

Basildon Borough Council

Local Plan Options for Meeting Hotel Needs in Basildon Borough

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1.0 Introduction

A Basildon Hotel Futures Study was commissioned by Basildon Borough Council to ensure that the Borough Council puts in place an appropriate planning policy approach in its new Local Plan that is in line with future market demand for hotel accommodation in the Borough, hotel operator location and site requirements, and national planning policy, and to guide other Borough Council intervention to support hotel development in the Borough. The *Basildon Borough Hotel Futures: Hotel Needs & Demand Review* report was finalised in September 2016, detailing the outcomes of this study.

The hotel demand projections for Basildon and the other findings of the Hotel Futures study have a number of implications for the Basildon Local Plan in relation to hotel development. This document provides further detailed guidance on the Council's future planning policy approach to direct and guide changes in the use of land and properties for hotel accommodation in Basildon.

2.0 Study Findings

Basildon currently has a limited range in its hotel supply, focused very much around budget hotel provision, plus a Holiday Inn which is the only full-service provider. The market is relatively strong during the week, which reflects the predominance of corporate demand/business tourism in Basildon; weekends however are a challenge. This limits future potential in terms of achievable occupancies and room rates, and therefore the scale and nature of new hotel development that can be supported going forward.

The Hotel Futures Study shows market potential for two large new hotels, some smaller hotels and possible extensions to existing hotels in Basildon, and scope for some small-scale accommodation development in Billericay and possibly also in Wickford. There is a clear need for additional budget hotels, but the breadth and depth of the market for a new full service provision is less evident, and is likely to require further growth in higher spending corporate markets and ideally, new drivers of weekend demand. The Local Plan therefore needs to plan for such hotel and accommodation development.

3.0 Implications for Planning Policy

Basildon has the basic infrastructure in place to market itself as a business tourism destination. It is well placed in this market by reason of its accessible location in the South-East, and lower costs (when compared to London). However, it does not benefit from a comprehensive strategy to take forward this potential to realise the greatest results. A wider strategic policy approach is required in the emerging Basildon Borough Local Plan, to provide a focus towards supporting high quality hotel accommodation offer in Basildon - for both existing and new hotels.

Improvements to both the quality of hotel provision as well as the surrounding area will be fundamental to strengthening the visitor offer and attracting new visitors.

No clear need was identified in the Hotel Futures Study to allocate sites for hotel development, unless evidence comes forward of hotels being squeezed out of potential hotel sites by higher value uses. Subsequently, it was recommended that there is no requirement to allocate the hotel development site on land adjacent to Basildon Golf Course for a country club hotel of scale, as there is no certainty that new hotels can be commercially delivered in Basildon because of the lack of weekend demand. Allocating sites for hotel development could therefore sterilise them for alternative uses when hotel projects on them might not get off the ground. Although, it was suggested that there could be potential for a small full-service hotel of up to 30-40 bedrooms on the site, with conference and function space, linked to the golf course. In any case, the Hotel study concluded that further work is required to find a workable solution for the proposed hotel development site in order to decide on the need and scope for a hotel and/or other leisure use allocation of the site in the new Local Plan.

Subsequently, further engagement has been undertaken with relevant stakeholders, given the role that the Council plays as the owner of the golf course. This will see to the potential deliverability of the site being determined imminently. Therefore, a less prescriptive policy approach will be better suited for the hotel development site in order to support a realistic and viable scheme on the site, having regard to evidence. Such a policy would support proposals which recognise the specific characteristics of the site, and will seek to promote the development of hotel accommodation alongside other supporting services and/or uses, in line with the Council's objectives.

A locational strategy should also be reflected in policy that will permit hotel development not only within the town centre, but also in support of employment sites along the A127 Basildon Enterprise Corridor, as evidence indicates these as the two key locations in Basildon where it would be appropriate to focus hotel development. The town centre in order to support its regeneration, and the A127 Basildon Enterprise Corridor to help promote business growth. As a consequence, there is need to apply some flexibility with regards to national planning policy guidance on prioritising town centre locations for hotel development. A degree of flexibility will also be required in the application of the Draft Local Plan *Policy E12 Non B-Class Uses in Employment Areas*, in terms of permitting hotels on/in support of employment sites, with reference to the acceptability of this use in the text.

Taking into account, the current limitations to attracting hotel stays in Basildon town centre, it would be helpful to identify the potential for hotel development in the town centre as part of *Policy R2, Basildon Town Centre Regeneration*. This would typically reflect the aspiration for a town centre hotel, albeit the potential is not immediate and will require to be linked to leisure destination and evening economy development. Policies R5 and R6 relating to Wickford Town Centre Regeneration and Billericay Town Centre Enhancement could also make reference in the supporting text to the potential for accommodation development as identified in the Hotel Futures report.

Hotel development opportunities identified in the borough can largely be accommodated within the urban areas of the Borough, without the need to consider hotel development in the Green Belt. The Hotel Futures study does however recommend allowing in principle, extensions to existing hotels in the Green Belt and hotels linked to other established leisure uses in the Green Belt.

The NPPF considers development within the Green Belt to be inappropriate except in very special circumstances. Development which would be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt or the purposes of including land within it should therefore be resisted. Furthermore, the existing hotels within the Green Belt benefit from the undeveloped nature of these locations, and therefore permission of such development would be counter-intuitive in terms of the appeal of these hotels in the first instance. Consequently, it is not recommended that this recommendation be pursued further, and that draft Policies GB4 to GB8 of the draft Local Plan, which are

considered to be consistent with the NPPF in terms of weighing harm to the Green Belt when considering planning applications, should also be applied to hotel proposals.

Careful consideration also needs to be given when applying planning conditions to a hotel scheme, in terms of the impact these might have on viability. A streamlined planning process is recommended for hotel planning applications, without onerous and expensive conditions that adversely affect the viability of hotel development projects.

4.0 Current Local Policy Context

The Basildon District Local Plan was adopted in 1998, and does not include any policy relating to hotel development. The new Local Plan will however be able to respond to those matters of policy significance that have arisen or changed since that time.

There is no specific tourism or generic hotel policy in the Basildon Borough Draft Local Plan. Hotels are a town centre use and are covered in principle by the NPPF. The Draft Plan does however refer to the Basildon Town Centre Masterplan as planning for hotels.

Beyond the town centre, the Draft Plan makes reference to planning for needs that can't be accommodated in the town centre, and proposes the allocation of a hotel development site next to Basildon Golf Course (otherwise known as the Toucan Way or Nethermayne site) for a country house style hotel. However, the case for allocating sites for hotel development is not clearly evident in Basildon as revealed by the Hotel Futures study.

5.0 Recommended Actions for the Local Plan

In terms of the prospects for future growth in demand for hotel accommodation in Basildon, the following are recommended to be incorporated into the Basildon Borough Local Plan:

- A strategic policy in relation to the development and retention of hotel/visitor accommodation, including considering a streamlined planning process for hotel planning applications;
- A policy approach with a practical solution for the 'Hotel Development Site – Land adjacent to Basildon Golf Course' that reflects the site's potential, as well as the Council's objectives for the site;
- A locational strategy that will apply some flexibility with regards to permitting hotel development outside town centre locations, with particular reference to the A127 Basildon Enterprise Corridor;
- Amend draft Policy E12, *Non B-Class Uses in Employment Areas*, in terms of permitting hotels on/in support of employment sites;
- Reflect the aspiration for a town centre hotel in draft Policy R2, *Basildon Town Centre Regeneration*; and
- Reflect the potential for identified accommodation development in draft Policies R5, *Wickford Town Centre Regeneration*, and R6, *Billericay Town Centre Enhancement*.