

### Creating and Sustaining Vibrant Centres

#### Reasoned Justification

**19.1** The Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability while:

- Enhancing consumer choice.
- Supporting efficient, competitive and innovative, retail, leisure and tourism sectors.
- Improving accessibility.

**19.2** The South Worcestershire Development Plan will progress this aim by focusing retail and leisure development on existing centres <sup>(1)</sup> in order to strengthen and regenerate them. Wherever possible, growth should be accommodated through an effective and efficient use of land and buildings within the centres. This approach will help to maintain the historic character of centres and provides opportunities to minimise the consumption of non-renewable resources by reusing existing buildings and providing a more accessible leisure and retail offer as set out in Planning Policy Statement 4 (Planning for Sustainable Growth).

**19.3** Worcester being at the top of the retail hierarchy will be the preferred location for major leisure, office and retail developments, and other uses which attract large numbers of people. Other centres are suitable for day-to-day food and non-food shopping, small scale leisure uses and local service and facility provision.

**19.4** The retail studies prepared by DPDS in 2008 and 2011 concluded that:

- No additional food floorspace beyond that which is already planned will be required before 2026.

**High Street, Worcester**



1 For the purposes of this chapter the town centres are: Worcester city centre, Malvern, Evesham, Droitwich, Pershore, Tenbury Wells and Upton Upon Severn centre.

- Worcester City Centre needs to provide at least 4,000m<sup>2</sup> of additional non-food retail space by 2021
- Only modest additional non-food floor space is required in the wider South Worcestershire area.

**19.5** If Worcester is to maintain its sub regional role within the area and attract South Worcestershire residents who might otherwise travel to Merry Hill or Cheltenham, it must be the focus for major retail development.

**19.6** Satisfying the shopping and leisure needs of South Worcestershire residents close to their home or workplace will contribute to sustainable development and growth by retaining more expenditure locally. Local shops and other services must be enhanced and past trends that have eroded local facilities reversed if this Development Plan's objectives of: reducing the causes of modelled climate change; minimising the need to travel; and protecting the environment are to be met.

#### **Festival in Wychavon District**



**19.7** Major leisure and tourist attractions should be directed to existing centres where they can be easily accessed by most people and where alternatives to car use such as public transport are more viable. This is to ensure that these facilities do not contribute to the unsustainable growth in personal car use. However, tourism is important to the rural economy. Where location in the existing centres is not appropriate, tourism related proposals should be directed to rural settlements and locations accessible by public transport. (See Policy SWDP 36, 37, 38 for specific policy guidance for tourism). Additionally proposals will be supported that genuinely support the successful operation of existing tourism facilities where the scale, form and function is appropriate to the location and they can be accessed by public transport.

**19.8** Worcestershire County Council consider that greater use of traffic management and parking controls, together with better public spaces and shared road space, would assist the development of town centres and that tourist and leisure attractions should be linked to town centres by direct and attractive pedestrian routes. They favour options that protect existing facilities and encourage redevelopment in sustainable town centre locations.

**19.9** The provision of additional retail development is set out in the individual strategic policies for the main urban centres (Policies SWDP 6 to SWDP 21)

### 19.1 SWDP 28: Creating and Sustaining Vibrant Centres

#### **SWDP 28: Creating and Sustaining Vibrant Centres**

New retail, leisure and tourism development that contributes to the vision for South Worcestershire as a high quality sustainable network of urban and rural settlements will be promoted and supported. Retail and other town centre development will be of a scale appropriate to the location and not compromise the Retail Hierarchy (set out in SWDP1). Proposals should respect the character and environment of the centre, including any special architectural or historic interest.

Measures to secure the vitality and viability of existing town centres as defined on the Proposals Map. The Centres are Worcester, Droitwich Spa, Evesham, Malvern, Pershore, Tenbury and Upton upon Severn and will be set out in Supplementary Planning Documents. These measures will include environmental enhancements and activities that seek to improve the visitor experience.

Hotel developments that enhance the visitor experience and demonstrate that they will support an increase in average visitor length of stay and / or average visitor spend will be supported.

Proposals for retail or leisure facilities will need to demonstrate that they are:

- Meeting an identified need, including the needs of disadvantaged rural and urban communities and of the growing population of South Worcestershire;
- Not detrimental to the settlement/retail hierarchy as set out in Policy SWDP1;
- Increasing the quality and range of shopping available in the centres, as well as contributing to a comfortable, safe, attractive and accessible environment;
- Making full use of the premises avoiding vacant floors over shops and providing a separate entrance for office or residential use of upper floors.

## Links to the Objectives

**19.10** The Preferred Option policy for creating and sustaining vibrant centres supports the following Objectives:

- Economic Success that is Shared by All objectives 3 and 4;
- Stronger Communities objectives 4 and 5;
- A Better Environment for Today and Tomorrow objectives 1 and 2;
- Communities that are Safe and Feel Safe objective 2.

## Alternative Options Considered

### **19.11 Rely on national planning policy to control development.**

This is an option, which would not necessarily encourage more sustainable patterns of land use. It does not address local needs and it risks ignoring current trends that are stripping rural villages and suburban areas of local services. This in turn would result in longer journeys to satisfy everyday needs. The Government is to revise national planning policy with more emphasis given to local decision making. As the nature of revised national policy for town centres is uncertain it is important that South Worcestershire has robust policies to safeguard the economic benefits provided by the existing town centre functions.

**Cyclist on Pershore High Street**

