



Wyre Forest District

Site Allocations and Policies Plan

Examination

Matter 4: A Good Place to do Business

WFDC Response

14th January 2013

Matter 4 - A Good Place to do Business

1. Is Policy SAL.GPB1 sufficiently flexible to ensure the deliverability of economic development on the allocated sites?

- 1.1 It is considered that Policy SAL.GPB1 is sufficiently flexible. The policy identifies that a number of sites are safeguarded for economic development activity over the plan period. This provides certainty for businesses to enable investment and expansion. Furthermore, the policy refers to adopted Core Strategy (SD003) Policy CP08, which allows for the full range of B use classes to be developed on each of the identified sites, along with other compatible sui-generis uses. CP08 also makes provision for the consideration of alternative uses of allocated employment sites, subject to a number of criteria being satisfied.
- 1.2 In terms of future deliverability on allocated sites, work is currently underway at the former British Sugar site to bring forward this mixed use site, which includes delivering economic development. The former Romwire site has recently been subject to planning permission for 2 hectares of the site for a car dealership and it is considered that this site still provides the potential for new economic development to come forward. This site is considered in further detail under Matter 8. Furthermore, work is being carried out by the owners of the former Lea Castle Hospital Site to look at options for bringing forward a mixed used development at this site.
- 1.3 Aside from these sites, there are a number of other sites identified at Paragraph 5.17 which are expressly safeguarded for economic development purposes. This is considered to be an appropriate safeguard to enable the continued protection and enhancement of the existing employment offer of the District. This approach will allow for current trends of investment in these sites to continue. These sites were assessed as part of the Employment Land Review (EB031 – EB033), which concluded that they remained an important part of the District's portfolio of employment sites. Furthermore, many of these employment areas have benefitted from planning permissions for intensification and expansion of employment operations, along with new developments on other parcels of land, showing a clear trend of investment in existing sites. The policy position therefore provides a proactive framework for the continuation of this trend.

1.4 Paragraph 22 of the NPPF (SD001) places emphasis on the regular review of employment land allocations to avoid their long -term protection where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. The District Council considers that the Employment Land Review undertaken as part of the evidence base to inform the plan's development has thoroughly reviewed the allocated employment sites. This has demonstrated that there is evidence of recent investment and that their retention as employment sites is justified.

1.5 It is noted that there is currently an economic downturn and that the market for delivering economic development is currently more difficult. However, the plan period covers up until 2026 and therefore it is considered that a longer term view is required to enable economic development to come forward within the District. This is also considered to be in line with the NPPF which identifies that the planning system needs to perform an economic role in order to provide for sustainable development. It is considered that the flexibility provided by the policies in the Core Strategy (SD003) and the Site Allocations will ensure that economic development.

1.6 It is also worth noting that the District Council has recently adopted a Local Development Order for the South Kidderminster Enterprise Park area (EB038). This has already started to yield results with two companies using the provisions of the Order to expand their operations. This additional planning mechanism also provides for extra flexibility for bringing forward economic development on a number of the allocated sites without the need for planning permission.

2. Does the amount of land allocation for employment purposes have regard to the requirements for the delivery of green infrastructure and open space?

2.1 The amount of land allocated for employment purposes has been guided by the Adopted Core Strategy. These figures were derived from work undertaken at a regional basis, as part of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase 2 Revision and so is considered to be an appropriate figure to be included within the plan.

- 2.2 The figures from the regional level were derived from a number of sources. One of the sources of information used to determine the appropriate level of employment land was from local authority monitoring regimes. The monitoring undertaken at a Local Authority level was submitted to the region on an annual basis and the guidance note provided for this monitoring provides the following information:

“The area should be defined as gross ‘developable’ area, which includes on site landscaping and infrastructure”.

- 2.3 The figure provided for monitoring purposes has therefore been derived from the site as a whole, including landscaping and infrastructure. As these figures have subsequently been used to help determine the strategic employment allocation for the District, it is considered that infrastructure will have been factored in to the amount of land required. It is therefore considered that the figure included within the Core Strategy, which is provided for through the Site Allocations, has factored in the other infrastructure elements required for development.
- 2.4 It should also be noted that all developments will still need to have regard to the policies contained in the Site Allocations which includes providing provision for Green Infrastructure and Open Space, where appropriate. Furthermore, the Green Infrastructure Strategy (EB047) further highlights the need for improvements to be made to the environment of employment areas within the District.