

South Worcestershire Development Plan Review (SWDPR)

Topic Paper – Determining an Appropriate Spatial Development Strategy

Introduction:

This topic paper (TP) sets out how the three plan making councils, collectively referred to as the South Worcestershire Councils (SWC) arrived at the proposed revised spatial development strategy to address the employment and housing growth requirements to 2041.

Context:

The growth requirements for the plan area for the period 2021 to 2041 are as follows:-

		Source
Employment	295 ha	Economic Development Needs Assessment 2019
Housing	14,000	Employing the Government's standard methodology
Retail	12,200m2	Retail Study 2019

In November 2018, the SWC published an Issues and Options consultation paper which included questions on the most appropriate way of meeting the new growth requirements and where new development should be located including the potential of new settlements as one such option. Predictably, given different interests, the representations were mixed. However, the associated technical evidence, in particular the Sustainability Appraisal, indicates that there is planning merit in including a new settlement option in a revised spatial development strategy for the plan area.

National planning policy does not define large-scale development, therefore, in the context of the SWDP, it is taken to be proposals in excess of 500 dwellings delivered either through substantive extensions to towns or villages, or through new settlements. Paragraph 72 of the National Planning Policy Framework supports this approach.

The next section explains the reasons why new settlements are proposed in the SWDPR to deliver a substantive proportion (57%, equivalent to 8,000 dwellings) of the 14,000 housing growth requirement for the period 2021 to 2041.

Strategic Options Considered and Why New Settlements?

The SWC have considered alternative spatial development strategies. This includes continuing with the one currently set out in the adopted SWDP which focused most of the growth on urban extensions, particularly at Worcester and which was found to be sound by the examination inspector in 2016. However, a further round of substantive urban extensions is considered to raise a number of technical difficulties and is in danger of becoming an unsustainable strategy for a number of reasons. Firstly, by their very nature they tend to be further away from the main centres where the majority of services lie. Secondly, additional

urban extensions would typically be further away from the nearest railway station. Increased distances will also make walking and cycling more challenging and a less realistic alternative to car based journeys. The combination of these factors, combined with an ongoing decline in the economics of commercial bus service provision, means that the car would become even more dominant as the chosen mode of transport. Given the highway network is already heavily constrained at a number of important road junctions across the SWDP area and the economic and environmental costs associated with traffic congestion, this is clearly an outcome to be avoided. The allocation of additional large scale urban extensions would also have an unacceptable impact on existing infrastructure, for example; the A46 (T) at Evesham; would result in the coalescence of settlements, e.g. Worcester with Lower Broadheath or Kempsey; will necessitate encroachment into land unsuitable for development, e.g. land in medium to high flood risk (at Worcester, Pershore, Tenbury and Upton), the Green Belt (at Droitwich Spa), the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (at Malvern).

A spatial strategy of directing strategic level growth to rural settlements runs contrary to the published Sustainability Appraisal and would be less effective in planning terms due to: the lack of services for these settlements; the relatively high cost of securing new services such as bus transport; fewer employment opportunities and the increased commuting distances and other car trips. It is important to note that the use of the car as a means of transport for commuting trips is relatively high in south Worcestershire at around 70% (2011 Census). A spatial development strategy based on dispersed growth would increase that percentage substantially.

The preferred option is to focus strategic growth at free standing and expanding settlements. The new and expanded settlements will provide a range of services and facilities and employment opportunities. The Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) contains a number of available land holdings large enough to accommodate a new/expanded settlement of a size which could deliver a reasonable degree of self containment. That is they:

- are able to accommodate sufficient land, homes, employment and other land uses;
- are in close proximity to a railway station (existing or planned) which is on a line(s) where there is or could be passenger growth capacity;
- are not overly constrained by environmental constraints e.g. flooding, landscape sensitivity etc;
- have the potential to create a high quality environment for a new community;
- could reasonably meet some of Worcester City's unmet housing and employment needs.

Free Standing/Expanded Settlements – The Preferred Options

As a result of the above assessment, the following areas have been identified as the preferred locations for new development:

1. Worcestershire Parkway (WP)

A new settlement focused around WP station is considered an appropriate location for the following reasons:

- At this stage the suggested quantum of development which is considered deliverable by 2041 at WP is 5,000 dwellings, 40 hectares of employment land and associated infrastructure which would include a secondary school, three primary schools, a town centre (to include retail and other commercial space, leisure centre, medical service provision) and a minimum of 40% Green Infrastructure. This development will be phased over at least 10 years. The new station itself will start providing services for both the Cotswold and Malvern line and the north east – south west main line from December 2019. The station is the essential element of the infrastructure necessary to reduce and shorten the length of car trips.
- The area is within 3km of the urban edge of Worcester, such that it is reasonable to envisage that it can meet some of the city's unmet employment and housing needs.
- The quantum of available land (approximately 1,130 hectares) is sufficient to create a new settlement with an appropriate mix of land uses.
- At the time of writing, there are no identified significant planning policy or environment constraints that would prevent development of this scale. There is more than enough land in Flood Zone 1. The land is neither Green Belt nor in an AONB and there are only a few important localised environmental designations which can be protected through the plan policies and subsequent master planning.
- In terms of infrastructure requirements beyond the station itself there will be the need for other infrastructure elements. More work will need to be carried out to justify WP inclusion as the main focus for new development in the SWDPR and we will be assessing the site's development viability, deliverability and additional infrastructure requirements over the next few months. However, abnormal costs are considered unlikely at this stage.
- Much of the strategic infrastructure necessary to allow development to progress can be relatively easily implemented. This could allow development to commence early in the plan period. In order to achieve this, work will need to be undertaken to demonstrate a clear route map to delivery. It is anticipated that the delivery of WP will be driven by a comprehensive masterplan and further supplementary planning guidance to inform infrastructure provision, design quality etc.
- Initial contact with the landowners suggest that they are willing to work together to support the allocation.

2. Throckmorton Airfield

Throckmorton Airfield has been identified as a suitable broad location for growth. The current evidence base is not yet as comprehensive as for Worcestershire Parkway and therefore the SWDPR Preferred Options simply sets the quantum of deliverable growth by 2041, i.e. 2,000 dwellings and 40 hectares of employment land

and the provisional associated infrastructure to include 1-2 primary schools, a Local Centre with retail and leisure uses. The detailed masterplan and the fine tuned infrastructure requirements are therefore to be set out in a separate Development Plan Document which will be subject to a separate public examination. A new settlement will require a new, direct road from the centre to the A44 before any development commences. In addition high quality pedestrian and cycle links covering the 3km from the new settlement to Pershore railway station will be required. This would also incorporate a new 500 space car park at the station. A new settlement focused on Throckmorton is considered an appropriate broad location for growth for the following reasons:

- The quantum of suitable land in the broad area, i.e. land bounded by the A44, B4082 and the C class road linking Bishampton with Fladbury, is sufficient to enable the creation of a new settlement with an appropriate mix of land uses. Currently some of this land has not yet been submitted through the Call for Sites. There is also land within the broad area which is not suitable for certain types of development.
- The core of the site is brownfield land.
- The site is close to Pershore Railway Station and is easily linked by new walking and cycling routes, making this a sustainable location.

3. Rushwick

An expanded settlement focused on Rushwick is considered an appropriate location for the following reasons:

- There is a strong business case to open a new railway station at Rushwick which will both help to address current traffic congestion issues in the wider area and offer a genuine opportunity for new residents to access employment, retail and leisure destinations by train. However, an expanded settlement will not function effectively without the railway station being secured in advance.
- The quantum of suitable land within the broad area, i.e. land bounded by the A4440, A4103 and the River Teme, is sufficient to accommodate an expanded settlement which will contain a new primary school and Local Centre (retail and leisure uses) and some employment land.
- (1,000 dwellings by 2041) There is additional suitable land within the broad area that has not yet been submitted to the Call for Sites process so, as for Throckmorton Airfield, the quantum of development and high level infrastructure requirements will be set out in the SWDPR but the detail, including a masterplan, will be the subject of a separate Development Plan Document process.

The three strategic sites set out within this paper are considered to be the most sustainable options as they offer significant opportunities to increase travel by rail and therefore reduce car transport. Each of the strategic sites has sufficient land available to deliver the quantum

of development and that land is free of major constraints such as flood risk, Green Belt and protected habitats and species.