



Bracknell Forest Local Plan

Position statement giving details of monitoring of
employment floorspace since base date of
Bracknell Forest Local Plan (1st April 2020)
and implications

January 2026

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Whilst the base date of the Bracknell Forest Local Plan (BFLP) is 1st April 2020, it was not adopted until March 2024. Due to the time lag, Position Statements were published during the examination process in December 2021 (LP/Ev/3m¹) and November 2022 (LP/EV/30²). These documents helped explain the impact of completions and permissions granted during 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 on the overall supply of employment floorspace i.e. since the base date of the BFLP. Since those documents were published, a further three years of monitoring has taken place, the impact of which is summarised and explained below.

2. Context

- 2.1 Section 7 of the BFLP deals with Economic development. Employment development is dealt with as a component of economic development. It is defined as offices, general industrial, and storage or warehousing and distribution together with any Sui Generis uses that share a significant number of characteristics with those uses.
- 2.2 An Employment Land Needs Study (ELNS) was published in 2020 and summarises the needs for 2020 – 2036. If the figures are adjusted to align with the Local Plan period, which covers 2020 – 2037, the following figures are calculated:
- 19,125 sq.m of office space (Egi and Egii), and,
 - 48,875 sq.m of industrial and warehousing floorspace (Egiii, B2 and B8)
- 2.3 Planning permission is not required for a change of use from one Class E use to another, which makes it difficult to monitor changes between these uses to other Class E uses.

3. Changes

Annual commitments exercise

- 3.1 As indicated above, the Council monitors net change in floorspace in different use classes on an annual basis. This provides details of floorspace that has been completed during the monitoring year and details of the amount of floorspace in the pipeline – both sites with planning permission (hard commitments) and those that have been accepted in principle but that are subject to the completion of legal agreements are covered (soft commitments).

¹ <https://consult.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/file/5942881>

² <https://consult.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/file/6093331>

Results of employment commitments exercises and impact on future employment needs since 31st March 2020

3.2 The following table summarises completions that have occurred during monitoring years since the base date of the BFLP.

Table 1. Floorspace completed between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2025 (net sq.m)

	Office (Egi and Egii) ³	Industrial (Egiii and B2)	Storage and distribution (B8)
Completed 2020-21	-5,839	-1,314	1,176
Completed 2021-22	-23,039	662	1,904
Completed 2022-23	-12,901	-37	29,870
Completed 2023-24	-7,772	665	-5,512
Completed 2024-25	-118	-939	9,590
Total	-49,669	-963	37,028

3.3 **Table 1** shows that Egi/Egii floorspace has been lost over the period. This trend is of concern but reflects what is being experienced in the wider area. It's due to many occupiers downsizing and/or consolidating their operations at one location, and/or exchanging quantity for quality of office floorspace with the aim of attracting staff to the office. There tends to be an acceptance of hybrid working, with three office days a week having become the dominant attendance pattern for many. Small companies tend to have the highest levels of attendance reflecting the fact that offices are seen as more essential to their day-to-day operations. Large companies are more likely to have office space and infrastructure that supports hybrid working. They also tend to employ staff living across wider geographic area. Challenging conditions in the investment markets have also not helped investor confidence. The pattern of office losses is considered further in the context of Permitted Development Rights (PDR).

3.4 **Table 1** also shows that there has been a small net loss of Egiii and B2 floorspace along with larger gains in B8 floorspace since the start of the plan period. This reflects the increase in demand for logistics and data centres. Please note that the gain of 9,590 sq.m of B8 floorspace is largely due to the redevelopment of a site at Downmill Road, Bracknell for 9,446sq.m of floorspace. The loss of -6,512 sq.m of B8 floorspace through demolition at this site was counted in the 2023/24 monitoring year. Whilst this appears to be a

³ Historically, the monitoring exercise covered B1 before more recently collected by the components of B1 (B1a, B1b and B1c) now Egi, Egii and Egiii, if available.

reasonable gain, much of it is a matter of timing. However, there is general trend of an increase in B8 floorspace.

Table 2. Identified need for employment floorspace at 1st April 2025 taking account of completions (sq.m)

	Office (Egi and Egii)	Industrial (Egiii and B2) and Storage and distribution (B8)
Need identified for plan period 2020-2037	19,125	48,875
Completed floorspace 2020-2025 (<i>impact on remaining need</i>)	-49,669	36,065
Remaining need 2025-37	68,794	12,810

- 3.4 **Table 2** shows the remaining need for the plan period having taken account of completions in the first five years of the plan period. This shows that the remaining need for offices (Egi and Egii) has increased significantly due to losses in office floorspace since the start of the plan period. The need for industrial (Egiii and B2) and storage (B8) floorspace has decreased by almost three quarters.
- 3.5 Whilst the outstanding commitments indicate the potential for further changes, it is important to note that many of them were included in the ELNS baseline when the ‘need’ figures were calculated. It is therefore necessary to look at new permissions granted in the last four years (but that have not already been completed over the last four years since these will be incorporated within the figures in **Table 1** and any changes resulting from lapsed or superseded permissions. These are set out in **Table 3** along with the residual balance of sites allocated in the Site Allocations Local Plan 2013 (SALP) and those that were allocated in the BFLP.

Table 3. Changes in outstanding commitments over the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2025 (net sq.m.)

	Office (Egi and Egii)	Industrial (Egiii and B2)	Storage and distribution (B8)
Lapsed/superseded/alternative permissions in baseline 2020-2025 ⁴	27,127	0	-517
New outstanding permissions granted 2020-2025 ⁵	2,137	4,840	3,617
New sites accepted in principle subject to S106 Agreement	2,500	0	0
Residual balance of allocations in SALP	-19,426	0	0
Allocations in BFLP	25,960	0	0
Total	-15,956	4,840	4,134

3.6 The loss of 27,127 sq.m of Egi floorspace from the baseline shown in **Table 3** was the extant permission for offices (09/00792/OUT and 10/00310/REM) at the former Hewlett Packard site. This involved two parcels of land as follows:

- 21,391 sq.m of office floorspace that was never been built at the main site and which was superseded by permission 21/00239/FUL for 9,443 sq.m of B8 which is complete.
- 5,736 sq.m of floorspace that has never been built at the island site which has been superseded by permission (20/00947/FUL) for a 68-bed care home and 50 dwellings. This permission was granted following the allocation of the site for residential in SALP Policy SA2 Land north of Cain Road and is under construction.

Table 4: Remaining need if changes in outstanding commitments and allocations are taken account of in the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2025 (net sq.m.)

	Office (Egi and Egii)	Industrial (Egiii and B2) and Storage and distribution (B8)
Need identified for plan period 2020-2037	19,125	48,875
Completed floorspace 2020-25 (<i>from Table 2</i>)	-49,669	36,065
Total outstanding commitments and allocations at 2025 (<i>from Table 3</i>)	-15,956	8,974
Remaining need 2025-37⁶	84,750	3,836

⁴ Commitments that were previously in the baseline that had involved a gain in floorspace have been subtracted from the total (since the gain never occurred it adds to the overall need) whilst commitments that had involved a loss of floorspace have been added to the total (since the loss never occurred).

⁵ Does not include completed permissions.

⁶ Losses of office floorspace are added to the need for the plan period to generate a new 'remaining need'; gains in industrial, storage and distribution floorspace have been subtracted from the need for the plan period since this is a gain in floorspace to meet identified needs resulting in a reduced 'remaining need'.

- 3.7 BFLP Policy LP20 allocates sites for 25,960 sq.m. of office floorspace in and around Bracknell Town Centre.
- 3.8 Whilst there appears to be an over allocation of sites for offices in Policy LP20 compared with the original need for the plan period, it is evident from **Table 4** that the level of need is increasing due to planning permissions that involve loss of office floorspace.
- 3.9 The need for further industrial/storage floorspace has decreased substantially since the start of the plan period. Several speculative proposals have cumulatively reduced the remaining need identified in the BFLP. This trend is mirrored in the stock of floorspace in the Borough from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA). With the VOA data showing a loss of office floorspace and a gain of industrial/warehouse floorspace during between 2018 and 2025 (see **Appendix A**).
- 3.10 The general interest in industrial/storage floorspace that has occurred may be due to the shift towards high-value manufacturing sectors such as computers, electronic and optical products and the growth in online retailing. Demand has also been influenced by the fact that warehousing is not just being used for the storage of goods, but, also the reworking, assembling, packaging and dispatch of items. There has also been a little appetite for data centres, fuelled by the increase in data usage driven by AI, cloud computing, and digital services.

4. PDR involving the change of use from offices to residential

- 4.1 Due to concern about the impact of losses of office floorspace on need, the issue of PDR⁷ is considered further below.
- 4.2 Historic records can be used to look at the annual net change in floorspace in the Eg Use Class in Bracknell Forest since PDR was first introduced in 2013. It is also possible to identify the net change that results directly from PDR in respect of the change of use of offices to residential. The latter is the only form of PDR which has been taken up in Bracknell Forest on a significant scale, to date.

⁷ removing the need for planning permission for a change of use from offices to residential and replacing it with a system of prior approval where consideration can only be given to a narrow suite of matters

Table 5: Net change in completed Eg floorspace overall and through Egi PDR 2014-2025

Year	All Eg net change (sq.m.) ⁸	Egi net change through Egi PDR (sq.m.)	% of net change represented by Egi PDR
2013-14	-33,206	-1,290	3.9%
2014-15	-12,287	-3,674	29.9%
2015-16	-31,354	-1,423	4.5%
2016-17	-10,750	-6,679	62.1%
2017-18	-58,526	-100	0.2%
2018-19	-23,541	-8,525	36.2%
2019-20	-49,497	-39,984	80.8%
2020-21	-7,516	-5,708	75.9%
2021-22	-23,039	0	0%
2022-23	-12,938	-128	1%
2023-24	-9,432	0	0%
2024-25	-2,746	-118	4.3%
TOTAL	-272,832	-67,629	24.6%

4.3 The data in **Table 5** shows that overall there has been a net loss in Eg floorspace through PDR, and that it is making a significant contribution to the overall change in the stock of Eg floorspace. During the period 2013-14 to 2024-25, 24.6% of all Eg floorspace has been lost as a result of change of use of office floorspace through PDR representing -67,629 sq.m of office floorspace. The data shows that the proportion of Eg lost through PDR tended to increase over time, until 2021/22. This is due to changes to the permitted development rights introduced in August 2021 which restricted the floorspace that could be changed to 1,500 sq.m. However, this restriction was removed in March 2024 along with requirement for the building to be vacant for 3 months. The impact of these changes will start to become apparent in future monitoring years. Initial indications are that the removal of this threshold will lead to an increase in changes of use through permitted development rights, potentially leading to a significant contribution to a further reduction in E(g)(i) office floorspace in the future.

Table 6: Amount of Eg floorspace outstanding overall (including soft commitments) and with potential to be lost through Egi PDR at 31st March 2025

Year	All Eg ⁹ (sq.m.)	Egi PDR (sq.m.)
At 31 st March 2025	31,546	-8,996

4.4 The outstanding PDR total in **Table 6** is a loss -8,996. This is a reduction in losses compared to -25,924 sq.m in 2023/24. It reflects the introduction of the 1,500sq.m

⁸ includes Egi, Egii, Egiii and mixed E uses as breakdown of data not available for earlier years.

⁹ Includes Egii, Egiii and mixed Eg uses

floorspace restriction in August 2021 (outlined in paragraph 4.3), and two outstanding PDRs no longer being commitments: due to:

- 21/00763/PAC Atrium Court, The Ring, Bracknell: loss of -22,090 sq.m. of offices to 150 flats having no deemed consent; and
- 21/00755/PAC Lily Hill House, Lily Hill Road, Bracknell: loss of -3,716 sq.m. offices to 33 flats lapsing.

4.5 The trends seen in Table 5 are continuing to be fuelled by the fact that residential values are often greater than office values. PDR appears to be affecting both vacant and occupied floorspace. The Council is concerned that following the removal of the 1,500sq.m threshold PDR is continuing to erode the amount of floorspace available to businesses and therefore having an impact on the number of job opportunities. As demonstrated, it is also making it more difficult to meet assessed needs for office space, even though the BFLP allocations appear to result in a surplus compared with the original need. This could impede economic growth and the sustainability of communities. Indeed, the Council's independent economic consultants have stated *"The lack of commercial motivation to promote new sites, coupled with the negative pipeline due to PDR losses of employment floorspace makes it challenging for Councils to demonstrate that they have a supply of office space for a full plan period."*¹⁰

4.6 The map in Appendix B shows the location of PDR schemes across the Borough. Those shown within the designated Employment Areas around Bracknell were agreed some time ago but have taken a while to complete. Several schemes have also been completed in and around Bracknell Town Centre.

4.7 An Article 4 Direction originally covered the Western, Southern and Eastern designated Employment Areas around Bracknell but due to legislative changes, ceased to have effect from 31st July 2022. At about the same time, revisions to the NPPF also raised the bar for when a local planning authority could make an Article 4 Direction. There is now a need to demonstrate that the Direction is essential to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts. It should also be based on evidence and cover the smallest geographical area possible (para. 54 of the NPPF (2024)).

4.8 The Council reviewed whether a new Article 4 Direction was needed for the Borough's Employment Areas in 2022. At the time, it was concluded¹¹ that there was insufficient robust evidence available to support a new Article 4 Direction. This was partly because it was not clear what the impact of the introduction of the 1,500 sq.m floorspace threshold in 2021 would have. However, this threshold was removed in March 2024. It will be important

¹⁰ [Technical Note: Bracknell Forest - Sub-regional Supply \(October 2021\)](#)

¹¹ [Article 4 Direction Area for Office to Residential Conversions Council Decision \(July 2022\)](#)

to continue to monitor PDR applications and give further consideration to the need for a new Article 4 Direction.

Conclusion

- 5.1 It is clear that there are challenges in the ability to meet needs in the Borough, especially for offices. It is critical that the designated Employment Areas are protected for employment uses. The fact that offices now fall within Use Class E which also includes shops, estate agents, cafés and restaurants, indoor sports facilities (including gyms), medical and health services, creches and day nurseries makes the situation even more complex in that there is no control in changes within this Use Class.
- 5.2 It is critical that employment opportunities within the Borough are not lost since that could cause harm to the local and the wider economy. Whilst demand for offices has decreased following the COVID pandemic, there are signs that businesses are requiring staff to return to the office on a full or part-time basis in the interests of increased collaboration, connection and mental health. Therefore, demand may return in the longer term, particularly for high quality office floorspace, and so sites must be protected, and new space provided if the assessed need is to be met.

Appendix A

The tables below provide data published by the VOA in 2025 on the overall stock of office and industrial floorspace in the Borough, together with the degree of change. Please note all the VOA figures are different to those published in 2023, as the 2025 release follows a different methodology¹². The stock of office floorspace declined by -25.6% between 2018 and 2025. The stock of industrial/warehousing floorspace increased by 7.6% between 2018 and 2025. The VOA data is not directly comparable with BFC data, and we only monitor floorspace greater than 100sq.m. However, the overall pattern of decreasing office and increasing industrial/warehousing floorspace is also reflected in BFC monitoring.

Table A: Total stock of office space in Bracknell Forest (2025 VOA data)

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total floorspace sq.m ¹³	356,000	343,000	316,000	317,000	308,000	300,000	271,000	265,000
Change in floorspace %	-	-3.7%	-7.9%	0.3%	-2.8%	-2.6%	-9.7%	-2.2%

Table B: Total stock of industrial/warehouse space in Bracknell Forest (2025 VOA data)

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total floorspace sq.m ¹⁴	330,000	320,000	320,000	332,000	341,000	338,000	329,000	354,000
Change in floorspace %	-	-3%	0%	3.8%	2.7%	-0.9%	-2.7%	7.6%

¹² See section 3: [Non-domestic Rating: Floorspace Background Information - GOV.UK](#)

¹³ Data source: Non-domestic Rating: Business Floorspace, 2025 Valuation Office Agency Table FS3.1: [Non-domestic rating: business floorspace, March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁴ Data source: Non-domestic Rating: Business Floorspace, 2025 Valuation Office Agency Table FS4.1: [Non-domestic rating: business floorspace, March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

Appendix B

