South Worcestershire Joint Core Strategy

Report of Stakeholder Visioning Event

Worcester Rugby Club
Monday 14th April 2007

QUEST

Session facilitated by Quest Associates
Report of outcomes produced by Quest Associates Ltd.
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Agenda

Welcome

Session aims and process

    Cllr Rowden, Chair, South Worcestershire Joint Advisory Panel

    Peter Woodward, Facilitator, Quest Associates

The need for a strategy

    Mark Middleton, Head of Planning, economy and Research, Worcestershire County Council

What makes South Worcestershire special?

    Group work and plenary follow up

What are the challenges and opportunities facing the area over the next 20 years?

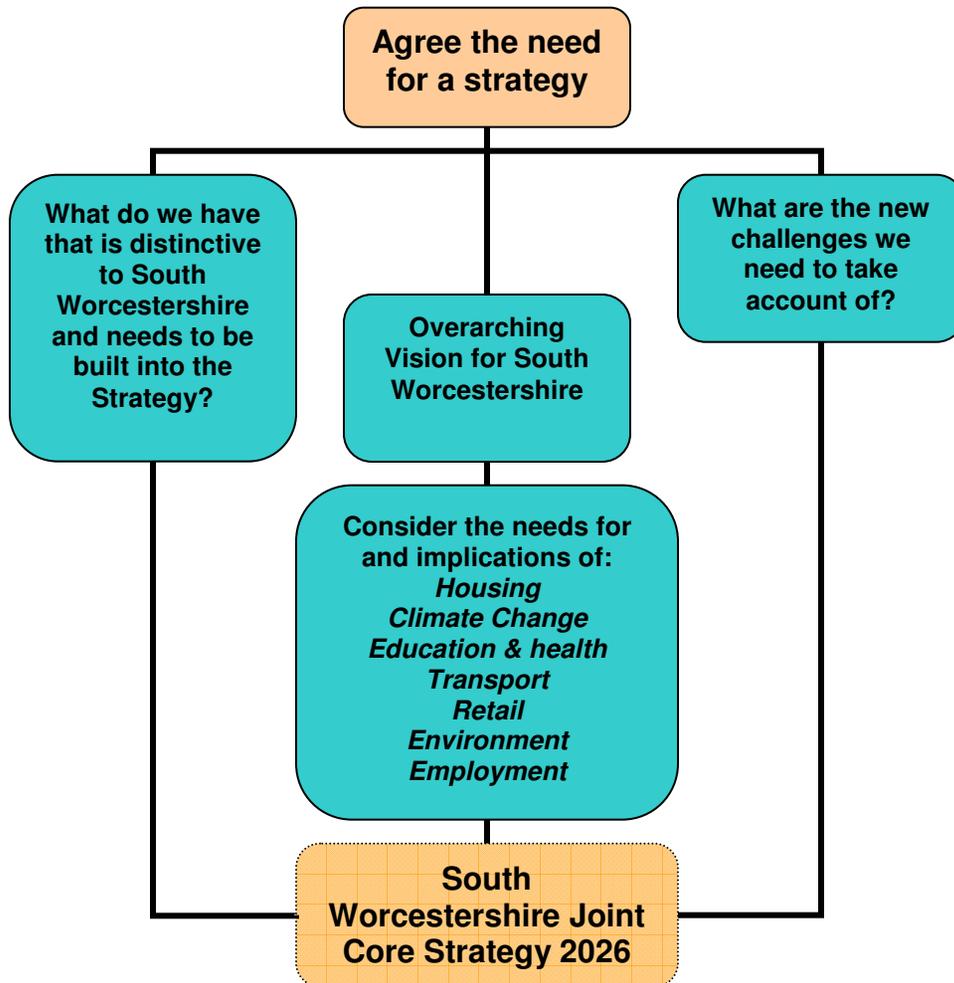   Group work and plenary feedback and observations

Draft a compelling vision for S. Worcestershire 2026

    Group work then plenary 'dot vote' to identify preferred vision statement

Considering spatial dimensions of change issues– group work

    Housing– looking at the criteria we should apply in choosing locations for development, considering the implications of this, identifying key messages to inform the strategy.

    Six groups looking at one of climate change, health & education, transport, retail, the environment and employment. In particular, identifying insights on the issue, provide advice on the spatial options, and give key messages that would inform the strategy.

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│  Agree the need │
│  for a strategy │
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Agree the need for a strategy

What do we have that is distinctive to South Worcestershire and needs to be built into the Strategy?

Overarching Vision for South Worcestershire

What are the new challenges we need to take account of?

Consider the needs for and implications of:
Housing
Climate Change
Education & health
Transport
Retail
Environment
Employment

South Worcestershire Joint Core Strategy 2026

Workshop Purpose and Process

A strategy for South Worcestershire has been identified through the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy statutory framework. The need for the strategy is therefore already established. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together a wide range of stakeholders from the three districts involved – Worcester City, Malvern Hills and Wychavon - to consider aspects of the strategy and how to take them forward. Sessions were run corresponding with each of the blue boxes to the left.

The day was run in a series of group sessions and plenary discussion, all facilitated by external facilitators. Groups were mixed up through the day and participants had the opportunity to choose areas they wished to contribute to when working on the core issues.

The outputs from these sessions are recorded here in this report as faithfully as possible. A photographic record of the day's work is also available.

It is important to remember that the outcomes represent the starting point for taking the strategy forward and are not the final conclusions. They also test the mood and instincts of the participants on the day which will be useful in subsequent stages of developing the strategy.

Participants split into 6 groups to consider aspects of South Worcestershire that they felt were distinctive. They were asked to identify 5 of the aspects that were unique to the area and particularly special. The following table shows how much consensus there was between the groups.

Group/ Priority	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
1	Quality local environment, areas of beauty	Malvern Hills, Clee and Bredon Hill	Urban/rural balance and strategic position	Diversity of open spaces	River/canal network in lovely landscape e.g. orchards	Variety of green space
2	Rivers and canals- Severn	Rivers Severn/Avon/Tene	Landscape features – Malverns, Severn	Market towns	Healthy environment	Elgar and other cultural assets
3	Access to the conurbation and the rest of the country	Historic fabric- urban and countryside	Scale & size of communities	Culture and heritage	Area of outstanding natural beauty- Malverns, Wyre Forest	Vale of Evesham distribution centre
4	Housing in good condition and high value	Spa towns- Malvern and Droitwich	Technology and knowledge	Transport links and networks	Low crime area	Bosch technical belt
5	History and culture. Theatre and music heritage.	Distinctive building materials	Agriculture and horticulture	Employment	Accessibility to the countryside	Expensive Housing

3 Groups were asked to consider the challenges South Worcestershire faces currently and might face over the next 20 years. The outcomes fell broadly into 5 categories.

Category	Challenges	
Environmental pressures	◆ Water demand ◆ Waste & recycling management ◆ Improved infrastructure in place early ◆ Improved drainage and water supply ◆ Appropriate buildings and carbon neutral construction ◆ Strain on natural resources ◆ Accommodating tourism	◆ Protecting open spaces and landscape ◆ Crossing the River Severn /infrastructure ◆ Protecting market towns whilst enhancing the economy ◆ Diversifying the rural economy ◆ Rural marginalisation versus urban development
Demographic change/consequences	◆ Ageing population ◆ Changing diversity ◆ Relationship between more homes and more jobs ◆ Employment opportunities needed ◆ Housing supply ◆ Stimulating economic development ◆ Tackling rural deprivation	◆ Supply of social infrastructure ◆ Sustaining small (rural) communities & preventing isolation ◆ Community safety ◆ Inward migration ◆ Needs of young people/retaining them ◆ Education in its broadest sense ◆ Retaining traditional skills
Governance	◆ Leadership ◆ Community engagement at all levels ◆ Raising the profile of S.Worcestershire and recognition as a sub-region ◆ Plethora of strategies and plans needing to be joined up	◆ Securing more public resources ◆ Governance and structures to deliver ◆ Ensuring public engagement and contribution ◆ Under investment
Transport	◆ Transportation needs- road/rail/river ◆ Unreliable rail infra-structure ◆ Location on the edge of the region	◆ Capacity ◆ Road congestion around Worcester ◆ Bottlenecks
Climate Change	◆ Flooding rivers ◆ Impact on historic buildings	◆ Issues beyond our control

At the same time 3 Groups were asked to consider opportunities that South Worcestershire could take advantage of over the next 20 years. The outcomes fell broadly into 5 categories.

Category	Opportunities	
Building on our heritage	* Tourism attractions * Local food * Retaining our local distinctiveness	* Historic buildings and places * Cultural associations * Waterways
Environment and quality of life	* Balanced approach to housing size and tenure * Balance homes and jobs * Keep low crime rates * Integrated spatial approach to development * Retaining local distinctiveness	* Home working * Affordable housing with green spaces and close proximity to conurbation * Improved existing housing stock * Accessible health care and schools * Sport and leisure- 2012 Olympics
Building a thriving economy	* Tourism employment * Low carbon economy * Good rail links * Balanced approach to housing size and tenure * Looking south to Cardiff/Bristol for expertise and partnership	* New technologies for design * Migrant labour * Qinetiq /skills-base * University- expand skills base * Local food and products * Opportunity to respond to Severn Barrage
Better working relationships to get things right	* Community involvement and engagement * Proactive in tackling challenges * Better working together	* Involve young people in decisions * Improve reputation and appreciation of South Worcestershire
Sustainable development	* Building balanced and sustainable communities * Climate change interventions * Reduce food miles- buy local * Impact of renewable energy on agriculture * Integrated transport	* Eco-housing * Renewable energy * Low carbon emissions

A Vision Statement for South Worcestershire

Six groups worked together to devise a vision statement for South Worcestershire which the whole group were then asked to 'vote' on, although 8 people felt they couldn't choose between them. These are listed below in order of preference of the whole group.

South Worcestershire 2026…….

1. The most beautiful, vibrant and creative place to live and work in the country

2. Is ..
Sustainable
Environmentally sound
Vibrant
Enterprising
Rural
Near Birmingham!

3. A high quality of life for all in thriving and sustainable rural and urban communities

4. Enhancing the best and improving the rest

5. Retaining its natural beauty whilst fully exploiting technical opportunities in sensors

6. Cherry picking the beauty of South Worcestershire life today for a sustainable tomorrow!

Criteria for Choosing Housing Locations

Working in groups, the participants were asked to focus on housing issues and identify criteria that should be applied when considering locations for new housing development. There was considerable consensus between groups and the following are the amalgamated criteria suggested.

∗ Distributed based on existing settlements ∗ On brownfield sites and infill first ∗ A new town? ∗ Not on a flood plain ∗ Retaining best quality agricultural land ∗ Close to good transport infrastructure ∗ Where there is a service capacity ∗ Where there is a social infrastructure ∗ Not in AONB's ∗ Where there can be affordable homes ∗ Where it will stimulate rural regeneration	∗ Driven by local aspirations ∗ Access main utility services ∗ Where environmental impact will be minimised- need very good design including green spaces ∗ Close to employment opportunities ∗ Where travel can be minimised ∗ Where homes are needed- reflecting community and family needs ∗ Where schools and education can be accessed ∗ Development should be in scale with existing

What are the implications for spatial distribution?

All six groups were also asked to consider the implications of spatial distribution of housing. The following comments were made. Group comments have been listed together in this case together with their key messages to inform the strategy;

Group 1

∗ Potential to regenerate villages if dispersed and adjacent to existing centres but….
∗ May require changes to green belt and there is a danger small scale will mean losing out on funding
∗ A new town? Would have to be gradual evolution over 20 years not immediate. But…
∗ It is difficult to 'create' a community and may not meet the needs of people who need homes now. Will this be the end of it in South Worcestershire?

Key Messages
- ∗ Avoid the mistakes of the past
- ∗ Think community
- ∗ Maintain Worcestershire distinctiveness
- ∗ Ensure element of affordability
- ∗ Contain MUA's

Group 2

* Utilise land surrounding towns and cities
* Potentially more diverse communities
* Potential reduction in average age of residents

Key Messages
* Protect and increase employment land
* Provide finance and infrastructure up front
* Meet carbon neutral standards

Group 3

* Hierarchy of priority- Worcester – market towns – rural areas
* Prioritising use of brownfield land but not to detriment of employment
* Infill site land priority
* Phased development requiring long term planning
* No new town!

Key Messages
* Retain and enhance quality of life
* Provide necessary infrastructure before development
* Meet customer choices and aspirations

Group 4

* Existing site availability should be the first priority
* Settlement linked to developments
* Enforceable design criteria to develop exciting communities
* Development should be incremental
* New town development brings focused infrastructure investment

Key Messages
* Any building should not overpower existing settlements or landscapes

Group 5

* Need to investigate brownfield land first
* Development will need to be focused on market towns e.g. Evesham
* Opportunity to improve and enhance existing services

Key Messages

 * Protect and enhance open spaces

Group 6

* Opportunity to create a new settlement near a main road
* Or dispersal across the area
* Could expand Worcester but need to put in major infrastructure first- possibly to the north or east of the city

Key Messages

 * Phased development over time will enable communities to adapt and encourage integration
 * Development should be based on need
 * Development must be close to main roads and rail networks
 * Need to consider the implications of growing the public sector to meet the needs of extra people here

What about other issues?

The groups were then asked to consider six other key change issues-

 * **Climate Change**
 * **Education & health**
 * **Transport**
 * **Retail**
 * **The environment**
 * **Employment**

Individuals were invited to work on the issue which most interested them or to which they considered they could make a contribution.

Climate Change

Insights	**Advice on spatial options**
* Flooding at Bewdley/Worcester * Produce/fruit affected by weather changes * Lack of water * Fires on Malvern Hills affects wildlife and heathers * Wildlife changes- Violet Click beetle (Bredon Hills) * Waste of resources * M5- fuel emissions	* Improve rail system * Use of renewable energies- reduce the carbon effect * Maximise innovative technologies * Subsidise public transport, use park and ride/car pool/safe walks to school schemes * Build carbon neutral houses- grants give incentive * Wetland ecological systems- target areas- learn from abroad * Minimise waste i.e. composting/recycling * Green infrastructure- trees/landscaping/green routes * All development should be carbon neutral and export to the grid * No plastic packaging in South Worcestershire * Develop wine producing businesses

Key messages
  * No carbon footprint in South Worcestershire (carbon trading)

Education and health

Insights	**Advice on spatial options**
* Pressures on schools- enrolment rates * Re-skilling opportunities- social/employment * Advance infrastructure- transport etc. * County hospital currently not meeting demand * Mobile GP's in rural areas * Health benefits of quality open spaces * Vocational skills to support local community * Pressures on roads due to traditional school run	* Encourage school travel plans * Creative transport solutions- access to services * New station to the north of Worcester- boat/bus along the river Severn * Best practice from similar localities * Health benefits of improving cycle ways

Key messages
  * Early funding for advanced infrastructure
  * Best practice from other areas

Transport	
Insights	**Advice on spatial options**
∗ Rail network good but underused ∗ Road network is creaking ∗ Additional road/river crossings required especially north of Worcester ∗ Congestion and poor roads could cost us Qinitiq ∗ Congestion may constrain growth ∗ We will be building a new town so build the new transport links ∗ Poor road network restricts options for new housing developments	∗ More park and ride (rail and outside Worcester) ∗ Future development has to be along main roads/rail links ∗ More sympathetic rail timetables ∗ New motorway junctions- south and north Worcester ∗ Integrate rail and bus timetables ∗ Eastern bypass for Malvern with improved river crossing south of Worcester

Key messages
- ∗ Transport is the key!
- ∗ Listen to local people
- ∗ You won't get people out of their cars
- ∗ Rail could be developed further
- ∗ Congestion will cost jobs

Retail	
Insights	**Advice on spatial options**
∗ Internet shopping ∗ Viability of local shopping centres ∗ Viability of village shops ∗ Shopping mix- food in city centre ∗ Uniformity of larger retailers ∗ 24/7 or just 7! ∗ Out of town shopping centres ∗ Farm shops ∗ Change in means of payment	∗ Promote existing shopping centres ∗ Mixed use parades ∗ No more retail parks ∗ Support village shops ∗ Better parking in centres ∗ Warehousing?

Key messages
- ∗ Interesting mix of shops
- ∗ Village shops to serve needs of local community
- ∗ Alternative attractions in town centres

The environment	
Insights	**Advice on spatial options**

* **Built environment**
    o Sensitive design
    o Community safety
    o Public services and infrastructure
    o Noise/light/air pollution
* **Natural environment**
    o Leisure and quiet enjoyment of the countryside
    o Impact on agricultural land
    o Wildlife habitats
	* Potential of more road building
	* Density executive homes versus affordable units
	* Some people are going to be upset
	* Evidence!
	* Trade off for every proposal built
	* Eco friendly building- solar panels, water tanks, geo-thermal, wind turbines, remove hard surfaces for water infiltration

Key messages
  * Concentrate the impact? Or….
  * Spread the impact?.......either is possible.	

Employment	
Insights	**Advice on spatial options**
* Not as simple as more land * Appropriate sites for a mixed economy * Start up units/incubators * Planning system is too slow for commerce	* Live and work opportunities * Think creatively about the land required * Appropriate broadband * Infrastructure- Norton parking

Key messages
  * Don't build houses at the expense of jobs
  * Think creatively about the land required- don't follow RSS which is unsophisticated and just a finger in the air!
  * Next time, can the residential and RSS be one document please.	

QUEST (May 2007)