

ECONOMIC GROWTH

SWDP 8: Providing the Right Land and Buildings for Jobs



- A. Allocated sites to meet anticipated employment land requirements for B1, B2 and B8 uses are identified in policies SWDP 43-58 inclusive. However, proposals for other uses that clearly demonstrate the potential for job creation will also be welcomed on these sites, provided that they do not undermine or constrain the main purpose of the employment allocation. Proposals for retail and leisure uses on allocated employment sites will be permitted providing they are related in scale and use to the primary employment focus of the site, and would have no significant adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any defined centre (see policy SWDP 10).**
- B. Worcester Technology Park (South Phase shown on the Policies Map) will maximise the potential job generation provided by the North Phase. The South Phase will be limited to the use classes specified in policy SWDP45/6.**
- C. To support the aims of the Worcestershire Economic Strategy, employment land at the Malvern Technology Centre (QinetiQ), as shown on the Policies Map, will only be released in accordance with policy SWDP 53. 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 to maintain capacity within south Worcestershire for future research-based employment.**

- D.** Except where they are proposed on sites allocated in the SWDP for office use, major⁽²⁷⁾ office developments will be directed in the first instance to Worcester city centre and then to locations within the town centres of Droitwich Spa, Evesham and Malvern, subject to the requirement of SWDP 2 that the scale of development should be appropriate to the size of the settlement.
- E.** In addition to the sites allocated specifically for employment uses, the provision of employment land and the conversion of existing buildings to support job creation throughout south Worcestershire will be supported providing the development supports an existing business or new enterprise of a scale appropriate to the location.
- F.** Planning permission for the change of use to a non-employment-generating use of premises of over 1,000 sq.m. net floorspace, which are currently or were last used for employment purposes within the B1, B2 and / or B8 use classes⁽²⁸⁾, will be granted only where:
- i.** It is demonstrated that the continued use of the premises, or their redevelopment for employment use, is not viable, through the provision of:
 - Details of comprehensive marketing of the premises / land, for at least 12 months and appropriate to the prevailing market conditions⁽²⁹⁾; and
 - A financial appraisal that demonstrates that redevelopment for any employment-generating use is unviable and is unlikely to achieve viability within five years.

and

 - ii.** The proposed use would be compatible with adjacent land uses and not prejudice the amenity, lawful operation, viability or future development of other businesses.
- G.** Proposals for live / work accommodation will be permitted providing:
- i.** The residential use is ancillary with floor space split at least 60% employment and no more than 40% residential.
 - ii.** The residential accommodation contains no more than three bedrooms.
 - iii.** The residential and work spaces are entirely separate with separate entrances and toilet facilities.

27 For all non-residential uses, major is defined as exceeding 1,000sq. m (net) floorspace.

28 More restrictive criteria apply in rural areas – see SWDP12.

29 Further details of the marketing requirements are set out at Annex F.

- iv. **Where viable, affordable housing, in accordance with SWDP 15, is included within the development.**
- v. **All units have access to superfast broadband or equivalent infrastructure.**
- vi. **Proposals for ten or more live / work units include provision for shared business services, i.e. meeting rooms and basic office services.**
- vii. **The proposed use does not involve the sale of goods to visiting members of the public or fall within the A3, A4, A5, B2, C1, or C2 use classes.**

Reasoned Justification

1. Delivering economic prosperity is an objective of the SWDP. The policy reflects the ambition of the partner authorities and the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver a robust local economy.
2. The south Worcestershire economy exhibits 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 a range of services, from call centres to sophisticated logistics and business service 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.
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.
4. The technical evidence points to the need to allocate land principally for B1 and B2 uses. The SWDP is not supportive of proposals that would jeopardise the delivery of this but does encourage other employment-generating uses such as leisure and retail.

Malvern Hills

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 underpinning this Plan. Malvern will play a crucial role in the delivery of the Worcestershire Economic Strategy objectives because of its well established science and research base, including QinetiQ and the Malvern Hills Science Park and contributions to tourism.

Wychavon

6. Agriculture, horticulture, 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 (Persore) 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 to locations outside the area.

Worcester

7. Worcester is the county town and main sub-regional centre for public and professional services, which is the main reason why the city is a net importer of commuters. Worcester has economic activity levels that are higher than the national average. Worcester residents have higher than average earnings, but Worcester salaries are lower than the national average. The contradiction implied by these facts is the result of some residents commuting long distances, principally to Birmingham, the M42 Corridor and other centres for higher-paid jobs.
8. Historically, Worcester was a manufacturing centre and it retains a stock of older industrial / commercial premises. Much of the previously developed land is contaminated, reflecting its engineering past. More modern commercial property is located mainly on the northern edge of the city.
9. The difference in land values between residential and commercial use is greater within the city; together with the Framework's emphasis on housing delivery and its support for brownfield re-development, this is resulting in the loss of older and cheaper commercial property. This has an adverse impact on marginal sectors that cannot afford higher rents associated with newer premises. This leads to a loss of locally significant, low-value businesses and employment opportunities suitable for semi- skilled and unskilled workers, as businesses are forced to relocate to cheaper locations outside the city.

South Worcestershire

10. The South Worcestershire Employment Land Review (GVA Grimley 2008) 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.
11. South Worcestershire benefits from tourism, given its high-quality setting, attractive natural and built environment, historic sites and major attractions and its links with famous people and products such as Worcester Cathedral, Royal Worcester Porcelain, Worcestershire Sauce, Morgan Cars and Edward Elgar. More than 10,000 local jobs are provided by tourism-related activities in south Worcestershire. SWDP 34 provides policy guidance on tourism-related developments.

12. The majority of new employment provision in the Plan (land and commercial premises) is 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 workplaces are accessible by a range of travel modes. At the same time, accommodating and encouraging appropriate employment development in rural areas can help reduce commuting to urban areas and assist in establishing rural sustainability. More specific guidance on the provision of rural employment space is contained in SWDP 12.
13. Existing employment areas have come under sustained pressure from other 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 centre or rural areas. 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. The Roger Tym and Partners Employment Land Review in 2011 did not identify a significant number of commercial premises or sites that were unsuitable for continued employment use. Annex F provides guidance about what the authorities expect applicants to demonstrate in terms of the marketing of commercial property before consideration will be given to an alternative use. Premises and land will usually be required to be marketed on both a freehold and leasehold basis. The timescales and range of the marketing exercise will need to have regard to the nature and scale of the site and buildings and the prevailing economic conditions. Existing levels of development in south Worcestershire's city and town centres means that it is very difficult to replace employment sites that are redeveloped for alternative uses. The SWDP sets out both positive policies and employment land and retail allocations to address the economic and property-related issues listed above.
14. Business activity and its associated development follow economic cycles that are shorter than this plan period. It will be necessary, therefore, to undertake regular reviews of the evidence base used to support the planning policies that promote the economic success of the plan area; this will ensure they remain robust and appropriate in often rapidly changing economic circumstances.
15. The provision of live / work units can help support small and start-up businesses as well as provide sustainability benefits particularly in the more rural parts of south Worcestershire. For example, live-work units may be a suitable use for redundant rural buildings and afford opportunities for farm diversification. However, policy criteria need to be set to ensure that proposals are genuinely intended for employment purposes. The approved development may be controlled by planning conditions or a legal obligation governing the use of the premises and other relevant matters such as the number of non-resident employees who can work at the premises. The removal of permitted development rights for change of use of all or part of the premises or for residential extensions may also be considered appropriate.