Runnymede Borough Council

Justification Report for Article 4 Directions - Strategic Employment Areas

Date: November 2025

Classification: Official



Contents

1. Introduction 3
   1.1 Permitted Development Rights 3
   1.2 What is an Article 4 Direction? 4
2. Policy Context 5
   2.1 Employment evidence for the adopted LP 5
   2.2 Runnymede 2030 Local Plan 5
   2.3 Housing Size and Mix 6
   2.4 National policy and guidance 7
3. Evidence to support the Article 4 Direction 9
   3.1 Office Floor Area Lost and Potential Loss 9
   3.2 Dwelling Completions and Commitments 10
   3.3 Housing Mix 11
   3.4 Affordable Housing 12
   3.5 Quality of Dwellings 12
   3.6 Sustainable design and construction 13
   3.7 Air Quality 14
   3.8 Noise and Disturbance 14
   3.9 Infrastructure Contributions 14
4. Process and Approval of the Article 4 Direction 16
5. Conclusion 17
6. Appendices 18
   Appendix 1. Policy IE2 Strategic Employment Areas 18
   Appendix 2. Maps showing the SEAs (or parts of them) designated by Policy IE2 which are proposed to be included in Article 4 direction 19

1. Introduction

This report has been prepared to support the proposal for the introduction of a non-immediate Article 4 Direction for the removal of permitted development rights which allow the change of use from Class E (commercial class) to C3 (residential) within 4 of the 5 Strategic Employment Areas (SEAs) in Runnymede. This report sets out the:

- planning policy context
- forms of harm caused by permitted development rights for office to residential conversions
- evidence to justify the introduction of an Article 4 Direction on the borough's five SEAs

1.1 Permitted Development Rights

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (known as the GPDO) grants planning permission for specified forms of development, known as permitted development.

In 2013, the Government introduced Permitted Development Rights (PDR) to enable offices to be converted to residential use and create new dwellings (Class J)[1], initially for a temporary period of three years. This was made permanent in May 2016. Since that time several substantial additions have been made to PDR, both facilitating further sources for the creation of new dwellinghouses, whilst also introducing additional standards and prior approval criteria requiring consideration, such as compliance with national space standards and daylight/sunlight assessment.

The expansion of PDR has been pursued by central Government, as a way to speed up the delivery of new homes, address the housing shortage, and reuse empty or underused commercial buildings. It is seen as a way to cut 'red tape', and the time and costs associated with applying for planning permission, helping to meet housing targets and bring life back to vacant office spaces.

Many councils and their representative bodies, such as the Local Government Association, consider that permitted development rights, particularly office to residential conversions have resulted in the loss of thousands of affordable homes, and weaken local authorities' ability to implement their strategic planning policies and meet local needs for housing and infrastructure.

Increasingly, since 2013, PDR have been used to cover a number of other forms of development that would result in new dwellings, such as conversion to residential from retail and related uses and storage and distribution.

On 30 March 2021, the government amended the GPDO to introduce a new 'Class MA' (Mercantile to Abode) permitted development right allowing changes of use from a use falling within commercial, business and service (Class E) to residential. Class MA effectively expanded upon, and replaced, Class O. This means that provided the requirements and conditions of Class MA are satisfied, it is possible to make a change

[1] This was later amended to Class O.

of use from a Class E use to a Class C3 (residential) use without the need to apply to the local planning authority for planning permission. This permitted development right came into force from 1 August 2021.

Previously, the Class O prior approval allowed a change of use from office (revoked B1(a)) to residential. The class MA PD right now allows the conversion of a range of high street uses, including offices, restaurants, shops, and professional services, in the class E commercial use class into housing without the need for a planning application.

Class MA (as set out within Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the GPDO) permitted the change of use of buildings and any land within its curtilage from commercial, business and service uses to use as dwellinghouses, but this permitted development right was subject to some stringent limitations, most notably:

- that a building must have been vacant for a continuous period of at least three months immediately prior to the date of an application for prior approval from the local planning authority; and
- that the cumulative floorspace of the existing building changing use under Class MA could not exceed 1,500 square metres.

However, an Amendment Order was brought in by the government, which came into force on the 5th March 2024, which removed the two limitations listed above from Class MA. This means that many of the employment buildings within the borough which were previously considered to be exempt from these provisions could now be at risk of conversion.

It is important to note, however, that an application for Prior Approval still requires assessment of a number of technical considerations. These are outlined in the GPDO but can be summarised for this type of development as being, the transport impacts of the development (to ensure safe site access), contamination risks, flood risks, noise impacts and Conservation area impacts (if relevant).

1.2 What is an Article 4 Direction?

An Article 4 Direction is a direction under article 4 of the General Permitted Development Order which enables the Secretary of State or the local planning authority to withdraw specified permitted development rights across a defined area. An Article 4 Direction cannot be used to restrict changes between uses in the same use class of the Use Classes Order.

Whilst this does not prevent the change of use or development in that location, it ensures that it requires full planning permission and therefore can be more robustly scrutinised by the local authority in relation to their planning policies.

2. Policy Context

2.1 Employment evidence

The evidence base to support the identification of the Strategic Employment Areas in the adopted Runnymede 2030 Local Plan draws on the Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2018 and the Employment Land Review 2016, which provides detailed employment supply data.

Runnymede Borough Council commissioned the consultants, GL Hearn, to undertake a partial update of the Runnymede – Spelthorne Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in 2017 to support its consultation on its draft Local Plan. The document provides, at Chapter 8, an assessment of the need for employment land associated with the anticipated level of housing and population growth. This was to ensure that the strategies for housing and employment land were joined up. The employment forecasts in the 2018 SHMA update superseded the earlier employment land forecasting contained in Chapter 7 of the Council's 2016 Employment Land Review.

In producing the update to the SHMA, GL Hearn took account of both the quantitative and qualitative need guidance contained in the Planning Practice Guidance. The update considered the demand for employment land and floorspace over the period from 2016-30 and 2016-36. The update focused on the 'demand' for employment land in the 'B use classes' and therefore did not take account of any supply-side factors such as existing employment land allocations or commitments. The Council does however recognise that not all jobs fall within these use classes; growth in the service industry, retail, leisure and tourism is also expected to provide further economic growth over the current plan period.

The evidence from the SHMA and ELR helped to inform the economic policies for the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan. The update to the SHMA included jobs forecasts and projections, and B Class floorspace requirements for the need arising from the Borough. The analysis used three scenarios for future economic growth to 2030/2036:

- A labour demand – based on the Oxford Economics jobs growth forecast;
- A labour supply scenario – based on the population growth associated with 498 dpa;
- A past completions trend scenario – based on extrapolating historic completions.

Considering all factors, GL Hearn concluded that a range between the labour demand and labour supply forecasts were the most reasonable forecasts for Runnymede. This showed a need of between 12.7 and 20.4 hectares of employment land in the borough over the period from 2016-36.

2.2 Runnymede 2030 Local Plan

The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan was adopted in July 2020. The 2030 Local Plan

seeks to protect key employment sites, called Strategic Employment Areas, within the borough under Policy IE2, to accommodate existing and future demand. The justification for taking this approach is that given the projected need for additional employment floorspace over the plan period, as demonstrated in the Council's SHMA, in conjunction with the constraints on allocating additional employment land in the borough due to the large proportion of Green Belt land within Runnymede, employment land lost will be difficult to replace. The adopted Runnymede 2030 Local Plan sets out in detail further information about these areas.

Strategic Employment Areas (SEAs)

SEAs support clusters of employment activity that have or have the potential to become key drivers of the Borough and sub-regional economy. Safeguarding the Borough's strategic and best performing employment sites will ensure that important employment areas are protected and retained to maintain the Borough's base of higher value occupiers and employers, and enable additional companies to locate in the area, thereby delivering skilled jobs and continued growth. Focusing future development on such sites will help to build on existing sustainable patterns of development and market successes. Despite demand for headquarters accommodation within the Borough remaining relatively high due to the current lack of Grade A supply in the M25 market area, aspirations remain amongst some landowners for higher value non-B class land uses which puts established economic areas under threat.

The Borough's designated SEAs are home to a range of businesses both large and small. Although some business premises in these locations provide ancillary facilities for their staff, many smaller businesses are not able to do this. To enhance the sustainability of these areas and ensure their continued competitiveness in the marketplace, it is essential that these employment areas provide the necessary ancillary facilities such as cafes and crèche facilities to serve the workers based in the area.

The Strategic Employment Areas (for B uses) included under Policy IE2 are:

- SEA1: Hillswood Business Park
- SEA2: Longcross Park Enterprise Zone
- SEA3: The Causeway and Pinetrees Business Park
- SEA4: Thorpe Industrial Estate
- SEA5: Weybridge and Bourne Business Park and Waterside Trading Estate

Article 4 Directions

The 2030 Local Plan sets out[2] its intention to introduce Article 4 Directions to remove permitted development rights which allow for the change of use from B1(a) use (office) to C3 use (residential) and from B1(c) use (light industrial) to C3 use to ensure the protection of employment uses within the SEAs.

[2] Para. 8.15 of the adopted Runnymede 2030 Local Plan

It is proposed that the Article 4 Directions will be confined to the SEAs, and not include employment uses in the town centres, as these areas are expected to contain mixed use growth through employment and housing. Higher density development takes advantage of employment, sustainable transport links, walking and cycling routes and the wider town centre environment.

2.3 Housing Size and Mix

Policy SL19 sets out that an appropriate mix of dwelling types and sizes should be provided, in accordance with the evidence in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2018, or successor documents, unless an alternative mix is more appropriate.

The NPPF states that the overall aim should be to meet an area's identified housing need, including with an appropriate mix of housing types for the local community.[3]

The Council seeks to deliver a wide variety of high-quality homes that will provide the tenures, types and sizes of housing to meet the needs and demands of different people in the community. This includes housing for older people, people with disabilities, the travelling community and others in the community with specialist housing needs. The provision of new dwellings takes account of local need to allow for a genuine choice of housing options and the creation of sustainable, balanced and mixed communities.

Table 1 below shows the mix of housing recommended in the SHMA 2018 for Runnymede Borough. Developers are expected to generally provide a housing mix as set out in the SHMA or any similar evidence for market and affordable units. Development proposals which depart significantly from the required mix of housing are only be supported where evidence demonstrates that such a mix would not be feasible or viable.

Table 1: Housing Mix as set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2018)

SHMA 2018 targets	1-bed	2-bed	3- bed	4 or more
Market	5-10%	25-30%	40-45%	20-25%
Low cost home ownership	15-20%	40-45%	25–30%	10-15%
Social/ affordable rent	10-15%	40-45%	35-40%	5-10%

Source: Data taken from Chapter 6 of the SHMA 2018

The housing units completed under prior approval applications do not reflect the recommended housing mix. This is considered in more detail in 3.3 below.

2.4 National policy and guidance

Paragraph 54 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 sets out that the use of Article 4 Directions to remove national permitted development rights should:

"

[3] Para. 61 of the National Planning Policy Framework

a) where they relate to change from non-residential use to residential use, be limited to situations where an Article 4 Direction is necessary to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts….
c) in all cases, be based on robust evidence, and apply to the smallest geographical area possible."

Paragraph 038 of the Planning Practice Guidance section titled 'When is permission required?' sets out that the NPPF advises that all Article 4 Directions should be applied in a measured and targeted way and then reaffirms the contents of paragraph 54 of the NPPF. In addition, it sets out that the potential harm that the Article 4 Direction is intended to address will need to be clearly identified.

3. Evidence to support the Article 4 Direction

This chapter explores the forms of harm caused by permitted development rights for office to residential conversions and seeks to evidence the harm caused or which could be caused in the Strategic Employment Areas.

3.1 Office Floor Area Lost and Potential Loss

The Council monitors net changes in floorspace in different use classes on an annual basis and this is published in the Authority Monitoring Report. This includes prior approval applications which result in a change of use between different classes. Analysis of this data for office to residential or other 'B class' employment uses to residential shows that as at the end of the 2025 monitoring year, 39,343 sqms of employment floorspace has been lost as a result of PDR completions (this includes the 6,900 sqms of office floorspace at the Causeway which was under construction at the end of the 2025 monitoring year). In addition to this, there is extant permission for a further 30,581 sqms of PDRs. Consequently, altogether up to 69,924 sqms of employment space could, if all of the current prior approvals are implemented, be lost from employment use.

It is clear from Map 1 that the majority of the prior approvals have been permitted to date for the loss of office/ commercial uses to residential are located in the town centres. This is in part attributable to the recycling of older and less economically attractive employment floorspace that no longer meets the needs of modern office occupiers. It was in order to facilitate this kind of recycling to prevent long term vacancy of such buildings and to bolster the supply of residential units that the Government introduced permitted development rights to change from office to residential under the prior approval process.

It is recognised that bringing residential development into town centres can bring additional footfall and vitality, particularly when conversions occur in the upper storeys of retail units. These are less likely to threaten the health of high streets.

However, it is also apparent from the map that there have been a number of prior approval applications in the protected IE2 Strategic Employment Areas. These include:

- Hillswood (SEA1) – Prior Approval Application was granted for Lakeview 1000, on Hillswood Drive for the conversion of 7,500 sqm of office space to be converted to 83 flats. This application lapsed in January 2022 without being implemented.
- The Causeway (SEA3) – Prior Approvals were submitted for both Unit 1 and 2 at Lotus Park, The Causeway in 2021 (circa 3,300 sqm of office space) for 44 residential units. However, both PDRs lapsed in 2024 without being implemented. In addition, prior approvals were submitted for 3 further buildings at Lakeside East, Lakeside West and Lakeside House (RU.21/0483, RU.21/ 0484 and RU.21/0482 for 28, 39 and 36 units respectively. All three were granted and were under construction as at the end of the 2025 monitoring year. The loss of these three buildings from employment use has resulted in the loss of just under 6,900 sqms of floorspace.

- Thorpe Trading Estate (SEA4) - 3 buildings known as Blenheim House, Ashmead House and Laxton House which form part of Crabtree Office Village on the Thorpe Industrial Estate were granted prior approval for 12 units under RU.25/0833 on 28th July 2025. In addition, a prior approval application was also granted under RU.25/0822 at Blenheim House, Crabtree Village, Eversley Way, Egham, TW20 8RY for 8 residential units. These applications together will, if implemented, result in the loss of just over 1,800 sqms of floorspace.
- In the Weybridge and Bourne Business Park and Waterside Trading Estate (SEA5) there is a lapsed prior approval (RU.18/1350) for 9 residential units at Rivermead House, Hamm Moore Lane.

Not all prior approvals will necessarily be implemented, as some are likely to be speculative i.e. to see what value could be gained from the building if it were to be converted. Map 2 has therefore been produced to show where the prior approvals that have been permitted for these uses have been implemented. It is clear from this map that fewer prior approvals have been completed than have been permitted, as one might expect.

It is considered that in Runnymede, the amount of employment floorspace being converted to residential under the prior approval process is beginning to impact on the core supply of employment land in Runnymede and there is concern that this will impact on its capacity to provide sufficient employment land for the next iteration of the Local Plan, given the pressures on developable land within our constrained Borough.

The continued unconstrained loss of key employment floorspace through the conversion of offices to residential is considered likely to adversely impact the capacity of the next Local Plan to meet the requirement to provide sufficient employment floorspace in the future.

As set out above, para. 2.1 the SHMA 2018 included within it an employment needs assessment. This estimated a need of between 12.7 and 20.4 hectares of employment land in the borough over the period from 2016-36.

The SHMA is now somewhat out of date and will soon be replaced by a Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA). The draft HEDNA highlights the fact that according to agents “the Runnymede area has been particularly badly affected by Permitted Development.”

3.2 Housing Mix

There are a limited number of brownfield sites in existing settlements that can provide a mix of housing that will support a balance of housing types and tenures required, and relying solely on previously developed sites risks housing supply being weighted too heavily towards delivering 1-2 bed properties in higher density flatted schemes.

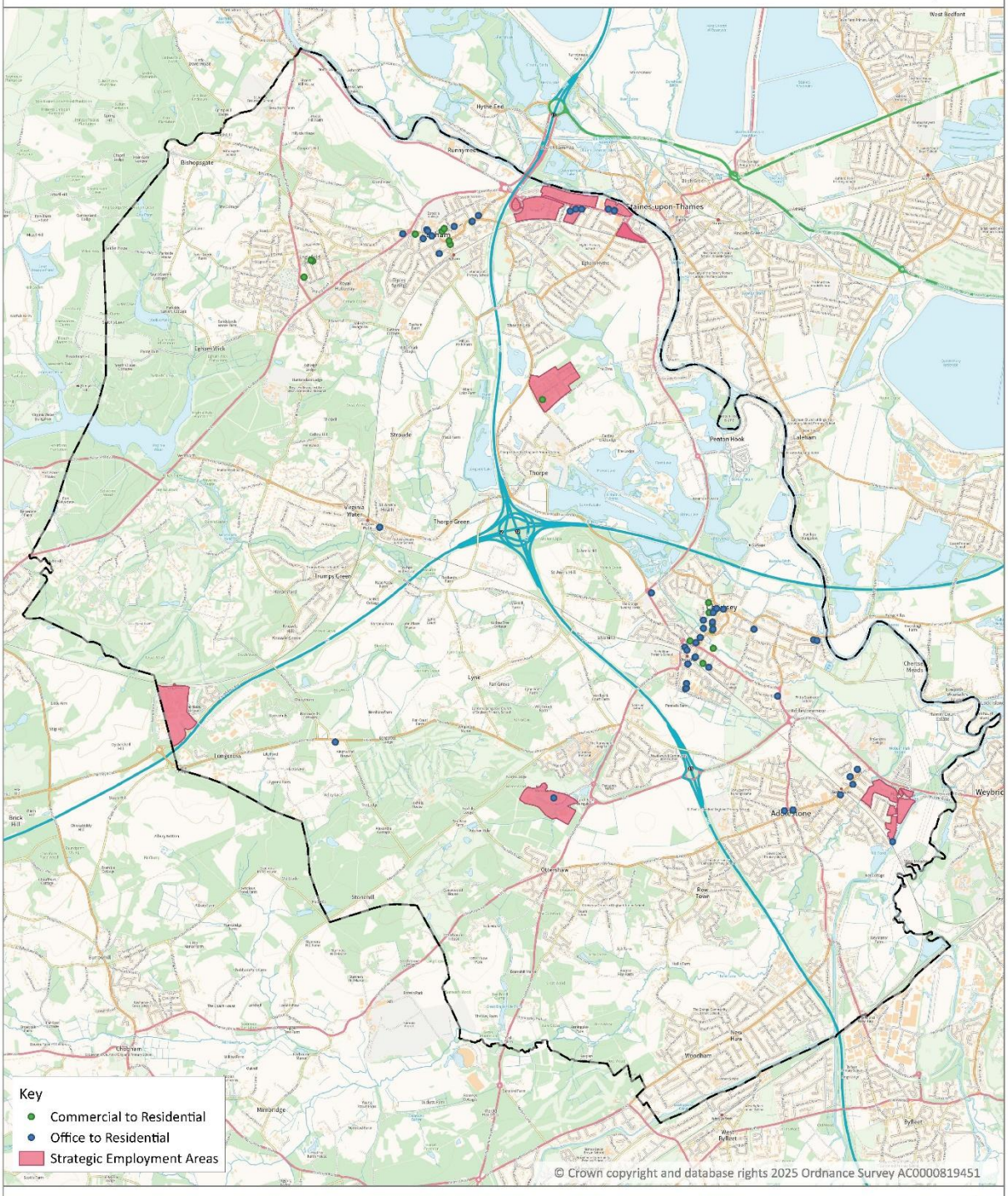
The delivery of new dwellings from prior approvals (from the class O and subsequently class MA of the GPDO) has not reflected the mix needed. In the last four years of the 388 units delivered as a result of prior approvals 93% have been one-bedroom flats and the remaining 7% have been 2-bedroom flats. This is contributing to an overprovision of 1 bed units in the borough, as set out in the latest Annual Monitoring

Report

Map 1 Prior approvals permitted for commercial/ office to residential uses in Runnymede since the 1st April 2015

Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Date: 29/09/2025



Scale: 1:40,000

0 800 1,600 m

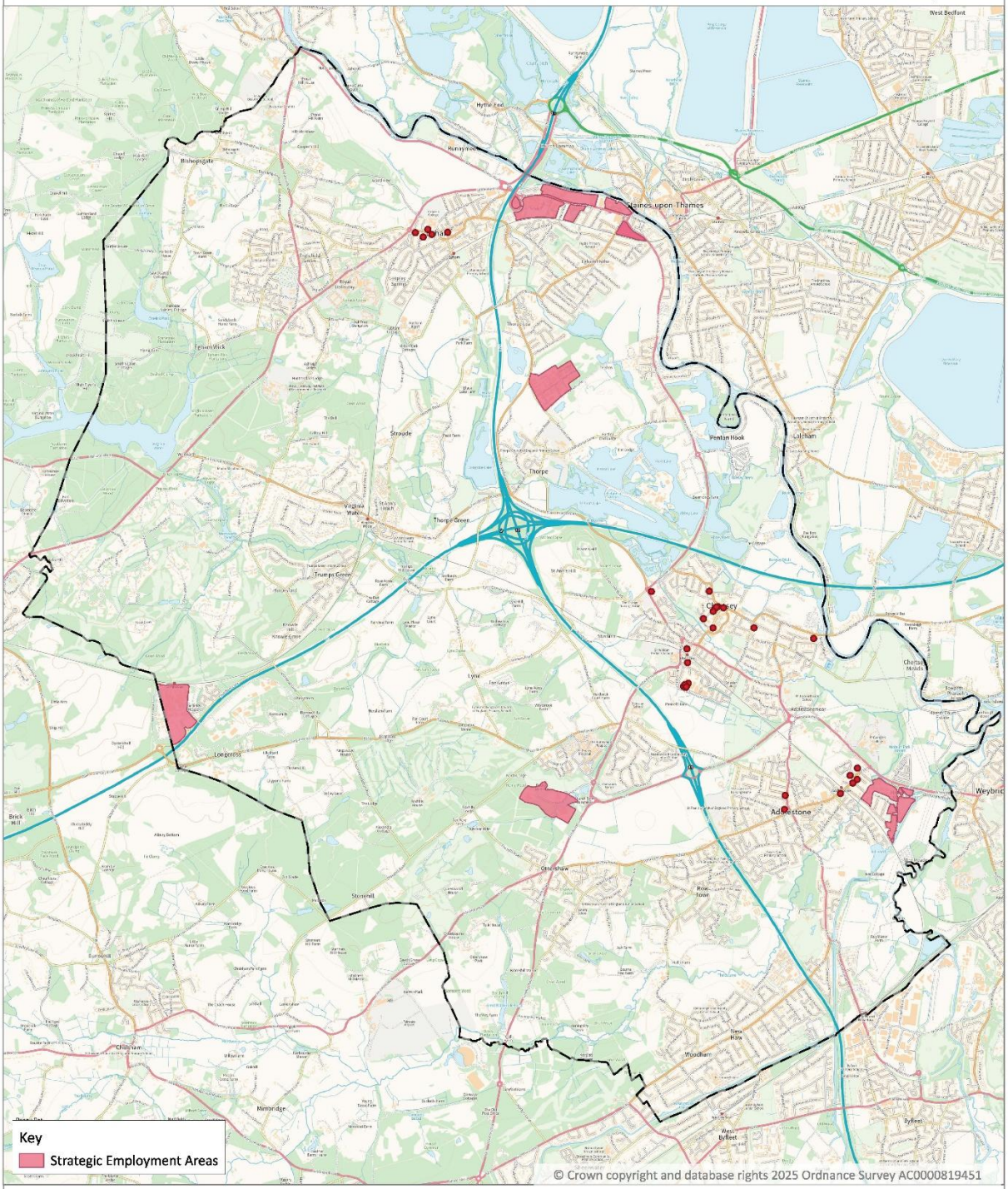
N

Map 2: Completed Prior Approvals for commercial/office to residential since the 1st April 2015

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Date: 20/10/2025



© Crown copyright and database rights 2025 Ordnance Survey AC0000819451

3.3 Affordable Housing

Affordable housing contributions or units are secured through a S106 agreement. The prior approval process does not require developers to contribute any affordable housing.

The housing need evidence underlying Runnymede 2030 Local Plan policy SL20 is the SHMA 2018. It indicates a high level of need for affordable housing in the Borough.

Policy SL20 sets out that over the period of the Local Plan the Council will seek to deliver 30% of all net additional dwellings as affordable units of which about 70% will be provided as Affordable/Social Rent and 30% provided as other forms of affordable housing. It also requires affordable housing on developments for 10 or more (net) additional dwellings to provide 35% of dwellings as affordable units with a tenure split of 70% Affordable/Social Rent and 30% provided as other forms of affordable housing. This includes 10% of homes for affordable home ownership (starter homes, discounted market sales housing and/ or other products which provide affordable routes to home ownership in line with the definition in the NPPF).

Since 1st April 2015, 703 affordable units have been completed representing approximately 18.8% of the 3,743 total housing completions, significantly below the Plan wide target to deliver 30% of all units as affordable homes up to 2030.

The extent of the impact of prior approvals on overall affordable housing delivery can not be conclusively demonstrated, and it is likely that other factors may well have played a role such as changing viability conditions and national policy on viability assessments. However, as an example, in the year 2024/25 Syward Place in Chertsey was converted from an office to 95 flats under prior approval. If a planning application had been applied for, this site would have triggered an affordable housing requirement as it exceeded the 10-dwelling threshold. If the 35% policy requirement had been applied to the site it would, subject to viability considerations, have resulted in 33 affordable flats being provided on this site. It is therefore clear that the introduction of class O and then MA has at the very least contributed to a decline in affordable housing delivery.

Given the scale of the identified affordable housing needs in Runnymede, it is of considerable harm to the planning of the area that so many private developments are not required to contribute towards affordable housing.

3.4 Quality of Dwellings

The housing figures in section 3.3 above demonstrate that dwellings granted through prior approvals are mainly 1-bedroom dwellings (approximately 93%). This does not reflect the identified need for family housing demonstrated in the evidence base prepared for the 2030 Local Plan.

Dwellings delivered through prior approvals are also often very small in terms of floorspace, with many being studio flats, but it is accepted that this issue has been largely addressed by the introduction in April 2021 of minimum national space standards for dwellings delivered through the prior approval route. There is also a requirement for adequate natural light for habitable rooms. However, several issues regarding the standards applied to new dwellings remain. This includes the lack of outdoor amenity space and no access to private or communal outdoor space. Dwellings without windows remain a concern, with natural light potentially only being provided by a rooflight. In addition, there is a more general locational concern relating to the introduction of new homes within commercial areas, for example the Strategic Employment Areas, where potential conflicts can arise from commercial and residential uses being located in such close proximity. This is considered further in the sections below.

The Local Plan includes a number of measures relating to sustainable design in Policy SD7 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan. These include the use of sustainable construction techniques. These cannot be required through prior approvals, undermining the aims of policy SD7 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan.

Accessible and adaptable dwellings under part M4(2) of the building regulations, and wheelchair accessible and adaptable dwellings under part M4(3) are a requirement of policy SD7 (f) for major residential schemes i.e. those resulting in 10 or more additional net dwellings. The mechanism by which they can be applied to a specific development is by planning condition. Without such a planning condition, there is no ability to require compliance with these standards, and a planning condition cannot be applied to a prior approval consent as wheelchair accessibility and adaptability are not matters that can be considered as part of a prior approval application.

3.5 Air Quality

Whilst some other environmental impacts, in particular noise and contamination, are matters that can be taken into account in considering prior approval applications, air quality is not among them. Poor air quality can have a serious impact on human health and on the natural environment.

Environmental protection policies are linked with Borough Local Plan (BLP) objectives to minimise the impact of development on climate change and the environment, and requiring new development to provide mitigation where required. The Council is committed to protecting existing environmental quality and where possible reducing adverse effects on the local and natural environment as a result of changes in activities or from new development.

Policy EE2: Environmental Protection of the Local Plan requires development proposals which may give rise to adverse impacts on air quality including sources of odour or fumes or which may place sensitive receptors in areas exceeding adopted air quality standards, or in close proximity to existing sources of odour to be accompanied by an air quality assessment or odour impact study. Where the air quality assessment or odour impact study shows that proposed development, either individually or cumulatively, will have an adverse impact on air quality, sensitive receptors, the natural environment or amenity, planning permission will only be granted where abatement or mitigation measures to reduce impacts to acceptable

levels can be secured and implemented. Such mitigation can be incorporated into a development's design from the outset, such as through its layout, for instance set backs from the road, or through ensuring windows to habitable rooms are located away from facades that are in close proximity to the source of poor air quality. Planting can also help to mitigate impacts, as can certain types of paving. Mitigation measures could also include mechanical ventilation systems which enables residents to keep their windows closed and which draw air from away from the areas of poorest air quality. None of these mitigation measures can be secured without a planning application being submitted.

3.6 Noise and Disturbance

It is considered that the location of residential prior approvals within the protected employment sites has clear potential for unacceptable noise impacts on residents. The lack of a planning application will mean that measures to provide mitigation, which would normally be secured by condition, will not be possible. Whilst it is possible to consider noise from commercial premises within the conditions of some prior approval applications, noise from other sources such as outdoor events or road noise, particularly with high levels of HGV traffic, cannot be considered.

Conversely, Local Plan policy EE2 requires development proposals resulting in or being subject to external noise impacts above Lowest Observed Adverse Effect Level to implement measures to mitigate and reduce noise impacts to a minimum. Development proposals resulting in or being subject to external noise impacts above Significant Observed Adverse Effect Level are not supported by the Council unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the social and economic benefits of the proposal outweigh noise impacts and unless the scheme's design and layout has been optimised to avoid, mitigate and reduce impacts to a minimum. Proposals which have or would be subject to unacceptable adverse effects are not supported.

The high levels of noise to which residents of prior approval schemes could be exposed could directly impact their quality of life. The importance of securing and improving people's quality of life is directly stated in the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan vision and objectives, and as such, schemes coming forward through the prior approval route could potentially fail to achieve the high quality development sought by the Local Plan.

3.7 Infrastructure Contributions

The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan Policy SD5 expects new development proposals to deliver infrastructure to support the overall spatial strategy of the Borough. This includes making contributions to the delivery of priority infrastructure projects included in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) in the form of financial contributions or on-site provision. Infrastructure required as a result of new development is only funded by developments subject to Prior Approval procedures where they are liable for CIL.

CIL is charged in pounds per square metre on the net additional increase in floorspace of liable developments. An Article 4 Direction would not change this situation because the CIL rules, including exemptions and deductions, would apply in the same way to planning applications. However, for particularly large developments, or developments

with specific impacts on infrastructure, the option to address this in a Section 106 agreement is lost through permitted development rights.

However, developments subject to prior approval which do not result in any increase in floorspace and have, or in part, been occupied for their lawful use for six continuous months of the 36 previous months (excluding temporary permissions), are potentially not CIL liable. Prior approvals are not required to provide affordable housing.
Without an Article 4 Direction, developments with prior approvals will continue to take place without making sufficient contributions to supporting infrastructure.

4. Process and Approval of the Article 4 Direction

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as well as Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), sets out expectations for when these directions can be used, and require that any Article 4 Direction that restricts changes of use to residential be limited to situations where an Article 4 Direction is necessary to avoid "wholly unacceptable adverse impacts".

The process of adopting an Article 4 Direction is as follows:

- Apply an immediate (confirmed within 6 months of being made) or non-immediate (implemented 12 months after the direction is 'made') Article 4 Direction by publishing a notice which needs to be publicised.
- Carry out a public consultation for a minimum of 21 days with those most likely to be affected and statutory consultees.
- Take into account responses received during the consultation period and decide whether to confirm or not confirm the Article 4 Direction.

If a decision is made to confirm the Article 4, the Secretary of State must be notified, and he or she can intervene to amend or remove an Article 4 Direction should he or she see fit. The Secretary of State has in some cases previously intervened to prevent blanket Article 4 Directions, and therefore the extent of the Direction needs to be considered carefully.

Government's existing planning guidance on Article 4 Directions is clear; the potential harm that the Direction is intended to address must be clearly identified, and in this instance, there will need to be a particularly "strong justification" as there are already prior approval powers available under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development etc.) (England) (Amendment) Order 2021 to control PDR Class MA (Use Class E to residential) applications.

The Secretary of State (SoS) also has the power to modify or cancel an Article 4 Direction and may indicate to the Council that the SoS is not willing to accept the Article 4 Direction as originally made.

In the case of an immediate Article 4 Direction, the Council can be liable under section 108 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to pay compensation to those whose Permitted Development Rights (PDR) have been withdrawn but only if, within 12 months of the effective date of the Article 4 Direction, the Council

1) Refuses planning permission for development which would otherwise have been permitted development, or
2) Grants planning permission subject to more limiting conditions than the General Permitted Development Order 2015

A non-immediate Article 4 Direction would remove the risk of compensation claims.

5. Conclusion

The Council intends to introduce a non-immediate Article 4 direction covering all five of the designated Strategic Employment Areas (Policy IE2). This will necessitate removing all of the areas covered by the SEA which have already been lost to residential use

Once a non-immediate Article 4 direction has taken effect it will remove the freedoms offered under Class MA of the GPDO and mean that planning permission will be required for changes of use from E class uses to use class C3 residential use within such sites. The 12- month delay before it takes effect avoids the Council being liable for compensation for any loss of value to the relevant property arising from a refusal of planning permission for development that would otherwise have been permitted under Class MA.

The National Planning Policy Framework sets a high bar for councils seeking to secure Article 4 Directions. It requires authorities to provide robust evidence to justify introducing them and requires them to be applied to the smallest geographical area possible (i.e., avoiding blanket Article 4 Directions). The proposal to restrict the Article 4 Direction to Class MA (Class E to Class C3) conversions within the most important protected employment sites complies with this requirement.

The aim of the Article 4 Direction is not to prevent all changes of use. The direction will enable the Council to consider relevant planning issues relating to change of use applications and to protect floorspace in commercial use within the Borough's protected employment sites to ensure that Runnymede retains an attractive and viable core of employment floorspace.

The direction will allow other planning matters to be considered, for example, affordable housing and amenity space provision, as well as infrastructure requirements, which would otherwise not be possible with prior approval applications considered under the GDPO.

Taken together, when considering the different considerations within this report, it is considered that the adverse impacts of prior approvals in the areas proposed for an Article 4 Direction are wholly unacceptable and warrant the introduction of an Article 4 Direction.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1. Policy IE2 Strategic Employment Areas

Strategic Employment Areas (SEAs)

8.12 SEAs support clusters of employment activity that have or have the potential to become key drivers of the Borough and sub-regional economy. Safeguarding the Borough's strategic and best performing employment sites will ensure that important employment areas are protected and retained to maintain the Borough's base of higher value occupiers and employers, and enable additional companies to locate in the area, thereby delivering skilled jobs and continued growth. Focusing future development on such sites will help to build on existing sustainable patterns of development and market successes. Despite demand for headquarters accommodation within the Borough remaining relatively high due to the current lack of Grade A supply in the M25 market area, aspirations remain amongst some landowners for higher value non-B class land uses which puts established economic areas under threat.

8.13 The Borough's designated SEAs are home to a range of businesses both large and small. Although some business premises in these locations provide ancillary facilities for their staff, many smaller businesses are not able to do this. To enhance the sustainability of these areas and ensure their continued competitiveness in the marketplace, it is essential that these employment areas provide the necessary ancillary facilities such as cafes and crèche facilities to serve the workers based in the area.

Policy IE2: Strategic Employment Areas

The five designated employment areas that together make up the borough's current core supply of employment land will be protected as Strategic Employment Areas, as shown on the policies map, and changes of use of land and/or buildings from employment to non-employment use resisted. The refurbishment and redevelopment of sites in these areas for employment use, and proposals for the intensification of sites for employment use will be permitted where they accord with other policies in the plan.

The Strategic Employment Areas (for B uses) are:

- SEA1: Hillswood Business Park
- SEA2: Longcross Park Enterprise Zone
- SEA3: The Causeway and Pinetrees Business Park (excluding the area at Lakeside, which has already been converted to residential use).
- SEA4: Thorpe Industrial Estate
- SEA5: Weybridge and Bourne Business Park and Waterside Trading Estate

Exceptions:

- The provision of limited essential ancillary facilities will be supported within the Strategic Employment Areas, where a clear justification is provided that the facility will provide positive benefits for the strategic employment area and will not conflict with established uses in the employment area;

- Applications for hotel use will only be permitted where the proposal accords with the sequential test and impact test and will not conflict with established uses in the strategic employment area.

Justification for inclusion of policy

8.14 Paragraph 21 of the NPPF states that in drawing up their Local Plans, LPAs should set out a clear economic vision and strategy for their area which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth and set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period.

8.15 Given the projected need for additional employment floorspace over the plan period as demonstrated in the Council's ELR 2016, in conjunction with the constraints on allocating additional employment floorspace in the Borough due to the large proportion of Green Belt land within Runnymede, this policy seeks to protect key employment sites throughout the Borough to accommodate existing and future demand. To ensure the protection of employment uses within the SEAs, the Council propose to make Article 4 Directions to remove permitted development rights which allow for the change of use from B1(a) use (office) to C3 use (residential) and from B1(c) use (light industrial) to C3 use within them in the SEAs.

8.16 The majority of employment sites which comprise the SEAs identified were ranked as good quality sites in the ELR. Of the three sites ranked average quality, two - Weybridge and Bourne Business Park (east and west) are considered to form an integral part of the Weybridge and Bourne Business Park and Waterside Trading Estate area and the third - Thorpe Industrial Estate is included as it provides the majority of industrial space in the Borough, which is considered to be of strategic importance to the local economy.

8.17 The commercial area of Longcross Park has been designated as part of the EZ3 Enterprise Zone and forms a substantial employment area of approximately 19ha and has planning permission to provide a new business park and data centre. The site is one of the largest strategic employment sites in the EM3 LEP area and sub-region and benefits from its own on-site railway station connecting it to London Waterloo and Reading. Existing former Ministry of Defence buildings on the site are currently used as a film studio.

8.18 Policy IE2 will help to deliver Local Plan objective 12

Appendix 2. Maps showing the SEAs (or parts of them) designated by Policy IE2 which are proposed to be included in Article 4 direction

N

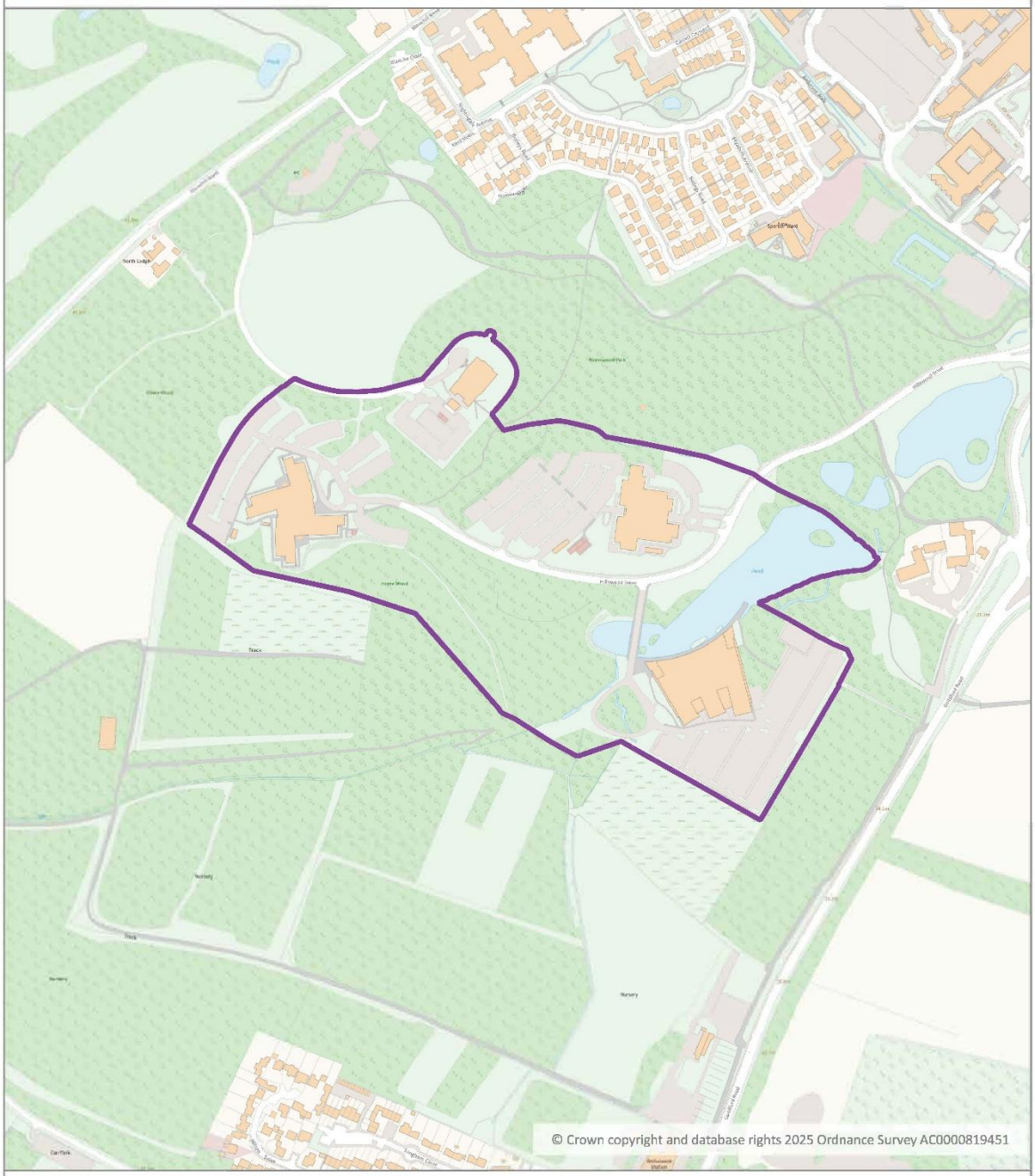
SEA1

HILLSWOOD BUSINESS PARK

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Date: 03/11/2025



Scale: 1:5,000

0 100 200 m

produced by GIS section

N

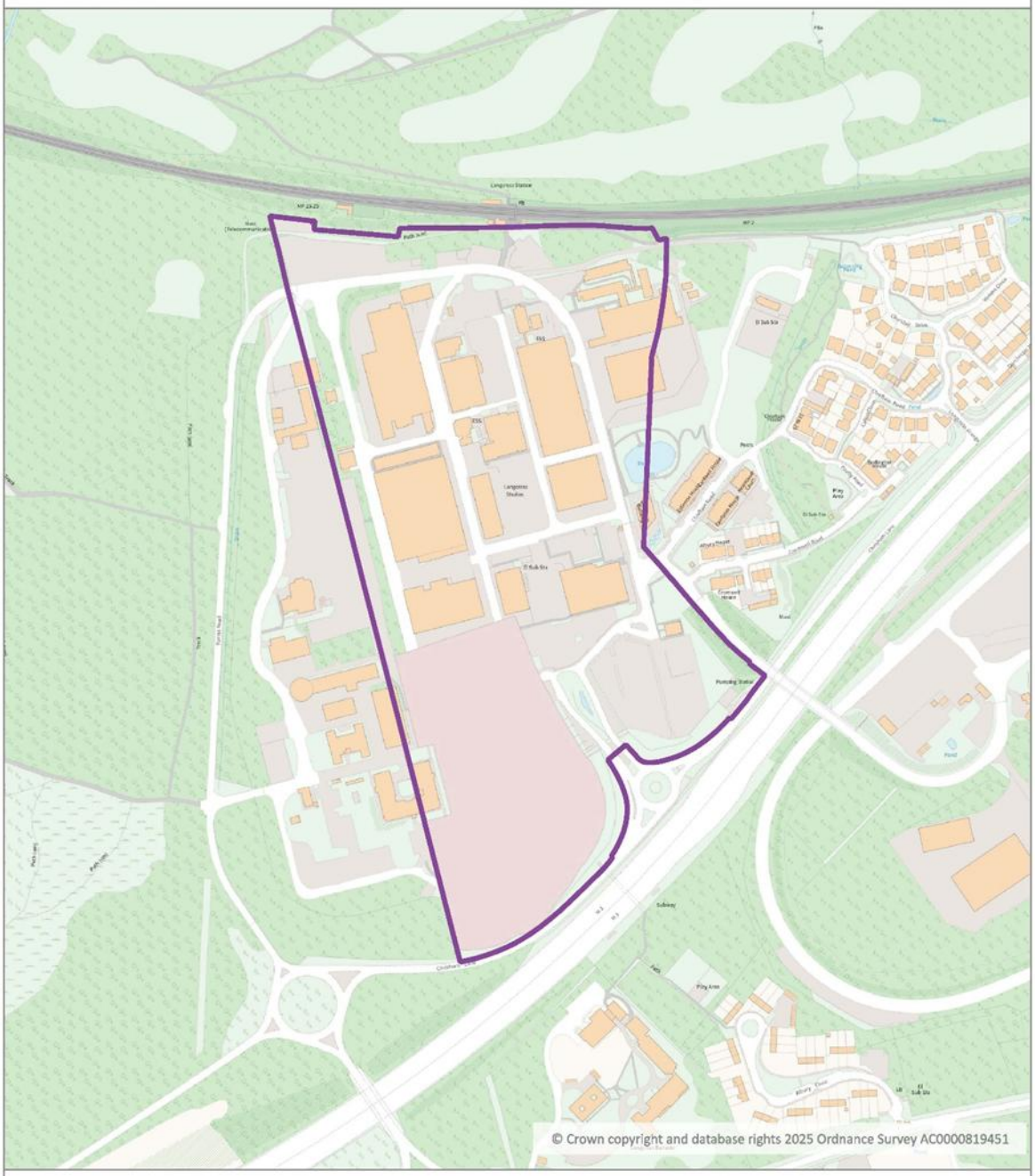
SEA2

LONGCROSS PARK ENTERPRISE ZONE

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Date: 03/11/2025



Scale: 1:4,800

0 90 180 m

produced by GIS section

N

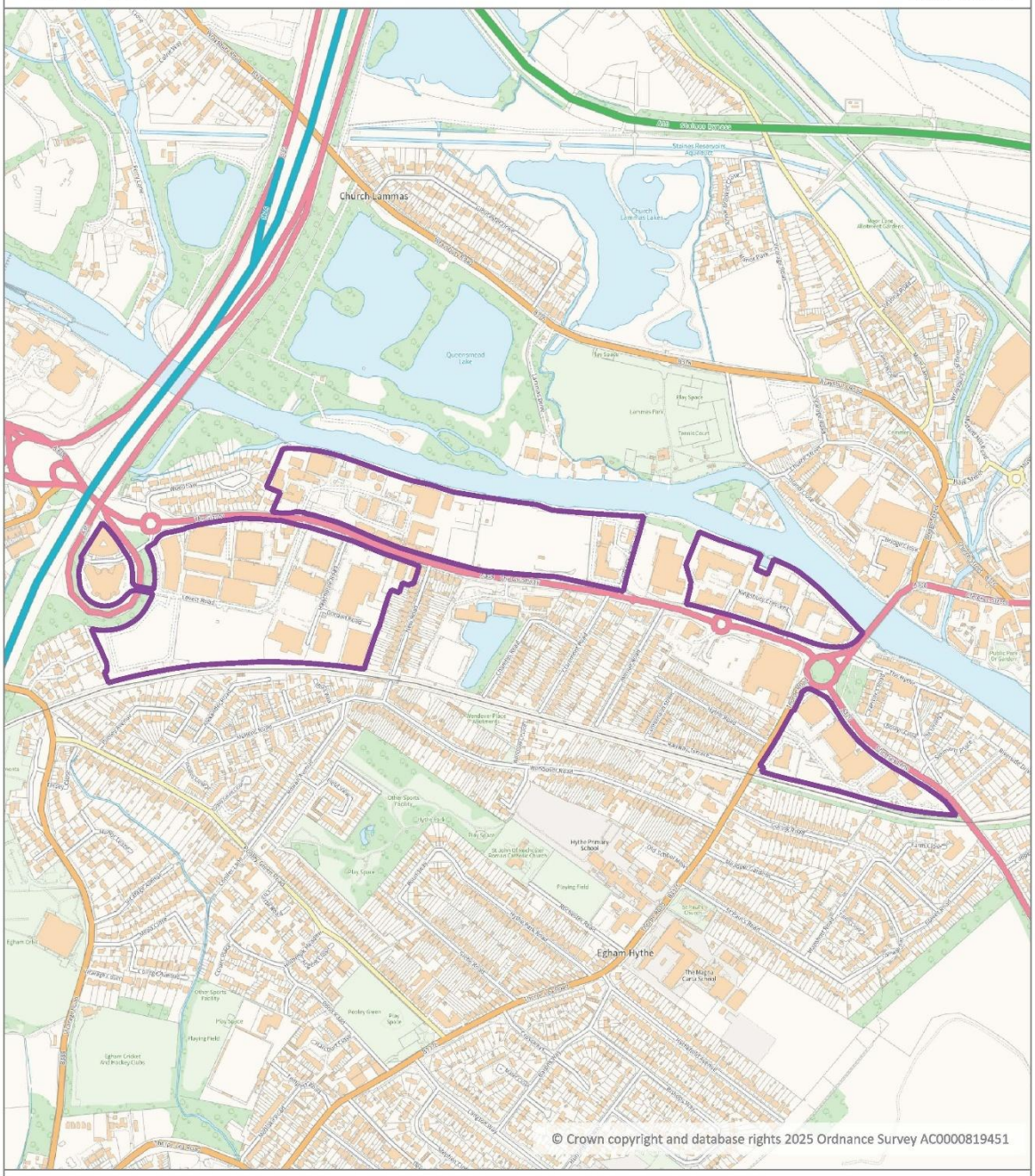
SEA3

THE CAUSEWAY AND PINETREES BUSINESS PARK

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Date: 03/11/2025



Scale: 1:9,000

0 100 200 m

produced by GIS section

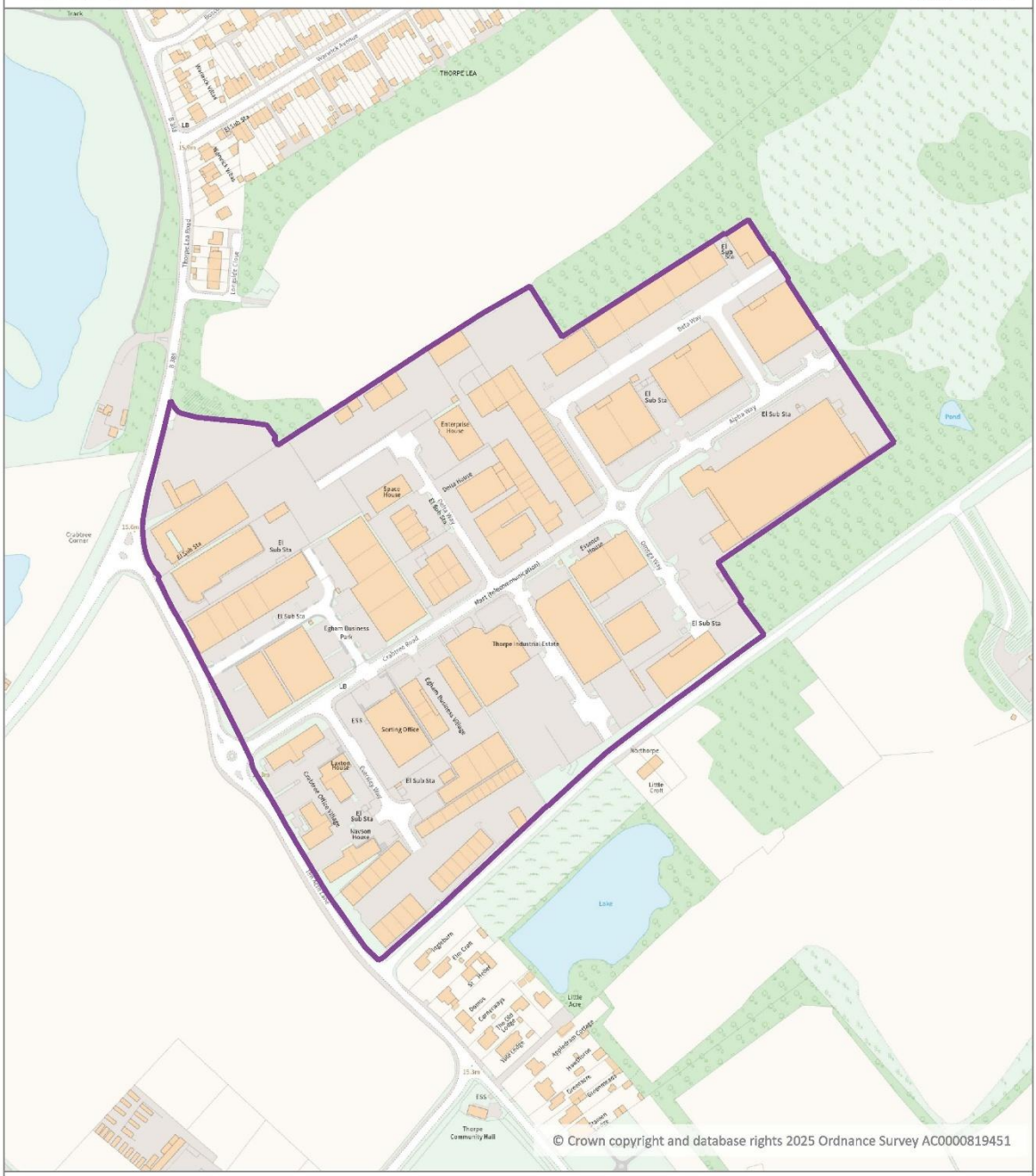
N

SEA4

THORPE INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Date: 03/11/2025



© Crown copyright and database rights 2025 Ordnance Survey AC0000819451

Scale: 1:4,000

0 80 160 m

produced by GIS section

N

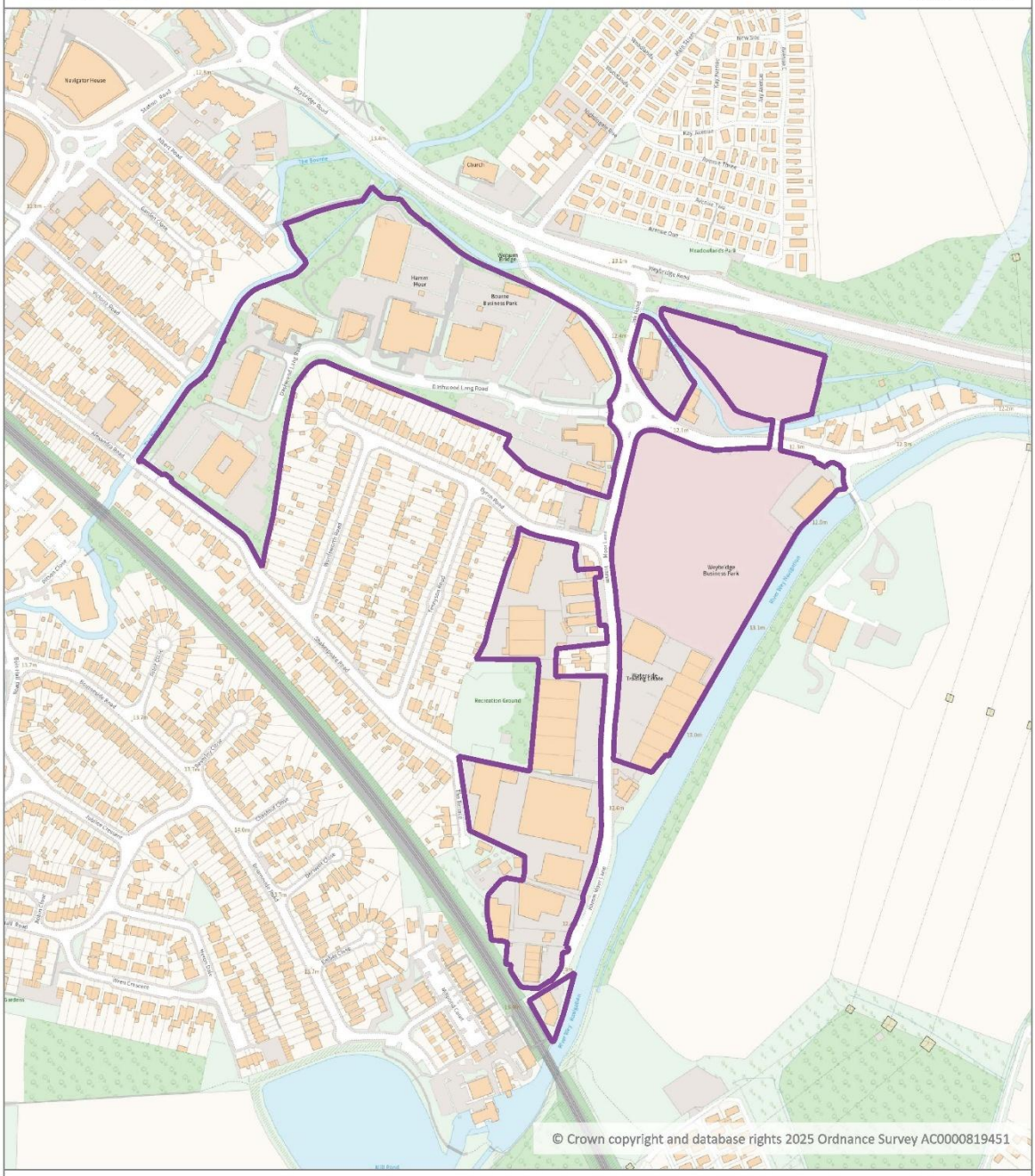
SEA5

WEYBRIDGE AND BOURNE BUSINESS PARK AND WATERSIDE TRADING ESTATE

Runnymede BOROUGH COUNCIL

Runnymede Borough Council
Runnymede Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Date: 03/11/2025



© Crown copyright and database rights 2025 Ordnance Survey AC0000819451

Scale: 1:4,500

0 90 180 m

produced by GIS section

For all information contained within this document contact:

Runnymede Borough Council
The Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Tel 01932 838383

email: planningpolicy@runnymede.gov.uk

www.runnymede.gov.uk

Further copies of this publication, or copies in large print other formats or languages can be obtained via the above contact details.

Search: Runnymede Borough Council

