

# Worcestershire

## Area Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



**Agenda Item No. 9**

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## Worcestershire at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Worcestershire. It says how well they are delivering better results for local people and how likely these are to improve in future. If, and only if, our assessment shows that the following special circumstances are met in relation to a major issue, we use flags to highlight our judgements. We use a green flag to highlight where others can learn from outstanding achievements or improvements or an innovation that has very promising prospects of success. We use a red flag to highlight where we have significant concerns about results and future prospects that are not being tackled adequately. This means that local partners need to do something more or different to improve these prospects.

### Green flags - exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from

-  Green flag: Reducing CO2 emissions, water use and addressing climate change

### Red flags - significant concerns, action needed

-  Red flag: Differences in quality of life in Redditch
-  Red flag: Flood defences in Tenbury Wells

## The local area

Worcestershire is in the West Midlands. It has a mix of rural and urban areas. It is a county of many faces. Famous for the Rivers Severn, Teme and Avon, Iron Age fortresses in the Malvern Hills and the cathedral city of Worcester, the county has a rich historical past. King John, the signer of the Magna Carta, lies here.

Canals were built in the north of the county as part of the development of the Black Country industrial changes. The Tardebigge Locks, in Bromsgrove are the longest flight of navigable locks in the country. Redditch became famous for needle-making and has the worlds only water powered needle scouring mill. Morgan in Malvern celebrated 100 years of car making this year.

Edward Elgar is the county's most famous son - a well known composer, possibly inspired by Malverns natural springs. The Severn Valley railway attracts people to Kidderminster, in the Wyre Forest, from across the country. The unspoilt Vale of Evesham sees the blossom of plums and cherries

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celebrated at the Pershore Plum Festival in August each year.

The black pear is rarely seen these days but is proudly shown on many signs and on Worcestershire's 'coat of arms'. Its history goes way back - it's thought black pears were sent with the Worcestershire bowmen to the battle of Agincourt in 1415, the pear tree was the emblem for the Worcestershire Rifle Volunteers and the blossom was the badge of the Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry until 1956. It is the nickname of the County Cricket team and the Black Pear Credit Union also takes this name.

The population is just over 555,000 people with a relatively high proportion of residents aged 65 or more. There is a high proportion of White British residents in the county - Redditch has the highest percentage of black and ethnic minority groups of all the districts in the county. Major urban areas include the towns of Worcester, Bromsgrove, Kidderminster, Redditch, Evesham, and Malvern, it is in these areas that the majority of the population live.

The next section tells you how Worcestershire's public services are doing in each of their local priority areas.

## How is Worcestershire doing?

### Communities that are safe and feel safe

Crime levels are low in Worcestershire, but too many people are still worried about crime. Levels of crime are falling in the southern half of the county and are staying about the same in the northern half.

There are many targeted projects in place to reduce crime, and many of these are being successful. Where people are victims of crime, there's more in place to help them protect themselves and their property. Crime and too much alcohol is a growing problem in the area. This affects people of all ages, but alcohol misuse is a growing problem among children and young people especially in Bromsgrove and Redditch, and amongst adults in Worcester City.

Over the last 10 years roads have become much safer in Worcestershire, with a reducing number of serious accidents or deaths as a result of road accidents. Organisations continue to take road safety seriously and still focus on tackling this important issue. The number of deaths from fires is the lowest on record. There are fewer fires, with far fewer people getting injured.

### A better environment for today and tomorrow

Reducing the use of energy in the county is taken very seriously by partners. Carbon emissions are reducing year on year. Waste to landfill has reduced substantially, and many schemes are being run to reduce energy use. Aerial thermal mapping to show energy use and heat loss is already giving all residents and businesses information on the energy use and losses from their

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properties, and what they can do about it. Schools are reducing their energy and water use and children are learning to protect their future.

Worcestershire has a beautiful landscape - from the Malvern Hills, the large areas of common land, to wetlands, the fertile vale of Evesham and the varying landscape around the rivers. And public sector partners work hard to understand and look after the landscape. More work to protect scientific sites of interest will be needed.

The county floods badly from time to time during extreme weather events. This has a huge impact on people's lives and well-being - and organisations know this. They have put many projects, large and small, in place to make people safe working with other places such as Gloucestershire. In Wychavon, each parish has a plan to reduce the risk of flooding. But some places are still at risk.

## Economic success that is shared by all

Redditch stands out in the county. Income levels are lower, and more people are out of work with the highest increase in taking up benefits. House prices are lower than elsewhere on the county, but people are less able to afford to buy their own home. For good health and education attainment, there's a marked difference between Redditch and the rest of the county.

The economy of Tenbury Wells is at risk from flooding. And there are no funds yet available to carry out the defence schemes to protect the town - for residents and businesses. Partners are working hard to find a solution, but it is proving very difficult.

People in Worcestershire are generally well-off. The recession has hit Worcestershire hard in some ways. Many people still have a job, but a lot of people are now out of work, and many more people are claiming benefits. Good information and advice is available. The 'technology belt' is developing, with more space offered for businesses. And work with Worcester Bosch has been successful in getting more jobs for now and for the future. Partners know that town centres need extra support, as people are spending less money and more shops are becoming empty. But tourism has benefited.

## Improving Health and Well Being

Many people living in Worcestershire enjoy good health. But there are big differences in health in different parts of the county. So people in Bromsgrove, Wychavon and Malvern Hills have the best health, while Redditch people on average don't live as long. Throughout the county, more people are drinking more alcohol and this is a concern for both children and adults and for their longer term health.

The number of people who are obese is growing. And more work is being done especially with obese children about healthier food and exercise. People don't go to the dentist regularly enough, though fewer children have tooth decay.

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Adults with disabilities and older people have better options about living independently, and getting the support they need. More support is in place for people for dementia and their carers. And plans are in place to meet the increasing need from a growing number of people suffering from dementia.

Many people suffer from poor mental health and are not always getting the help they need. For example, in the north if specialist help is needed this is generally through referral to a psychologist, whereas in the south it's to a psychiatrist. In some cases the right people do not get the right service at the right time.

## Meeting the needs of Children and Young People

Children and young people are healthier than those in many areas. But more children have problems with alcohol.

Exam results are not improving quickly enough. This includes results for all stages, and for GCSEs too few children get 5 grade A\* to C's including Maths and English compared to other similar areas. Worcestershire is a fairly well-off county, and the results don't represent what you may expect to see. There are some big issues, for example the lower, middle and upper school system where changing schools does not fit with the ages children sit national tests and holds children back. The County Council knows this and has a major plan of work to change this.

But where children live also affects how well they do. And children in Redditch do less well than many others in the county. Again, the County Council understands these problems in Redditch and certain other hotspots and has plans in place to help children achieve better results in Redditch - but it is too early to say whether these are having an effect. A team is in place to make sure that the needs of children looked after by the County Council are met.

Children and young people have the opportunity to say what they think. And children are involved in saying what funds should be spent on. Bullying is a problem and plans are in place to help children and stop bullying.

## Stronger Communities

People in Worcestershire have a strong sense of belonging to their area. They feel that people get on well, never mind their background. They are happy with sports and leisure opportunities in the area and the County Council is making sure that libraries are in a good state.

House prices have dropped with the recession, but most houses are still expensive. More homes are needed overall, and especially more homes that are easier for people to afford. There's a major building project planned for the southern half of the county, but this is at an early stage. The recession has had a good effect on building more homes that people can afford as developers have had to change some of their plans.

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Different people have different housing needs. The rural nature of the county brings problems in making sure that there are enough homes and homes local people can afford in rural areas. Plans are in place to make sure gypsies and travellers have enough suitable sites. Some older people need homes on one level, or somewhere where there's support nearby. There are projects already underway, and an overall plan is being worked on by partners.

Homelessness is still a problem for some people in Worcestershire. There is some good work to improve the choices people have to stop people from becoming homeless - especially in Redditch. And more is being done to help vulnerable people, for example people leaving prison and getting support so they can live on their own.

Keeping homes warm is a problem. Fuel is expensive and some homes 'leak' energy. More help and advice is now given so that people find it easier to keep warm, and homes use energy better.

## About Worcestershire

A recent survey shows that in Worcestershire 84 per cent of people are satisfied with their immediate local area as a place to live. This is broadly the same as the average for similar areas and higher than the national average of 81 per cent.

Worcestershire is a county in the West Midlands region. It has a mix of rural and urban areas. Parts of Worcestershire fall within the Rural Regeneration Zone, a partnership set up by Advantage West Midlands to deliver sustainable economic regeneration in the area.

The county has a population of around 555,400 people, with the districts of Wychavon and Wyre Forest have the largest number of residents. The proportion of older people in Worcestershire is greater than regional and national averages, with the younger population lower than average. The average age of the population of Malvern Hills is the oldest and Redditch the youngest. The district of Wychavon is expected to see the highest growth in over-50s. Worcestershire has a high White British population. The Other White population is relatively high in the area, and is projected to increase until 2026, along with all other groups. The Pakistani population is the highest of the non-White groups. Redditch has the largest non-White population in the county.

Levels of deprivation in Worcestershire are relatively low, although some areas in Worcester City, Kidderminster (Wyre Forest) and Redditch are within the top 10 per cent most deprived areas nationally. The main issues in terms of the type of deprivation are within housing, access to services especially in rural areas, and education.

Unemployment is relatively low in Worcestershire. There are low proportions of people on out-of-work benefits. The number of 16-18 year olds in education, employment or training is relatively high. However, a significant skills gap is developing and wage levels are below the national average.

The health of people in Worcestershire is generally better than the England average. However, there are health inequalities across the county, which are

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generally concentrated in Redditch, Kidderminster and Worcester. Worcestershire has the second highest house price to income ratio, meaning housing is generally unaffordable. Malvern Hills is the least affordable area, whereas Redditch is the most affordable.

The Worcestershire Partnership's role is to develop and deliver a vision for the future of Worcestershire that meets the aspirations of local people. A community strategy has been produced to express the vision for the future.

## How well do priorities for Worcestershire express community needs and aspirations?

Sixty per cent of residents live in urban areas, forty per cent live rurally. The county has a rich and very varied landscape. It is an affluent county, has low crime, people generally have good health. There are many older people and the over 65 age group is growing faster than other age groups.

There are challenges. Housing is expensive, and more housing is needed especially homes that people can afford. The landscape needs to be protected. Parts of the county have suffered from severe flooding which has had devastating impacts on many people and communities. Exam results are below average, they are improving but not quickly enough. And although many people are well off, this hides some big differences in some areas. Crime levels are low but people are very worried about crime - and this brings different problems for organisations to focus on.

The recession has brought challenges. The number of people out of work has increased sharply, there are fewer job vacancies. And the county as a whole has seen a big rise in the number of people claiming benefits especially in rural areas. Organisations are doing many positive things to help people and businesses through the recession.

The priorities that the Worcestershire Partnership (the decision making meeting attended by all the public organisations in the county) has set are based around these issues. Each challenge has been recognised and improvements are being made. The partnership works well together which isn't easy because of the number of organisations. There are seven councils in Worcestershire and many other organisations - for example, NHS Worcestershire, police, fire and rescue - that have to work together. Public organisations in Worcestershire have to use their money well to get the best services for people. The organisations across the county are beginning to use an approach called 'Total Place' where they count up all the money in the county and work out how to use it better.

Organisations talk to and consult with people. The county's research and intelligence team helps organisations understand the issues much better. It can be hard to get people's opinions and to find out what people need when many people live in more rural areas. There are some really good ways in which organisations talk to people who are harder to reach, and also getting to know the views of children and young people. With the growing number of older people, there is a clear understanding that certain services need to be

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reviewed and improved to meet their needs. For example, to give people with dementia, and their carers, the services and support they need.

People's views are asked for to develop better services. For example, NHS Worcestershire asked stroke survivors for their views to help the development of community stroke services. More than 400 survivors were surveyed in the north of the county to make sure a new community service was well designed. And talks with groups of people were then held in the Spring to find out what they thought of the improvements.

People's views are regularly sought on really big issues like housing and transport plans for the county as well as very local issues through Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings. These meetings are held 4 times a year in each district to hear what issues are affecting their lives.

The County Council has an on-line 'Ask Me' planner so that people can see what issues are being consulted on - and join in. It's not confined to council consultations, but open to other organisations to register their consultation events.

There is an increasing understanding of inequalities for Redditch. More research is now being carried out. One measure of how deprived areas are, shows that Redditch's position has worsened recently - this measure gives an area a rank to show how deprived the area is compared to everywhere else in England. However, Redditch does not fall into the very worst areas in the country and is therefore much less able to attract regional or national funding. Redditch Borough Council officers and councillors are holding events to talk to people in their own communities. Events have been held in Headless Cross, Winyates and Astwood Bank, with three more events in the pipeline to work out what local people want to see improve.

There is good engagement with children and young people. The 'Big Questionnaire' has been used to consult with, and to decide what priorities are important for children and young people. More than 8600 young people took part and from that the Youth Cabinet created the Youth Manifesto. This information is used by organisations to give better services - so for example, more is happening to stop bullying and help victims of bullying. It's important to talk to children and young people to give them a voice as it would be easy to overlook younger people and concentrate just on the very real and growing needs of older people.

Councillors in Worcestershire are being given more information about very local issues for their areas. So if, for example, there is a new building planned, or if there have been complaints about an issue, councillors know and are able to talk directly to local people.

## Communities that are safe and feel safe

Crime levels are low in Worcestershire. The amount of recorded crime has fallen steadily in recent years. Despite this, people are still worried about crime.

For the north of the county (Wyre Forest, Bromsgrove and Redditch) crime

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levels stayed about the same overall. But there were more robberies and violent crimes. But in the south of the county (Wychavon, Worcester City and Malvern Hills) the numbers of all types of crimes went down and especially for robberies. There is a different picture between the north and the south - but you have to remember that crime levels in Worcestershire are low compared to many other places making it a safer place to live in.

People feel that anti-social behaviour and drugs use is not a big problem in Worcestershire. They think that partners listen to what they say and are being more successful in making sure anti-social behaviour and drugs problems are reducing.

Crime doesn't pay in Worcestershire. More automated number plate recognition cameras are in place - these are helping detect whether vehicles are taxed, if they have insurance and even whether benefit fraud has happened. More CCTV cameras are in place. A Trader Register has been set up on the internet to help people find reliable trades people. And trading standards are encouraging people to tell them if they have been visited by rogue traders to clamp down on the number of people being cheated out of their money and possessions. SmartWater packs are being given to vulnerable people and to people who are victims of crime - SmartWater is a way of marking your possessions so that if they are stolen it's easier to identify them as yours. In the South Worcestershire area (covering Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon), reassurance and free security equipment are given to people who have been burgled.

More people are getting involved in helping protect themselves. There are more Neighbourhood Watch schemes now in the county. And some ShopWatch schemes are in place - for example, in the Rubery area in the Bromsgrove district.

Too many people drink too much, and this can lead to more crime and anti-social behaviour. This includes children and young people - especially in Redditch and Worcester City. Organisations in Redditch are trying to reduce the effects of people getting drunk in the town centre at night - a white light scheme is now partly in place. This makes the area much brighter so people can see each other more easily, and cameras have a better view of activity. The Drugs and Alcohol team are involved in a number of projects. For example, an area in Worcester City Centre called 'Safe Place' has been set up to help people who become vulnerable on a night out or as a result of drinking too much. More school children in Redditch are able to talk in schools about alcohol abuse. This is really important as more children and young people are needing treatment at the local hospital for serious alcohol problems. A great deal of work is concentrated on ensuring alcohol is not sold irresponsibly to under-age people.

Far fewer people are killed or injured on the roads than 10 years ago. The number of deaths and serious injuries have halved in this time to 249 incidents in 2008. The number of children killed or seriously injured fell by 77 per cent in the last 10 years. In 2008, 14 children under the age of 16 were killed or seriously injured. Organisations (through the Safer Roads Partnership) look at how useful safety cameras are and ensure that the most dangerous routes are targeted. The results are published each year and shows that collisions have reduced each year over the last few years, and drivers are beginning to slow down. These reviews help show where cameras should be placed. More

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electronic signs telling you what speed you're driving at are in place. And the County also works with a driver instructor who gives safer driving courses to people caught speeding - the results so far are showing that people do take the training seriously and its making a difference. Redditch has the lowest numbers of people that are killed or seriously injured. NHS Worcestershire is working with the community safety partnership to reduce road traffic accidents in Malvern Hills. It is raising awareness of the effects of driving whilst taking medication by distributing a Road Safety Factsheet to all GP surgeries and pharmacists.

Many people are killed by a whole range of accidents. Wyre Forest, Malvern Hills and Worcester City have high death rates from accidents (closely followed by Wychavon) compared to the England average. In Malvern Hills, accidents are particularly an issue for older people falling over and breaking bones. Fewer people need to spend more than three days in hospital because of injuries from accidents though compared to other similar areas. The development of a falls assessment service is expected to help improve peoples knowledge of how to prevent a fall.

Fewer people are killed in fires. The number of most types of fires has reduced, and there are far less people injured. The fire and rescue service is contacting more vulnerable people, in particular older people to give advice about fire safety and preventing fires. There are plans to promote Fire Safety Awareness in stop smoking clinics.

## A better environment for today and tomorrow

### Green flag: Reducing CO2 emissions, water use and addressing climate change

CO2 emissions and climate change are taken seriously in Worcestershire. Partners in Worcestershire work hard to make sure that Worcestershire is a good environment to live in. The partners use a very wide range of information to understand the county's environment. A State of the Environment report is produced each year. The whole of the county has been thermally mapped, and people can see the information about their own homes and businesses on the internet. This shows detailed levels of emissions from properties and advice is then given on how to reduce emissions.

Worcestershire County Council leads the way in reducing emissions. Since 2002 they have reduced CO2 emissions from their activities by 52 per cent.

Many schools have become more 'eco-friendly'. 230 schools have signed up to the eco schools programme and at the moment 40 schools have reached the top green flag award. The County Council has run a 'switch it off' campaign with schools over the last three years. School children do a secret energy audit the week before the switch off so they can see what difference it makes. Some schools saw a big difference of between 20- 50 per cent. Not only do schools use less energy, but children take the message home with them and are learning for future years.

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In 2004, the County Council started to work with the Carbon Trust. They worked out the carbon emissions produced throughout the county, and where they can make the most difference. The district councils, Environment Agency and other partners have worked out what emissions they produce and most now have set targets and are meeting them. For example, Worcester University set its base line in 2005/06 with a target to reduce carbon use by 3 per cent each year. But the university has now given itself a greater challenge to continue to reduce by 3 per cent a year despite expanding the university and many new buildings being built.

The biggest impact on CO2 emissions is 'waste going to landfill'. Across the county there has been a big reduction in the amount of waste produced and therefore going to landfill. Councils are working with residents and businesses and have also seen an 8.5 per cent increase in the amount of waste recycled. Many people are now composting their garden waste, and the County Council were able to agree lower prices for compost bins for residents to use.

Public sector buildings contribute to carbon emissions. New buildings have been built which reduce the emissions produced, for example the Wildwood building which the County Council and NHS Worcestershire occupy, and new schools. Flexible working is encouraged, so when people can work at home they do. This means more people can use Wildwood - and more money is saved.

People are encouraged to use their cars less. The number of people using buses has increased, and a park and ride scheme in place in Worcester City. More schools have travel plans which mean that more children now walk or cycle to school. And the County Council is keen to make sure fewer of its staff use their car to get to work. They will limit the number of days staff can use the car park at County Hall and encourage more bus routes to go through the campus.

By working together, organisations have brought together local funds and money from the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target programme. This means more homes can be insulated to reduce CO2 emissions.

The police are more carbon friendly. West Mercia police force has set targets to reduce the impact it has on the environment. New buildings are 'green' and they plan to reduce the energy used in its buildings by at least five per cent each year. A travel plan is in place to reduce people's use of their car to get to work.

The NHS are big emitters of CO2. NHS Worcestershire wants to reduce energy use by 25 per cent across their sites. They introduced smart metering earlier in 2009 to record energy use. They have looked at their energy use and worked out how they can reduce their emissions each year. For example, through a new waste disposal contract they are now sending 70 per cent less waste to landfill and aim to increase this to 95 per cent. And the waste that can't be recycled is made into 'brickettes' that can be used as fuel to make energy. New buildings such as Malvern hospital was designed to use less energy.

Both the Acute Hospital Trust and Mental Health Trust have plans in place to reduce or better use energy. An incinerator is used at The Alexandra Hospital in Redditch. This burns waste from the Acute Trust as a whole and recycles

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the energy produced to help heat their buildings. Energy efficient light fittings are being fitted at The Alexandra and in the Kidderminster hospital. And the Acute Trust works with its PFI (Private Finance Initiative) partners for example to fund the replacement of the chilling units. And it will be possible to close down parts of these new units when they are not all needed.

The West Midlands ambulance service covers Worcestershire County. They are at an early stage in understanding their impact on the environment and deciding what they can do about it. They have a plan in place, but this isn't yet very detailed. Staff are encouraged to have more fuel efficient cars. The service is looking at options other than taking people long distances to hospital - so for example, if there's a GP surgery nearby which would be able to deal with the problem.

Less water is used. The Fire and Rescue Authority use special systems to produce fire-fighting foam at incidents that uses 90 per cent less water. This is less damaging to the environment. Water saving devices are installed in buildings to reduce consumption and as a result savings made of over £30,000 a year on water charges.

Council buildings and schools had big refunds from Severn Trent Water because less water is used. And all their new buildings have water saving measures. Rainwater harvesting is the method used the most. This means that less water is used in flushing toilets, and sewerage charges are reduced too. At Redhill School for this year to date, 74 per cent of water used is rainwater.

Worcestershire could do even better if every organisation worked even closer to learn from each other about what they can do to help.

### A better environment for today and tomorrow

Councils are working with residents and businesses and can see a continuous reduction in the waste going to landfill, and an increase in the amount recycled. Many people are now composting their garden waste, and the County Council were able to agree lower prices for compost bins for residents to use. People are relatively satisfied with refuse collection, recycling and cleanliness of the area. Recyclable materials are collected from more flats and houses.

A waste management contract is in place. This is to manage waste disposal for the Worcestershire councils and Herefordshire Council. Although the contract has been in place for many years, to date the final solution for the way waste is disposed has not been agreed. The contractor has been asked to provide proposals in the early autumn about the technology needed and potential sites to take the situation out of standstill. The Audit Commission is reviewing the progress being made by Worcestershire councils and Herefordshire Council.

Streets are cleaner and litter is removed and local people get involved. For example there have been five community clean ups in Oakenshaw in Redditch.

People are still concerned about flooding. The county was badly hit by the floods of July 2007, and some people are still not in their homes. The

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Worcestershire land drainage partnership was set up because of the floods. All the relevant agencies are involved (councils, environment agency, Severn Trent water company, DEFRA). Many projects have been actioned to lessen the effect of severe weather. The agencies know which places are most likely to flood, and have put action plans in place. This means that any regular work that needs to be done gets done (to clear drains and gulleys for example), and any specific work that is needed, if a severe weather warning is forecast, is done.

Flood defences in some parts of Worcestershire have been funded costing £3 million. Flood defence schemes in Powick, Pershore, Uckinghall near Upton-upon-Severn and Broadway, near Evesham will go ahead and include work to prevent flooding of the A449. A major piece of work looking at how better to deal with flooding and other water management issues in Worcestershire is under way. Worcestershire County Council is working in partnership with the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water on planning water management in the county. A report is due to be published later in 2009 and looks at how planners should address flooding, drainage, infrastructure and water quality.

Wychavon district has flooded badly in the past. But now the district council, with the help of partners, has prepared plans for all 93 parishes to make sure they are well prepared for flooding and the Council has successfully bid for over £1.8 million for flood prevention schemes in a number of areas in the district.

Work also takes place with neighbouring areas, for example, with Warwickshire around the River Arrow. A member of staff from Wychavon District Council is on the Gloucestershire County flood group. This person acts as a link between that group and the Worcestershire multi-agency land drainage group to share best practice and ideas. Partners from Worcestershire and Gloucestershire work together on flooding around the River Avon. Because of the knowledge they share they know how drainage issues in Worcestershire for example can affect people and their homes in the neighbouring county.

But flood defences and land drainage can also have a bad effect. In some areas this work has destroyed the natural form of many of the rivers and streams in Worcestershire. Plants and animals have been lost. However, the Severn and Avon Vales Wetland partnership was established in 2000 to restore floodplain habitats.

Worcestershire has a rich landscape with many different features. And looking after the biodiversity and ecology of the area is important. A plan is in place which collects information and identifies the main concerns. This means that any project or plan will be able to bring together the right information at an early stage so plans can go ahead quickly. The plan lays out the actions needed, but some of these are long term or don't say when a result should be seen.

A thorough understanding of the landscape has been developed. The Council understands the landscape changes naturally, but knowing what the characteristics of the landscape are now means that areas are better managed. As a result planning officers can make better decisions.

The information was used by the Forestry Commission in Feckenham Forest.

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Here they have been able to decide what planting is best for the area, where the boundaries should be and how to use woodland grants. For housing development the data is used to understand the impact of about 36,000 new homes on the landscape and biodiversity of Worcestershire. The Forestry Commission leads the 'Grow with Wyre' £4 million Landscape Partnership Scheme. It is made up of 18 projects designed to restore the unique landscape of the Wyre, and celebrate its rich working history. In Wychavon, the District Council is helping to make the area more environmentally sustainable. It is creating a new community wetland in Pershore to attract a variety of wildlife, and to filter surface water from the neighbouring built up area before it enters the River Avon.

There are many sites of scientific interest in Worcestershire, especially in the Malvern Hills area. Some protection is being given to important geological sites in Worcestershire and neighbouring counties. The Abberley Hills and Malvern Hills Geopark (which also extends into Shropshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire) has been established as part of the European Geoparks Network to acknowledge the internationally important status of key areas, and their contribution to the local culture and economy. However, Worcestershire has 4 Geological Sites of Special Scientific interest in an unfavourable condition (there are 122 GSSIs in the West Midlands of which 13 per cent are in unfavourable condition).

However, Hewell Park Lake is one area where partners are doing well - here, the prison service with the Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust are restoring some of the original landscape features of the site. Too much water has been taken from the lake in the past, and the prison service is working with Natural England and Severn Trent to make sure water levels are maintained.

## Economic success that is shared by all



### Red flag: Differences in quality of life in Redditch

Redditch stands out in Worcestershire. Many people enjoy living in Redditch, feel part of the community and argue that it is a good place to live. But there are also too many people who live in Redditch and the surrounding areas who do not experience as good a quality of life. The different experiences of people in Redditch are played out in letters to the local press.

This is the part of the county that has the poorest outcomes overall for its residents. Compared nationally, GCSE exam results and life expectancy in particular are worse than expected. Compared with the rest of the county, more people rely on benefits, more families have a low income and 1 in 5 children live in poverty. There is the least satisfaction with the area as a place to live. Smoking levels are highest here and people live the least healthy lifestyles.

More people in Redditch consider levels of anti-social behaviour and levels of drunken and rowdy behaviour to be a problem than in most other parts of the county. The current recession has hit harder here than in other parts of Worcestershire with more people needing to claim benefits, though numbers are now starting to fall.

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There are positive things, of course, like good dental health amongst children, fewer people killed or seriously injured on the roads than other parts of the county and reducing overall crime levels.

Other areas of Worcestershire also have areas of deprivation (including more dispersed rural communities) but these do not stand out to the same extent Redditch does - for Worcestershire this is where more effort must be made.

This means that local hospitals, police, schools, councils and community organisations across Worcestershire must co-operate better together to make sure that each of them contributes to the future success of the people of Redditch. It is not necessarily a matter of providing more funds but more about using the money that is available to the Redditch area better. This needs to include the business community as well to help attract investment into the area, understand the skills that the people of Redditch have and use them. Talking to the people of Redditch and getting a better understanding of what it is really like to live here is an important part of making sure people's needs are met.

There are lots of projects and activities happening to help deal with a lot of the difficulties but this has not been well co-ordinated in the past. It is important that all the organisations in Worcestershire make a difference and plan together to make a change here in the long term.

**What's being done in response?**

Discussions are taking place about the improvements which are needed. This will include talking to the Government Office and Regional Improvement organisations. It will take a long time to see the situation change but it is anticipated that a package of measures, properly co-ordinated, will be the most effective response over a period of the next 2-3 years to help get improvement started.

** Red flag: Flood defences in Tenbury Wells**

In recent years the centre of Tenbury Wells has been repeatedly flooded. People living in the town and the surrounding rural areas depend on the town for local services, shopping, jobs and recreation. Some of the businesses here cannot now get insurance cover and this will also impact on new businesses being able, or willing, to set up here. This means fewer services and jobs could be available in the future affecting young and old alike. There is a strong possibility that repeated flooding will mean the loss of businesses, such as hotels and local shops, and the heart of the town could be lost.

There is a viable scheme available to prevent flooding in the town. But the national system for allocating money to flood prevention works doesn't take into account the wider benefits to the community of protecting the businesses here. This means that the scheme scores poorly, and ranks low, on the national system against other flood defence schemes, and that there is little prospect of national funding being allocated under the current system for the foreseeable future.

Organisations within Worcestershire have worked hard for the last 5 years to

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try and find a solution but have been unable to secure the necessary funding. They have been able to reduce the initial cost of the scheme by looking at using local contractors to do the work. The councils working with the Environment Agency are continuing to explore a range of ways of getting the money together. A solution to the problem lies beyond the Local Strategic Partnership alone.

The prospects for getting a solution together are not good unless further concerted action is taken by regional and national agencies working with organisations in Worcestershire to find a way to secure the future prosperity of this rural town.

### What's being done in response?

Local organisations are continuing to work with Government agencies to try to find a solution to this problem.

### Economic success that is shared by all

Most Worcestershire people have a job. But as a result of the recession the number of people out of work has increased sharply and there are fewer jobs available. Job losses for people in Redditch have increased most, and least in Bromsgrove. As a result the county as a whole has seen a big rise in the number of people claiming benefits especially Redditch. Redditch council has begun to improve its benefits service recently and is ensuring these important benefits are provided quicker.

'Twitter' - the new internet phenomenon - is being tested out to get advice and information on coping with the recession. All organisations in Worcestershire are part of the 'economy watch' action group which has a very good handle on what help people need.

More people need help managing big debts. Advice agencies such as the Black Pear Credit Union, Worcester Cash and Citizens Advice Bureau have extra funding so they can expand the services they give. And councils are doing more to help local businesses know how they can do business with councils, and even how to get business contracts abroad.

People will notice more empty shops on the streets. The councils are providing funds so that empty shop fronts can be dressed up - so high streets look more attractive and attract new business. They are working with town centre managers to identify businesses that are struggling to help them before they fold. People are being encouraged to visit their town centres. For example, Bromsgrove district council offered free parking on certain days in August.

Some town centres need improving. Stourport was able to redevelop and transform the canal basin with a marina and new leisure facilities. Kidderminster has seen a major improvement in the number of shops available and more people now shop there. Bromsgrove council knows its town centre needs improving but is struggling to get this ambitious plan up and running made worse by the recession. Worcester City has seen some developments by improving the river bank with new footpaths, improvements to the University campus and are currently building a major new university and public library and museum from which everyone in the county will benefit.

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Businesses are getting their bills settled quicker by councils. At the moment about 70 per cent of bills are paid within 10 days. There are still good numbers of new businesses being registered and district councils are giving start up grants to new businesses.

The recession is seeing an upturn in tourism, with many more people staying in the county and visiting local attractions.

Some people find it hard to get jobs because of where they live. The workwise travel project now has over 100 users who wouldn't otherwise be able to get a job. This project loans mopeds to people in rural areas at very low cost as well as providing safety training to users. 372 people have taken advantage of this scheme.

People are pretty well qualified in the county. More young people aged 16 to 19 are now in work, education or training in the last three years. This means that they have better future job prospects. The recession has not yet seen this being affected. Councils are offering paid graduate placements and apprenticeships to 300 young people for four months at a time. Funding is available to help create more jobs for 18-24 year olds, and for people who have been out of work for nearly 12 months.

Malvern Hills Science Park is important for Worcestershire. It is part of the desire to create a 'technology belt' stretching from Birmingham, through Bromsgrove and ending up in Malvern Hills. Phase three is now finished and there are 2000 square metres more space for technology businesses. Support is also given to the Bromsgrove technology park. It isn't clear how everyone in the county can benefit from the 'technology belt'. The 'belt' cuts through the middle of the county, but people may find it difficult to get to jobs there if they don't have a car. It is unclear what impact the belt will have on those areas in greatest need of more job opportunities in Kidderminster and Redditch. Councils are backing plans for a new development by Bosch in Worcester. The plan is for a new site by junction 6 of the M5 and this will help keep 1000 people in work, and create 1000 more jobs for the future.

History is being made with the Droitwich canal scheme. A 21-mile cruising ring that links two canals has been built, and a marina is being built next to the Droitwich rugby ground. This is the first canal that has been built since the 1700s. A tunnel closed since the wartime under the A449 has been reopened for it. So people will be able to enjoy the towpath walks, or boating on the canals, and more jobs will be available in the area.

Worcestershire's councils are working well together. They are beginning to see efficiencies and better value for money from working together. Worcestershire Two Tier Working (WETT) is looking at sharing certain services across the county, for example, regulatory services and Human Resources, which should lead to a better customer experience and potential savings. Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils are sharing a Chief Executive and are now working out the detail of sharing a management team and services. Joint savings are expected to be about £1.2 million over five years. Some success has already been delivered in the three district councils in the south of Worcestershire joining up their benefits services into one. Further work between these councils is on-going to talk to people about major new housing plans. There are some difficult decisions to take in achieving the benefits from

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some of these projects. But if future budget cuts are expected then the councils are moving in the right direction. They have made more progress on these areas than others in the West Midlands.

## Improving Health and Well Being

Health across Worcestershire is generally good with high life expectancy especially for men and reducing deaths from many conditions. Fewer people die from heart disease, cancer or strokes now. However, whilst deaths from heart disease continue to reduce, deaths from cancer appear to have stabilised.

There are significant differences in health in different parts of the county. People living in Bromsgrove, Wychavon and Malvern Hills have the best health. But people living in parts of Redditch live on average shorter lives. All parts of Worcestershire have 'hot spot' areas where there are problems with people's health. This has been recognised by the health service and there are lots of ideas being implemented which will help people in many of these communities. The health service and councils are determined to help people deal with increasing levels of obesity, not enough physical exercise, reduce smoking and curb the effects of too much alcohol. There are early signs of more adults doing more exercise in the last 2 years.

Alcohol consumption has increased significantly here like most of England but more so. Figures are still rising. This is recognised as being a concern and so organisations have agreed that this will be an area they will try and focus on. This is affecting increasing numbers of children and adults who need to be admitted to hospital with health problems. There are more middle age, middle income people with alcohol problems who also need hospital treatment and it is anticipated that this will continue to increase. A survey in 2008 found that 73 per cent of respondents were concerned about young people drinking and 63 per cent thought the county has a problem with alcohol. Alcohol also fuels anti social behaviour, crime and domestic abuse.

Fewer of Worcestershire's children have tooth decay. But both adults and children don't go to the dentist as much as they could even though there are now enough NHS dentists. So there is a campaign across the county to encourage people to go. A number of buses in Worcester City are now carrying a "Smile" advert promoting a Dental Helpline and calls to this are increasing as a result. GP practices are to be sent the list of dental practices throughout Worcestershire who accept NHS patients to help further.

Obesity is increasing in Worcestershire with about 1 in 4 adults obese. 15 per cent of year six children measured are also currently obese. This is leading to concerns about future health problems and so there is agreement that organisations will do what they can to help. For example, working with children in schools the public health officers are promoting the School Food Trusts Million Meals campaign and have developed a school meals plan. By April 2009, 95 schools had signed up to this and £6.4 million is available to build a new kitchens which are also able to supply smaller schools. School nurses and health visitors have been asked to provide more advice and support to the children they see.

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Exercise levels amongst children are also improving. There are many opportunities available to get involved in exercise at all levels or ages. Over 90 per cent of children do sport for at least two hours but organisations hope to increase this to five hours. In a survey, 48 per cent of pupils were involved in inter-school competition during 2007/08 (top quartile nationally) and 38 per cent of pupils participated in one or more community sports, dance or multi-skill clubs with links to the school- above regional average. 15 per cent of pupils were actively involved in sports volunteering and leadership which is also above the regional average.

A number of initiatives are in place or being developed to encourage adult participation in sport. An activity referral scheme is available to people across the county. People over 60 can swim for free in the county. Councils are working together with partners to improve the health of vulnerable people. Deaf Direct are to run a healthy lifestyle programme for deaf adults and young people. Activities will include keep fit and sports sessions at local leisure and sports centres and a Healthy Living Course. The County Council is encouraging communities to thrive through support for local and regional schemes. Wychavon held its annual Sports Recognition Awards at the Civic Centre in Pershore and all winners were entered for the County Sports Partnership awards in March 2009.

With more older people in the county, there are areas where there are high levels of falls - a significant problem for more frail and elderly people often resulting in a loss of independence. Falls prevention training programmes currently occur at 3 specialist clinics in the hospitals in the county but numbers of patients attending falls prevention training is limited to the capacity of the clinic. NHS Worcestershire has organised 12 trainers to deliver postural stability exercise groups and falls prevention across the county, which will start in September 2009. Referral pathways have been agreed to ensure appropriate patients are identified to attend exercise classes. Well organised falls assessment and prevention help is still developing in the county.

Fewer people smoke in the county than the England average and deaths from smoking are less. Reducing smoking and smoking related deaths still further is important. The Stop Smoking services support 3,000 people each year. The number of people who stop smoking is improving, but is not high enough. Latest information suggest that whilst too many pregnant women still smoke in Worcestershire, the numbers are much lower than for the country as a whole. Smoking in pregnancy figures show that 42 per cent managed to quit for a short period but people go back to smoking.

School nurses are advising and supporting children and young people to help prevent and stop smoking. NHS Worcestershire and the Fire and Rescue Service are delivering a Heart Smart Homes Programme. Fires are often caused by smoking so they link up stop smoking clinics and Fire Safety Awareness.

Adults with learning disabilities are being given more choices about how to live independently. The County Council has listened to people with disabilities and their carers and set up a house-matching service for people with learning disabilities who want to share accommodation with people with similar interests for example. The take-up is growing. The Council is working well with its housing partners to provide the right sort of housing, and as a result two young women were matched and now share accommodation and have

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developed social lives within the community.

Some people want to live on their own but still need some support. In these cases, the County works with a national charity 'Keyring'. This acts as a go between with landlords and aims to identify a number of flats within a neighbourhood. People live with support in the flats, with a dedicated support worker living nearby.

Some people's lives are being transformed. The choice and control budgets are used to help people choose how they want to live. For example, one woman with severe learning disabilities who has lived in care for 30 years since the age of 12 is now living in a flat with support, is doing voluntary work and developing her own interests and activities.

More adults with physical disabilities and those with mental disabilities are living at home with care and support. The Council provides 24-hour personal care suites and has changed some older people's residential homes into specialist centres, for example, for people with dementia. The 'side by side' scheme for supporting people living at home with dementia (and their carers) is in place and has been expanded.

More older people are being helped to live at home, and where necessary more of these people are getting intensive care at home. And fewer older people are having lengthy waits before being discharged from hospital. People are get assessments, care packages and the equipment they need much quicker. The Council promotes Direct Payments so that older people have more choice over the help and support they need. Take up is among the highest in the country.

Helping more people live at home is great, but sometimes people feel isolated at home. The Council is trying to find out if people are happy living at home or if they feel lonely for example and what they can do about this. Rather than getting older people or disabled people to attend more traditional day centres, day care is being set up in different types of places - in the library in Malvern for example. This means that existing buildings are used giving better value for money, and it brings people into more contact with others in a more positive, social environment.

Older people who have had a serious illness often decide that they should move to a residential care home. But health partners and the Council work with people who've been referred to them to think about the choices available. For example, if someone has had a stroke, really intensive care early on is key to making as good a recovery as possible and help people live independently as a result.

People with mental health difficulties face many challenges. In Worcestershire there is not an even spread of some services for people to use. Suicide rates vary but are relatively low, but more could still be done to ensure that people get the right type of help at the right time.

There is a primary care mental health service provided to all GP practices within South Worcestershire. In Redditch, following an initial pilot, primary care practitioners (Gateway Workers) are also continuing to provide a service to 3 pilot surgeries. This service has not been extended across the locality due

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to lack of further investment. A roll out of a scheme to improve access to psychological therapies across the County should improve primary care mental health services. Within the Kidderminster locality some primary care services are provided directly though and managed by the psychology department but are separate from the services provided elsewhere.

Waiting times for assessment and onward referral to counselling vary widely across GP practices. The lack of an equitable service across the county means that many people with common mental health problems do not receive an assessment of needs or appropriate treatment. Lack of a way of getting from early help to more intensive help means that there is an extremely limited service to clients with complex psychological needs that do not have high levels of risk. People with common mental health problems are sometimes referred to specialist mental health teams for treatment when lower levels of intervention from primary care would probably meet their needs.

NHS Worcestershire have concerns about the provision of mental health services to Worcestershire prisons and substance misuse services provided to Hewell Prison. Prisoners in the county need good health care. NHS Worcestershire is working with the Prison Partnership Board to improve prison health services. This includes the need to help prisoners and their families with their mental health, drug and alcohol abuse and sexual health needs.

Given the rural nature of the area ambulance response times remain difficult to achieve. The service has consistently failed to achieve the 75 per cent emergency calls target. Demand on the ambulance service is increasing every year, and the service is currently seeing calls for emergency ambulances at the highest level ever in the West Midlands. This has resulted in the service operating under extreme pressure.

Improvements are being made with a focus on improving turnaround times at hospitals. Following an independent review the 17 West Midlands Primary Care Trusts and the Strategic Health Authority have provided an extra £10 million. The extra money will enable a recruitment and training drive to continue at the ambulance trust. The review also highlighted the need to look at new ways of delivering the service, and the need for the ambulance trust and NHS commissioners to work in partnership to agree on an appropriate level of future funding to ensure national response standards are met.

## Meeting the needs of Children and Young People

Children and young people in Worcestershire are healthier than many others. But health problems for children and young people are growing. More children are obese although still not as many as the England average. Increasing numbers of children and young people need to go to hospital because of alcohol problems especially from Redditch and Bromsgrove. Partner organisations are working to improve children and young people's health.

Exam results are not improving quickly enough. Children in the early years are not achieving at a similar level to young children in similar areas or nationally. The Council is focusing on understanding why this is and what actions are

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needed. In more deprived areas like Redditch this includes giving advice and information to parents and carers through the Children's Centres. Results pick up at age 7 but then dip overall at age 11 where again children do less well than in similar areas or nationally. The Council knows the lower, middle and upper school system, which is still in place in several areas in the county, is contributing to the lack of attainment particularly at age 11. A programme to move many schools from three tiers to two tiers is taking place, and the schools in Wyre Forest have changed so far.

Fewer children get good GCSE results. The achievement of 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C including English and Maths is below average compared to similar areas. It is improving but at a slow pace. With more consistent and steady progress, starting with the early years, the attainment for young people in Worcestershire may be at a higher level. This means that not all children and young people are given the opportunity to achieve at the highest level, and to their potential.

Where children live may affect their achievement. Redditch has a high number of schools where children achieve less than the national average, and below the average in the county. There are some issues. About ten per cent of children who live in Redditch don't go to school in Redditch with many potentially high attaining children lost to schools in Birmingham and Warwickshire. The Council knows there is a lack of fairness for those who are less well-off. To improve attainment throughout the County it has to help children and young people in Redditch increase their potential and improve their results.

Some schools are causing concern. Partners are involved with these schools to support them. The Council is encouraging schools to work as villages of schools, to share resources, identify the special resources they need and then work together. These may be around areas of learning or special needs such as autism for example.

The future for school building looks better. The County has been successful in getting accepted into the building schools for the future (BSF) programme. BSF aims to improve schools and should reduce the three tier system where needed. This programme will take some years to complete.

Children have different needs. Schools recognise the challenges that children from diverse backgrounds can bring. Funds have been given to schools for children where English is not their first language, and to more isolated schools. A team is in place for looked after children - looking at their education and making sure that suitable targets are set for them. The County have a large number of children with special needs coming into Worcestershire who are fostered.

Reviews of child protection cases show that effective practice is in place. But there are not enough social workers which means more work pressures for social workers especially with an increase in child protection cases because of increased awareness.

Youth offending is less than other similar areas. The Youth Offending Service, which is designed to help young offenders, works reasonably well.

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Children and young people have more say within the County. The 'Big Questionnaire' asked children and young people about the things that matter to them. More than 8,600 young people took part. From this the Youth Cabinet was created and the youth manifesto. This manifesto helps partners provide the right things for children and young people. The main issues are on transport, for example, cheaper transport for children and young people, and better cycling routes. Children and young people also said they wanted to be treated fairly and that most young people are not disruptive and try hard to do well at school but don't get praised for this. However, those who are disruptive are rewarded if they behave better and if you're doing extremely well you are rewarded.

Some children and young people in Worcestershire are bullied. It's in line with other similar areas but partners know that any bullying is not acceptable. The emotional health of children and young people is better than other similar areas. The Big Questionnaire asked young people about their experience of bullying. More than half of those who took part in the survey know about bullying in their school or college. But most know that their school have an anti-bullying policy in place. Plans to combat bullying are in place and the Children and Young People's action plan has recently been reviewed.

Funds are in place to make the lives of children and young people better. Children and young people are directly involved in how these funds are spent what projects should benefit. There is £250,000 a year to spend. About 180 young people are trained as assessors and many projects are agreed. Many children and young people have enjoyed being assessors, and many have benefited from how the money is spent. While some assessors are from different ethnic groups or are disabled, a challenge for this year is to get assessors to realise how difficult it can be for some children and young people to apply for funds. In Bromsgrove, the District Council uses some of its money to increase the money available to children and young people to spend on projects. This means that a wider age range of children in Bromsgrove are involved in deciding what they need compared to the rest of the county.

## Stronger Communities

Many people like living in Worcestershire. People living in Worcestershire feel strongly that they belong to their neighbourhood area. On average, they feel that they get on together - never mind what their background is - and that people respect each other.

Councils in Worcestershire talk to people and work hard to understand the different needs of their communities. People are reasonably satisfied with the way their local council runs things, and on average, people feel that can influence what happens in their area.

There are plenty of things for people to do in Worcestershire. More people are satisfied with the parks and open spaces in the county. Libraries are being updated - the library in Upton-upon-Severn was recently refurbished and a new library was built in Alvechurch. A new Worcester Library and History centre is going to be built in Worcester - and work has started to get the site ready. Some districts hold community fairs and events and many people attend these.

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Many people are pleased with the sports and leisure facilities. More children are exercising, but schools and councils are keen to encourage them to exercise even more and play more.

People are encouraged to do voluntary work in the county. There are some people who enjoy taking part in voluntary work regularly. For example, more than 500 volunteers take part in the Worcestershire Warden Scheme. They work in parks, nature reserves and public rights of way helping to improve these areas so that more people can enjoy them.

Houses are expensive in Worcestershire. House prices have dropped over the last year, but they are still expensive compared to elsewhere in the West Midlands. Houses are most expensive in Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills and Wychavon, and least expensive by a long way in Redditch. For example, the average price for a house in Bromsgrove at the start of 2009 was £236,161 compared to an average price in Redditch of £149,298. It's a big difference. And it's hard to afford houses. You need to be well off to afford to buy a house in Worcestershire and particularly in Malvern Hills. House prices in Redditch are lower, but the income that people need to buy a home is still higher than national and regional levels.

Recently fewer homes that people can afford have been built in Worcestershire compared to the West Midlands or England averages. Wyre Forest has built the most. Some councils are blocked from building more homes, and this makes it more difficult to meet people's needs. In the last year, the number of homes built that people can afford has increased. In part, this is due to the recession as developers have changed their plans and used sites to build more affordable housing, especially in places like Worcester City.

Some areas in the county have more empty homes than others despite the need for more homes. These are particularly in Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wyre Forest. These districts have more empty private sector homes than the national and regional average. They also have more empty social housing than the other districts, although they remain below the national and regional average. None of the districts can show a year on year reduction in the number of long term empty private sector homes over the last 3 years.

Rural areas need extra housing to encourage people to stay in villages and hamlets. All of the districts have identified rural areas where homes should be built. In Bromsgrove, at Stoke Prior newly built homes will be restricted to people who live or have previously lived in the parish.

Redditch is the only district in Worcestershire that has its own council housing stock. All its homes are in a good condition. However, it takes too long to re-let empty homes, and this means that people have to wait longer to move into their new home. One of the reasons for this is some tenants leaving their homes in a poor state, so the Council is talking to people about this.

Worcestershire has a growing number of older people. They sometimes need different types of housing and partners are working on a plan so that they meet those needs. This plan will be in place by December 2009. Older people often need homes that may be on just one level, need extra help to be on hand. The districts have provided homes that are more suitable for older people. In Bromsgrove, partners are planning another extra care scheme at

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Perryfields. This is being designed to have bungalows with easily manageable gardens suitable for more independent older people as well as extra-care facilities for those who need more help.

The gypsy and traveller community have different needs that also must be met. These needs have been assessed and show that 112 more pitches are needed, along with two extra sites for show people and four temporary stopping places which can cope with up to 20 pitches each. The biggest number of gypsy and travellers are in Wychavon, and very recently a number of new sites have had the go ahead. In Bromsgrove, funds are available to improve some sites already in place.

Not everyone has a roof over their head. Being homeless is a real problem for some people in Worcestershire. Plans are in place to provide better help for people and these also look at people's different needs. The plans also deal with the needs of more vulnerable people for example people leaving prison, drug users and young people leaving care. In Bromsgrove, a Foyer scheme is being built - this is a half way house for younger people leaving prison before they move on to live on their own. In Worcester City, the Bubble project gives support and somewhere to live to young people aged between 16 and 24 years. And this is helping meet the needs of vulnerable people.

Some people are living in temporary accommodation for too long. In Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills and Wyre Forest homeless people spent longer in bed and breakfast accommodation in 2007/08 than in 2006/07. People in Bromsgrove and Malvern Hills spent longer than the six week maximum at 15 weeks and eight weeks respectively. In Redditch and Bromsgrove people spent on average about ten weeks in hostels which is a decrease for people in Bromsgrove but an increase for people in Redditch on the previous year. Malvern Hills is also using hostels, and the average length of stay has increased every year for the last three years to 12 weeks in 2007/08. Living in temporary accommodation is disruptive for people - so the less time people have to spend here, the better.

Good advice given at the right time can help stop people from becoming homeless. In Redditch, advice about what choices people have about housing is helping to stop more people from becoming homeless.

Many people find it hard to afford to keep their homes warm. Very recently, the whole of the county has been thermally mapped, and people can see the information on the internet. This information shows detailed levels of heat loss from properties and advice will be given on how to reduce this. But in the last three years, only Redditch and Wychavon can show that energy ratings have got better in private homes which were hard to heat and keep warm. In 2008, Malvern Hills said that 25 per cent of private homes were hard to keep warm - this is far higher than many other areas. The district councils are all giving advice and information on insulation and grants that may be available.

Many thousands of new homes will be needed across the county in the next fifteen years. There are plans to build many of these in the south Worcestershire area. Plans are at very early stages, and a lot of public consultation will be needed. Good roads and public transport systems will be needed, along with shops, schools, GP surgeries for example, to support this increase in the number of people. Difficult decisions will have to be taken in coming months and years to ensure that these very large projects are

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delivered. This will be a very big challenge for the councils and other organisations involved.

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CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

Alternative formats - If you require a copy of PDF documents in this site in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call: 0844 798 7070

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