

Stewkley Neighbourhood Plan

Economy and Employment

According to the AVDC Councillor Update – Economic Profile of Stewkley Ward Report April 2014, there were 132 businesses in Stewkley, providing some 500 jobs. Of these business, 112 were micro businesses, employing fewer than 10 people. Education was the highest employment sector at 49.1%, with professional, scientific and technical at 12%, construction at 8.4%, and property at 2.7%.

There are two business estates, being Manor Business Centre off High Street South and the Ploughing Barns, a school, a number of farms and a small shop. Stewkley has a high level of self-employed who are home based and offer a wide range of services and products.

There are a high level of degree or higher qualified inhabitants, with those working in managerial, professional and technical roles (51.4%), ranking in the top quartile nationally for managerial occupations and the second quartile for professional and technical occupations.

The Stewkley Neighbourhood Plan Survey carried out in 2016 reported that 30% of inhabitants were employed full time, with 14% part time. 16% are self-employed and 4% home workers. 19% are home businesses, with 39% home working and 12% working in Stewkley.

Commuting

The Stewkley Neighbourhood Plan Survey established that 64% of the working population commute to work, with 74% by car. Leighton Buzzard station provides easy access to London and the new A505/M1 link road will improve access to Luton Airport. Heathrow is also with easy access. High vehicle movement into and out of the village at rush hour is a consequence of commuting outside the business and lack of public transport.

Working in Stewkley

A separate business survey undertaken in June/July 2016 sought to establish reasons for businesses being based in Stewkley, current challenges and future plans. No bespoke database was found so one had to be created for this purpose. Of 70 questionnaires delivered, 20 were completed. Respondents identified their residency in Stewkley, transport links and local customers as being typical reasons for having their businesses based here. Wiltshire Farms Foods, a significant employer based in Stewkley, plans to grow the business, which will require expanded premises. There was significant interest in a business club and one respondent suggested a cafe.

Key challenges

The key challenge was poor broadband/internet connection (69% of respondents said they were very or somewhat dissatisfied). With a significant number of businesses operating from home, it is desirable that all new homes are connected to the fibre optic network when available. Lack of public transport (42% of respondents said they were very or somewhat dissatisfied) was also a limiting factor for attracting staff to work here. Lack of sufficient parking and street lighting were mentioned by the shop. There were no expectations of significant change to their businesses. A local business forum would provide an opportunity for sole traders and businesses to meet to not only share matters concerning operating in Stewkley, but also to provide mutual support and learning opportunities. This could also address the current lack of Parish Council involvement in Stewkley businesses through joint activities. Outcomes could include additional and improved premises for businesses to locate to the village or to expand, the provision of off- site facilities such as meeting rooms, and better infrastructure. A database of businesses operating out of the village would provide opportunities to find local suppliers and to communicate on matters of mutual interest.

The Neighbourhood Plan recognises the need to maintain the variety of businesses in Stewkley and to ensure that the main challenges of improved broadband and mobile capability are addressed very soon.

Proposed Policies for Economy and Employment

1. Business Sites

Applications for business use (including live/work), offering employment opportunities for local people will be supported providing they complement existing clusters of activity, accord with Policy H1 and do not;

- negatively impact upon residential amenity or the character, appearance, vitality and distinctiveness of the local area
- adversely increase traffic or impact upon road safety

2. Protection of Existing Employment Sites:

Existing employment sites should be retained unless it can be demonstrated that there is no demand for such a facility or that the redevelopment would result in a more efficient use of land.

Applications for change of use of employment sites will be considered subject to the provision of alternate site(s) that comply with current development policy.

3. Superfast Broadband

Proposals involving the development of a new dwelling/s or non-residential floor space (over 100sqm) should recognise the need for a choice of supply for Superfast (via copper) or Ultrafast (via fibre) broadband and incorporate the infrastructure to connect to both

Other Recommendations:

- The development of a Stewkley business social networking club to share expertise and ideas and provide mutual support