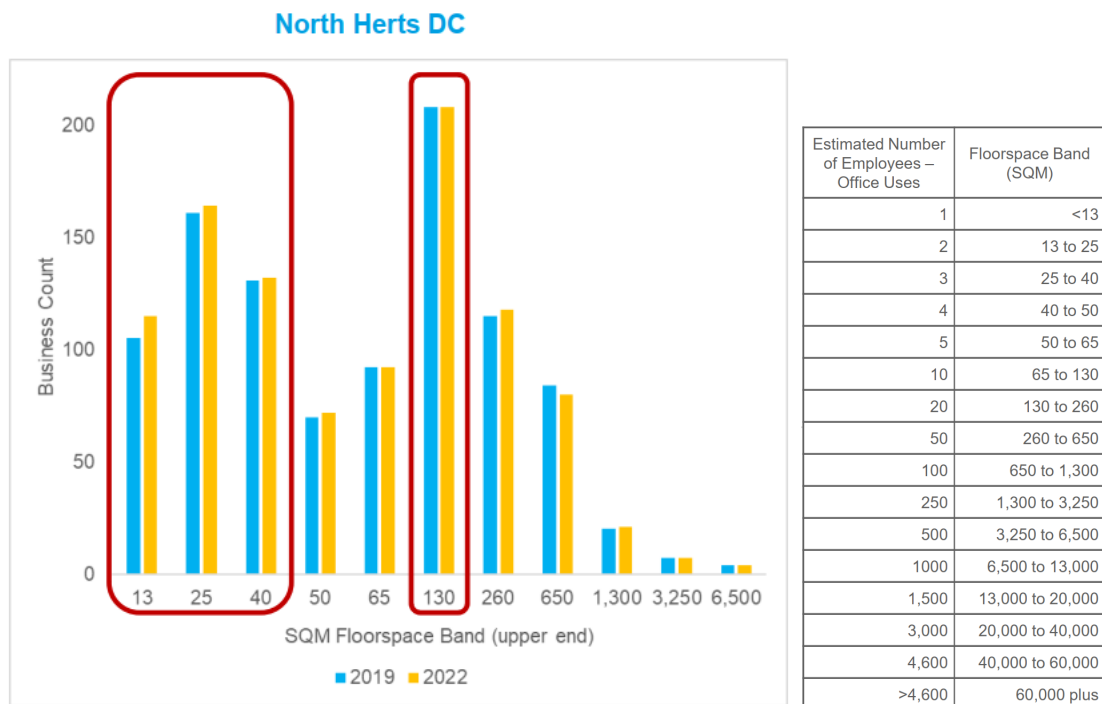


Figure 6: Demand for Office Floorspace in North Herts

Source: VOA 2023 – from Quod SMP Baseline Employment Report

- 3.19 Hertfordshire Futures (formerly the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership) has identified weaknesses in the Hertfordshire economy including land employment space of the right size

and availability, housing affordability and a slow business growth from small to medium size businesses. BA10 is well placed to counter these weaknesses by providing a range of employment opportunities on a well connected site immediately adjacent to a ready supply of new and existing homes.

Demographics

- 3.20 There are high levels of skills in Baldock's workforce. For example, residents typically hold professional and managerial occupations as demonstrated in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Skill Levels in North Hertfordshire

Source: Census 2021; Characteristics of Homeworkers, Great Britain, September 2022 to January 2023, ONS, 2023 – from Quod SMP Baseline Employment Report

- 3.21 Furthermore, almost one in four of Baldock's residents have a degree level qualification.

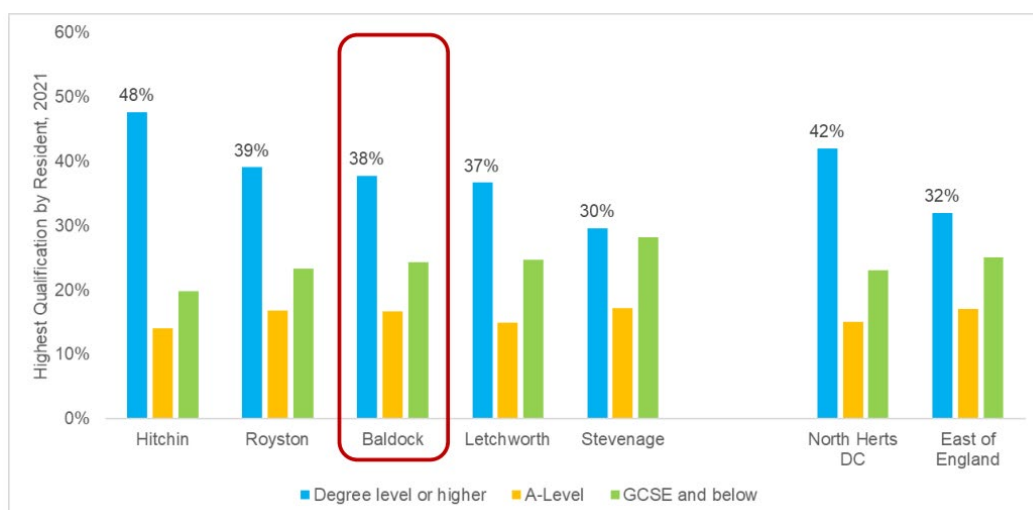


Figure 8: Qualification Levels in North Hertfordshire

Source: Census 2021; Characteristics of Homeworkers, Great Britain, September 2022 to January 2023, ONS, 2023. *Age 16+ – from Quod SMP Baseline Employment Report

- 3.22 At present Baldock offers little in the way of existing employment opportunities, with very little provision in key target growth sectors (see Figure 8). However, the evidence that Baldock has a well educated and skilled workforce indicates that BA10 could support specialised sector employment uses to counter this trend.

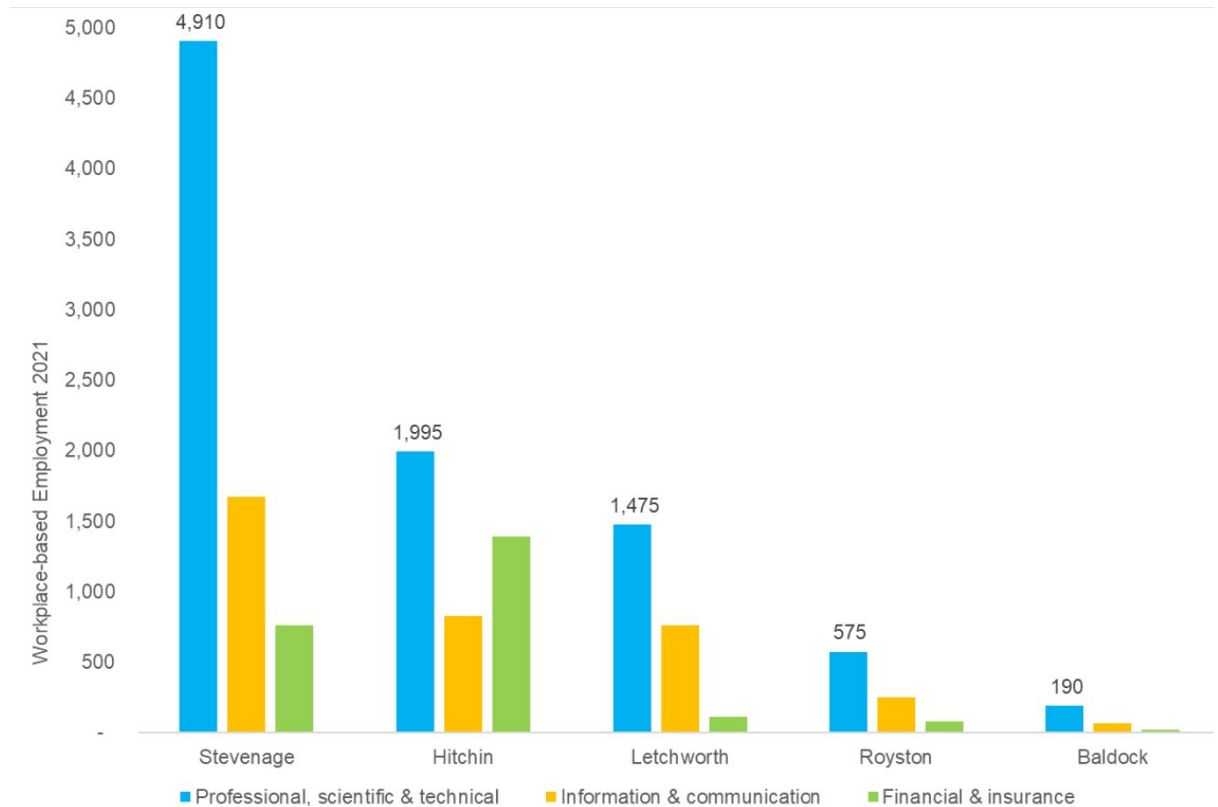


Figure 9: Work based employment in North Hertfordshire

Source: Census 2021, BRES 2022 – from Quod SMP Baseline Employment Report

Summary

- 3.23 The North Hertfordshire Local Plan includes a policy allocation for parcel BA10 in Policy SP3 and this is for offices, research and development, light industrial, or B class employment uses. The strategy behind the policy allocation and employment land at Baldock is to reduce out-commuting, align housing and employment development to support sustainable patterns of development, and increase high skilled and high-value sectors.
- 3.24 However, part of the allocation was also made to provide for Stevenage’s unmet employment needs, and since adoption of the Local Plan Stevenage has met its own needs through the delivery of substantial employment development. Nonetheless, the site remains allocated as employment land at Baldock and a series of drivers supporting this use include:

- the location of the site in proximity to high skill and high-value sectors such as life sciences, agri-tech, and advanced engineering;
- the transport and connectivity advantages due to its access to Baldock Rail Station and A1(M);
- demand for micro and small businesses;
- the highly skilled local workforce.

4.0 PROPOSED STRATEGY AND NEXT STEPS

Introduction

- 4.1 Chapter 2 presents the detailed breakdown of the employment uses proposed as part of the OPA – a mix of traditional employment (office/industrial) and retail/leisure employment. This allows for a range of office, indoor sport and recreation, research and development, industrial, and health uses. However, as the final mix of uses is not defined at this outline planning application stage, a strategy is needed to determine how the employment is brought forward post outline permission. This chapter therefore sets out how a strategy for the site will be delivered.

Strategy

- 4.2 U&C have established a set of guiding objectives for the employment land parcel BA10. These are as follows:
- to **safeguard land** and provide **phased market-facing opportunities** that build on the latent inward investment demand and core strengths of Baldock's strategic location;
 - to provide **new quality** and **accessible employment floorspace** providing local employment opportunities to the new residents of the development plus existing residents of Baldock, providing opportunities for local businesses to stay in the area and invest, and attract new business opportunities;
 - to ensure **local people benefit from training and job opportunities** arising from the development such as apprenticeships, employment and training initiatives and local procurement agreements;
 - to establish a **new waste transfer station and depot** that reduces and more efficiently manages waste, reduces carbon emissions and avoids local environmental impacts through a landscape-led approach to design;
 - to design buildings to **support a high proportion of home working** through individual households and through the provision of suitable shared co-working/meeting space (note – this relates to the wider OPA area where residential uses are proposed, beyond BA10); and
 - to establish **supporting and complementary uses** on BA10 including a health hub, leisure use and potential nursery.
- 4.3 U&C and HCC's strategy is principally to steer the employment space to a **themed development outcome** (for example a scientific cluster) to secure 'high quality jobs' and help create a thriving and established employment cluster and successful place within Baldock. BA10 is well placed to capitalise on the relative proximity to strong clusters and renowned international organisations and thus secure such an outcome. This could include an anchor tenant or a single large occupier, or alternatively a cluster of units ranging in size, but falling within a single, or related sector.

- 4.4 However, there is a risk that Baldock's slightly peripheral location relative to the more established knowledge clusters, plus the existence of sites elsewhere that are more attractive to the market means that it is not possible to secure tenants under a themed employment strategy. In this event, an alternative, more locally derived employment approach will be considered and planned for.

Employment Strategy Delivery

- 4.5 The following activity plan is proposed to support the themed development strategy:
- 4.6 Following the submission of the outline planning application U&C will undertake **mapping and research** of the immediate employment climate. This will entail a full desk-based review and will be undertaken into organisations in the immediate area to identify wider trends and clusters which could form the backbone of the strategy for the site. Soft market testing will be undertaken of specific companies on an 'off market' basis to test the principle of the location for certain sectors.
- 4.7 A **marketing strategy** will be developed to promote the employment opportunity and this will involve support from commercial land agents to distribute the strategy and keep up to date with potential anchor tenants interested in relocating to Baldock. It will establish time periods for delivery of the marketing strategy and decisions to be taken about the outcome for employment mix at BA10.
- 4.8 U&C will also adopt a **coordinated approach** with NHC and HCC employment teams establishing regular meetings to review the strategy and employment opportunities. U&C will provide HCC and NHC with marketing information so it can be shared at key industry conference such as UKREIIF.
- 4.9 The OPA, and the uses set out within the Development Specification, are structured such that a mix of employment uses can be brought forward in a flexible manner, supporting the proposed strategy of securing a themed development, or an alternative locally derived mix of uses.
- 4.10 In the event that it is not possible to secure tenants under the themed employment strategy, alternative employment occupiers will be sought from the locality. Throughout the marketing strategy period, strong links and communication will be maintained with the wider business community, including keeping a log will of local business enquiries, provision of updates on project progress on the Growing Baldock website, and ongoing engagement with the community, local businesses and their representatives.
- 4.11 U&C have developed a series of concepts on how the employment land could come forward in development terms. This is based on the evidence presented in Chapter 3, particularly around the property market opportunities and the size and narrow, linear shape of the BA10 allocation.

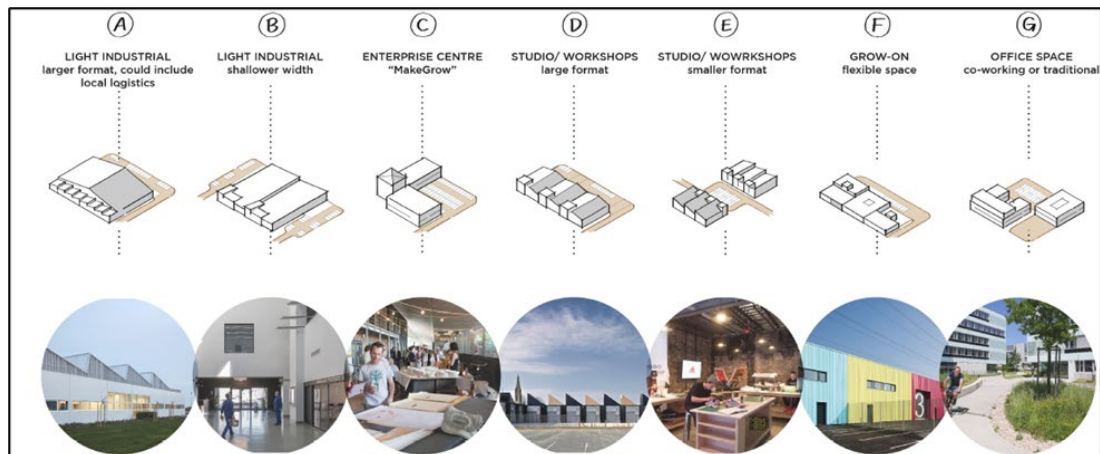


Figure 11: Potential Employment Typologies at BA10

Source: David Lock Associates

- 4.12 Figure 11 demonstrates a range of types of employment development that could be appropriate, from light industrial units, studio/workshops, grow on flexible space and co-working office space. An overall strategy of locating denser, more urban grain employment typologies towards the western end of BA10, with larger format units towards the east is considered appropriate but will driven to a large extent by sector and occupier requirements.
- 4.13 BA10 will deliver a curated series of employment units with a focus on high quality public realm, safe active travel provision to the station, town centre and the local centre in BA1 and unobtrusive servicing and parking arrangement.
- 4.14 Delivery of BA10, in terms of speed and phasing, will depend on the final occupiers. A single, or limited number of tenants would expedite delivery within a small number of phases. A more disparate range of tenants, potentially resulting from local demand rather than a themed approach, could come forward more gradually, responding to more directly to the local market.

5.0 SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

- 5.1 U&C are proposing a mixed use development at Baldock, as part of an outline planning application, to include up to 3,200 homes and up to 16 hectares of employment land along with supporting uses. The employment land will be located between the Cambridge Line and Royston Road and will include a mix of office and light industrial uses along with supporting leisure and health uses.
- 5.2 The employment land is allocated for employment uses in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. The strategy behind the policy allocation and employment land at Baldock is to reduce out-commuting, align housing and employment development to support sustainable patterns of development, and increase high skilled and high-value sectors. However, the allocation was also made to provide for Stevenage's unmet industrial employment needs, and since adoption of the Local Plan Stevenage has met its own needs. Nonetheless, there is still a strong justification for continuing with the employment land at Baldock and a series of economic demand and supply drivers support this: the location of the site in proximity to key economic sectors, the good transport and connectivity of the location, the demand for micro and small businesses, and the high-skills levels of the local workforce.
- 5.3 There is therefore strong support from the Local Plan and the economic drivers to provide employment land at Baldock. U&C's strategy is to steer the employment space to a themed development outcome (for example a scientific cluster) to secure 'high quality jobs' and help create a long-term place. U&C have set out a series of objectives to help deliver the strategy; these range from ensuring local people benefit from training to providing job opportunities to support home working through shared meeting/working space. U&C have also set out design concepts on how the development could be realised. Part of the strategy is also to provide employment use in line with the Local Plan policy but also to provide supporting uses that complement the employment uses like a health hub, waste transfer station, and leisure facilities to support a mixed employment environment.
- 5.4 In conclusion, U&C have set out a clear strategy for the delivery of the employment land and a timeline to support it, and there is strong policy support for the employment land provision and strong economic demand and supply drivers to justify the inclusion of 16 hectares of land in the outline planning application.