Executive Summary:
The draft Development Management Advice Note 5: Supporting the local economy and our high streets (referred to as the draft Advice Note) has been prepared as part of the measures and initiatives within the wider recovery programme the council is undertaking to support local businesses and communities as they recover from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. This draft Advice Note forms part of a series produced to assist applicants and their agents when considering proposals during the preparation of the new Elmbridge Local Plan.

Local Plan Working Group agreed on 29 June 2020 that approval should be sought from the Cabinet Member for Planning Services and the Cabinet Member for Community and Corporate Development to publish the Advice Note on the council’s website.

The attached draft Advice Note incorporates amendments following comments received from the Local Plan Working Group.

Recommended: that the Cabinet Members for Planning and Community & Corporate Development:

- Approves the Development Advice Note 5: Supporting the local economy and our high streets for publication on the council’s website following a two-week call-in period.

Report:

1. Background and purpose of the advice note

1.1 The Government has been clear of the role of the planning system in assisting sustainable economic recovery post Covid-19. With this in mind, this advice note has been prepared as part of the measures and initiatives within a wider recovery programme the council is undertaking to support local businesses and communities as they recover from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.
1.2 This advice note forms part of a series produced in 2018/19 to assist applicants and their agents when considering proposals during the preparation of the new Elmbridge Local Plan. This note focusses on matters relating to employment land (B1 uses) and those within town and villages centres (retail centres). It provides a direction for the type of development that will and will not be encouraged in these locations.

2 **Policy context and market trends/demand**

2.1 The draft Advice Note sets out the background and local context including the relevant national and local policy requirements. It then outlines the national/regional and local market trends and demand in relation to employment (B1 uses) and our high streets. This includes the increased demand for smaller, affordable and more flexible workspaces and the evolution of our town and village centres from a retail-led offer.

2.2 The sources of published and emerging evidence are listed in the draft Advice Note. This includes the emerging Local Market Appraisal (LMA) which was jointly sponsored by the Local Plan Working Group and the High Streets Working Group.

3 **Giving weight to market trends and demand to respond to change and ensuring flexibility**

**Pro-actively managing employment (B uses) floorspace**

3.1 National planning policy and local evidence supports the safeguarding of sufficient employment land and encourages opportunities to reuse and repurpose land and optimise mixed use opportunities to meet the needs of the economy to support recovery, local job creation and business growth.

3.2 Therefore, it is important that the council continues to safeguard and promote Strategic Employment Land (SEL) as identified on the Policies Map. In areas designated as SEL, development will be supported if it secures the following uses:

- Office and work space (use class B1a),
- Research and development (use class B1b)
- Light industry (use class B1c),
- General Industry (use class B2),
- Storage and distribution (use class B8); and
- Ancillary uses to the above and hybrid and flexible uses that reinforces the
  - function, role and operations of employment uses within the SEL.

3.4 Across the borough, the sub-division and re-configuration of existing larger employment units, to produce smaller units and shared or co-working space is a key example of flexible or adaptable units that should be encouraged. This reflect the needs of the borough’s changing office market and the demand for smaller and cheaper units.
3.5 It is important that short-term decisions are not made which could lead to the loss of important employment land in the borough. Therefore, longer marketing periods of up to three years, should be required to demonstrate that there is no reasonable prospect of the site being retained in employment use(s). The reasonable marketing period for individual sites will be advised at the preapplication stage and will depend on the location, use and quality of the unit. A reasonable marketing period will be no less than 12 months.

Supporting our high streets

3.6 To support the changing role of our high streets including the reduced retail focus, a move away from traditional A1 uses within primary frontages (as defined on the Policies Map) is required. Therefore, changes to or the introduction of new uses that complement the evolving role of town and village centres needs be encouraged, this would include for example leisure, health and wellness and community facilities and services.

3.7 This includes positive consideration of the visitor attractor role and the planning merits of temporary and flexible meantime and pop-up uses within vacant units which can attract footfall. Mixed use development including those with office and residential elements, which contribute to increasing footfall and vibrancy and which demonstrate efficient use of land should be encouraged.

3.8 The loss of retail and A class use floorspace to solely residential will be carefully considered and acceptability will be dependent on the location and individual circumstances of the site.

4 Implications of the Covid-19 pandemic

4.1 At this time, it is difficult to predict the short, medium and long-term implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on how businesses will work and adapt, on employment space demands and similarly on how our town and village centres will function and how their role as community hubs will continue to adapt and evolve. However, it is reasonable to anticipate that many of the market trends will continue or accelerate.

4.2 Therefore, it should be assumed that a pro-active approach informed by clear market trends to date, local evidence, consistent with national planning policy and centred around flexibility will prevent short term, reactionary planning decisions being made. Failure to respond pro-actively could hinder sustainable economic recovery and / or lead to the delivery of unsustainable development and the loss of valued and vital employment space, local businesses and services. This will have an adverse impact on our communities.

5 Implications for decision making

5.1 The draft Advice Note is clear that the current Local Plan policies are not considered out of date. However, it is acknowledged that on occasion there may be a conflict with the requirements contained within the Core Strategy 2011 and Development Management Plan 2015.
Therefore, the decision-maker will continue to assess every application on its merits and consider any arising conflicts on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the relevant national and local policies and material planning considerations. This includes published and emerging Local Plan evidence on market demand and trends and matters raised in this draft Advice Note.

6 Implications for the emerging Local Plan

6.1 The council has already been utilising market trends, the findings of its local evidence, the requirements of national planning policy and consultation responses to inform the development of new policies as part of its Local Plan preparation. The latest Regulation 18 consultation ‘Creating our vision, objectives and the direction for development management policies 2020’ set out the council’s current thinking as to the approaches that the new Local Plan policies should take, including those that relate to growing a prosperous economy. The approach set out in the draft Advice Note is consistent with the policy approach identified in the ‘Vision’ consultation.

6.2 The published and emerging local evidence base was prepared prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The council will continue to monitor closely land supply, economic performance, take up and vacancy rates in relation to employment areas and high streets as well as local and national trends. However, at this time it is considered premature to undertake further or additional evidence work and to forecast the short, medium and longer-term implications on market demand.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Approval is sought from the Cabinet Members for Planning Services and Community and Corporate Development to publish the Advice Note as set out in the Appendix A of this report following a two-week call-in period.

Financial Implications: None for this report

Environmental/Sustainability Implications: None for this report

Legal Implications: This DM advice note has been prepared for the purpose of guidance only in relation to the subject matter. The DM advice note does not provide a comprehensive list of the material planning considerations that will need be considered by the decision maker as required by Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Equality Implications: None for this report

Risk Implications:
None for this report

**Community Safety Implications:**
None for this report

**Principal Consultees:**
Councillor Mrs Karen Randolph
Councillor Mrs Christine Elmer
Local Plan Working Group

**Background Papers:**
None for this report

**Enclosures/Appendices:**
Appendix A- Draft Development Advice Note 5- Supporting the local economy and our high streets

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