

### Economic Prosperity

#### Introduction

**18.1** Delivering economic prosperity is the overriding aim of the South Worcestershire Development Plan. The following policy reflects the ambition of the South Worcestershire Councils and the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership 'Worcestershire Works' in delivering a robust local economy.

#### Reasoned Justification

**18.2** The South Worcestershire economy has high levels of economic and entrepreneurial activity. Its diversity ranges from traditional and marginal agricultural activities to high technology research and manufacturing businesses. These include services such as call centres to sophisticated logistics and business services providers. The range of business premises in South Worcestershire reflects this diversity, from basic storage facilities in converted agricultural buildings through to modern purpose built business parks and manufacturing facilities.

**18.3** The diversity of the local economy is characterised not only by a strong focus on employment opportunities within the main urban areas but also on a number of employment areas and small businesses, including home-work/live-work arrangements, dispersed throughout the rural areas. Home working accounts for over 11% of all employment in South Worcestershire. There is a need to continue to diversify the local economy to create a wider employment base so that South Worcestershire is less vulnerable to international and national economic changes.

**18.4** The technical evidence points to the need to allocate land principally for B1 and B2 uses. The Plan is not supportive of proposals which would jeopardise the delivery of this but does encourage other employment generating uses such as leisure and retail.

#### Office Development, Worcester City Centre



## Malvern Hills

**18.5** The local economy of Malvern Hills District has relied upon both agriculture and the defence industry, both of which have declined in recent years. Improving the economic prospects and quality of life for those living in the rural north and west of the district is especially important to the achievement of Sustainable Development objectives that underpin this Development Plan. Malvern will play a key role in the delivery of the Worcestershire A38 High Technology Corridor objectives because of its well established science and research base including QinetiQ and the Science Park.

## Wychavon

**18.6** Agriculture, food processing and distribution remain a very important part of the local economy of Wychavon particularly in the Vale of Evesham. Higher value and higher skilled jobs are concentrated at the business parks at Vale Park, (Evesham), Keytec, (Persnore), and Stonebridge Cross, (Droitwich Spa). While Wychavon does attract some of the highest earners in Worcestershire securing employment sites to provide high quality jobs for local residents remains a significant challenge. Many higher paid residents work from home or commute outside of the area.

### Food Process Line, Vale of Evesham



## Worcester

**18.7** Worcester is the county town and sub-regional centre for public and professional services which is the main reason why the city is a net importer of commuters. Worcester has higher than national average levels of economic activity and higher than average earnings but lower than national average salaries. The incompatibility of these facts is because some residents are commuting long distances principally to Birmingham/M42 Corridor and other centres for higher paid jobs.

**18.8** Historically Worcester was a manufacturing centre and retains a stock of older industrial/commercial premises. Much of the Previously Developed Land is contaminated reflecting its engineering past. The more modern commercial property is mainly located on the northern edge of the city.

**18.9** The difference in land values between residential and commercial uses is larger within the city and together with the national planning policy emphasis on housing delivery and 'Brownfield' re-development is resulting in the loss of older and cheaper commercial property. This does not help marginal sectors that cannot afford the higher rents associated with newer premises and does lead to a loss of low value businesses and local employment opportunities for semi and unskilled workers as businesses are forced to relocate to cheaper locations outside of the city.

### **South Worcestershire**

**18.10** The South Worcestershire Employment Land Review (GVA Grimley 2008) has predicted that Worcester will benefit from an increase in manufacturing employment, Wychavon will benefit from an increase in warehouse based employment and all three South Worcestershire Districts will benefit from an increase in commercial service related employment over the next twenty years.

**18.11** South Worcestershire as a whole benefits from tourism given its high quality, setting, attractive natural and built environment, historic sites, major attractions and its links with famous people and products such as; Worcester Cathedral, Royal Worcester Porcelain, Worcestershire Sauce and Elgar. More than 10,000 local jobs are provided by tourist related activities in South Worcestershire. Policy SWDP 36 refers to policy guidance on tourist related developments.

**18.12** Commuting patterns have changed over the years and are now more dispersed. In particular people now tend to live in rural areas and work in the towns. Also, they live in, or retire to, the rural areas but use facilities and services in urban areas. Accommodating and encouraging appropriate employment development in rural areas can help reduce commuting to urban areas and assist rural sustainability.

**18.13** Existing employment areas have come under sustained pressure to accommodate a range of non-employment uses including housing, retail and leisure, due to their higher land values, the absence of suitable sites elsewhere and the difficulties of accommodating certain uses within residential, town centres or rural areas. There is a limited supply of suitable land for all uses within South Worcestershire. The growing economy and population mean that the pressure to change the use of existing employment premises to higher value uses is likely to continue and intensify. The continued loss of employment land will clearly harm South Worcestershire's sustainable growth ambitions. This Development Plan therefore sets out both positive policy and employment land and retail allocations to address this issue. Existing development in South Worcestershire's city and town centres means that it is very difficult to physically replace employment sites that are redeveloped for alternative uses.

**18.14** Business activity and its associated development follow economic cycles that are shorter than this plan period. It will therefore be necessary to regularly review the evidence base for the planning policies that support the economic success of the sub region, to ensure they remain appropriate.

## 18.1 SWDP 27: Providing the Right Land and Buildings for Jobs

### **SWDP 27 Providing the Right Land and Buildings for Jobs**

Full account shall be taken of the economic implications of a planning proposal, including the wider implications to the regional and local economy, alongside social and environmental aspects in so far as they are material considerations in the determination of the planning application to which they relate.

Where the economic implications of a proposal are significant, substantial weight shall be afforded to them in the determination of that planning application.

The majority of new employment provision (land and commercial premises) will be allocated within or adjacent to the main urban areas, including the proposed urban extensions, in order to provide opportunities to reduce commuting distances and to ensure work places are accessible by a range of travel modes. Land will be allocated for employment generating uses, principally for Class B Uses. However, proposals which clearly demonstrate the potential for job creation and investment will be welcomed. Such uses should not undermine or constrain the main purpose of the employment allocation. Proposals for retail and leisure uses on allocated employment sites will be resisted, principally in order to safeguard the viability and vitality of the town centres, unless they are directly related in scale and use to the primary employment focus of the site.

Worcester Technology Park (Phase II, as shown on the Proposals Map) will maximise the potential job generation provided by Phase 1 (potentially to be occupied by Worcester Bosch). Phase II will be limited to Use Classes B1 and B2 only.

To support the aims of the Worcestershire A38 High Technology Corridor land at Malvern Hills Science Park and QinetiQ (as shown on the Proposals Map) will only be released for new B1(b) use class floor space. This is to ensure the provision of additional incubator and research facilities within acceptably close proximity to the established research and development facilities already concentrated at Malvern and maintain capacity within South Worcestershire for future research based employment.

Major office developments will be directed to Worcester City Centre in the first instance, and then locations within the town centres of Malvern, Evesham and Droitwich Spa subject to the requirement of Policy SWDP 1 that development should be appropriate to the needs of the specific settlement.

Sites to deliver economic prosperity and meet the anticipated new employment land requirements, B1, B2 and B8 uses, are identified in Policies SWDP 6-20 inclusive. Phasing of these sites is included in SWDP 50 Implementation, Phasing and Monitoring Plan.

In addition to the sites allocated specifically for new employment uses the provision of employment land and existing buildings to support job creation in other parts of South Worcestershire and especially in the most rural parts of the area will be supported providing:

- The development supports an existing business or new enterprise of a scale appropriate to the setting and host community; and
- The development will not undermine the Sustainable Development Principles set out in Policy SWDP3.

Existing businesses including those in vulnerable sectors will be supported by only considering alternative uses for existing employment land and buildings when all of the following criteria can be met:

1. The continued use of the buildings, or their redevelopment for an employment use, is not viable (in physical, operational and commercial terms) and this is supported by robust evidence. As a minimum this evidence would include:
  - Details of the realistic and appropriate marketing of the premises, leasehold and freehold for at least two years;
  - A financial appraisal that demonstrates that redevelopment for any employment use is unviable and will remain unviable for at least five years;
  - The premises have been identified by an up to date Employment Land Review as unsuitable for continued employment use;
2. The proposed alternative use would deliver a clear community benefit;
3. The proposed use would be compatible with adjacent land uses and not prejudice the amenity, viability or future development of other businesses.

### Links to the Objectives

**18.15** The Preferred Option policy for Providing the right land for and buildings supports the following objectives:

- Economic Success That is Shared by All objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4;
- Stronger Communities objective 4;

- Improving Health and Wellbeing objective 3.

### Alternative Options Considered

**18.16 To seek to prevent the loss of all existing employment land and buildings to other land uses.** This approach is not supported by national planning policy, or the responses from consultation, and therefore cannot be our preferred option.

**18.17 To have no policy that seeks to protect lower value land uses such as factories and offices from higher value land uses such as housing.** In the circumstances that prevail in the South Worcestershire area such an approach would almost certainly result in a pattern of land use that encourages longer distance commuting and reduces the range of local employment opportunities available to semi skilled and unskilled residents. Such an approach would clearly undermine the aim of achieving sustainable development and would not support a Development Plan that is seeking employment led growth.

#### Malvern Hills Science Park from Hills

