

**Blackhorse Lane Area  
Employment Growth Survey**

**Final Report - Summary**

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Prepared for  
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and  
regenfirst

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## ***Introduction***

This report presents the findings of a survey of businesses in the Blackhorse Lane area. London Borough of Waltham Forest is seeking to develop a new interim planning framework for the Blackhorse Lane area of the borough in order to accommodate new homes, increase employment and improve quality of life for local people. The project is supported by Growth Area funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as part of the Sustainable Communities Plan.

The aims of the study were:

- To determine current employment profile in the area, by sector and occupation;
- To determine the future likely employment growth in the area, by sector and occupation
- To determine the likely skill needs of employers in the future;
- To provide information which will enable better planning of training, support and advice;
- To identify the types of business currently in the area with an assessment of how this might change.

The study was conducted by means of a structure questionnaire. An attempt was made to interview all the businesses located in the Blackhorse Lane area. The study was conducted in two phases, interviews with businesses in the industrial estates along Blackhorse Lane were interviewed in March 2004 and those in Sutherland Road and Billet Road in December 2004/January 2005. A total of 159 businesses were interviewed, the majority face to face which represents a response rate of 80%. Most of the non-contacts were small companies. The survey covered employers located on the west side of Blackhorse Lane and along Blackhorse Lane itself.

The Blackhorse Lane area includes Higham Hill ward, one of the most deprived wards in the Borough. Information from this survey will be used to help ensure that ward residents have the chance to access jobs in the area.

## ***Profile of companies***

- The industrial areas each have their own characteristics. The Uplands Business Park included some of the larger employers as well as some public sector outlets. The industrial estates to the west of Blackhorse Lane have two main sector clusters; wholesale distribution and printing. The Business Centre at 5 Blackhorse Lane is home to a large number of micro-enterprises, many of them service sector companies. The east side of Blackhorse Lane (Highams Lodge Estate and Sutherland Road) are generally characterised by smaller employers in a wide variety of sectors. There is a cluster of small companies involved in wholesale meat and food distribution for the catering industry. The Billet Road area includes one more modern business park (Waltham Park Way) and two business complexes with many vacant sites. There is a significant concentration of motor repair businesses in Billet Road.
- Firms in the area cover a wide range of sectors. Three 'clusters' are in printing, warehouse/wholesale distribution and motor repairs along Billet Road. Overall in

terms of numbers of companies (interviewed in the survey), 16 respondents were in printing, 22 in other manufacturing, 48 in wholesale and retail distribution, 10 in construction, 19 in motor repairs and 58 in services.

- The firms surveyed employed a total of 3700 people, showing that there is a minimum of 4000 people working in the area (taking into account the non response).
- The companies employing more than 150 people were in manufacturing, printing, wholesale and services. Overall, 31% were employed in services, 24% in wholesale and retail distribution, 14% in printing, 24% in manufacturing (dominated by two large companies), 4% in construction and 4% in motor repairs.
- The majority of companies (75%) were limited companies but 17% were sole traders. Six employers were in the voluntary sector.
- Nearly three in four firms (71%) only had the site in the Blackhorse Lane area. 12% were the head office with branches elsewhere, 15% were a branch with a head office elsewhere.
- A significant proportion of respondents have not been located at their current address long, with 18% saying less than a year (at the time they were interviewed) and 29% for 1-3 years. This means that just under half the sample (47%) have been at their current address for less than three years. Nearly three in four of the firms in Uplands Business Park had been these for less than 3 years.
- 32% of employers employed fewer than 5 people. The majority of the non-respondents were small companies based in 5 Blackhorse Lane or Uplands Studios. 27% employed between 5 and 9 people and 20% between 10 and 19 people. Only one in five employed 20 or more people. The largest firm had over 400 employees
- 94% of the workforce were permanent members of staff.
- 86% of employees were full-time, 9% part-time and 4% casual.
- 70% of the workforce was male and 30% female.
- 55% of the workforce was White, 20% Asian, 13% Black and 11% from an 'other' ethnic group (mainly Turkish, Kurdish or Chinese). Turkish employees might have been included under Asian or 'other' categories.
- The majority of employers (89%) did not employ any disabled people. Respondents identified a total of 39 disabled employees, 1.3% of the workforce.
- About one in three of employees (for whom employers could supply the information) lived within two miles of Blackhorse Lane.
- A high proportion of employees are in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations (45%). Overall, 13% were managers or administrators, 1% professional and 8% associate technical or professional occupations. A total of 14% were clerical or administrative jobs, 12% skilled manual trades, 3% personal services and 5%

sales occupations. Overall, 22% were plant or machine minders and 23% other elementary occupations.

- 10% of the workforce were described as warehouse assistants or workers and 5% were drivers.
- The trend for employment was encouraging, with 34% of employers saying their workforce had increased in the previous year. 51% said it had remained much the same with 13% saying it had decreased.

### **Recruitment**

- 60% of employers had recruited staff in the previous 12 months, rising to all those with 50 or more employees.
- One in three (37%) of recruiting companies had experienced problems with recruitment. This corresponds to 22% of all employers.
- There was a range of occupations which proved hard to recruit. The main problem areas were clerical/admin jobs and plant and machine operatives, mainly drivers. Nine companies had experienced problems with recruiting drivers. Eleven companies had problems with recruiting clerical workers and three with sales representatives.
- The main problems mentioned with recruitment were a lack of suitable qualified applicants and a lack of suitably experienced applicants. Other issues included the salary on offer, a lack of applicants who can speak English and the fact that Blackhorse Lane is not a very attractive area for service or professional companies.
- Just over half respondents (56%) expected to recruit in the forthcoming 12 months. A further 22% were not sure whether or not they would be recruiting.
- 42% of those companies expecting to recruit expected to encounter difficulties. Again the main problems were thought to be with finding drivers and general clerical jobs.
- The most frequently used method for recruiting staff was word of mouth (59%). A total of 42% used the Job Centre, 33% newspaper advertisement and 21% a recruitment agency. A total of 17% said that they only used word of mouth to recruit staff. This rose to 32% of those with fewer than five employees.

### **Skills and training**

- Skills shortages were a problem for a significant minority of employers. Overall 14% strongly agreed that skills shortages were having a serious impact on their business with 17% saying they agreed. Companies with 10-19 employees or with 20-49 employees were the most likely to have problems with skills shortages.
- A total of 3% said that a lack of basic skills amongst their workforce was a serious problem and 6% a fairly serious problem.
- Employers were asked whether or not a range of skills and attributes might need improving in their existing workforce. A total of 47% of the sample said that their

current workforce did not lack any of these skills or attributes ranging from 68% of those companies with fewer than 5 staff to 31% of those with more than 50 staff.

- The most significant skills gaps were in basic IT (18%) and more advanced IT (16%). A total of 15% said their workforce lacked management skills and 14% supervisory skills. Overall, 17% said their current workforce (or some of their workforce) had problems with reliability and timekeeping. About 12% of employers said they lacked sales and marketing skills.
- A far smaller proportion of respondents (32%) said that new recruits did not lack any of these skills or attributes, but a further 15% said they were not sure as they had not recruited recently. 17% of respondents said that new recruits had problems with reliability and timekeeping. Other skills which were lacking included speaking English (5 respondents), Asian language skills, common sense, health and safety and patience.
- The majority of employers said that they or their management team had the skills necessary to manage their business efficiently. Between 9% and 13% of firms said they lacked skills in a number of different management.
- The main ways employers had addressed skills shortages was to train existing staff or to recruit new staff with the requisite skills.
- Overall, 21% of firms surveyed offered their staff no training and 28% only offered on the job training where staff were shown how to do the job. A total of 33% sent staff on short courses on specific topics, 14% had staff training to a nationally recognised vocational qualification and 9% to a nationally recognised academic qualification. Larger companies, in general offered more training than very small companies.
- More than half the sample (57%) said they had spent nothing on training in the past year, although some of these had provided induction or on the job training. A total of 4% had spent less than £1000, 13% £1000-£5000 and 9% more than £5000 on training. A further 17% could not give a figure for their training spend.
- The main barriers to offering staff training were lack of time and lack of anybody to do the work while staff were training.

### **The Future**

- The area is undergoing a great deal of change with 18% of employers having been in the area less than a year and 29% for 1-3 years.
- One in three employers said their workforce had increased in the past 12 months,
- Employers are positive about the future with 39% saying they expected their workforce to increase over the next year with only 3% thinking it will decrease. Firms located in the Forest Trading Estate and Uplands Business Park were the most likely to say their workforce would increase.
- Employers were asked what skills would become more significant for them in the future and many employers found this very difficult to answer as they were not

sure what would happen in the future. A wide range of skills and attributes were mentioned including IT, multi-tasking, better management and strategic planning.

- Just under half the sample (42%) said they were planning major changes in the next few years, with companies with between 20 and 49 employees and service sector companies being the most likely to say they were.
- A half of those planning changes said they would expand their workforce (53%), 41% wished to expand their premises and 38% were developing new services or products.
- A total of 16 companies (9% of the sample) said they were likely to relocate out of the area in the next few years. The main reasons were for larger premises but high rates, a poor physical appearance and a desire to buy rather than rent were also mentioned.
- More than half the sample said that they would like more information about new developments in the area.