



STOCKPORT
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Stockport Local Plan

Employment Topic Paper

September 2026



Contents

Contents	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Understanding our development needs for employment.....	4
2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (2024)	5
2.2 Planning Practice Guidance	8
Housing and economic needs assessment.....	8
2.3 Local Evidence	8
One Stockport Economic Plan	8
Employment Land Review (ELR) – update 2026	11
Whole Plan Viability Assessment	12
2.4 Implications	13
3. Identifying additional sites.....	14
4. Conclusion.....	17
Appendix A: Proposed employment allocations on sites outside of the existing built-up area.....	18
BUS 3.1 Bredbury Gateway	19
BUS 3.2 Heathside Park Road	20

1. Introduction

- 1) This is the ‘Employment Topic Paper’ and is one of a number of topic papers that has been written to support Stockport’s Local Plan.
- 2) All topic papers can be found online at Stockport Council’s website.
- 3) The main purpose of this document is to set out what the NPPF requires us to do with regards to identifying and meeting our development needs for employment land and to outline our approach for seeking to meet those needs. It should be read alongside the draft Local Plan itself as well as the key evidence that is referenced within it.

2. Understanding our development needs for employment

- 4) The council is required by the government to have up-to-date planning policies which help create the conditions to support businesses, economic growth and productivity. In doing so, those policies should recognise and address the specific needs of different sectors of the economy.
- 5) Stockport is home to around 295,000 people, in the region of 13,500 businesses, and approximately 139,000 jobs. It has a number of successful town and neighbourhood centres and employment areas. These have, in part, helped the borough to attract, support and enable strong economic growth and investment in recent years. Stockport has a good basis for further growth but those opportunities also come with challenges.
- 6) Stockport, whilst having a number of affluent also has deprived areas with lower than average education, health and employment outcomes, leading to significant inequalities which damage the life opportunities of our residents. Stockport's Anti-Poverty Objectives set out its approach to addressing economic inequality. Stockport has an estimated 49,000 people living in poverty based on national figures, around 17% of the population. Work is an important route out of poverty, but this needs to be good work with fair terms and conditions and sufficient flexibility to support, for example, carers and people with a disability who need reasonable adjustments. We want to create opportunities for all residents to reach their full potential in work.
- 7) Whilst Stockport generally has a well-skilled workforce, this varies across the borough, and there are opportunities to improve these skills through new development in order to ensure that the highest number of people possible benefit from that new development. More jobs within the borough that are accessible to people living here would also help to reduce the number of people travelling out of the borough to find work. This in turn has implications for the provision of housing to ensure the right balance of jobs and housing prevents significant out-commuting.
- 8) The council recognises, however, that not everyone has the necessary skills and qualifications to access the jobs which will be delivered. Amongst the council's own ambitions are the aims of improving schools and access to jobs for a variety of people in the borough. In addition, the council has included within its emerging draft Local Plan a policy which seeks to ensure that when development occurs, employment and skills training forms part of that proposal – see proposed policy BUS 6.
- 9) The council's One Stockport Economic Plan (2022) sets out the vision for economic development in Stockport, including how the priorities of the One Stockport Borough Plan will be achieved, and this received a recent update in the

Delivery Plan for 2025-2028. This informs the Local Plan by identifying the key economic priorities for the borough. Critical to the success of Stockport will be to ensure that appropriate economic development can take place which ensures that the maximum number of people benefit in order to help address some of the inequalities which exist in the borough.

- 10) In addition, the council has updated its Employment Land Review (ELR) in 2026, which is a key part of the evidence to quantify and identify employment needs, and the information in the Whole Plan Viability Assessment covers employment uses.
- 11) In order to ensure that Stockport can continue to maintain and strengthen its local economy, a range of employment uses will need to be provided for. The provision of employment space is important in supporting growth in both the number and range of jobs to be provided in Stockport. This helps to strengthen the economy and provides work for local people, which is important as Stockport aims for a fairer and more inclusive borough.
- 12) The following information sets out the background guidance and evidence.

2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

- 13) **This topic paper has been prepared with regard to the 2024 version of the NPPF, in accordance with Annex A of the August 2026 NPPF.**
- 14) The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024¹ provides, amongst other things, the basis for how all councils should develop their plans and identifies what the key purposes of local plans are, in the context of delivering sustainable development.
- 15) Paragraph 11(a) of the NPPF states that:

“all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects;”
- 16) Paragraph 11(b) of the NPPF clarifies that our plan should contain strategic policies which provide, as a minimum, for our objectively assessed needs unless:

“i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area; or

¹ See <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20250225172715/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.”

- 17) Para 11(b)i. of the NPPF is subject to footnote 7, which confirms that:

“The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 194) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.”

- 18) Section 3 of the NPPF provides the broad requirements for plan-making. In that section, paragraph 36 sets out that Plans are ‘sound’ if they are:

“a) Positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;

b) Justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;

c) Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and

d) Consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.”

- 19) With all those requirements in mind, the council sets out here the overall need in employment terms, and where and how need can be met in the urban area. Where that need cannot be met in full how the council has assessed the potential for Green Belt release, as required by NPPF paragraphs 145 and 146. Please see the Green Belt topic paper for more information on the process undertaken.

- 20) Paragraph 85 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) sets out the purpose of employment policies:

“Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its

strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential.”

- 21) The Framework then provides further detail on how policies should aim to achieve that purpose in paragraph 86:

“Planning policies should:

- a) set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth, having regard to the national industrial strategy and any relevant Local Industrial Strategies and other local policies for economic development and regeneration;*
- b) set criteria, and identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period;*
- c) pay particular regard to facilitating development to meet the needs of a modern economy, including by identifying suitable locations for uses such as laboratories, gigafactories, data centres, digital infrastructure, freight and logistics;*
- d) seek to address potential barriers to investment, such as inadequate infrastructure, services or housing, or a poor environment; and*
- e) be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, and allow for new and flexible working practices and spaces to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances.”*

- 22) Paragraph 87 identifies the need to ensure that the different needs of businesses are met through local plans:

“Planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors. This includes making provision for:

- a) clusters or networks of knowledge and data-driven, creative or high technology industries; and for new, expanded or upgraded facilities and infrastructure that are needed to support the growth of these industries (including data centres and grid connections);*
- b) storage and distribution operations at a variety of scales and in suitably accessible locations that allow for the efficient and reliable handling of goods, especially where this is needed to support the supply chain, transport innovation and decarbonisation; and*
- c) the expansion or modernisation of other industries of local, regional or national importance to support economic growth and resilience.”*

2.2 Planning Practice Guidance

Housing and economic needs assessment

- 23) The government has produced Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) in respect of assessing economic need: ‘Housing and economic needs assessment’².
- 24) Amongst other things, the PPG sets out the requirement to assess the need for land or floorspace for economic development, including both the quantitative and qualitative need for all foreseeable types of economic activity over the plan period. In addition, it advises that authorities should have regard to the likely availability and achievability of employment-led development, the role, capacity and function of town centres and locations of deprivation which may benefit from planned remedial action.
- 25) The Employment Land Review Update (2026) has been produced in line with PPG requirements.

2.3 Local Evidence

One Stockport Economic Plan

- 26) The One Stockport Economic Plan³ was published in 2022 in partnership with key stakeholders from across the borough as a long-term response to opportunities and challenges which exist in Stockport in order to enable those who live, work, and do business in Stockport to thrive. The main opportunities and challenges are set out below.
- 27) Stockport is strategically located within one of the most important, exciting and dynamic city regions in the country. People and businesses benefit from Stockport’s proximity to Manchester and the airport, as well as economic links to Cheshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire.
- 28) The borough has experienced rapid and sustained economic growth over the past decade. This has made Stockport a major regional economic driver in its own right. Since 2015, Stockport’s employment base has grown by 13%, which is greater than the England and Greater Manchester averages.
- 29) Stockport is home to a range of nationally and internationally significant companies such as Music Magpie, BASF, Adidas and McVities as well as a number

² See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

³ See <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/economic-information>

of specialisms across many critical foundational sectors such as utilities, logistics and manufacturing.

- 30) Stockport makes a distinctive contribution to the Greater Manchester (GM) Economy in terms of its high-quality skills base, its innovative businesses and its thriving Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector.
- 31) The One Stockport Economic Plan aligns closely with the Local Industrial Strategy and the ten priorities of the Greater Manchester Strategy. There is a significant opportunity for Stockport to build on its existing strengths in business, finance and professional services, health innovation, life sciences, medical technology and digital sectors.
- 32) Despite the overall position in terms of elements of the economy, Stockport remains one of the most polarised boroughs in the country and Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis have widened existing inequalities. This has had a disproportionate impact on the borough's most disadvantaged residents. The One Stockport Economic Plan identifies the need to ensure that, as a borough, maximum social, economic and environmental benefit is secured, but also that these benefits are shared across the borough. Greater levels of unemployment are identified in Brinnington and Central ward and other wards surrounding the town centre. The creation of additional jobs within or close to these areas that match the skills of out-of-work residents can provide an effective route out of poverty.
- 33) Work can only be a route out of poverty if employers offer fair terms and conditions and sufficient flexibility to support, for example, carers and people with a disability who need reasonable adjustments. The National Minimum Wage is insufficient to prevent poverty. 67% of children in poverty live in families with at least one working adult. We want to create opportunities for all residents to reach their full potential in work, by promoting the Good Employment Charter⁴ and Real Living Wage⁵ to businesses and employers in Stockport, including developers.
- 34) Diversifying Stockport's economy is a vital part of ensuring it has the ability to deal with future changes in circumstances. Currently, factors in the borough, such as poor survival rates of some businesses and an inability to respond to changes, risk undermining Stockport's recent growth. There is little evidence of an entrepreneurial start-up culture, and existing employment specialisms are also forecast to decline. This means that economic diversification is a necessity.
- 35) The council has declared a climate emergency and the 'greening' of the borough represents an economic opportunity. The development of skills to support the 'green economy' is a key priority.

⁴ See <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/>

⁵ See <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/>

- 36) The overall vision of the One Stockport Economic Plan is to build a more inclusive, resilient and greener economy by design. This is based on four core priorities:
- **Fair and Inclusive:** Supporting a fairer economy where local people are the primary beneficiaries of regeneration and growth.
 - **Enterprising and Productive:** Capturing a bigger share of high value knowledge sector jobs while supporting a resilient foundational economy.
 - **Climate Friendly and Resilient:** Tackling the climate emergency, growing the green economy, and enabling Stockport to 'build back better' and recover from the pandemic.
 - **Accessible and Connected:** Ensuring multi-modal transport infrastructure and digital infrastructure supports employment and inclusive economic growth.
- 37) The Economic Plan Delivery Plan 2025-2028 sets out a programme of actions for that period, whilst continuing to build on the strong foundations set down in preceding years (2022-2025). The four core priorities, set out above, remain unchanged, reflecting the borough's long-term commitment to inclusive growth, resilience, and partnership working.
- 38) The Delivery Plan identifies Stockport's opportunities and challenges and outlines a set of actions, aligned to the four priorities, ensuring continued focus and coordination across all delivery partners. The following big-ticket items are intended to deliver significant impacts for the borough:

Enterprising and Productive

- Deliver projects that create the spaces required to bring additional jobs and businesses at St Thomas' Gardens, flexible office and co-working space and creative studios; and
- Deliver an extended Mayoral Development Corporation, tripling the boundary to encompass 280 acres across the town centre.

Climate Friendly and Resilient

- Completion of Cheadle Eco Park - 115,000 sqft of new, net zero carbon industrial units providing space to support growth in the green tech, clean tech, and renewables sectors; and
- Deliver a low carbon Complete the development of Cheadle Eco Park – 115,000 sqft of new, net zero carbon industrial units providing space to support growth in the green tech, clean tech, and renewables sectors. Accessible and Connected: District Heat Network within the town centre, in collaboration with government and private sector partners.

Fair and Inclusive

- Deliver the Construction Skills Hub; and

- Create a network of LiveWell Centres across the borough, including targeted skills outreach.

Accessible and Connected

- Extend Metrolink to Stockport – develop and submit the business case to secure investment; and
- Complete construction of Cheadle Railway Station to enhance connectivity at Cheadle.

Employment Land Review (ELR) – update 2026

- 39) The ELR has been undertaken to assess the existing employment space and land in the borough and to assess future needs. Overall, it has found that there is not a need for a large amount of new employment land in relative terms. More specifically, in terms of Class E office space, future requirements of around 19 hectares should be able to be met within the existing urban area, particularly in the town centre, which will be a key focus for office development, and within Employment Areas. The new Local Plan will respond to this with policies which seek to protect existing employment land and to promote appropriate uses in the main centres of the borough.
- 40) However, there is a lack of suitable land for certain employment sectors, particularly in logistics and distribution. The type of businesses in this sector that are driving demand require fit-for-purpose modern and accessible space. The ELR found that the sector would not consider it suitable to locate in existing stock, where many sites are judged to include stock that is ill-equipped for and be situated in areas that are not attractive to the modern occupier. Whilst some redevelopment of existing employment spaces may occur this will take time to realise, with periods of vacancy prior to the planning and construction process.
- 41) The ELR concludes that to adequately provide for B2/8 (General Industrial / Warehousing and Logistics) requirements over the plan period, the Local Plan should find around 26 hectares in appropriate locations.
- 42) The land requirements (in hectares – ha) for employment over the plan period to 2042 are as follows:

<i>Class E (offices)</i>	<i>19 ha</i>
<i>Class B2/B8 (industrial)</i>	<i>26 ha</i>

- 43) The ELR identifies a number of requirements for logistics sites, and these can be found in that document's recommendations. In order for regional and national logistics operators to be successful there are a number of key locational requirements. These include:

- A nationally strategic location – regional and national distribution requires a strategic location in a national context which is:
 - Within 4-5 hours’ drive of key population centres in the north and south to provide efficient access to markets, retailers, and consumers;
 - Accessible to key deep-sea ports, sea freight, and key freight hubs; and
 - Directly connected to the national strategic road network.
- A locally strategic location – major logistics centres, in addition to being located in a strategic location nationally, must within its locality be located with:
 - Direct access to the Strategic Road Network, with ready preference being for land directly adjacent to motorway junctions; and
 - Ready access to a local pool of labour, including training and education providers who can deliver the skills and employees required to meet the modern needs of logistics operators – ranging from entry level to highly skilled jobs.
- Suitable site/physical characteristics – the site itself must be appropriate and suitable to accommodate the scale and type of development to meet occupier needs. This includes:
 - A site of sufficient size and scale to deliver large scale modern logistics to Grade A standard – usually of a size and scale that can deliver buildings in excess of 250,000sqft (c.23,225sqm) in size and up to 1,000,000sqft (c.92,900sqm) in a single building;
 - Sites that are deliverable and viable – in essence not affected by significant constraints (contamination etc.); and
 - Ready and immediate access to the strategic highways network with capacity to handle the development on local roads/junctions. Prime sites will be located adjacent to motorway junctions.

Whole Plan Viability Assessment

- 44) A whole plan viability assessment (‘viability assessment’) was commissioned in 2026 to form a key part of the evidence for the Local Plan. As part of this work, an assessment of draft policies, selected sites, and developer contributions was undertaken. This approach scrutinised whether the total cost of policy delivery is realistic and deliverable, to help inform the evolution of our policy approach to ensure a sound Local Plan.
- 45) Consultants carried out detailed development appraisals for a range of development site typologies across Stockport, including employment sites as well as policies affecting employment uses. A large focus of the work was to understand whether residential development is viable across the borough; please see the Housing Topic Paper for more information on the approach to that.
- 46) Viability testing for industrial and commercial uses indicates none of these typologies tested are viable. This means that industrial

and logistics development require a very flexible policy approach, especially on brownfield land. In addition, any new-build high street retail would be unlikely to support additional development contributions or policy costs.

- 47) Office development appears unviable at current market value and build costs, a situation which is reflective of general challenging economic conditions across the country.
- 48) Flexibility will be needed when applying energy and carbon reduction related requirements, to avoid stymying commercial development.

2.4 Implications

- 49) The council has identified sufficient land within the urban area for most employment sectors. This is to be achieved either on existing allocated employment areas or in the town and district centres. These are the best located areas for employment development with benefits of conglomeration with existing employers and ready access to the potential workforce as well as many of these being in the more accessible locations in the borough.
- 50) The key shortfall will be in the delivery of land to support logistics and warehousing development at the scale identified in the ELR. This is due to the lack of suitable sites in the urban area and locational requirements for these use types. There are currently no sites of a significant size which would be appropriate for large floorspace units of the type required by this employment sector and which are well located with ready access to the major road network.
- 51) As such the council, and with regard to NPPF paragraphs 86 and 87 has had to consider whether any suitable sites for employment development are available in the Green Belt.

3. Identifying additional sites

- 52) As detailed in this topic paper, meeting need in full within the urban area for B2/B8 space has not been possible. Despite extensive work to identify suitable opportunities via repeated requests for sites through various ‘call for sites’ exercises (see below) and the outcomes of annual monitoring of possible employment land show that there are no suitable sites within the urban area for the future scale and needs of B2/B8 uses.
- 53) As such, and as set in paragraphs 145 and 146 of the NPPF, the council has had to consider the suitability of Green Belt land to meet some or all of the identified need for logistics and distribution.
- 54) The council has undertaken the following ‘Call for Sites’ exercises where property developers, landowners and the general public were formally invited to submit site suggestions for development and/or protection:
- Greater Manchester Spatial Framework Call for Sites (2016)
 - Local Plan Call for Sites (2017)
 - GMSF Consultation Submission Call for Sites (2019)
 - Local Plan Call for Sites (2020)
 - Brownfield Call for Sites (2021)
 - Local Plan Call for Sites (2024/25)
 - Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation (2026)
- 55) Each of the potential sites that are within the Green Belt has been subject to our Green Belt site selection methodology. The Green Belt topic paper sets out the methodology in full and the implications arising.
- 56) As a result of that assessment, sites have been identified as potentially suitable for allocation and those sites are listed in policy BUS 3b of the Local Plan.
- 57) The following sites outside of the existing built-up area of the borough have been identified and are allocated on the Policies Map:

Site name	BUS 3.1 Bredbury Gateway
Minimum floorspace (square metres)	50,000
Site area	11.1 ha

Site name	BUS 3.2 Heathside Park Road
Minimum floorspace (square metres)	32,000
Site area	7.1 ha

Total land	18.2 ha
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- 58) The minimum floorspace is based on assumptions around how much of the site could be developed and how much land would be required for supporting uses such as transport infrastructure.
- 59) Plans showing the boundaries of each site are set out in appendix A to this paper.
- 60) Both sites are well located in relation to distance from existing residential areas, providing both ready access for potential employees and also meaning that travelling to the sites is likely to be minimised.
- 61) At the time of writing, the council is in receipt of a request for a screening opinion on a proposal for an Electric Vehicle Bus Depot on the southern half of the Heathside Park Road allocation, providing relevant floorspace for transport-based logistics. The site covers approximately 3.7 hectares and access would be taken from an upgraded access point off Heathside Park Road. The position will be reviewed as and when a decision has been made on this and any subsequent planning application.
- 62) Despite ongoing challenges with development viability for employment sites, a planning application is expected for the southern part of BUS 3.2, as stated above, and BUS 3.1 has a live planning application and has previously been subject to an application and appeal for a larger site, indicating that there is active demand for this type of development to come forward.
- 63) When factoring in the total land in hectares from the two proposed land allocations above against the overall requirement from the ELR for B2/B8 space this reveals the following shortfall:

Proposed allocations:	18.2 ha
Need:	26 ha
Shortfall:	7.8 ha

- 64) The employment land provision for B2/B8 space is below the need identified in the ELR. Having undertaken a full assessment of the Green Belt and relevant factors (see the Green Belt topic paper), further B2/B8 land has not been identified in the Green Belt to accommodate this need as the areas with the most potential to meet the ELR requirements are restricted by other factors outlined below. It is judged that no other land exists in the Green Belt that would satisfy these requirements.
- River valley and landscape considerations: The most attractive location in the borough for large-scale logistics development to meet modern requirements is at Bredbury although this has challenging topography and is within the Tame Valley. It is judged that further encroachment northwards beyond the proposed allocation boundary at Bredbury Gateway would cause significant adverse impacts on landscape character and the river valley which could not be remedied sufficiently by mitigation.

- Fundamental impacts on remaining Green Belt: The land north of Bredbury Gateway and adjacent the A555 between Bramhall and Poynton is identified by the Green Belt Assessment as having potential to fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt⁶.
- 65) As such, it is judged that these harms are not outweighed by the benefits that would be offered by the delivery of employment floorspace.

⁶ This evidence can be found at Figure 4.2 of the Stockport Green Belt Assessment 2025 which is available on the council's website at <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/evidence-planning-policy>.

4. Conclusion

- 66) The Local Plan seeks a thriving and productive economy and ensures that high quality sites and premises for business and employment growth are in the right locations. Policies serve to protect and enhance existing employment areas and identify new sites to meet identified needs.
- 67) This topic paper has pulled together and summarised evidence and legislation from a variety of sources. In doing so, an overview has been given of how policies have been developed. The policies are underpinned by proportionate and locally relevant evidence, including the Economic Plan and Employment Land Review.
- 68) This evidence and the outcomes of call for sites exercises has highlighted that land requirements for B2/8 (General Industrial / Warehousing and Logistics) over the plan period cannot be met within the urban area due to a lack of suitable sites that satisfy the locational requirements of logistics operators relating to scale and strategic location.
- 69) As such, following a site selection methodology, two allocations have been proposed for release of the Green Belt to meet the majority of the need. A moderate shortfall remains although it is judged that impacts on the Tame Valley and on the remaining Green Belt would not be outweighed by the benefits that would be offered by the delivery of additional employment floorspace.

Appendix A: Proposed employment allocations on sites outside of the existing built-up area

BUS 3.1 Bredbury Gateway



BUS 3.2 Heathside Park Road

