

South Worcestershire Development Plan
Orchard House
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I am writing in to this consultation both as a local resident in the Malvern Hills and as the Member of Parliament for West Worcestershire. The response reflects my own personal views as a resident of the Malvern Hills District and those that I have heard from constituents.

I welcome the efforts of the three councils to work together to deliver a locally-owned plan which avoids the top down targets of the Regional Spatial Strategy. This will allow a locally-owned strategic approach to the growth of South Worcestershire linking housing, employment land development and the appropriate infrastructure improvements.

The three local councils have developed an evidence base for their population projections. It is notable that the growth in the number of residents who are aged 65 and above is a very significant factor in the increased need for housing. Allowing infrastructure development, employment growth and family housing will help to attract and keep younger people of working age in South Worcestershire.

A Five Year Vision

Although I understand that the plan needs to look ahead to 2030 in order to develop a strategic approach to infrastructure, it is important to have a five-year land supply for housing and employment. Forecasts become more uncertain the further out they go. Emphasizing the different five year phases more clearly in the plan documents would be helpful for residents who may have very different time horizons.

Windfall sites

In my consultation response to the National Planning Policy Framework, I was keen to stress the importance of the ability to include estimates of potential windfall sites in the strategic plan, where locally supportable.

Windfall sites deliver hundreds of new homes in our area each year. Over the last decade, Wychavon DC and Malvern Hills DC have together built 200-300 homes

each year. Although it is hard to predict where the sites will be, the numbers are quite consistent.

Should the Minister agree this change to the NPPF, the three South Worcestershire Councils should make strong and supportable estimates for windfalls, which should both be admissible in the plan and also form part of the strategic vision. On their own, windfall sites can provide 6,000 homes over the next 20 years. I am convinced that individual parishes would be able to work with their district councilors to find further windfall Brownfield sites to grow this number. Most importantly, this will reduce the pressure on Greenfield sites.

I also welcome an initiative from Wychavon to explicitly share the New Homes Bonus with parishes which make land available for development. This is a huge incentive for parishes to develop neighbourhood plans and identify development land.

Parishes should also be encouraged to develop their own plans and not find themselves 'categorized' by planners. Parishes are themselves accountable to their electorate and the 'Localism' principle encourages them to have a greater say in their evolution. The strategic plan must take account of this principle.

Green Space Protection

Over the last 18 months, one of the clearest voices of complaint has been the threat of the erosion of our green spaces, many of which now define our villages surrounding Worcester.

I am particularly concerned about the language used in the plan. The continued reference to the ugly phrase 'urban extension' sets the wrong tone for this document and is 'city-focused' rather than 'community-focused'. People who live in villages surrounding have chosen this village life over town dwelling. They do not want to see their communities swallowed up by the city and to them, the threat of urban sprawl is a continued concern. Perhaps the more neutral word "suburb" could be used?

I would therefore request that, within this plan, there is a strategy for the designation of green belt and green spaces acting as a boundary both for individual villages and the city. In particular, the green area between Worcester and Hallow, Worcester and Lower Broadheath, Rushwick and Kempsey is highly valued by constituents.

Agricultural Land

The plan must also pay close regard to the way that we protect our precious agricultural land. We depend on farmers and their produce and top quality prime agricultural land must be preserved for farming as much as possible. As transport costs increase, local food production will become ever more important. A twenty-year strategic plan must acknowledge this and protect this vital local resource. Although it is inevitable that some development will encroach on agricultural land, every effort must be made by the local plan to minimize and delay this and to allow development in areas of lower environmental value and especially Brownfield sites.

Similarly, we must endeavour to protect our woodlands and hedgerows. They form an integral part of the appeal of our countryside and it is a natural resource that should be protected from eradication by land developers.

Community green spaces are essential to encourage community cohesion. I would like to see playing fields designated and protected. The Malvern Hills Conservators are a historic example of how correctly protecting and designating local land use is valuable for the long term.

In the Severn, Avon and Teme valleys, development on flood plains is wrong and must be avoided.

I would also suggest that the plan considers a route towards extending the Malvern Hills designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty into the Teme Valley. This would add value from a tourism perspective and protect some of the beautiful hills and valley surrounding the Malvern Hills.

Infrastructure

The impact of the projected population increase will lead to future challenges for the provision of healthcare, education and employment. These are significant challenges and should not be underestimated.

Of principal concern is the impact of more cars and passengers on the road and rail network. The Southern Link Road is already over-capacity and our motorway junctions are all operating beyond capacity at peak times. The full dualling of the railway line to Oxford, the expansion of signaling capacity at Worcester and the establishment of a Norton parkway station are all important strategic goals for the railway network.

We must do all we can to encourage people who can to work from home and investment in faster broadband will help this. However, until this aim is delivered, the majority of local people will still travel to work by car. Urgent plans must be developed to enhance our road network and housing development, particularly West of the River Severn must be contingent on improved transport links being in place.

Yours faithfully,

Harriett Baldwin