

### Spatial Context

#### Background

12. South Worcestershire covers approximately 1,300km<sup>2</sup> and forms the southern limit of the West Midlands region. It also borders the south-west and south-east regions. South Worcestershire comprises the largely rural districts of Malvern Hills and Wychavon along with Worcester, the largest urban area. Beyond the city are the three main towns of Droitwich Spa, Evesham and Malvern and the towns of Pershore, Tenbury Wells and Upton-upon-Severn. In addition there are over 200 villages of varying size, character and level of service provision. The total population of south Worcestershire is approximately 290,500 (2011 Mid-Year Population Estimates).
13. The landscape is of a very high quality and is a defining feature of south Worcestershire. The countryside is distinguished by the upland areas of the Cotswolds (including Bredon Hill) and Malvern Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as well as the river valleys of the Avon, Severn and Teme. Human influence on the landscape can be traced to the prehistoric period and is reflected in a large range of prominent features, most notably listed buildings (5,600), Scheduled Ancient Monuments (150), historic parks and gardens (13), conservation areas (105) and numerous protected trees and woodlands. In addition, the urban greenspace enhances the environmental quality of the area. All these environmental attributes mean that south Worcestershire attracts a significant number of tourists and visitors, who account for approximately 11% of local expenditure.
14. South Worcestershire is easily accessible by rail and road from the West Midlands conurbation and to a lesser extent from London. However, there is concern over the capacity of key elements of the communications network to deal with current demands and future requirements. Rural accessibility is also an important issue as reductions in public transport provision and increases in transportation costs will increase demand for flexible and accessible transport. Safer routes for pedestrians and cyclists will be needed to support rural communities and the rural economy.
15. Good accessibility and a high quality built and natural environment has led to the area being subject to relatively high levels of inward migration, which has kept market housing prices relatively high. Housing affordability within both the urban and rural areas is a major issue and is likely to remain so throughout the plan period.
16. The West Midlands Green Belt has been an effective planning tool in ensuring that the main settlements, in particular Droitwich Spa and Worcester, remain physically separate and distinctive.
17. South Worcestershire provides some 127,000 jobs, 65% of which are in Worcester and the main towns. Unemployment is nearly half that for the West Midlands and the last decade has seen employment growth trends higher than the regional average. Average wages are lower than those in the West Midlands and England whereas average incomes are higher, reflecting the relatively high proportion of people with investments. Commuting beyond south Worcestershire is necessary for those residents wishing to achieve higher salaries, particularly in London and the M42 corridor. Most commuting, however, generally

takes place internally within south Worcestershire, with the strongest commuting flows between the towns of Malvern and Droitwich Spa and Worcester city.

18. The context map (Figure 1) sets out the main features of the south Worcestershire area, including transport (main routes and other infrastructure), neighbouring local planning authorities, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, green belt and the main settlements.

### Worcester City

19. Worcester is the county town and the only city within the plan area. It is the principal urban area within Worcestershire, with a population of 98,700 (2011 Mid-Year Population Estimates). It has a long and prominent history, but is now focused on its future and intent on creating an economy to match its environment. It is a compact city of approximately 33km<sup>2</sup> and can be compared with similar aspiring cities such as Chester, Cambridge, Lincoln, Oxford and Exeter.
20. Worcester is set on the River Severn and boasts a historic cathedral, a rapidly growing university and a diverse retail, culture and leisure offer.
21. Worcester is in an excellent location with good transport links by road and rail to the rest of the UK. It is also in close proximity to the M5, M6, M42 and M40 and is within a relatively short distance of Birmingham International Airport.
22. The city has embraced the opportunities to expand across the centuries with the most recent expansions being the well-planned urban extensions of Warndon Villages and St Peters. Worcester is distinctive because it maintains the image of being a city within a rural setting. This character is shaped by the many villages beyond the city boundary, over which the city has a major influence.



23. Worcester has a dynamic local economy, with high levels of economic success, knowledge-based industries, connectivity and communications, with an active university benefiting the area and businesses through its education and research activities. Being the dominant employment, shopping and tourist centre, Worcester's success in attracting and retaining employers will have a consequential impact on the economic success of south Worcestershire as a whole.

24. Providing the right mixture of employment land in the right locations can assist expansion in both new and high growth sectors and will provide opportunities for the growth of existing firms. This will help to provide opportunities in those parts of the city that have higher levels of unemployment.
25. Employment land is spread geographically across the city, with more established sites being closer to the city centre. Employment sites vary in size, with the largest being Shire Business Park on Warndon. Businesses on Warndon represent a robust mix of employment uses with manufacturing being strongly represented. Examples of industries based here are Worcester Bosch, Yamazaki Mazak, Npower, CryoService and Royal Mail.
26. Worcester has both greenfield and brownfield sites allocated for employment. These include land south of Warndon Wood, Worcester Woods Business Park (Newtown Road), Grove Farm (Bromyard Road), Government Buildings (Whittington Road) and land at Midland Road.
27. The city centre remains the focus of the Worcester economy. Strategically positioned on the banks of the River Severn, the city centre is steeped in centuries of history, having played a role in England's ecclesiastical development, the Civil War and important manufacturing. Today, this remains evident in its pattern of medieval streets and a remarkable collection of historic buildings.
28. Despite challenging economic conditions, Worcester retains healthy levels of retail activity, including a strong independent retail sector. The growing university has also provided a catalyst for the provision of a new library and history centre (The Hive), which opened in 2012. Other recent developments at the Riverside and Lowesmoor show that the city centre is continuing to thrive and renew itself, with further opportunity areas identified in the City Centre Masterplan Vision. Critical to its success will be ensuring that the unique and historic fabric can be positively integrated within a modern, dynamic city centre.

### Droitwich Spa

29. Droitwich Spa is the largest settlement in Wychavon, with an estimated population of 23,500 (2011 census-based population estimates). It has the highest natural increase in population and the greatest housing needs in Wychavon.
30. The town's origins can be traced back to at least the Roman period and its industrial heritage has been dominated by salt production, which only ceased during the first half of the 20th century. From the mid-19th century the town developed as a 'Spa town', with visitors taking to the brine baths. This continued well into the 20th century and the baths remained open in the town until 2008. The underground 'brine runs' mean that in some locations special building foundations are required in order to meet Building Regulations. The legacy of the 'Spa' culture has led to a town centre with spacious and pleasant parks and open-air leisure opportunities much valued by the local community.
31. Since the 1960s, the town has undergone considerable growth, with phases of housing development predominantly to the south of the town centre. This, along with the established central shopping area, adjacent employment sites and industrial estates to the north-west, has led to a diverse town providing a focus for town residents and local villages alike.



32. The range of services includes education, health, leisure and retail facilities. Employment is concentrated to the north-west within three sizeable industrial estates, whilst shopping is centrally located, with some provision in larger units along the Kidderminster Road and other local shops serving residential areas. Approximately 46% of residents work outside the town, with more popular destinations being Worcester (14%), Birmingham

(8%) and Bromsgrove (14%), with the remainder further afield within the West Midlands or south-west.

33. Given these patterns of commuting, the SWDP needs to meet the requirements of local employment opportunities whilst avoiding increasing travel-to-work journeys to and from the West Midlands conurbation. Droitwich Spa also provides employment opportunities for approximately 5,000 people from within and outside the town, the majority travelling from the Worcester (22%), Wyre Forest (15%) and Bromsgrove (13%) areas (GVA Grimley, 2008).
34. With regard to accessibility, Droitwich Spa is served by the M5 (Junctions 5 and 6), A38, rail (with two routes into Birmingham) and regular bus services to neighbouring towns. The Droitwich Canals project completed a boating 'ring' that links the Birmingham and Worcester Canal with the River Severn and is bringing more visitors into the town centre.
35. Droitwich Spa has an extensive Conservation Area focused on the town centre and important areas of nearby public open space at Vines Park and Lido Park. High quality leisure facilities are on offer including the recently refurbished open-air Lido complex. The town lies between two high points - to the north at Dodderhill and to the south at Yew Tree Hill - and is therefore not particularly prominent within the wider landscape, although from these vantage points long-distance views of the Malvern, Abberley and Clent Hills are provided.

### Pershore

36. The historic town of Pershore lies on the River Avon and has a population of 7,100 (2011 census-based Population Estimates). The historic core of the town is centred on the Abbey, the bustling Georgian High Street (the focus of the conservation area) and important open spaces providing a high-quality town environment. These attributes are greatly valued by residents and the local rural communities that use the town for shopping, leisure, recreation and education as well as other key services. These include the retail market, Number 8 Community Arts Centre, leisure centre, High School and community hospital. Significant local employment opportunities are also provided in the many businesses located in the town, as well as on the industrial estate to the north.



37. Approximately 34% of Pershore residents work outside the district, with the most popular employment locations being Worcester (11%) and Malvern Hills (5%). This is a relatively high out-commuting figure compared with Droitwich Spa and Evesham and is a reflection of the town's size. Pershore provides employment opportunities for approximately 3,350 people from other settlements, with the highest number coming from Worcester (11%). The long established centre for horticultural training at Pershore College reflects the locally distinctive characteristics of horticulture and farming in the Vale of Evesham.
38. The functional floodplain of the meadowland between the River Avon and rear of the High Street provide both a resource for nature and a valued area for passive and active recreation, such as walking and sport. In the last decade, significant flooding events have reinforced the importance of keeping this area free of development; the town and the surrounding villages have been dramatically affected by both flooding from the River Avon catchment and surface run-off. Consequently, local communities have been cut

off from other centres and services. It is important that the SWDP recognises and responds to this issue.

39. Pershore is on the main bus route between Worcester and Evesham and there are also services to Cheltenham. Most villages within close proximity also have regular bus services to the town. However, it is important that the SWDP helps to improve the accessibility of the town to and from the surrounding countryside, for example, by improving public transport facilities and services and by locating new development in areas that minimise the need to travel by private car.
40. In seeking to accommodate further growth, the SWDP aspires to build on the success of existing high quality developments in the town and seeks to promote the regeneration of the town's key brownfield sites, including the garage, High Street and the former health centre in Priest Lane. Further growth must be delivered in a manner that facilitates high-quality design, the provision of public open space and integration into the surrounding rural area without detrimental impacts on protected areas of open space and Pershore's conservation area.

### Evesham

41. Evesham is situated within the Vale of Evesham and has an estimated population of 23,400 (2011 census-based Population Estimates). It is the second largest town in Wychavon and the town provides a wide range of services including education, health (including a hospital), leisure and retail. Evesham's employment opportunities are dispersed in a distinctive manner, with concentrations centred on the main aerial routes, none more so than Vale Park alongside the A46(T). Retail provision is focused in the town centre with some provision to the north-west (Worcester Road) and the south (Four Pools). A majority (54%) of Evesham's residents work in the town itself, which demonstrates that Evesham is a relatively self-contained settlement. Approximately 30% of residents work outside the district, with the most popular employment destinations being Stratford-upon-Avon, the Cotswolds, Tewkesbury and Worcester. Evesham also provides employment opportunities for approximately 4,700 people from outside the town; the majority of these (approximately 60%) live within Wychavon. After Droitwich Spa, Evesham has the highest level of housing need.



42. Evesham is highly accessible, being located on the A46(T) trunk road. It is served by frequent buses from Cheltenham and Worcester. Having a station on the Cotswolds and Malverns line offers leisure and work opportunities in Worcester, Oxford, London and the south-east. The River Avon and its immediate environs are very popular for recreational activities, such as boating and festivals.
43. To the north of Evesham is the location of a historic battle site (Battle of Evesham, 1265). There is also an extensive conservation area, centred on the high street. The town has secured a new leisure centre and football stadium. The historic town is low-lying, hence its vulnerability to recent flooding, particularly in Bengeworth. It is visually prominent in

the landscape, particularly from the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that lies to the south. Recent regeneration proposals have delivered improvements to the High Street and Port Street, including the refurbishment of the Regal Cinema.

### Malvern

44. Malvern is the principal urban area within Malvern Hills District. It is formed from the settlements of Great Malvern, Malvern Link, Barnards Green, West Malvern and Malvern Wells. The urban area contains a population of over 34,200 (2011 census-based Population Estimates). It is a large town and needs to balance its special townscape, landscape and heritage qualities with the requirements of a modern and well-adjusted local economy. In addition, Malvern needs to provide for appropriate infrastructure maintain the vibrant and successful town and district centres and meet the housing and community needs of the existing and future population, whilst also recognising that it is important as a tourist and cultural destination.
45. The key characteristic of the Malvern urban area is its dramatic setting on the slopes of the Malvern Hills. This establishes a need to consider the implications of change and development upon both views from and to the hills from key vantage points, alongside protecting the beneficial qualities of the town as a whole. The setting and historic importance is reflected in the conservation area status of the larger part of Great Malvern. The Malvern Hills are designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The town is characterised by a high proportion of greenspace, which is important to the character of the town and its surroundings and as such will be protected. The town also contains large areas of common land, both within the built-up area and on its fringes, giving a green setting and opportunities for green corridors for recreation and wildlife. Beyond the urban area, Malvern is surrounded by open farmland, smaller villages and more isolated farm settlements. Malvern, thus, has a role as a service centre for a wider rural area.
46. As the focus for growth to meet a significant element of the housing and employment needs of the district, priority has been given to the allocation of available and deliverable brownfield sites within the urban area, although at the present time the supply is constrained. Further growth, including the allocation of land at Newland, will necessarily have regard to the balance referred to above and respect the setting of the town as a whole. A strong emphasis on achieving an appropriate balance will, however, include embracing the highest objectives set out in this plan for sustainable development, quality of design and timely provision of the infrastructure required to support the SWDP proposals.
47. Malvern is a centre of employment for a large part of the district. This employment is centred on the Enigma Business Park, the industrial estate at Spring Lane, the high technology enterprises at the former defence establishment, now QinetiQ and the associated / similar businesses at the Malvern Hills Science Park. Great Malvern is the main town centre for retail purposes in the district, complemented by district centres at Malvern Link and Barnards Green. Other main retail facilities are at the out-of-centre retail park at Townsend Way.
48. Opportunities remain for the redevelopment of the existing “backland” area centred on Edith Walk, within the designated town centre boundary (previously promoted in the 2006 Local Plan), for town centre-related uses, including retail expansion. This area, between Bellevue Terrace, Graham Road and Church Street, is well related to the existing shopping provision and other services and is within the heart of the conservation area. It provides important pedestrian links, especially north / south links, between the higher part of the town and the Malvern Hills and tourism-related facilities at the theatres

and the Priory; these links should be maintained or enhanced in any redevelopment. Should additional retail floorspace be required over and above development of this area, other opportunities will be considered within or on the edge of the Malvern town centre boundary and then sequentially at sites within and on the edge of the district centres of Malvern Link and Barnards Green.



49. Malvern has significant areas of public open space that should be protected and enhanced.
50. Malvern is served by two railway stations at Great Malvern and Malvern Link, connecting the town to Worcester and Hereford on a frequent service. The A449 links the town directly to Worcester, some 8 miles away, with regular bus services. Road links to the M5 on the eastern side of the district provide access to Junctions 7 (Worcester) and 8 (Strensham, via the M50 Junction 1). There are important functional links with Worcester, as the county town, providing opportunities for employment, higher and further education at the University of Worcester and Heart of Worcestershire College and sub-regional health services.
51. Great Malvern's character is based on its nineteenth-century legacy as a spa town and tourist centre and its more recent role as the administrative centre for Malvern Hills District. It also contains the main local services for health, education and retail uses. There has been considerable investment in replacement health centres with three of the five GP surgeries in new premises with capacity to accommodate planned growth and a recent larger replacement for Malvern Community Hospital. Malvern contains two main state secondary schools, a campus of the Heart of Worcestershire College and a number of private schools.

52. Malvern is an important arts and 'traditional' cultural centre but also has a range of bars and restaurants. The Malvern Theatres are recognised as being one of the country's leading regional venues and includes a cinema. Other leisure facilities include the Malvern Splash Leisure Complex, tenpin bowling and various public sports facilities. Events at the Three Counties Showground have extended beyond its original focus on agriculturally-based activities. The showground now accommodates a range of recreational and commercial activities and events making it a major attraction and facility.
53. In terms of population, Malvern Hills District has a higher than average number of older people and more deaths than births, meaning a negative natural change in the population. This brings its own challenges and could lead to changing demands on the health service and housing stock. Housing demand and house price growth are stronger in Malvern Hills than in the rest of the plan area and improving affordability will be a long-term challenge. Further pressure on housing stock is generated by younger people moving away and being replaced by established families moving into the area, who are often better equipped to compete in the market place and can thus outbid newly forming or expanding local households. However, further housing provision will provide the opportunity to rebalance the population structure.

## Tenbury Wells

54. Tenbury Wells is a small town in the north-west of Malvern Hills District, situated on the River Teme, which defines the district and county boundary with Shropshire. It has a strong physical and functional relationship with Burford, which is situated on the north side of the Teme in Shropshire. The two settlements are linked by the Teme River Bridge, at the junction of the A456 and the A4112. It has a population of 2,200 (2011 census-based Population Estimates).
55. Tenbury is surrounded by a mainly rural hinterland, with open countryside and small settlements and farmsteads; the town provides an important service function for the wider rural area.
56. The key characteristics of the town are its historic setting on the River Teme, its commercial heart with many historic buildings - reflected in the conservation area status of the town centre (recently reappraised in the Conservation Area Appraisal for the town) - and its landscape setting, rising from the floodplain of the river and climbing to the south of the town. This higher elevation offers long distance views northwards to the Shropshire and Cleve Hills. The River Teme is important in ecological terms in its role as a wildlife corridor and also provides for recreational opportunities.



57. Tenbury Wells has strong links with Worcester in terms of post-16 years education at the Worcester College of Technology, University of Worcester and for employment. Beyond Worcestershire, Tenbury looks towards Shropshire and Herefordshire for employment opportunities and services, as well as to places such as Ludlow, Leominster and Bromyard. The Worcestershire LEP has taken over the economic development and promotion role for Worcestershire and will address rural regeneration issues.

### **Town Centre Regeneration**

58. A resolution to grant planning permission was taken by Malvern Hills District Council for redevelopment of the former cattle market site to provide a retail store, car parking and riverside walkway. This is also intended to enhance the environment of that part of the conservation area, adjacent to the main shopping area and river and provide additional employment opportunities and leisure walks along the river frontage.

## Upton-upon-Severn

59. Upton-upon-Severn is a small town of some 2,700 people (2011 census-based Population Estimates), mainly situated on the southern bank of the River Severn between Worcester and Tewkesbury. Its one road bridge links the main part of the town to the marina on the north bank and to the villages of Holly Green and Ryall to the east. The village of Tunnel Hill lies to the west of the town. Upton is some 7 miles south-east of Malvern.
60. There are no rail connections - the nearest stations are at Ashchurch, near Tewkesbury, and Great Malvern. However, the town is within easy reach of the M50 and M5, some 2.5 and 3.5 miles away, and is thus on a main route linking Malvern and its surrounding villages to the national motorway system.
61. The main characteristics of the town are its historic core and riverside - reflecting its past importance as a riverside port, and its present value as a market and service centre for the surrounding rural area and a tourist destination. Travel to work data (2001 census) shows that the majority of people who live in the parishes of Upton-upon-Severn and Hanley Castle tend to work within the immediate area, in the rest of Malvern Hills (particularly the Malvern and Welland areas) and at Ledbury. There are also strong travel to work links with Worcester, Pershore and Tewkesbury.



62. The town grew up around the river and its economy is based mainly on agriculture and river-based trade. Today, the town acts as a service centre and market town for the surrounding rural areas and as a tourist centre, based on its historic character and the riverside - a large marina is located on the north bank. The town is renowned for its music and water-based festivals. There are many pubs, hotels and restaurants and a range of mainly independent retailers in High Street and Old Street. There are also a considerable number of services for its size, including a library, secondary school (at Hanley Castle) and a new health centre (at Tunnel Hill).
63. The flooding problems associated with the town (almost the entire town is surrounded by the floodplain up to the boundary) have created the fragmented nature of the town and its services. Flooding also imposes a considerable constraint on any future development, particularly for housing growth, despite the current construction of flood defences to mitigate the problem.
64. To support the existing population, services such as the schools and the commercial and retail trades, it is considered that some additional housing should be located in the Upton-upon-Severn area to meet the town's needs. This is particularly the case for affordable housing, which will support those people who cannot afford to buy or rent properties on the open market.
65. Future expansion of the marina, which has permission (including a new basin and holiday chalets), is likely to support local employment. The flood constraints make it difficult to find other suitable sites for employment within the town.