# SWC Response to SWDP Joint Parish Committee

# November 2021

Further to the Parishes Committee Meeting on 12th October 2021, please see below South Worcestershire Council's (SWC) response to the questions raised both within the presentation and those that were raised through discussion. Our response is categorised by theme as presented at the meeting by the SWDP Joint Parishes Committee.

Rail Based Strategy

Several questions have been raised around the SWC's adoption of a rail focussed strategy and the reasoning behind this.

The overall development strategy for the SWDPR was consulted upon in the Issues and Options consultation in 2018. Although there were several options, a rail-based strategy was adopted primarily due to the concern that continuing the existing allocations would put pressure on the villages and infrastructure across the three districts. There was also strong support for a large urban extension and/or new settlements; it was considered that locating new development close to railway stations would be the most sustainable option towards achieving sustainable mobility and accessibility.

SWC would like to address the concern that the Joint Parishes Committee (referred to hereafter as 'the Committee') raised in the presentation at the meeting. We would like to clarify that Worcestershire Parkway was not the only site considered following the decision to adopt a rail-based strategy, but rather, SWC considered all land submitted in the call for sites stage of the local plan process. Each site was assessed against a set of criteria and multiple sites were put forward to be part of potential 'strategic' locations.

The Committee also questioned how the internalisation ambition for Worcestershire Parkway (WP) will be balanced with the inevitable attraction of the station. SWC recognise that the station has regional importance, and it is inevitable that the station will attract individuals from outside the area, as the station has strong nationwide links. The regional function will be accommodated on this basis and SWC consider that those who choose to use the train rather than private motor vehicle are making sustainable alternative transport choices. Worcestershire Parkway will not be a 'commuter town'. The settlement will be designed to facilitate sustainable lifestyle choices, with employment provision onsite reducing the need for those who live within the town to travel elsewhere on a day-to-day basis. The settlement is to be designed to have all facilities within a 10-minute walking distance, to encourage active travel and reduce the need for individuals to travel by car.

Future Volumes of Vehicular Traffic

In response to concerns raised about the future volumes of vehicle traffic and the evidence being gathered to understand this, Worcestershire County Council are currently undertaking assessment work including detailed transport modelling. The transport modelling undertaken considers the cumulative impact of all the development proposed in the SWDPR. It necessarily factors in assumptions about the number of trips that would be generated by extra housing, employment and leisure and loads these onto the highway network. This identifies those junctions that would then be nearing or at capacity. The follow up piece of work then considers what mitigation is required to make the development acceptable if this can be achieved. This part of the evidence base will be published alongside the consultation of the plan. The output of this work will be a report which will detail the mitigation measures for Worcestershire Parkway and surrounding A Class Roads and Motorway Junctions. This assessment Work will also inform an overarching movement (i.e. transport) strategy

for Worcestershire Parkway. Worcestershire County Council are also preparing a bespoke Parking Strategy for Worcestershire Parkway, which will support the movement strategy.

Worcestershire County Council have been engaged in the SWDPR process throughout. Officers from the County form part of the Officer Steering Group and also the Joint Advisory Panel. The SWCs asked WCC to assess the transport impacts of all of the proposed development in the emerging SWDPR, which is being undertaken by the County's consultants – Jacobs.

With regard to the engagement SWDP has had with National Highways and with WCC, there are strong communication channels between WCC, SWC, National Highways and developer transport consultants, with a group meeting biweekly to discuss all matters relating to movement. Developer transport consultants are preparing their own technical evidence base work, this is reviewed by WCC (the transport authority). National Highways also attend this group and have been continually engaged since the beginning.

The Committee also questioned how road infrastructure and upgrades will be funded. This infrastructure will be funded through Section 106 agreements and National Highways funding. WCC are in the process of sourcing this funding.

Delivery of Targets

The Committee requested further clarification on the discrepancy between the SWDP and the Worcester City Master Plan and questioned whether these two plans were aligned. The Worcester City Masterplan is a corporate vision document, which unlike the SWDP is not an officially adopted planning document. It therefore does not have any weight in planning considerations.

The master plan for Worcester City was done at a point in time when the flatted market was more popular. It would be fair to say that Covid has impacted on people's desire for living accommodation with outdoor space. Worcester will still need to maximise opportunities for development within their administrative area.

With regards to the possibility of the SWDP review committing to a full reassessment of the long-term opportunities to the refactoring of town centres within Worcestershire, the Council is preparing investment prospectuses for the town centres, these will examine and identify long-term opportunities for development.

5 Year Housing Land Supply

The South Worcestershire Councils can demonstrate a positive robust Five Year Housing Land Supply as of 1 April 2021 (published September 2021) – see

https://www.wychavon.gov.uk/component/fileman/file/Documents/Planning/Planning%20Policy%20Monitoring/5YHLS/2021/South%20Worcs%20Five%20Year%20Housing%20Land%20Supply%20Report%202021.pdf?routed=1&container=fileman-files

Sustainability

Concerns were raised that there was bias towards development at Worcestershire Parkway in the recent Sustainability Appraisal Report. The SA looks at reasonable alternatives in detail and advises accordingly, against the SWDPR overall spatial strategy. This has been commissioned by an independent consultant and all outcomes are quantifiable based on the set of criteria set out in the report. With regards to the responses put forward to the SA consultation, officers have been reviewing

the representations submitted, and we can confirm that all responses will published alongside the Regulation 19 consultation in July 2022.

Concerning the question raised about the undertaking of assessment and comparison of the net Carbon cost of the proposed developments, our policies will stipulate the use of sustainable construction techniques and materials that involve the lowest embodied carbon and minimise their ecological and carbon footprints. With reference to the impact of development on arable land, the development is required to deliver a biodiversity net gain.

Achievability and Delivery

SWC recognise the importance of having appropriate levels and types of infrastructure in place for future residents of the new development. We have been working in partnership with infrastructure providers to ensure that infrastructure is delivered at the right time. An Infrastructure Delivery Plan (also referred to as IDP) will be produced and published alongside the plan at Regulation 19. The role of the IDP is to identify and plan for the delivery of the infrastructure that is needed to implement the policies relating to the strategic allocations. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive strategy and approach to site wide infrastructure delivery, inform masterplanning work and provide the necessary evidence to demonstrate that the allocation is deliverable. The IDP will reduce the risk of piecemeal development by a myriad of different developers (a concern raised at the meeting) as applications will be assessed in accordance with this plan as an official planning document.

With regards to educational infrastructure, the SWC, landowners and the Education Authority are working in partnership to ensure that educational infrastructure is provided on site to meet the needs of the residents. Land will be safeguarded for a new centrally located two-form entry Primary School with a 52 place Nursery, an All-through School providing a 52 place Nursery, two-form entry Primary provision and four-form entry secondary provision and space identified in local communities to support two – three private nurseries. This requirement will expand beyond 2041 to also support the additional 3000 dwellings and will comprise in total: three two-form entry Primary Schools, each with 52 place nurseries, one seven-form entry Secondary School, space identified in the local communities to support six – eight private nurseries (dependent on size) and space identified for Post-16 College education.

How infrastructure will be maintained will be established at a later date as a matter of detail.

Long-term Viability

Further to the above, concerns were raised at the meeting around committing to delivering homes and the risk associated with this. SWC would like to reassure the committee that evidence base work is being prepared by sector specific consultants, including work on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan that will set out the development trajectories for Worcestershire Parkway. This work will be assessed by the planning inspector at the SWDPR examination. All viability and strategic infrastructure work will inform the phasing of the new settlement.

Commercial Arrangements

There are currently no commercial arrangements in place with developers with respect to funding arrangements. Homes England, the executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are expected to contribute public funding towards the delivery of infrastructure.

Impact on Wildlife and Ecosystems

In response to concerns raised at the meeting with regards to the above theme, SWC is working closely with developer parties, specialists and WCC officers to produce an evidence base. Once all evidence base work is collated, a Blue and Green Infrastructure Strategy will be prepared that will identify opportunities to protect and enhance the natural environment, including ecology and ecosystems. The concept of Biodiversity Net Gain is also likely to have been mandated through the Environment Bill prior to any planning application. This concept uses a habitats-based metric to compare the quality and quantity of habitats pre and post development. It is expected that biodiversity net gain will be met on site through tree planting, habitat creation etc. The development will seek to incorporate ecological enhancements for protected species. This could include integrated bat and bird boxes within new buildings, hedgehog holes within fence lines and the provision of specific habitats including enlargement of the existing reptile receptor site shown on the Concept Plan.

The design of the new settlement will be landscape-led, respecting both the local rich and diverse landscape character and the local historic character. The design of the new settlement with regards to landscape will be informed by the SLVA (can't use acronyms) to maximise the opportunities its environmental assets offer and the potential for their safeguarding and improvement. Acting upon the findings of the ecological assessments will allow the development to positively contribute to conservation, restoration and creation of coherent ecological networks and deliver biodiversity net gain throughout. In addition, wildlife corridors will be maintained and strengthened, and existing woodlands retained within the Concept Plan.

Railway Improvements

Land is being safeguarded close to the station in anticipation of future rail improvements, including dualling of the platform. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan will inform the future rail improvements required, which as mentioned previously, will be published at Regulation 19.

Physical Barriers of Rail Tracks etc

SWC are currently undergoing discussions about different types of railway crossings that could be implemented or enhanced to improve connectivity. The site will have 3 neighbourhoods that will have strong linkages not only within the settlement and to the town centre, but also beyond Worcestershire Parkway. Each neighbourhood will be carefully designed to have a unique sense of place and community. The layout and design of the roads will also be carefully considered.

New Town Authority

The authority is considering proposals towards setting up a future development corporation.