

**Wyre Forest District Site Allocations and Policies DPD
and Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan DPD
Independent Examination**

Economic Development Technical Paper

October 2012

Wyre Forest District Council

1.0 Employment Land / Economic Development – Technical Paper

- 1.1 This technical paper has been produced to highlight the changes that have occurred since the Adoption of the Core Strategy in relation to economic development within the District. The paper provides a summary of the main changes as well as providing commentary on a number of other complementary strategies and initiatives that are focussed towards the economic growth of the District.

2.0 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2.1 The main change for Planning Policy since the adoption of the Districts Core Strategy has been the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF came into force in March 2012 and replaced the previous Planning Policy Guidance and Planning Policy Statements almost in their entirety. Due to this change in national policy it was considered prudent to understand what, if anything has altered, in relation to economic development and whether this would have an impact on the existing, or emerging, planning policies at the local level.

2.2 Economic Development and the NPPF

NPPF - Strategic Points

- 2.3 The first key element of the NPPF that has regard to the role of economic development relates to considering sustainable development as a whole. The NPPF identifies that one of the 3 strands of sustainable development is economic development, and that planning should ensure that there is:

“An economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;”

- 2.4 Therefore, economic development remains a key consideration when preparing development plans and is one of the three key strands in ensuring sustainable development is achieved. The other two strands relate to social and environmental considerations with the NPPF making clear that these *“roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent”*.

- 2.5 The emphasis on economic development is also contained in the Core Planning Principles of the NPPF as follows:

“Proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs. Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. Plans should take account of market signals, such as land prices and housing affordability, and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities;”

NPPF - Specific Sections

- 2.6 The first section of the NPPF refers to *“Building a strong, competitive economy”*. This whole section deals with the need for planning to help to secure economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity. The NPPF is clear that local planning authorities when drawing up local plans should:

- *set out a clear economic vision and strategy for their area which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth;*
- *set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period;*
- *support existing business sectors, taking account of whether they are expanding or contracting and, where possible, identify and plan for new or emerging sectors likely to locate in their area. Policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances;*
- *plan positively for the location, promotion and expansion of clusters or networks of knowledge driven, creative or high technology industries;*
- *identify priority areas for economic regeneration, infrastructure provision and environmental enhancement; and*
- *facilitate flexible working practices such as the integration of residential and commercial uses within the same unit.*

Planning policies should avoid the long term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. Land allocations should be regularly reviewed. Where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for the allocated employment use, applications for alternative uses of land or buildings should be treated on their merits having regard to market signals and the relative need for different land uses to support sustainable local communities.

2.7 The NPPF is therefore very clear in that economic development remains a key element of planning policy and that local authorities should ensure that the above elements are taken into account when preparing local plans.

2.8 What is clear to see from the NPPF, however, is that the approach to economic development does not depart from previous national guidance in any fundamental way. If anything, the NPPF provides a reinforced emphasis on planning for economic development at the local level. These key elements of the NPPF have been considered against the adopted and emerging local planning framework to ensure conformity. The Council’s views are considered against these criteria in the table below:

Table 1: NPPF Economic Requirements and the Local Policy Position

NPPF requirements for Local Authorities	Local Authority Position
<i>Set out a clear economic vision and strategy for their area which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth</i>	A clear vision and strategy is included in the Adopted Core Strategy. One of the Development Objectives of the Core Strategy is to <i>diversify and grow the District’s economy, emphasising the development of the service sector, high tech industry and sustainable tourism</i> ”. Furthermore, Policy CP08 provides a positive framework for considering. Other more site specific policies are included in the Site Allocations and Policies DPD and the Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan DPD.
<i>Set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan</i>	This is achieved quite clearly in Policy CP08 of the Adopted Core Strategy, which identifies the strategic locations to meet the Districts employment needs, as set out by Policy DS01. Furthermore, the emerging Site Allocations and Kidderminster Central AAP identify specific sites to ensure that this requirement is met in full over the plan period.

NPPF requirements for Local Authorities	Local Authority Position
<i>period.</i>	
<i>Support existing business sectors, taking account of whether they are expanding or contracting and, where possible, identify and plan for new or emerging sectors likely to locate in their area. Policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances;</i>	The Core Strategy, and more specifically, the Site Allocations and Policies DPD provides protection for existing businesses to ensure that they have the ability to grow their business, where appropriate. Furthermore, Policy CP08 of the Core Strategy provides for flexibility to consider alternative land uses of employment sites, subject to a number of criteria being met. There is a recognition in Wyre Forest that one of the main employers and potential growth sectors is related to tourism. This has been reflected in Policy SAL.GPB5 of the emerging Site Allocations, which seeks to provide support for the existing Major Tourist Attractions within the Wyre Forest District. This support for the tourism industry is considered to be sector specific and reflects the current and emerging economic makeup of the District. Furthermore, the support for development of existing employment sites, coupled with the flexibility to consider alternative use, is considered to be in line with the NPPF and would allow for a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances, should they occur.
<i>Plan positively for the location, promotion and expansion of clusters or networks of knowledge driven, creative or high technology industries;</i>	The Core Strategy and proposed Site Allocations Policies are considered to be flexible enough to provide the platform for this particular element of the NPPF to be met.
<i>Identify priority areas for economic regeneration, infrastructure provision and environmental enhancement; and</i>	A number of priority areas for economic regeneration have been identified through the planning policy framework, as well as through other regeneration initiatives. The Kidderminster Central AAP is a clear commitment to providing economic regeneration in the heart of the District's largest town. This targeted Action Plan seeks to provide a positive platform for economic regeneration in Kidderminster. The AAP builds on the work undertaken to produce the ReWyre Prospectus, which was about releasing the economic potential of Kidderminster. The Site Allocations also identifies key strategic sites for new economic development, with the focus being on the former British Sugar site, which will also help to deliver a key element of infrastructure that is required in the District. The Council's Infrastructure Plan also helps to identify priorities for development. It is considered that this combined approach to economic development meets this particular criterion of the NPPF.
<i>Facilitate flexible working practices such as the integration of residential and commercial uses within the same unit.</i>	The Core Strategy specifically refers to the potential to consider live/work units as a development opportunity within the District. The Site Allocations proposes further policy wording to help manage this particular type of development.

NPPF requirements for Local Authorities	Local Authority Position
<p><i>Planning policies should avoid the long term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. Land allocations should be regularly reviewed. Where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for the allocated employment use, applications for alternative uses of land or buildings should be treated on their merits having regard to market signals and the relative need for different land uses to support sustainable local communities.</i></p>	<p>It is considered that the proposed policies in the plan have sought to avoid the long term protection of employment sites. One of the key aspects of the adopted Core Strategy was an agreement for the former British Sugar site to be considered as a mixed use development, instead of a purely employment led scheme. By allowing this flexibility the viability of the site could be improved and the potential for economic development to come forward, in conjunction with other uses, could be realised.</p> <p>The Council reviewed the employment designations as part of a comprehensive 3 stage review, to inform the development of the Core Strategy. A further update was produced in April 2011 and these studies highlight the approach the Council has taken with regard to employment sites – ensuring that there is sufficient land available to meet the needs of the District and considering further sites that are no longer suitable for employment designation. A balanced view is needed to be taken when considering this as it is important to ensure that a reservoir of land is available for when market conditions improve.</p> <p>In terms of considering alternative uses of land and buildings, it is considered that Core Strategy Policy CP08 provides clear criteria for considering this process. Furthermore, the NPPF identifies that alternatives should be considered taking into account the need for different land uses to support sustainable local communities. This is an important element to consider and reinforces the need to ensure a balanced supply of sites is available to meet economic, residential and environmental needs. It is considered that the current adopted, and emerging, local development framework achieves this balance and will enable a sustainable approach to development to be realised.</p>

- 2.9 The above table identifies the relationship between the NPPF and the current and emerging local policy framework and it is clear to see that there are strong links and consistency between the two levels of policy.
- 2.10 The next sections of this paper provides further detail on the existing and proposed local policy framework, highlighting the key points in relation to economic development and providing an update from the time that the Core Strategy was adopted, where appropriate.

3.0 Wyre Forest District – Core Strategy (Adopted December 2010)

3.1 Wyre Forest District Council adopted its Core Strategy in December 2010. The Core Strategy contains the following aims, objectives and policies which specifically relate to employment / economic development.

3.2 The Development Objectives of the plan include the following which relate to economic development:

2. To diversify and grow the District's economy, emphasising the development of the service sector, high tech industry and sustainable tourism.

3.3 The Strategy also identifies the amount of employment land that the District will provide over the plan period to ensure that the needs of the District are met. The Strategy also provides key strategic policies in relation to employment development, retail and commercial development and sustainable tourism. These all provide a positive framework for the consideration of economic development within the District and as identified above, it is considered that this framework is consistent with the NPPF.

4.0 Employment Land Review and April 2011 Update

4.1 The Council produced a detailed, three stage, Employment Land Review to inform the development of the Core Strategy. This study identified the need for new employment space within the District as well as assessing current and potential new employment sites as to their continuing suitability to meet economic needs. The document suggested a number of sites that could be considered for alternative uses and these recommendations have been assessed further through the production of the site specific Development Plan Documents. Furthermore, a number of sites were outlined as being important sites that should be protected from competing uses and retained for employment purposes. Again, these sites have been included for protection within the Site Allocations and Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan.

4.2 The Employment Land Review was subsequently updated in April 2011, where sites were re-assessed and recommendations made for the production of the Development Plan. Both of these studies can be viewed on the Council's website.

4.3 The findings of these studies have helped to inform the production of the site specific documents and will ensure that the District is providing sufficient opportunities for the growth of the economy. It is considered that, on the whole, the recommendations made within these studies remain relevant for the preparation of the site specific DPDs and are in conformity with the NPPF. Furthermore, it is important that a long term view is taken with regard to employment land designation given the economic cycles that can occur over the lifetime of a plan. Furthermore, in view of the Government's commitment to providing a balanced approach to sustainable development, through the NPPF, it is considered key to ensure that appropriate employment land is provided to meet the District's employment needs. Therefore, the approach recommended within the Employment Land studies is considered to be consistent with the NPPF and will ensure a balanced development strategy will occur over the plan period.

5.0 Other Economic Strategies and Initiatives

5.1 As well as the main statutory processes the District has a number of other initiatives and strategies that are focussed towards improving the economic prospects of the District. A summary of these are included below.

6.0 Local Enterprise Partnerships

6.1 Wyre Forest District is located in two Local Enterprise Partnerships as follows:

- Worcestershire LEP
- Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP

6.2 The involvement of the District in both Partnerships reflects the economic geography of an area that has strong ties with the County in which it is located, Worcestershire, as well as the larger urban conurbation of Birmingham and its surrounding areas.

6.3 The Council's involvement in both of the LEPs has already meant that funding has been secured for infrastructure improvements from both of the partnerships, with £2.5million being contributed towards the development of the Hoo Brook Link Road. The continuing good relationship between the Council and the LEPs will be a key element of ensuring that the District is positioned to drive its economic prosperity and that opportunities to access funding streams for infrastructure exist and are available.

6.4 More recently the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP have produced a White Paper for consultation entitled a 'Strategy for Growth'. This paper seeks to build a strategy the region can own as a clear roadmap to greater productivity. The White Paper sets out what the LEP believe are the key priorities for the region that will deliver the outcomes they are seeking. A copy of the White Paper can be found in the following location, <http://centreofenterprise.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/GBS-LEP-Strategy-for-Growth-White-Paper-low-res.pdf>

6.5 The websites for the two LEPS, where more information on the role and activities of the partnerships can be found, are as follows:

- Worcestershire: <http://worcestershirelep.org/>
- Greater Birmingham and Solihull: <http://centreofenterprise.com/>

7.0 ReWyre Prospectus

7.1 The Rewyre Initiative was officially launched on 30th September 2009. Rewyre is all about partnership working and bringing together the public sector, businesses and the wider community to improve the District. An integral part of the ReWyre Initiative is the Kidderminster Regeneration Prospectus, which was produced in 2009 and this document identifies some of the potential investment opportunities that exist within Kidderminster. Since its inception, the work on regeneration within the District has gathered apace and now Wyre Forest District Council, together with Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council, took the decision to pool their resources to create a shared Economic Development & Regeneration Service. By pooling resources it is hoped that the quality of the service on offer can be strengthened and can better exploit the many strengths already apparent in the area; as well as building on the numerous opportunities.

7.2 This regeneration focus helps to provide an implementation focus for the Development Plan within the District. More information about the ReWyre prospectus, and the North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration section can be found on the District Council's website. (www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk)

State of the Area

- 7.3 Linked to the work being undertaken in terms of regeneration initiatives, Wyre Forest District Council's Cabinet made £1million available to support economic regeneration the District over the 2012/13 year.
- 7.4 In order to help find where this money should be targeted, the District Council held a State of the Area Debate in March 2012 to discuss the economic regeneration of Wyre Forest. The Council held a series of workshops and events involving residents, businesses, politicians and other stakeholders to work up key messages and objectives of focus. This money has been specifically targeted to improving the projects that will help to improve the economic prospects of the area and will help to implement some of the vision and objectives included within the Development Plan.

8.0 South Kidderminster Enterprise Park – Local Development Order

- 8.1 Wyre Forest District Council, through involvement with the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), bid for Enterprise Zone status to be given to the South Kidderminster Enterprise Park area. Unfortunately, the LEP were unsuccessful with the bid and Enterprise Zone status was not afforded to the South Kidderminster Area. However, the District Council decided to consider the implementation of some of the benefits that would have come with the allocation of Enterprise Zone status, despite the area not having this formal recognition. A Local Development Order (LDO) is one of the mechanisms the Government are promoting to help aid economic growth throughout the Country, and are a pre-requisite of the identified Enterprise Zones. The ability to implement a LDO is not, however, restricted to Enterprise Zones and therefore the District Council was able to bring forward an Order to tie in with the ambitions for the District in relation to business growth and regeneration.
- 8.2 The District Council produced a draft Local Development Order, which it consulted on for four weeks in March 2012. The Order was then subsequently amended and re-drafted, taking into account the comments received through the consultation. The Order was submitted to the Secretary of State, who did not intervene, and so the Council were able to adopt the Order on the 13th August 2012. This coincided with a visit from Eric Pickles MP to the area and he was able to officially launch the LDO during his visit to the District.
- 8.3 The final document is designed to simplify the planning process and it is hoped that this will help encourage businesses to locate in the area and for existing businesses to expand their operations. It allows development falling into specific employment use classes to be undertaken without the need for planning permission.

The full Order can be viewed on the Council's website by using the following link:

<http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/cms/non-ignl-pages/planning-and-regulatory-servic/planning-policy/local-development-order.aspx>

- 8.4 The introduction of the Order is starting to yield results and the first application under the LDO has recently been notified to the District Council. It is hoped that more economic based applications will come forward over the 3 year life span of the Order.

9.0 Strategic Sites

- 9.1 Since the adoption of the Core Strategy there have been a number of planning permissions granted for new economic development purposes. The most significant of these is the outline planning permission that has been given to the former British Sugar site to provide the following:

WF: 12/0146/EIA: An outline application for the redevelopment of the British Sugar Factory (phase 1), including access and Phase 1 link road with all other matters reserved, comprising: demolition of any remaining existing structures on site; residential development up to a maximum of 250 dwellings (class C3); employment development of up to 4 hectares (class B1, B2 and B8); retail development (class A1); restaurant/cafe/drinking establishment/hot food take away (class A3, A4 and A5); hotel (class C1); care home (class C2); extra care facility (class C2); crèche (class D1); a railway halt; access into site, ancillary roads, footpaths and cycleways; and open space

- 9.2 This is the District's largest regeneration site and this recent permission highlights the opportunity for new economic investment to occur within the District.
- 9.3 Although not considered to be employment development in the traditional sense there has been another key development within the District which is considered to be important to improving the economic fortunes of the area, which is the investment being made by further education providers as detailed below.

Birmingham Metropolitan College

- 9.4 Birmingham Metropolitan College has made a £10million investment in a new Academy, which has opened in the Piano Building, Weavers Wharf Kidderminster in September 2012. The new skills and entrepreneurial Academy is a partnership between Birmingham Metropolitan College and Kidderminster College to provide education and training for up to 1,000 16 – 18 year olds and adult learners so they can progress into further / higher education and employment.
- 9.5 The courses will provide a broad choice of skills / qualification and employment directed provision, which is very much in line with Local Enterprise Partnership Priorities for an employer-led skills approach to education and training. The aim of the Academy is to encourage local jobs growth.

Stourbridge College

- 9.6 Stourbridge College have recently acquired a piece of land to the south of Kidderminster with the aspiration to turn the area into a centre of sporting excellence. The site is already used by Kidderminster Harriers and the college also runs football and hospitality academies with the football club. The College are seeking to create a new golf academy and are looking to adapt the ground's facilities for teaching students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Plans for the ground also include a new classroom and IT areas, a new kitchen and updated changing rooms and showers. The centre of excellence will offer sports courses including football for girls and boys, rugby, boxing, golf, equine and multi sports.
- 9.7 It is envisaged that the investment being made by further education providers will also provide an economic boost to the area as a whole.

10.0 Conclusion

- 10.1 As can be seen from the various elements covered in this technical paper, a lot of work is going towards improving the economic fortunes of the District both in relation to the statutory development plan process but also through a number of key initiatives and strategies that are focussed towards economic prosperity. Overall, it is considered that the approach taken within the Development Plan will provide for a balanced development strategy that is consistent with the NPPF and will ensure that sustainable development can occur within the District.