

A New Plan for South Worcestershire

The coalition Government has given local communities the freedom to establish their own local growth requirements for employment, housing and other land uses through the plan making process. The South Worcestershire Authorities have seized this opportunity to bring forward a long term development plan for South Worcestershire which is not based on regional housing requirements.

Whilst we must work within the current legislation which requires local authorities to prepare a Core Strategy and related Development Plan Documents, we very much see the new South Worcestershire Development Plan as returning to the spirit of planning at the local level with a 'Local Plan' which brings together both strategic and detailed planning policies into one overall document. By doing this local people and business interests can see what we aim to achieve over the next 20 years and also what is specifically proposed for your local area.

Taking the time to fundamentally reconsider our planning strategy for South Worcestershire has meant a delay in producing a plan for your area, but we feel it has been worth it. In particular we wanted to make sure that a locally developed plan ensures that:

- Economic prosperity leads our planning strategy with greater emphasis on creating the right conditions for job creation;
- Future housing development is set at a level which supports our economic objectives, meets established local housing needs and aspirations and yet reflects the capacity of the area to accommodate growth;
- Future development is infrastructure led not just infrastructure dependent.

Understandably local communities and visitors value and wish to protect the environmental qualities of the area which have led many to move or bring their businesses here over the years. We recognise this but equally see that there is a continuing need to allow business to develop and grow, promote inward investment, to address some of our most pressing affordable housing problems and to improve South Worcestershire's infrastructure.

We believe that the strategy now set out in this Preferred Options document gives appropriate weight to these varying interests and reflects other local pressures such as an ageing population and inward migration.

There are likely to be as many views on the Preferred Options as there are readers of the document, but we feel that our work has achieved a number of important changes to the emerging plan for South Worcestershire which we invite you to consider when reading the document.

- The Preferred Strategy is no longer led by targets set by the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy.
- Greater emphasis is placed on delivering economic prosperity for the benefit of South Worcestershire as a whole.

- We are proposing an overall reduction of some 20% against the regional housing requirements for South Worcestershire.
- Through proposing a longer plan period (i.e. up to 2030) we are reducing the annual building rate needed by 30%
- Already 40% (around 8,000 dwellings) of the 20,361 dwellings recommended by this document for South Worcestershire up to 2030 have either been built since 2006, are under construction or have the benefit of planning permission or a previous Local Plan allocation for development.
- We have reduced the size and number of urban extensions on Greenfield sites, with the two largest potential urban extensions at Worcester being reduced.
- Detailed assessments suggest that over 1000 additional dwellings can be provided within Worcester city which means that over 4000 dwellings will be provided within the city by 2030 reducing significantly the need for housing beyond the city boundary.
- Recommended allocations for housing and other uses are based upon an assessment of the appropriate capacity for development and not the imposition of a target or quota for a particular location, settlement, village or site.
- We have at all times sought to make sure that the Preferred Options document reflects the available evidence on topics such as employment, flooding, retailing and housing need alongside your earlier consultation responses.
- Most importantly it provides South Worcestershire with a stronger voice on planning and infrastructure issues and establishes consistency on planning policy issues.
- It helps to streamline the consultation processes for local residents and community groups who are interested in issues in each of the three districts.
- It provides significant efficiencies through sharing resources and costs which ultimately benefits the local communities.

The review process has convinced us, more than ever, that the need to tackle cross boundary issues in the interests of South Worcestershire as a whole and the ability to give the area a single and stronger voice on planning matters. This means that joint working on the South Worcestershire Development Plan is essential and the right thing to do for this area.

There is a significant risk that without a published Development Plan the three councils will be subject to development proposals which could be granted planning permission by the Planning Inspectorate on appeal.

This report is at the Preferred Options stage and we welcome your views and suggestions about its content. It is not however, the final plan and we would encourage you to take the opportunity to influence the outcome and contribute to delivering a long term Plan for South Worcestershire.

South Worcestershire Planning Portfolio Holders (left to right) Cllr David Hughes Malvern Hills District Council, Cllr Marc Bayliss Worcester City Council and Cllr Judith Pearce Wychavon District Council

