

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 11 SEPTEMBER 2019

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GROWTH

Summary

1. The Panel has requested information about how the Council supports infrastructure for Worcestershire's growth and how the Council is building the infrastructure to cope with growth in demand for services, for example recycling centres, roads etc
2. Supporting infrastructure for growth is part of the Panel's work programme and has been prompted by awareness of continued growth in Worcestershire's population and housing which in turn increases demand on public services. Panel members are therefore keen to understand the Council's role in supporting infrastructure growth
3. Officers from the Economy and Infrastructure Directorate and the Cabinet Member for Economy and Infrastructure have been invited to the meeting.

Infrastructure

4. Infrastructure is a pre-requisite for housing and economic growth in the county, to mitigate development proposals and as an enabler of economic growth and development.
5. The County Council has differing roles when providing infrastructure, acting as a statutory provider for example in the provision of school places and highways, and also a promoter of infrastructure provision to facilitate growth and champion the county as a desirable destination to live, work and do business, such as the provision of broadband and promotion of 5G technology. Infrastructure needs are identified through a number of documents including:-
 - Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4); a statutory document which sets out the issues and priorities for investment in infrastructure.
 - Rail Investment Strategy; linked to the LTP4, this sets out the proposals for rail and station investment in Worcestershire.
 - Infrastructure Delivery Plans which accompany local plans and set out the all the infrastructure required to support the local plan including waste, transport, community and education, broadband etc.

Current project examples:

- Worcestershire Parkway;
- Southern Link Road, phase 4; construction commenced;
- Pershore Northern Link Road; planning permission secured, site preparations commenced including the translocation of slow worms;
- Churchfields Urban Improvement Scheme; planning permission secured.

Delivering Infrastructure

Local Plans

6. The housing and economic growth proposals for the county are set out in the Local Plans which are developed by the district councils, individually in the case of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest Councils and jointly through the South Worcestershire Development Plan for Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon Councils. These plans both set out the policy context for new development, and also allocate housing and employment land for the plan period.

7. Officers from the County Council work in partnership with the districts throughout the plan making process to identify the infrastructure arising within our areas of responsibility, including school places, local highways, broadband, local authority collected waste and community infrastructure such as libraries.

8. These requirements are set out either in the policies of the local plan or in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan which forms a part of the evidence base for plan delivery. Infrastructure requirements which are incorporated into plan policy are usually strategic, relating to either an overarching requirement essential to deliver the plan or to the largest site allocations such as urban extensions, the requirements being critical for the proposals to be delivered. For example, within the South Worcestershire Development Plan, the dualling of the Southern Link Road A4440 is a requirement of the SWDP4 Moving Around in South Worcestershire (the transport policy), as it is essential to support the delivery of 12,200 homes and 120ha of employment land in the Wider Worcestershire area, whilst the requirement for a new primary school at the South Worcester Urban Extension is set out in policy SWDP 45/1 Broomhall Community and Norton Barracks Community (South Worcester Urban Extension) as it is directly related to the delivery of the housing proposal.

9. In total IDPs cover the following areas:-

- Transport & Highways
- Education
- Utilities
- Community facilities
- Emergency Services
- Flood Risk & Drainage
- Healthcare
- Communications
- Open Space, Sport & Recreation
- Waste

Funding infrastructure

10. Developers are expected to deliver or contribute to infrastructure needs arising from development through Section 106 developer contributions or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The level of contribution being proportional to the scale of the development and its infrastructure needs.

11. However, all proposals within local plans are subject to viability testing to determine if the combination of policy and infrastructure requirements are deliverable in the

geographic area of the local plan. Prior to the 2018 revisions of the National Planning Policy Framework this was undertaken at a high level at local plan examination, with the detail being considered on a site by site basis once a planning application was submitted. Both nationally and locally this has resulted in some protected negotiations particularly on large sites and compromises having to be made over either the policy requirements normally expressed as reduction in affordable housing, or a reduction in developer contributions or both. Both West and South Worcester Urban Extensions have been subject to viability testing resulting in a reduction in the affordable housing percentage being delivered, other infrastructure contributions having been secured at their full value.

12. The changes to the National Planning Policy Framework in 2018, now place greater emphasis on viability being considered during plan making rather than through individual sites. The purpose of this is to reduce the protected viability discussions on individual sites. As this has only applied to local plans submitted for examination since January 2019 the impact of this is still unclear.

13. In addition to developer contributions, external funding is normally needed to support the provision of strategic infrastructure such as the dualling of the Southern Link Road or Worcestershire Parkway rail station.

14. County Council has used a number of different sources of finance for infrastructure including Local Growth Fund, Housing Infrastructure Fund and prudential borrowing.

Delivery Mechanisms

15. The delivery of all new infrastructure whether identified through County Council plans such as Local Transport Plan 4 or Rail Investment Strategy or the Infrastructure Delivery Plans outlined are delivered in multiple ways. Within E&I the major projects team leads on the delivery of major projects, once the business case has been developed, supported by relevant financing and funding strategy.

16. The Education Place Planning team provide additional school places through either direct development of new schools, now through Place Partnership and our term consultants Jacobs, or through developers taking on direct delivery of schools as part of wider largely residential developments.

17. Extensions to existing schools are either delivered directly by County Council with Place Partnership, or academy schools are commissioned to deliver a certain number of places and provided with funding to do so.

18. Currently no new waste management infrastructure has been identified as required to meet the needs of either adopted or proposed local plans. Members will be aware that EnviRecover was designed, built and is managed by our current waste management contractor.

Infrastructure to facilitate growth

19. County Council also provides infrastructure to facilitate future growth which has not yet been identified in a local plan or to address an existing infrastructure deficit. The Local Transport Plan 4 is a strategic document which identifies a number of these interventions to facilitate the growth of the county, because of the wide strategic impact

of the proposals. The best example is Worcestershire Parkway, a long standing aspiration which alongside improvements to the North Cotswold line, and increased access to the Oxford, Worcester, Wolverhampton rail line will improve rail services in the county, increase destinations served by direct rail services, reduce journey times and provide additional car parking for passengers. This is part of a wider programme of upgrades to train stations and car parking identified in the Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy.

20. The Issues and Options consultation of the revised South Worcester Development Plan posed a number of questions about the location of future growth in the county, one of which proposed that strategic growth should be located within a certain distance of train stations to facilitate non car based travel in the county and encourage the growth of sustainable transport.

21. A further example of County Council facilitating growth through infrastructure is investment in broadband where the importance of early investment was identified to support economic growth of the county.

Assessment of Infrastructure

22. County Council has also been looking at an approach to the assessment of infrastructure focussed on infrastructure as a determinant of growth and how we can make better use of our existing infrastructure to locate sites and determine what the county will look like in 2040 which is the end of the current local plan period.

23. To this end the county has undertaken an assessment of infrastructure, which looks at many of the different forms of infrastructure available in the county and determines where there is a capacity, to identify zones of infrastructure opportunity. If these areas become a focus for growth it will enable existing assets to be better used, taking advantage of our available capacity, reducing the infrastructure bill for both the public and private sectors and assisting in addressing viability issues. This work has and continues to inform Local Plan and economic strategy development.

Purpose of the meeting

24. The Panel is asked to consider and comment on the latest information on how the Council is supporting infrastructure for Worcestershire's growth in areas relating to the Panel's remit.

- determine whether any further information or scrutiny is required at this stage
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member.

Contact points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and Minutes of Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 3 October 2017 - available on the Council's website at: