

A New Plan for South Worcestershire

Background

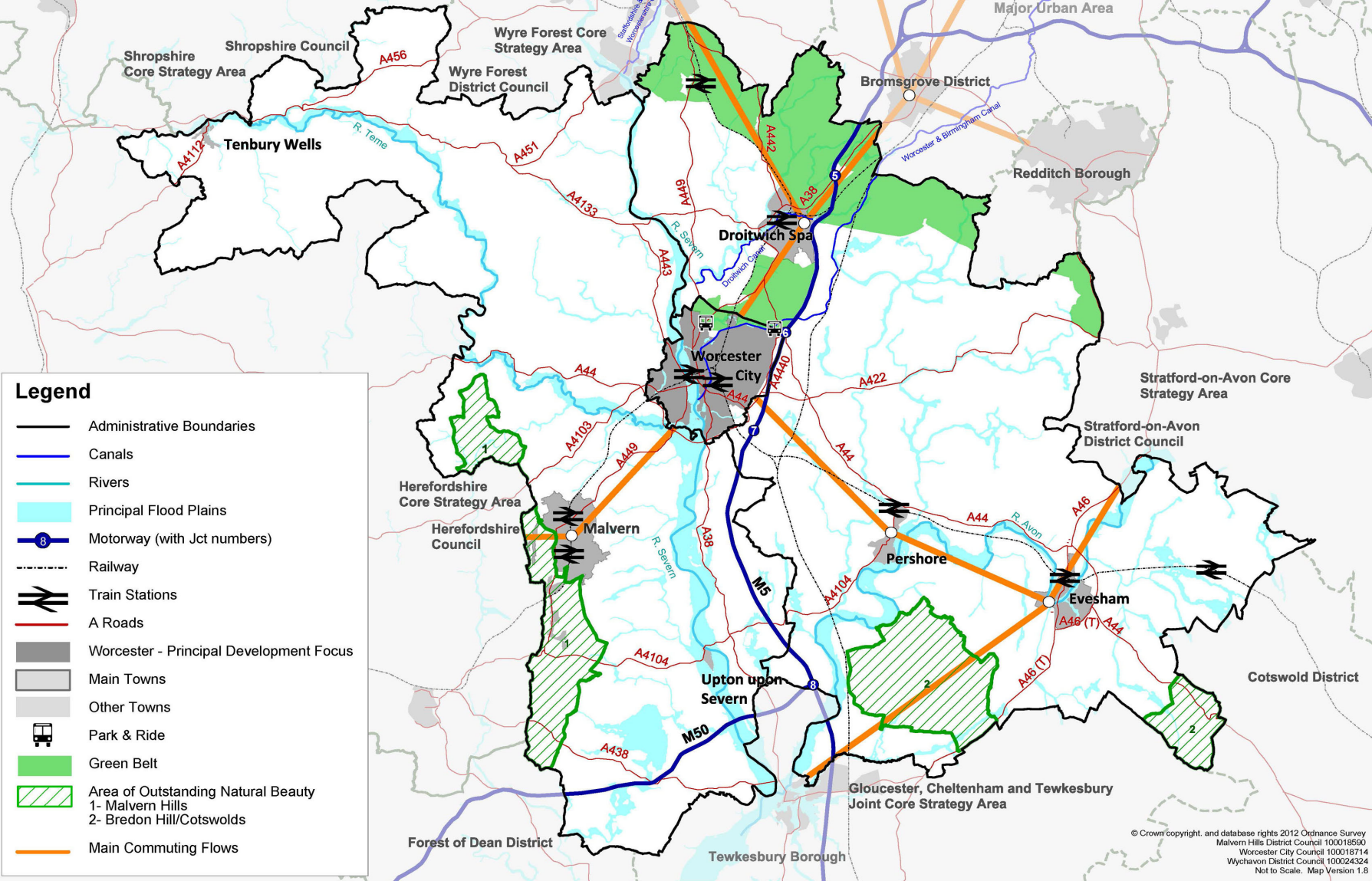
66. The SWC have taken the opportunity to develop a long-term plan for south Worcestershire that is based on local economic and housing requirements (covering the period from 1 April 2006 - 31 March 2030). The SWDP aims to provide a context for development decisions up to the year 2030, with regular monitoring and review as necessary to ensure it remains relevant and accurate. The purpose of the SWDP is as follows:
 - a. To provide a Vision for south Worcestershire to 2030.
 - b. To set out a development strategy and planning policies, including the allocation of land for employment, housing and other land uses and to guide infrastructure and service provision. This will help to deliver the aims of the area's Sustainable Community Strategy and promote economic prosperity across south Worcestershire.
67. A locally developed Local Plan ensures that:
 - a. Economic prosperity leads the local planning strategy, with greater emphasis on establishing the right conditions for economic growth and job creation.
 - b. Future housing development is set at a level that supports economic objectives, meets established local housing needs and aspirations and reflects the capacity of the area to accommodate growth.
 - c. Future development considers fully any infrastructure requirements, ensuring that appropriate provision is made and improvements identified that will enhance the quality of life for all residents and businesses.
68. Understandably, local communities and visitors value and wish to protect the environmental qualities of the area, qualities which have led many to relocate or to move their businesses to south Worcestershire over the plan period.
69. The SWDP gives appropriate weight to varying issues, such as the need to balance economic growth and housing provision with protecting and enhancing the local environment; it also reflects other local pressures, such as an ageing population and inward migration. The SWDP pays regard to a wide range of related aims, objectives and policies developed both nationally and locally. These are identified and explained more fully throughout the SWDP and in a series of topic-related Background Papers.
70. The review process has identified the need to tackle cross-boundary issues in the interests of south Worcestershire as a whole giving the area a single, strong voice on planning matters. A plan-led approach enables the partner authorities to better manage development pressure through the use of agreed policies and proposals. This helps the SWC resist inappropriate development and deliver growth where it is needed.

Context

71. South Worcestershire is not a formal sub-region or administrative area, but the partner authorities consider that whilst each district has a distinct character, there are strong functional, economic, infrastructure and cross-boundary relationships that mean preparing a joint development plan makes good strategic sense.
72. The Context Map sets out the main features of the SWDP area, including transport, main routes and other infrastructure, neighbouring planning authorities, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Green Belt and the larger settlements.

Development Plan Context Map

NORTH
Not to scale



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 Malvern Hills District Council 100018590
 Worcester City Council 100018714
 Wychavon District Council 100024324
 Not to Scale. Map Version 1.8

Figure 1 - SWDP Context Map

National Planning Guidance

73. National planning policy includes the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework). The Framework sets out a number of fundamental issues that need to be taken into account during the preparation of local plans, which include the following requirements:
- a. To set out a clear economic vision and strategy for the area, which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth.
 - b. To use a robust and up-to-date evidence base to ensure that the local plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in the Framework⁽¹⁾, including identifying key sites that are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period.
 - c. To set criteria, or identify strategic sites, that will help to encourage local and inward investment to match the strategy and meet anticipated needs over the plan period.
 - d. To maintain a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites with a buffer of either 5% or 20% depending on past delivery performance.
 - e. To recognise a duty to co-operate between public bodies and to implement a new soundness test, to ensure that plans are "positively prepared".
74. The SWC are satisfied that the SWDP has been designed to achieve sustainable economic growth throughout the plan period, in accordance with the requirements of the Framework. It has identified and promoted a range of sites suitable for larger-scale employment-generating activity, mixed-use, commercial and retail growth and appropriate rural diversification and enterprise activities. It champions high technology research and development through offering support to existing and emerging companies across the sub-region. It also includes specific policy support for the promotion and delivery of live / work units, making it easier for small-scale local entrepreneurial businesses to start up and grow in both rural and non-rural areas.

The Benefits of a Joint Plan

75. Extensive consultation with both stakeholders and the general public, coupled with a comprehensive review of the local evidence base, has identified a number of critical cross-boundary issues, which taken together make the substantive case for a south Worcestershire-wide Plan. These are:
- a. **Employment land**

The Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership has prioritised the need to identify a strategic portfolio of employment sites. Decisions regarding investment usually take place at a strategic level rather than within individual local authority areas.

1 See paragraphs 47 and 159 of the Framework – these provide the basis for developing housing provision and supply policy

b. **Economic Prosperity:**

To maximise south Worcestershire's economic potential in order to improve prosperity through the promotion of high technology and high-value industries, particularly in Worcester, Malvern and Droitwich Spa.

c. **Jobs:**

The demand for / supply of jobs will maintain the high commuting flows between Worcester, Malvern and Droitwich Spa (see Figure 1). Important elements of the road and rail network cross internal district boundaries and intersect at Worcester and have a very important bearing on the area's competitiveness and attractiveness. This needs to be considered within a strategic planning context, to ensure the future provision and enhancement of the area's transport network is maximised.

d. **Infrastructure:**

Major infrastructure planning and investment decisions can be made on a strategic and comprehensive basis at the sub-regional level. This is particularly relevant to road and rail infrastructure. Growth across south Worcestershire as a whole will place demands upon facilities that serve a wide catchment area. In terms of education, health, leisure, sports and cultural activities, the following currently serve a wider community:

- Worcestershire Royal Hospital.
- Sixways (Worcester Warriors Rugby Football Ground).
- New Road (Worcestershire County Cricket Club).
- Worcester Race Course.
- The Swan Theatre.
- University of Worcester.
- Worcester College of Technology.
- Pershore College of Horticulture.
- Various sixth form colleges.
- Public schools in Malvern and Worcester.
- Malvern Theatres.
- Three Counties Showground.

e. **Housing:**

The strategic housing market area is defined in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2012 as Worcestershire. The local Housing Market Areas originally identified in the earlier 2008 South Housing Market Assessment report crossed administrative boundaries within south Worcestershire. One of these local areas, the Worcester Housing Market Area, covers large parts of both the Malvern Hills and Wychavon districts. Worcester does not have sufficient available and suitable land, within its administrative area, on which to deliver all the long-term employment and housing needs. The partner authorities have agreed to work together to determine the most appropriate way to deliver the city's future development needs.

f. **Shopping:**

Worcester is a sub-regional retail centre and meets a significant proportion of the shopping requirements of residents in Malvern Hills / Wychavon, in particular their non-food needs. Other towns also have an influence on the surrounding rural areas and are similarly influenced by retail locations beyond south Worcestershire.

g. **Flood Risk:**

There are a number of significant watercourses within the area, including the Rivers Severn, Avon, Teme, Salwarpe, Isbourne and the Barbourne and Carrant Brooks. Some of these flow between the three districts. In order to avoid increasing peak flood levels downstream and compromising areas of land most vulnerable to flooding, development should be planned across the whole area and should not increase flood risk either downstream or upstream.

h. **Landscape and Green Infrastructure:**

The character of the natural landscape of south Worcestershire is to be protected and enhanced. Important features, such as the Malvern Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (including Bredon Hill), the Rivers Severn, Teme and Avon and the Worcester to Birmingham and Droitwich Canals, have important cross-boundary influences and are major tourist attractions.

Key Issues and Challenges

76. In developing the SWDP an assessment of the technical evidence base to inform the plan content allowed for the identification of a number of key issues and challenges under the following headings:

- Population and Housing
- Employment and jobs
- Retail

- Tourism
- Green Space and Sports Facilities

Analysis of the evidence provided a context for developing the policies and a basis for consultation on the draft content of earlier versions of the SWDP from the Preferred Options onwards. Detailed explanation of the issues raised by the evidence base can be read in the archived draft consultation documents on the SWDP website.

Influences on the Plan

77. The SWDP is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) as set out in the Inspector's final report into Examination of the SWDP published in February 2016.
78. The countywide Worcestershire Local Strategic Partnership has created a long-term vision for the area to tackle local needs which provide the framework for the SWDP's vision and objectives. This is expressed through the Sustainable Community Strategy, which brings together the multiple strategies covering south Worcestershire.
79. The strategy and policies have been based on technical evidence including feedback from infrastructure / service providers and specific technical reports including the statutory Sustainability Appraisal (SA). An SA is an independent assessment of the social, environmental and economic effects of a development plan document throughout its preparation. The outcomes of the SA have directly influenced the policies and proposals in this document.
80. Under the duty to cooperate the SWDP has had regard to policies and relationships beyond the combined administrative areas. This includes existing and emerging policies related to Worcestershire as a whole, together with consultation and co-ordination with neighbouring local authorities within the West Midlands and South West regions. There is no strategic case for development allocations to meet needs arising beyond the administrative boundaries of south Worcestershire. The SWDP has therefore met all the legal tests, including the duty to cooperate.

Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership

81. The Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership has identified a number of priorities. Its overriding aim is to create the right economic environment to inspire business, encourage investment and to create lasting and sustainable employment in Worcestershire by 2017. It published a five-year business plan in November 2012 - 'The Outlook is Bright in Worcestershire' - intended to raise the profile and promotion of the area, improve business access to finance, support key sectors in the local economy, focus on employment and skills along with planning, development and infrastructure needs.

Infrastructure Delivery

82. Following the economic downturn in 2008 there has been less private and public funding available to deliver infrastructure. Provision and availability of public funding has reduced,

resulting in an increased reliance on the private sector and other available funding sources. A full assessment of the costing of infrastructure and the potential funding sources can be found the South Worcestershire Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

83. The provision of appropriate and crucial infrastructure required to service the level of development in the SWDP represents a major challenge, which the SWC have tried to deal with in a positive manner as described elsewhere in this document. In particular this issue is addressed by SWDP 7 on Infrastructure, SWDP 4 on transport, SWDP 62 on Implementation and also by the supporting South Worcestershire Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which was updated in October 2014.

The Development Strategy

84. The Development Strategy will be delivered principally through the following strategic policies:
- SWDP 1: Overarching Sustainable Development Principles.
 - SWDP 2: Development Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy.
 - SWDP 3: Employment, Housing and Retail Provision Requirement and Delivery.
 - SWDP 4: Moving Around South Worcestershire.
 - SWDP 5: Green Infrastructure.
 - SWDP 6: Historic Environment.
 - SWDP 7: Infrastructure.
85. In addition to the above, guidance designed to provide context and direction to development management decisions is to be found in policies SWDP 8 – SWDP 42; more specific site allocations and associated guidance are contained in policies SWDP 43 – SWDP 61; and implementation, management and monitoring guidance is found in SWDP 62 and SWDP 63.
86. Annex C contains a list of primary policy connections, which demonstrates at a glance the clear relationships between the policies in the SWDP.
87. The policies of the South Worcestershire Development Plan supersede all the saved policies from the following former Local Plans: Malvern Hills District Local Plan 1996-2011 (adopted July 2006), City of Worcester Local Plan 1996-2011 (adopted October 2004), Worcester Local Development Framework Balanced Housing Market Development Plan Document (adopted December 2007) and Wychavon District Local Plan (adopted June 2006). Annex J contains a full list of the superseded policies.