

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
19th February 2009

Priorities for the Worcestershire Economic Strategy

OPEN	
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	Economic Success Shared by All
CORPORATE PLAN AIM	A Vibrant Local Economy
KEY PRIORITY	District-wide Regeneration
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Stephen Clee
HEAD OF SERVICE	Head of Planning, Health and Environment
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APPENDICES:	<p>Appendix 1 – Worcestershire Economic Strategy – Latest</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Worcestershire Economic Delivery Plan – Latest</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Worcestershire Partnership Economy and Transport Theme Group (ETTG) – Workshop Notes & Proposed Priorities, September 2008.</p> <p><i>The appendices to this report have been circulated electronically and a public inspection copy is available on request. (See front cover for details).</i></p>

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of progress on the emergence of priorities for the delivery of the Worcestershire Economic Strategy and to consider these priorities on behalf of the District Council as part of the Worcestershire Partnership.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to DECIDE that:

- 2.1 **That the priorities for the delivery of the Worcestershire Economic Strategy outlined in this report and within Appendix 3 be endorsed by Cabinet on behalf of Wyre Forest District Council.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Worcestershire Economic Strategy (WES), which is provided at Appendix 1 to this report, has been produced for Worcestershire Partnership and progress reported through the Economy and Transport Theme Group (ETTG)

of the Partnership. The Economic Regeneration and Sustainability Unit of Worcestershire County Council are leading and coordinating this work. The WES was presented to Worcestershire Partnership Board on July 10th 2008.

- 3.2 As with Kidderminster Prospectus, which is considered elsewhere in this agenda, the WES is structured in a similar fashion to the Regional Economic Strategy. It is organised in themes of Business; Place; People; and Powerful Voice.
- 3.3 The WES is supported by two key papers which focus on delivering the strategic aims. The first, the Worcestershire Economic Delivery Plan (see Appendix 2 to this report), outlines the on-going work relating to Economic Development and Transport activities that are being undertaken by partners across Worcestershire. This includes the work that Wyre Forest District Council is leading on the development of a regeneration prospectus for Kidderminster. The second is the outcome of a special ETTG workshop, held with an expanded membership, and from which priorities have emerged with regards the activities detailed in the Delivery Plan. The notes of this workshop are provided at Appendix 3 to this report.

4. PRIORITIES FOR WORCESTERSHIRE

- 4.1 The priorities emerging from this workshop are summarised below. They are important as they will ultimately form the basis of any discussions with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) for support and additional funding towards delivery. This will include support for regeneration in Wyre Forest District. Given the significance of the prioritisation process, these papers are being considered and agreed by other partners including the District Councils. The priorities set out below were considered by the Cabinet Worcestershire County Council on 9th February 2009.
- 4.2 In line with the Sub-National Review (SNR) of Economic Regeneration there is an increasing role for County-level structures to bridge the gap between local actions and the Regional Development Agencies. This will also need to consider the Local Area Agreement for Worcestershire. Under the SNR, agencies such as AWM would take on a heightened role in terms of prioritising support and distributing funding across service areas and throughout the West Midlands. The Head of Planning, Health and Environment presented a series of reports regarding the SNR during 2008.

- 4.3 The emerging priorities highlighted by the Worcestershire Partnership Economy and Transport Theme Group and recently considered by the Worcestershire County Council Cabinet include:

a) Business

The priority areas for 'business' are:

- Technology Development / Transfer
- Central Technology Belt
- QinetiQ
- Longbridge
- Developing Strategic Employment Sites
- Supporting key growth sectors particularly Environmental Technologies and Tourism
- Promoting enterprise, business growth, diversification and retention

b) Place

The priorities for 'place' are:

- Investment Priorities including:
 - Worcester City
 - Kidderminster and Redditch
- Rural towns as a focus for rural renaissance and regeneration
- Infrastructure especially transport

c) People

The priority area linked to 'people' are;

- Addressing Worklessness
- Graduate retention and training
- NVQ 3-4 skills (including apprenticeships)
- Management and Leadership Skills
- Facilitating employer engagement with the skills agenda

d) Powerful Voice

The priority areas for 'powerful voice' are:

- Business Engagement
- Leadership and governance
- Raising ambitions
- Broadening horizons/expectations
- Developing cross-boundary working

5. WYRE FOREST DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

- 5.1 The above priorities for the medium to longer term are broadly consistent with the District Council's overall approach towards District-wide regeneration. The business priorities include the development of 'strategic employment sites' and it is understood that the former British Sugar site would be a good example of this type. The particular growth sectors being targeted include environmental technologies and tourism and both of these are highlighted in the emerging Kidderminster regeneration prospectus.
- 5.2 Worcester City is identified as a 'Sub-regional foci' in the Regional Spatial Strategy and as such is in line for significant housing and employment growth as the main centre within the County. It is, therefore, understandable that Worcester is given a preeminent status as an investment priority ahead of Kidderminster and Redditch.
- 5.3 There has been some debate about whether Redditch, as a settlement of significant development (SSD), should also be prioritised ahead of Kidderminster. It is clear that there are different pressures facing both towns. It would appear that Redditch's challenges are focused on dealing with growth, whilst in Kidderminster the focus is on the regeneration of large brownfield sites, tackling environmental decay and addressing the particular challenges of deprived communities. In light of this there does appear to be some consensus that both towns merit equal status and this is reflected in the emerging priorities. It will be for each centre to make a more detailed case for direct support. In Kidderminster's case this is being developed through and the 'Connecting Kidderminster' Prospectus initiative which helps to underpin the County status.

- 5.4 Rural towns such as Bewdley and Stourport, which have both benefited from Market Towns Initiative status, are also recognised as priorities for place together with investment in infrastructure. These remain important to Wyre Forest District Council's 'District-wide Regeneration' corporate priority. The emerging Kidderminster Prospectus also highlights a number of important infrastructure projects including a new railway station; the Hoo Brook Link Road; town centre ring road; and tackling Blackwell Street air quality and transport congestion.
- 5.5 In terms of people, the focus is very much on economic priorities. The worklessness and skills agendas are the priority focus and these issues are being addressed in partnership within Wyre Forest District and particularly in the context of the Oldington and Foley Park Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder. Facilitating employer engagement in the skills agenda is also an emerging theme in the Kidderminster Prospectus and closer working through the Wyre Forest Business Leaders Group. The Prospectus also considers the wider aspects of the 'People' in terms of health, housing and social issues.
- 5.6 Finally the recognised priorities for 'Powerful Voice' are consistent with the approach of Wyre Forest District Council. The Wyre Forest Business Leaders Group organised by the District Council and Chaired by Dr Richard Taylor MP is a good example of business engagement. The Kidderminster Regeneration Prospectus and other district-wide initiatives are very much focused on 'broadening horizons', whilst there is closer partnership working between authorities.
- 5.7 It is recognised that the economic circumstances in the UK have changed since the WES was produced and the associated action plans listed. The value of the WES and the priority actions relate to the longer term economic prosperity of Worcestershire. As with the 'Connecting Kidderminster' initiative, these County priorities are an essential part of preparations for growth following the economic downturn.

6. THE CREDIT CRUNCH

- 6.1 An additional work stream has emerged to assist with the effects of the economic downturn and specifically the impact on Worcestershire businesses and residents. This work started with a successful event "Global Slowdown; Local Actions" held at County Hall on December 8th 2008. The event asked business what we could do to help in the current situation. At the County level work has included:
- Targeting Worklessness – renegotiating LAA targets and establishing joint work plans with partners, especially JCP and voluntary sector
 - Raising the profile of Worcestershire with the Regional Minister
 - Organising follow up meetings with business to keep our actions relevant

- Progressing work on procurement and rapid payment

6.2 This is complemented by further work being undertaken at a more local level. District Council Officers contribute towards a 'strategic task force' to provide advice to those residents being made redundant. In addition the District Council arranged a special Business Leaders Breakfast on the 13th February with a guest speaker from Advantage West Midlands and support from the Hereford & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses. The aim of this session was to provide a forum for businesses and to signpost support services and potential public sector funding sources. A further event on the 17th February was arranged jointly with Wyre Forest Matters Local Strategic Partnership. The purpose of this meeting was to bring together public and voluntary sectors with representatives of the private sector to discuss joint working arrangements and whether signposting to appropriate support and services can be improved.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The County-wide priorities for the Worcestershire Economic Strategy will help to underpin external funding from key partners in the region including Advantage West Midlands and the County Council. If a particular project is not covered by any of the priorities then the case for funding would no doubt be significantly diminished. It is, therefore, important to ensure that the District Council's main economic priorities fall within one of the identified priority areas. Section 4 of this report has illustrated this and for these reasons it is recommended that the emerging priorities be agreed.

8. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no legal or policy implications arising from this report.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising for the Council from this report. It is important for the District Council to support a strategic approach across Worcestershire. In this way the authority can help to ensure that the District's priorities are embedded within the County structure and this will assist closer working and joint funding arrangements to deliver key initiatives such as Kidderminster Regeneration Prospectus or the redevelopment of the former British Sugar site. However, failure to partake in agreeing the priorities could undermine confidence in the District.

10. CONCLUSION

It is clear that emerging County-wide priorities will take on added significance with regional and sub-regional partners including Advantage West Midlands, particularly if the SNR is taken forward as planned. For Wyre Forest District it will be important to ensure that direct connections can be made between the District and County priorities. Section 4 of this report outlines how this could work in the Wyre Forest District context. When considering the priority status of Redditch and Kidderminster, in the absence of more information, it would appear premature to suggest that one centre is needier than the other and for this reason it is recommended that parity remain between these two centres until further studies suggest otherwise.

11. CONSULTEES

- Chief Executive
- Head of Community and Partnership Services

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

See the appendices which are provided electronically.