

Developing Castle Point's Economy

Castle Point lies within a significant radial economic corridor centred on London, defined by the Thames Estuary to the south, and the A12/A127 to the North. The A127, A13/A130, and a regular rail link, connect the borough with the regional employment locations of Docklands, the City, the Thames Gateway, and Southend. There are also road links to important local employment locations in Basildon and Chelmsford.

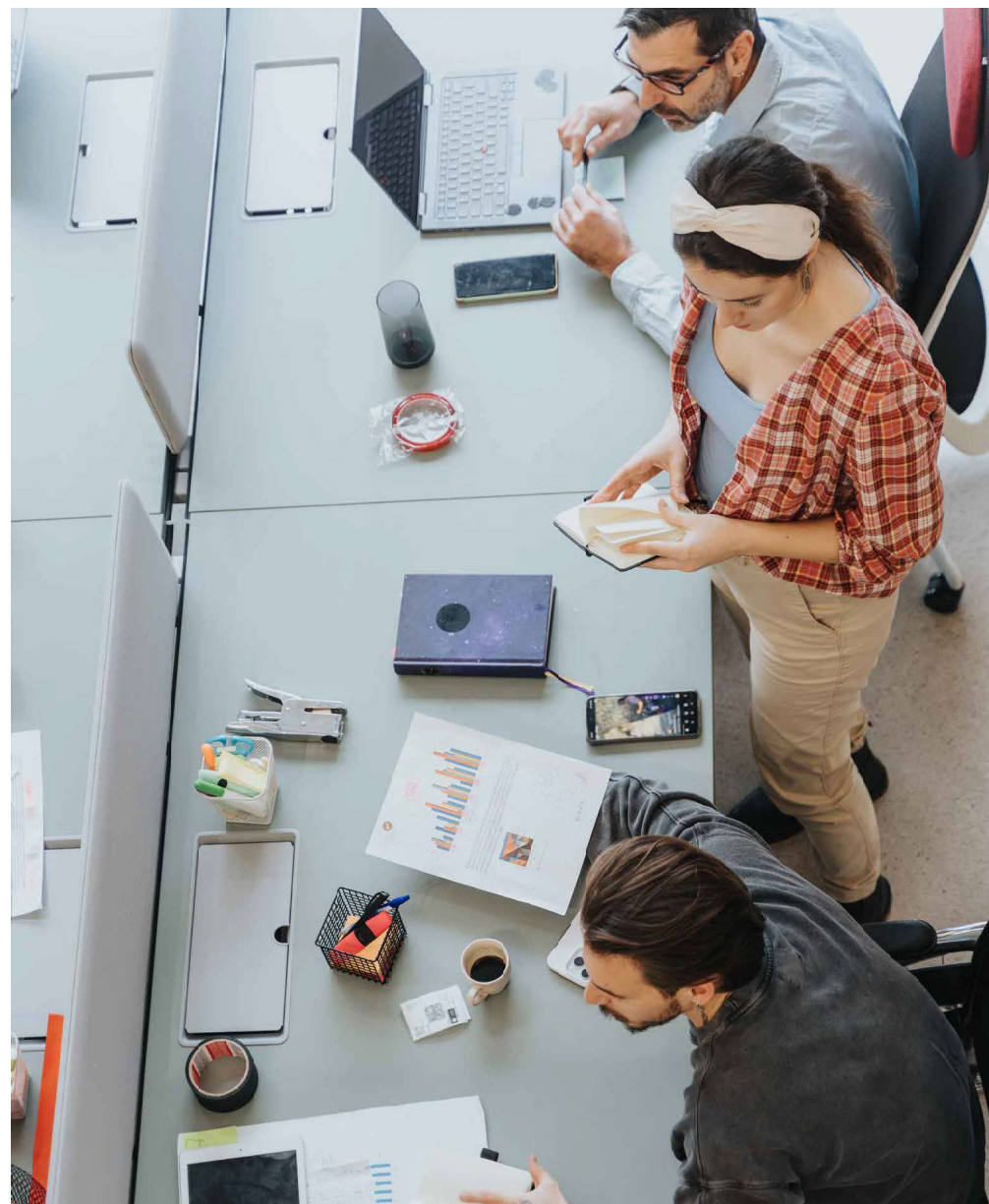
According to the 2021 census there are 26,000 jobs in Castle Point. They are primarily located in the major employment sites of Manor Trading Estate, Charfleets, and Stadium Way. Canvey has the highest existing employment density, and also has the most undeveloped industrial land, and therefore existing potential for growth.

Canvey is a port location, with gas and oil storage facilities. Port related development is an important and growing source of local employment, particularly in the Thurrock area as the Thames Freeport project develops. Castle Point, as a part of the A13/A127 corridor has an opportunity to capitalise on this by providing land for industries that operate within the supply chain of goods arriving and departing the UK by sea.

In terms of business make-up, Castle Point is heavily represented by Micro (less than 10 employees) and small businesses (10-49 employees). The plan will need to help nurture these businesses, and provide the conditions and space for them to grow.

Castle Point has a high economic activity rate, with unemployment at 2.8% being below the national average of 3.8%. Qualification levels are generally lower in the borough than nationally, particularly in higher education, which is significantly below national average – 15.6% of residents have a degree or higher, compared to the national average of 33.9%. The number of people aged between 16 to 64 with a Level 3 qualification is also below the national average. There are currently no Higher Education Institutions in the borough, and no Adult Education provision on Canvey Island. This contributes to a “knowledge drain”, with young people often leaving the borough to pursue careers after completing their education (something seen across South Essex).

The borough's average income is below the national average salary. Presently fewer people work in Castle Point than commute out of the borough for employment. Principally, they commute to the larger economies of Thurrock, Basildon, London, and Southend.



PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL SITES SHOWN ARE IDENTIFIED AS POTENTIAL SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENT ONLY, THEY ARE NOT ALLOCATIONS AT THIS STAGE

During the initial engagement you told us:

- There is a desire to create more local jobs, and attract more businesses into the borough.
- Support small businesses to thrive and encourage local entrepreneurs to want to develop business here rather than going elsewhere.
- The local economy needs a boost in the right areas of the borough to attract more business and more customers for those businesses.
- Improve childcare options/initiatives to allow parents to get back to work.
- Ensure the borough's best assets are protected, improved, and advertised for better employment use.
- Invest in the borough's coastline to cater for tourism, which will provide an additional boost to the local economy.
- Manage employment areas to ensure they are not unoccupied, provide opportunities for local businesses to grow, and create more job opportunities for school and college leavers and give young people a chance to succeed.
- A new industrial area in north west of Thundersley would create much needed local jobs in the borough and provide an opportunity to move existing companies from the Manor Trading Estate to make way for much needed homes.
- Parking must be available for workers in town centres. Encourage car sharing by commuters by allowing free parking in local car parks.
- Encourage businesses working from residential premises, but deter the negative impact of parking commercial vehicles in residential areas.
- Improve the visual appeal of existing commercial premises by tidying them up and replacing derelict/disused buildings with new well-designed buildings.

Economic Strategy

Siting at the heart of South Essex, the economy of Castle Point is intrinsically linked to the economies of Basildon, Southend and Thurrock. There are significant opportunities for economic growth in those locations in the A127

Enterprise Corridor, at Southend Airport and at the ports in Thurrock.

Critical to the Castle Point economy is ensuring that there are strong relationships into this wider economy so that local businesses can benefit from supply chain opportunities, and so that residents can access the jobs available both in the borough and in this wider economy.

This means that within the borough there is a need for employment space and infrastructure to help attract investment, and to support the growth in the supply chain opportunities.

It also means that there is a need to ensure that our residents have access to the training they need to access jobs within the local and wider south Essex economy, and access to those jobs. Education, transport and digital infrastructure is therefore key to local economic growth and development.

Fundamentally, Castle Point is a place to live as part of the South Essex economy, and it is important that it is a good place to live so that skilled people who can support the economy and economic growth want to live here. It is therefore also important that we stimulate those sectors of the economy that improve place, such as retail and hospitality, environmental management, healthcare and the cultural and creative sectors.



The supply of Employment Land

Castle Point has a wide range of types of employment sites, ranging from large scale industrial estates at Charfleets, Manor Trading Estate, and Stadium Way, to businesses embedded within the residential and retail fabric of the borough. Vacancy rates are generally low at present, in line with much of the region.

The South Essex Economic Development Needs Assessment identifies the number of jobs the borough is likely to need over the period 2016-2036, and translates that job number into floorspace need, and land need. The results of two scenarios (historical trend based, and what happens if some industrial demand relocates from London outwards to Essex) are set out below.

	Scenario	
	Trend-Based	London redistribution
Office	+3,500m2	+3,500m2
Industrial	-4 Ha	+2 Ha
Warehousing	-4 Ha	- 2 Ha

While there is a forecast loss of warehouse floorspace across the plan period, it does not necessarily mean that the Castle Point Plan should actively seek to decrease the borough’s stock of warehouse units. A small vacancy can assist businesses to find appropriate premises (this is called “frictional vacancy”), which helps them to expand their businesses when the time is right. It can also position the borough to respond positively to any upturn in the market.

Recent development trends suggest that there is a positive market for industrial land in Canvey, with the development at Roscommon Way being completed, and successfully let in recent years.

Development within Designated Employment Areas

The use of employment sites evolve over time as business needs change. Designated Employment Areas provide a reservoir of employment land, and a sufficiency of land should be provided to ensure price certainty for businesses.

There is often potential to intensify employment areas. This may be done to respond to changes in technology, or to increase the economic value of the site. Intensification could create jobs, for example if offices replace warehouses, but it could also come in the form of capital investments displacing labour operation (mechanisation). Some estates may be more suitable for certain intensifications, for example, sites with good connections to the strategic road network more suitable for intensified industrial or warehouse, with residential-linked designations more suitable for intensification of knowledge-oriented uses such as offices or creative workspace.

Certain uses are ancillary to the principal employment uses, actively complementing them and enabling them to be successful. An example of this might be a café or crèche on an industrial estate.

Q59. Do you have any comments on the continued safeguarding of the Council’s three principal employment areas for employment?

- a. Manor Trading Estate
- b. Charfleets
- c. Stadium Way, Rayleigh Weir

Q60. What additional uses should be introduced to help improve the operation of the borough’s employment sites?



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Employment Uses outside Designated Employment Areas

Castle Point has hundreds of premises in employment use that are not on allocated employment land. These range from garages and workshops within the urban area, small office blocks, services above shops, to large, unallocated uses in the Green Belt.

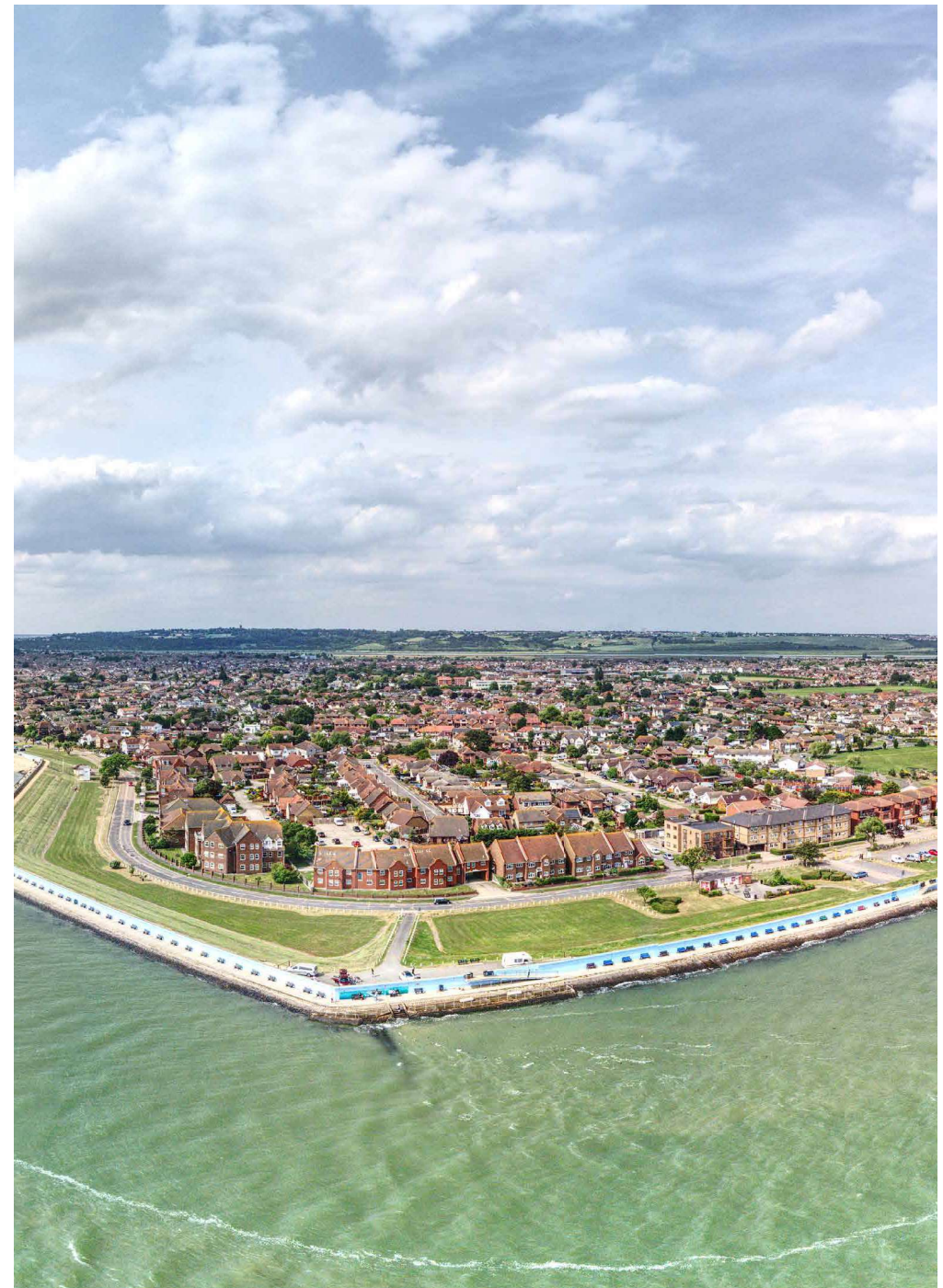
Together these uses make a very significant contribution to Castle Point's economy, but their financial viability is coming under pressure from alternative (residential) land values. It is important that policy acts to ensure that a sufficient range and type of employment space exists to enable businesses to operate, grow, and when appropriate move on.

There are a number of undesignated sites across the borough. There may be a benefit in designating some of these as employment areas, and there may be value in having a differential approach to retention and intensification of employment assets in different parts of the borough.

The South Essex Employment Development Needs Assessment identifies 3 areas of employment in the borough:

- Canvey, which has a strong supply of designated employment land, strong local amenity assets, but limited connectivity to other parts of the regional economy.
- The A13 corridor, which has good labour supply, services, and public transport accessibility.
- The A127 corridor, which has a number of undesignated industrial sites, good road connectivity, but limited local amenities.

Q 61. How much protection do you feel undesignated smaller employment sites should be given?



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Working From and Near Home

The Covid 19 pandemic radically increased rates of home working across the world, and especially in developed economies like the UK. Some recovery in commuting has happened, but it is becoming clear that levels will not return to pre-pandemic levels. This has implications for dedicated employment premises, and the amount of office that is needed. We have seen the need for this demonstrated locally, an example being International House Business Centre, which opened on Canvey Island just after the pandemic. Demand for the small, flexible offices spaces provided at the centre was very high, and the centre quickly became fully occupied.

It has also changed the way that residents use their homes, with a greater emphasis on finding space to work as well as live. This has seen bedrooms turned into workspace, and the creation of annexes and outbuildings for use as home offices.

Working near home is an emerging use that sits between working from home and traditional workplaces. It has the potential to offer some of the benefits of working from home in terms of reduced commuting distances, while also offering a separation between the domestic and employment setting. This use is already offered informally by some cafés and other spaces, and there are businesses that offer flexible rental workspace that also provide this type of offer.

Employment in and around town and local centres is crucial to supporting the local businesses that operate there. Working near home, if adequately provided for, has the potential to benefit local centres through drawing in a diverse range of workers at different times of the day. There is further opportunity to capitalise on this pattern by co-locating local services alongside flexible workspace in centres. The visitor to the centre then can combine doing work, obtaining local services, shopping and potentially leisure activities into a single trip.

Q62. Do you think that new development should be designed to support working from home?

Q63. Do you think new facilities that aid working near home should be supported?

Tourism

The borough has a number of tourist attractions including Canvey seafront and Hadleigh Castle and Country Park, including the 2012 Olympics Cycling track. Tourism is an excellent way of securing investment into the local economy to support local jobs and ensure that local assets remain viable into the future. In 2022 tourism accounted for a spend in the borough of approximately £26m, supporting an estimated 1,568 jobs.

Specific assets that could be protected include the Canvey pools, entertainment area on the Esplanade, Canvey market, and Hadleigh Castle & Country Park. There are also opportunities to link the food and beverage opportunities in South Benfleet to walking/hiking opportunities through and to Hadleigh and Thundersley.

Q64. How can the Castle Point Plan help to support the tourist economy of the borough?



Local Skills

Castle Point sits within an area of significant economic opportunity, but local workers are not earning either the regional or national average wage. It is very likely that the number and value, and hence range of skills required to match the jobs in the Thames Gateway area will continue to grow over the plan period. There is also the potential to grow the number and range of jobs in Castle Point.

It is therefore appropriate that measures to support Castle Point residents' ability to access these jobs are brought forward. Guidance around securing Employment and Skills Plans to increase the volume and quality of employment opportunities in the construction and in the end use on the site are set out in the Essex County Council's Developers' Guide to Infrastructure Contributions.

Q65. How can the plan support the development of skills within the borough's workforce?

Q66. Would you support the development of a new facility to help improve local skills, and the ability of residents to improve their opportunities to find work locally?

Supporting Documents & Information

- [Review of Economic Impact of Tourism, Castle Point Borough 2022 \(Destination Research\) Report](#)
- [South Essex Economic Development Needs Assessment, 2017](#)
- [Economic Sites Review \(Deyton Bell\) 2024](#)

