

COUNCIL

15 FEBRUARY 2024

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR ECONOMY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND SKILLS

Introduction

1. This is my second report to Council as Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills. This report covers work that has taken place across my portfolio of responsibility since my previous report in 2022.
2. Open for Business remains a key priority within “Our plan for Worcestershire”. There is a significant amount of work in this area, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to report on the progress made.

The Worcestershire Economy – An overview of the headline statistics

3. Worcestershire’s economy is predominately made up of micro businesses which have between 0-9 employees and account for 89.4% of the 26,900 businesses in the county. Businesses employing between 10-49 account for 8.7% of the total and medium (50-249) and large 250+ account for 1.4% and 0.4% respectively.
4. Based on the number of businesses, the top five sectors in the county are Professional, Scientific and Technical; Construction; Business Administration and Support Services; Transport and storage and Retail. Manufacturing businesses make up 6.4% of the total number of businesses in Worcestershire compared to an average of 4.9% in England. Since the last report the Worcestershire economy has generally continued to recover from the pandemic, with trends like those seen in the national economy.
5. The macro-economic conditions are challenging given war in Ukraine has changed global supply chains, therefore inflation has impacted all economies and higher interest rates in the UK and other markets equate to a higher cost of operating a business. Despite this the Worcestershire economy continues to perform well, given its recovery from the pandemic. With measures such as Gross Value Added ahead of trend, at £14.3bn from the latest data release, which is 86% of the target to achieving a £2.9bn uplift in 2025 from a 2015 baseline. The County has also seen an extra 36,000 jobs being created against a target of 25,000 by 2025 from the baseline, this shows that despite reported labour challenges the County is diverse and has no dominant sectors or employer, therefore building a level of resilience against these global economic conditions.
6. Claimant count: The claimant count figures remain lower in Worcestershire when compared to both the regional and national averages, with the claimant count for Worcestershire in November 2023 being 2.9% compared to an average in England of 3.8% and a West Midlands regional average of 4.9%.

7. The employment rate in the county was 78.4% in 2022/23, a similar level to pre pandemic and above the West Midlands employment rate of 74.3% and England employment rate of 75.8%.
8. Productivity (GVA per hour worked) was £33.70 in Worcestershire in 2021, slightly above the West Midlands (£33.40), but below England (£38.90).
9. The proportion of firms that undertake innovation activities in Worcestershire was estimated to be 42.5% for 2018-2020, lower than the West Midlands (48.6%) and England (45.7%). Worcestershire businesses were awarded nearly £2m in Innovate UK grants in 2022/23.

Visit Worcestershire

10. Visit Worcestershire, managed by the County Council on behalf of wider stakeholders, was recognised by Visit England as the official 'Local Visitor Economy Partnership' (LVEP) for the County. Worcestershire was one of the first 21 areas to be granted this accreditation and was praised by Visit England for its innovative business support programme and for its strategic approach to tourism growth.
11. Alongside gaining this accreditation, the new Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the County was approved by Cabinet in December 2023. The Plan was developed following a programme of consultation with businesses, visitors and stakeholders to develop a clear vision, and objectives that focus the work of the team and the wider tourism sector over the next five years.
12. Visit Worcestershire has supported over 400 businesses with webinars, training, sector focussed networking sessions, bespoke consultancy support as well as targeted account management.
13. Visit Worcestershire has recently launched two new support programmes; the first an exciting product development scheme, 'Experiential Tourism' to support and fund new and exciting 'hands on' visitor experiences in the County, this new service is aiming to develop new fresh and unique products, to grow the sector and generate wider visitor appeal.
14. The second, an access and inclusion support programme, which is designed to train accessibility champions. Contracted experts will undertake a detailed accessibility review for tourism businesses, make recommendations and a small grant will be available to help fund small changes. This links to the new Visit England accessibility toolkit, Worcestershire is to be the first pilot LVEP area to be rolling this out.
15. Over 250 businesses joined us for our second Tourism Awards in March 23, with the 100 applications being whittled down to 13 winners.
16. Visit Worcestershire launched its first TV advert in 2023, 'Make Worcestershire Part of your Story' is the key tag line for all of the marketing campaigns. Targeting families and couples in the London, Bristol and Birmingham areas, this has been a great way to reach out to people who may not have considered Worcestershire as a destination previously, and alongside our out of county advertising e.g. in London Paddington with GWR, our guidebooks in pick up points across the region, digital marketing, social media

and press/PR we have managed to reach over 12million people with the Worcestershire message this summer.

17. The website has been developed to improve visitor experience, we have seen an increase in web traffic by 300%, with an average of 40,000 unique visitors viewing the site every month and visitors can now make bookings via the site, with self-catering accommodation, experiences, and attractions directly bookable and plans to increase this over the next 12 months.

18. The council was awarded a VISA 'Talk of the Town' award for Bromsgrove, which is designed to celebrate the high street. This award provided £20,000 to spend on the local area, which has since been matched with UKSPF funding to support independent hospitality businesses in the district for the next two years. So far, there has been a focus on increasing the PR and, promoting Bromsgrove as a 'foodie' destination, with bespoke consultancy lined up and a restaurant month planned for the new year. The restaurant month concept was tested in Worcester in October 2023 where Visit Worcestershire successfully partnered with the Worcester BID to bring residents and visitors to taste what Worcester has to offer. This pilot was hugely successful with nearly 5,000 vouchers downloaded.

Business Support Programmes

19. European Regional Development Fund Programmes: All European funded programmes completed in June 2023.

20. UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Funding of over £2.5m has been secured from the six District Councils to support the delivery of some or all of the following programmes from September 2023 to March 2025:

- Enterprising Worcestershire
- Elevate Worcestershire
- Innovation Worcestershire
- Net Zero Worcestershire

21. The UKSPF will support over 260 businesses across the county, create over 100 jobs and generate a reduction of over 420 tonnes of Co2.

22. The team is also managing the Marches Energy Grant programme in Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin, funded by UKSPF and Marches LEP.

23. WCC Open for Business Funding: The County Council has also allocated £4m to facilitate the continuation of the business support programmes over the next 2-3 years following the discontinuation of ERDF funding and the reduction in available funds.

24. A series of district launch events took place in September 2023. There was a total of 5 events with 206 attendees. Feedback was extremely positive from businesses and district councils and these events have generated a strong pipeline of clients with certain programmes already oversubscribed in some areas due to the limited funding available through UKSPF.

25. Enterprising Worcestershire Business Start-Up Programme: Pre-start support will be provided to 270 Worcestershire residents. Business Start-It masterclasses are being

delivered at locations in each of the 6 districts. 60 individuals completed support between September – December 2023.

26. The Business Coaching programme is available for businesses less than 3 years old providing one to one coaching support for up to 10 hours. 58 businesses are currently on programme.

27. Start-Up grants are available to support small businesses and entrepreneurs under 3 years old to help with costs associated with starting a business. 22 grants have now been awarded, 15 applications in progress and 55 businesses in the pipeline.

28. The programme was promoted during Global Entrepreneurship Week in November 2023 and kicked off with a 'Starting a Business & Building Success' event at the Hive attended by 43 people. This was followed by a series of Start-Up Spotlight videos on social media to showcase a range of businesses and their owner's start-up journey.

29. Elevate Worcestershire: Following the success of the ERDF funded programme, this support is continuing and will offer places to a total of 130 businesses. 30 businesses are currently on programme with a cohort of 10 businesses commencing in January and a pipeline of c.40 businesses currently being followed up to also commence support early in the new year. Grant funding is available up to a maximum of £10k to support the businesses going through the programme to implement their growth plans.

30. Innovation Worcestershire: A business focus group took place at the beginning of December 2023 to look at what support has worked well in this area and determine what the future need is for ongoing support. Work is now underway to scope out support and to also work with the LEP on project development, aligned to the vision of the Innovation Board.

31. An Innovation adviser will be appointed to support businesses to review their potential projects to develop new products and services for the businesses and/or bring new products to market and develop any grant funding applications. Innovation grants are available, through UKSPF in some districts and also topped up with Open For Business funding up to a maximum of £15k or £20k depending on the area. There are currently 20 grant referrals with 8 grant applications in progress.

32. The Business Worcestershire Innovation & Technology Conference is scheduled to take place on 13th March 2024 at Sixways Stadium.

33. Net Zero Worcestershire specialist providers were appointed in November 2023 to deliver bespoke business decarbonisation reviews and provide recommendations. Net Zero grants are available in all districts at varying levels of funding. Our 'Getting Started with a Net Zero Plan' is scheduled to take place in February, in partnership with Small99, for 30 Worcestershire SMEs with expert sustainability talks and workshops to help build an informed sustainability plan and connect with other local SMEs.

34. Funding is available to support 125 businesses/organisations to March 2025. To date, 15 businesses are on programme with a further 51 businesses in the pipeline and completing applications.

Digital Connectivity

35. Broadband: Due to the successful ‘take-up’ of services from the Superfast Worcestershire programme, now at c.80%, by early 2024 all of County Council’s investment into the improved infrastructure as part of the first contract will have been returned to the Council. The second contract has also started to return on the investment and will continue to do so until 2025. The third contract has yet to reach the point at which gainshare payments will be returned.

36. In late 2023, the last of Worcestershire’s ongoing ‘Gigabit Voucher Scheme’ projects completed. Over 80 community projects have been delivered (over 5,300 premises). About 35 projects required local top-up funding, which were supported through the reinvestment of local gainshare funding.

37. The Council’s ambition, outlined in the Corporate Plan, remains to ensure Worcestershire, increases the gigabit coverage to above the national average and reaches at least 90% by 2027. Gigabit capable broadband coverage in Worcestershire has increased from b c.23% in 2023, now standing at 78% in December 2023 (source: www.thinkbroadband.com).

38. Mobile: According to the website www.signalchecker.co.uk, Worcestershire is ranked the 24th best area for mobile coverage in the UK, out of 96 areas, three places higher than last year. Despite this, contact from our residents and businesses suggests that people living and working in Worcestershire do not always receive the mobile connectivity they expect. The Council’s Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity team is also of the view that modelled data from Ofcom and mobile operators is overestimated.

39. Through 2023 the Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity team engaged with the telecommunications market and set up, in partnership with 10 neighbouring councils, a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). The DPS will allow us to investigate real-world mobile coverage and performance, so that they can focus attention on possible solutions in the most effective way in 2024 and beyond.

40. Innovation in Digital Connectivity: The Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity team has explored potential new connectivity technologies to support digital transformation. In 2023 Worcestershire was successful in securing funding from the Department of Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

Skills and Investment

41. The work of the Skills and Investment team continues to directly support the Open for Business theme of the Corporate Plan and the economic priorities of the County Council which focus on improving skills levels in the county and the growth of business but over the year has also supported to contribute to the Worcestershire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and its ambition to support Quality local jobs and opportunities. Alongside this the work supports the ambition to ensure all young people realise their potential and move successfully into employment whilst focusing on improving outcomes for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people.

42. Universal Credit claimant levels in the County are continuing to reduce to a level experienced prior to March 2020 with around 10,640 individuals currently claiming support.

43. NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) Levels in the County experienced growth and are likely to continue to impact future youth employment levels with an increase. However, at this time in the academic year it is impossible to predict that with any accuracy other than current numbers exceed those in similar timeframe, what is known that education in the Covid 19 period and mental health are significant factors driving this increase.

44. Over the last twelve months, The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce has conducted significant research into skills gaps and whilst employers continue to report skills deficits work is underway to support employers to articulate skills and to influence the planning of curriculum through the Local Skills Improvement Plan. Latest intelligence from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce report reflecting 58% of respondents finding it difficult to recruit staff citing skills deficits most frequently but that this represents a 20% decrease on the previous year where labour markets were significantly challenged.

45. The Skills and Investment Programmes and Initiatives responding to the Strategy, working with the Worcestershire LEP spent 2023 continuing to implement the priorities identified in the 2022 Local Skills report.

46. Over the last twelve months, programmes have been expanded and implemented, co-ordinating the efforts of all to improve the careers and employment prospects of residents and to develop and expand the services to meet the needs of local businesses. Over 2023 the team has brought in several new funding streams from both DWP, DfE and other sources to maximise local capacity and support the investments made by Worcestershire County Council.

47. Careers and Enterprise Company Programme: The Careers and Enterprise Company Programme, working with our 62 Education establishments and 3 Further Education Colleges supporting cohorts of young people from Year 7 up to year 13 across the county, has continued to improve the quality of careers planning of young people and increase knowledge on the labour market and skills needs of Worcestershire employers. Key points include:

- In 2022/23 Worcestershire remained in the top 3 highest performers in England, where quality measures are above the national average.
- Increasing Employer Engagement and where work experience is relevant, 80% of all young people completed in 2022/23, equating to 7,070 young people in Worcestershire participating in work placements.
- Implementing Events to support young people – including the return of the Worcestershire Skills Show following the Pandemic attended by 3965 young people from 28 schools.

48. Careers Worcestershire: The brand of Careers Worcestershire has continued to grow supporting young people across the county aged 16-24 to both make careers decisions and to access employment opportunities. In July 2022, the service expanded to create a “youth hub” with the support of DWP in Worcester City, located in the Hive to bring together holistic support around a young person from housing, health and employment with the aim of moving them off benefits and into sustainable employment. Over the last 12 months, the team has worked with 597 young people in the Hub with around 170 of those moving into employment, alongside this in the wider European

Programme around 900 young people have been supported to access education and employment including apprenticeship outcomes across the county with 517 of those now in education or employment.

49. In October 2023, Careers Worcestershire held two events aimed at years 10 upwards in Worcester and for the first time Redditch engaging 900 young people over the two evenings.

50. In December 2023 the Hub was visited by the DWP Regional Director Helene Dearne OBE who cited Worcester City's Youth Hub as one of the top 10 out of the 102 in the United Kingdom citing the partnership working and outcomes/value for money as high quality.

51. Worcestershire Apprenticeships: Apprenticeship numbers in Worcestershire over 2022/23 stand at 3540, with steady recovery across the county from the decline experienced in the pandemic. Growth has been significant in both 19–24-year-olds accessing Advanced Apprenticeships and growth into Higher Apprenticeships, alongside a growth in numbers across digital standards. However, challenges still remain, with both a need to engage more candidates to fill vacancies and challenges in available provision, the quality of provision but also the ability of providers to respond to entry level standards because of cost-of-living increase impact on costs.

52. Worcestershire Apprenticeships goes from strength to strength and over 2023 worked with 20,000 young people across schools and Jobcentres engaging them in Apprenticeships and challenging them to consider. Alongside this WCC put in place a grant to incentivise young people to take on apprenticeships and implemented the WA Account which simplifies access to multiple providers for young people.

53. Multiply: In 2022, the Government as part of its UK Shared Prosperity Fund brought in Multiply to Upper Tier Authorities, Multiply is designed to increase the levels of numeracy in the population, targeting those who have not achieved a GCSE at Grade C, recognising the link between numeracy and improved employment prospects. Worcestershire was granted £2.6M between 2022 and 2025 to support delivery across the county. Worcestershire commenced delivery in October 2022 and to date has worked with 1533 residents supporting them to access numeracy. These programmes vary in length, content and can be workplace based but the majority have been with residents wishing to upskill themselves.

54. Bootcamps: Launched in September 2022, HM Government announced a programme of vocational bootcamps, a 16-week accelerated programme enabling individuals to upskill and reskill. Worcestershire LEP was successful in applying to deliver Bootcamps in Construction, Engineering, ICT and Health and Care, working with 5 providers across the county. To date the programme has delivered 172 Bootcamps to residents to date, with 45 of those moving into work. Worcestershire LEP has been confirmed to deliver further Bootcamps into 2024/25 with new curriculum and providers coming on board.

55. Inclusive Worcestershire Currently the disability employment gap in Worcestershire is at its highest levels of 27% between those with and those without disabilities, alongside this the impact of the pandemic has meant that employers have both struggled to recruit and have been challenged in learning new management skills to work with staff remotely. This initiative was launched in March 2023 as part of the

Governments drive to increase numbers of Supported Internships in the country brought forward strands of work including a seminar programme and magazine for employers, a forum for stakeholders and a programme to increase numbers of young people into internships and apprenticeships.

56. Worcestershire commenced a drive toward supporting businesses to be more inclusive, with the overall objective being to increase the number of employers willing to take on individuals with Health Conditions and Disabilities.

57. This project is also looking at how to make systemic improvements to both the DWP, Local Authority and Education processes to support individuals more effectively to access support. The recent Neurodiversity Seminar hosted 45 businesspeople with excellent feedback. Outcomes of the work to date have been improvements in the process around SEND finance to Colleges, launch of an Inclusive Apprenticeship programme in an FE College, New providers in county delivering supported internships, Launch of a Supported internship bursary and a quality assurance programme across all Internships.

58. The Learning Services team in Skills and Investment deliver a number of Education and Skills Funding Agency contracts worth approximately £1.07 M, which are subject to Ofsted inspection. The team delivers programmes of education including qualifications to vulnerable young people and adults 19+ through the Learning Services Centre in Warndon and other community venues. In October 2023, the service was subject to Ofsted Inspection and retained a secure position of “Good” from its previous inspection. The inspectors noted the quality of teaching and the teaching environments and the distance that learners’ education travelled whilst working with the service.

59. Over the academic year 2022/23, work has included the relaunch of the Young Adult Learning programme, working with young people predominately with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs to access small group education in the Fairfield Centre in Warndon, An ESOL programme for Learners who are unaccompanied Asylum Seekers under the responsibilities of Childrens First, Working to support the Homes for Ukraine programme helping Ukrainian arrivals to settle and plan their next steps in the County, whilst continuing to offer Adult Learning and Community based learning programmes. In 2022/23 the service worked with 949 learners across the county and the overall achievement rates of learners ranged from 74 – 91% dependant on the learning accessed.

Planning and Development Control

60. The Minerals Local Plan was submitted to the secretary of State in December 2019. The subsequent hearing sessions were delayed as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic with main modifications consultation being held in autumn 2021. The Inspector’s report was received in April 2022, and the Minerals Local Plan was adopted at Council in July 2022. This now forms the basis for decision on minerals planning decisions in the County.

61. The Worcestershire Waste Core Strategy was adopted in 2012. Proposals for the review of this have been contingent on the Royal Assent being received of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill which took place late in 2023 with changes to the National Planning Policy Framework also being published in December 2023. These propose

significant changes to the approach and timescale for plan reviews which will now inform the timescale for the review of the Waste Core Strategy.

Transport Strategy and Planning

62. As the local highways authority, Worcestershire County Council is a statutory consultee on planning applications submitted to all of the local planning authorities within the county, plus applications submitted to the County Council. Over 2000 applications are reviewed to assess their impact on the highway each year, varying from householder applications to the strategic development sites.

63. To facilitate the determination of applications and focus our resources on the areas of greatest impact, highways development management have increased the use of standing advice during 2023 for smaller applications, in conjunction with the local planning authorities.

64. During 2022/23 a total of over £22.5m was agreed through developer contributions in section 106 agreements for highways and transport to mitigate the impact of planning applications. This funding will be allocated to projects as development is implemented, including transport infrastructure and major projects such as highways schemes, improvements for walking and cycling including dropped kerbs and crossings, extensions to bus services and upgrades to bus stops and shelters.

65. We have continued to work with the district councils as they have reviewed their local plans. This is a combined workstream across all the teams in planning and transport planning. During this reporting period, the focus has been on the review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan which has required ongoing input into the policies and proposals including testing of proposals and evidence bases. We will continue to work with South Worcestershire colleagues as this plan is subject to examination.

66. During 2023, the council adopted a revised Rail Investment Strategy (WRIS2), reflecting not only the changing travel and work patterns since the Covid 19 pandemic, but achievements since the initial strategy was adopted in 2017, and the advent of Great British Railways. Core to this remains aspirations for improved services and connectivity for the County to facilitate and support economic growth and enable greater travel choice for residents and visitors alike. This includes the proposals for the Midlands Rail Hub which, as of Autumn 2023, has secured funding from Government's Network North proposals, and the dualling and upgrades to the North Cotswold line with greater connectivity and services to the South East, Oxford and Cambridge Arc and Heathrow Airport for international travel.

67. Worcestershire Parkway continues to grow in use, offering direct connections to London, Herefordshire and Birmingham. Proposals for further services and calls at stations continue to be discussed with the train operating companies to further enhance its role as a rail hub and the feasibility of the provision of further car parking is currently being developed.

Strategic Initiatives

68. Shrub Hill: Worcestershire County Council and Worcester City Council have agreed a shared Vision for Shrub Hill to become a vibrant new destination and community for Worcester. It will be a home in the city for new, high-quality employment and enterprise, and a desirable and inclusive place to live and spend time. Supporting our wider investment and growth aspirations for Worcester and Worcestershire, Shrub Hill will become established as an exemplar for successful and inspiring urban renewal and investment. Shrub Hill has the capacity to provide up to 5,000 jobs, 500+ new homes and 2 hectares of new public space as well as forming a new gateway to Worcester City Centre.

69. With £12 million of government funding secured to date, the first phase of development is set to complete by March 2026. Funding includes Getting Building Fund, Brownfield Land Release Fund and Towns Fund. This will see the demolition of industrial units to free up canal-side land for residential development, the formation of a new pedestrian and cycle link to the city centre and an Enterprise Centre in the refurbished 5,000 square metre Isaac Maddox House building supporting 400 jobs.

70. Malvern Hills Science Park (MHSP) has been developed over five phases and is currently accommodating circa 35 technology- rich companies employing over 350 people. Phase 5 was the latest construction providing a further 17,000 sq. ft of Technology/R&D workspace and is now fully let.

71. Malvern Technology Park (MTP) is a 4.5ha parcel of employment land situated to the south of MHSP. It benefits from Outline Planning Consent up to 300,000 sq. ft. of commercial floorspace including the provision of a new access road from Longridge Road. The site has been cleared of all structures and a new access road has been partly constructed.

72. Key target sectors are identified to be; defence technology, digital technology (including work to promote the site for cyber security) and engineering (product, property, aerospace) but all innovation sectors companies should be able to collocate. Market appraisal has highlighted the existing strong local focus on the aerospace / defence / cyber security / engineering sectors with the site legacy of DERA / QinetiQ which can form the basis of a market strategy.

73. Worcester Six is a 72-hectare (178 acre) site set immediately to the east of the M5 motorway at junction 6, Worcester Six is progressing into a prominent business site in Worcestershire. With current and future Worcester Six occupiers creating around 878,500sqft of new employment space. Phase 2 is now underway with work on the onsite infrastructure expected to start early in 2024.

74. The appointed developer at Redditch Gateway has secured one large occupier, Amazon, and is now seeking occupiers for the remaining available plots. After a successful planning application submitted to Stratford Upon-Avon District Council for two speculative builds totalling 446,000sqft; works on site is near completion. The developer and property agents are actively seeking occupiers for these units which is set to deliver economic value to the area. Achieving an increase in economic growth and productivity, through the development of high-quality headquarters-style manufacturing facilities, the site provides an opportunity to transform the economy in the environs of Redditch and

re-position the area as a location of choice for growing local companies and prospective inward investors.

Major Infrastructure Projects

75. Following completion of the Southern Link Road, recent testimonials from the public have been shared via social media which has generated further positive feedback about regular commutes now being transformed by the opening of the Southern Link Road.

76. Work was completed on the Pershore Northern Link Road to improve links between Pershore Town Centre and the A44. This entailed the provision of a bridge over the North Cotswolds Rail Line and a new shared-use path for pedestrians and cyclists along Wyre Road. This was the final phase of the Pershore Infrastructure Improvement Scheme following earlier efficiency and capacity improvements to Pinvin Crossroads.

77. Work on Kepax Bridge which will provide a traffic-free link over the River Severn between Barbourne and Henwick Park for pedestrians and cyclists has been progressing well with the piers and pylon already in place. A shared-use path on the west side of the river is nearing completion and the bridge decking will be craned into place over the coming months. Despite recent flooding the bridge is currently on target to be opened later this year.

78. Redditch Railway Station project continues to progress the design development and land acquisition work around the Railway Quarter. The Project secured £10m funding allocation from the Worcestershire Rail Capital Programme, via WCC Cabinet Approval on 27 October 2022. A Public Engagement consultation took place: 26 June to 7 August 2023, which showed positive public support for proposals with over 400 responses to our online survey. Work to complete the station design continues.

79. The Worcester Future High Streets Fund programme, which is improving the public realm in Worcester City Centre, is progressing well. The first four phases have now been completed in Angel Place, The Trinity, St Swithins Street, The Foregate and The Cross. Works are ongoing on Phase 5 which covers Foregate Street. Phase 6 works will conclude in Angel Street in the summer of 2024.

80. Detailed design is underway on Phase 3 of the Redditch Town Centre Improvement Programme which is focussed on Unicorn Hill and Church Green West. Utility works have commenced this winter and work is due to be completed by the end of 2025. The work is being funded through the Towns Fund secured by Redditch Borough Council and NWEDR.

81. Detailed Design has completed for improvements to Bromsgrove Town Centre funded via LUF focusing on the High Street and Chapel Street. Work is currently scheduled to commence in spring 2024.

82. Following the announcement of £50m of funding by the DfT, work has started on site on the A38 Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme. This extensive programme of works includes junction capacity improvements, new walking and cycling routes and bus stop enhancements. Work is currently scheduled to be completed in winter 2025/26.

83. A planning application for the bridge, which will provide a traffic-free link for pedestrians and cyclists over the River Avon between Evesham Town Centre and

Hampton, has been submitted and is due to be considered by the Planning and Regulatory Committee this spring. Negotiations are progressing well with landowners and the first phase of work which is the provision of a crossing on the Pershore Road is due to start before the summer.

84. Work has continued to enhance the accessibility of stations including a programme of quick wins at Droitwich station e.g. way finding, lining and signing being delivered, and exploring opportunities for car park expansions in preparation for demand increases.

85. Finally, I would like to place on record my thanks to the Strategic Director for Economy and Infrastructure, Assistant Directors, Managers and staff across the Council for their continued work and commitment.

Councillor Marc Bayliss
Cabinet Member for the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills