



## **Planning Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

### **South Warwickshire Economic Strategy (SWES) 2023-2028**

#### **Consultation February-March 2023 JPC Response**

### **1. Overview**

The SWES was issued for consultation by the Stratford and Warwick partnership in February and the period concludes on 31<sup>st</sup> March. As one would expect there is major overlap between the SWES and the Local Plan (SWLP) and there are many references to the Local Plan in this document. The SWES is a much shorter document than the SWLP partly because it is a narrower focus and shorter time period. It also draws on the same information particularly the HEDNA report. The detailed proposals are contained in pages 19-22 and this is a useful shortcut for the JPC and the community to explore the ideas in the strategy. The document raises many of the same issues as the SWES so much of the following will be familiar to the town.

### **2. Timescale and Framework**

The Councils have chosen to make the strategy period only 5 years. This is an odd decision as the Local Plan is for 25 years, and economic issues are not susceptible to short term changes in the main. The SWES is also a target free zone and almost all the objectives and proposals lack any quantification and are not SMART so cannot be tested. This makes evaluation of the chosen options very difficult. When this document is approved each Council will prepare an action plan for their district. The plan is scheduled for approval in the summer.

### **3. Vision and Objectives**

The vision hinges on three priorities People, Productivity and Place. These are all valid categories, however as the overriding concern in both plans is the Climate Emergency it is strange that the Environment has not been used as a separately identified category. As will be seen below this also affects how some of the priorities are identified and developed.

#### **4. Core Opportunity Area (COA)**

There is a core opportunity area identified in the SWES which centres on Warwick and Stratford themselves but then covers a very large East-West corridor. This area ends well to the South and East of Henley and the surrounding villages. This has enormous implications for the future of the town. It means that the potential housing growth in the SWLP will inevitably be unsustainable and there will be little if any structural investment in the town. There are logical reasons for many of the places for example Leamington being included in the COA to achieve high growth in the sub-region. The impact on Henley of being well outside this area will nevertheless be very substantial. It is not surprising that modern scientific, electronic, digital and industrial sectors are being emphasised. The doubt is how this affects or benefits places like Henley/Beaudesert.

#### **5. Infrastructure**

There are no references in the SWES plans for the crucial infrastructure concerns of Henley residents to be addressed. There are no road rail or bus plans which are directly relevant to the area. There are no plans to deal with local water and flooding. There will obviously be no financial assistance to create commercial, scientific or technological opportunities in the town as these will be concentrated in the COA.

#### **6. Housing**

The housing chapter is the least well integrated topic in the document. Although it cross refers to the SWLP it only mentions three points none of which are in the draft Local Plan. These are worth addressing in more detail:-

##### **Objective 2 - To increase the provision of affordable housing**

1. Encourage and support the provision of 100% affordable housing schemes across South Warwickshire in accordance with Local Plan policy
- 2 Explore with partners the potential for affordable keyworker accommodation targeted at the service and hospitality sectors
- 3 Deliver additional housing that meets the needs of South Warwickshire through Milverton Homes Local Housing Company

These are not directly related to SDC policies and point 1 appears to be a direct contradiction of SDC strategies and do not seem to have direct relevance to the Henley area. 100% affordable housing development would only be possible with enormous public subsidy which will not be available.

#### **7. Connectivity and Transport**

In the SWLP the presence of good public transport connections was a critical reason for choosing growth options. In particular the presence of a rail station was mentioned as fundamental. In the public consultation in Henley last month the problems with roads, rail and bus services were a very high priorities for improvement. There are no

proposals in the SWES to even evaluate this and certainly no intention to invest to deal with the many facets of the problem.

## **8. Town Centres**

It is good to see the problems of Town Centres being identified for action. It is not clear whether or not Henley might benefit from these initiatives and this would be an area to explore with the partnership. The draft only mentions working with Town councils not Parish Councils.

## **9. Culture, Heritage and Tourism**

Culture, Heritage and Tourism are critical issues for South Warwickshire which is one of the richest areas in Britain in all three. This is true for Henley and we highlighted this in the response to the SWLP. Economically there seems little doubt that the prosperity of Henley and the surrounding villages will depend on successfully harnessing the potential of the historic assets, buildings on the facilities and services already established. The SWLP and the SWES give insufficient emphasis to these areas of the local economy. In fact, tourism and culture are almost treated as a problem because of the presence of low wage employment. Little thought appears to have been given to the spreading of the positive benefits of this superb heritage throughout the sub-region.

## **10. Summary and Conclusion**

There are many interesting ideas and suggestions in the SWES, and the focus of many of the policies is sensible and understandable. The strategy excludes the whole of the wider Henley area from the priority Core Opportunity Area. The SWES as a result does not integrate well with the issues identified by the community in the Local Plan discussions as critical to its future. The conclusion that we are forced to reach is that Henley/Beautesert can only support limited housing development over the SWLP period because the other factors which make development sustainable are neither available nor priority to the sub-regional authorities.

Cllr Richard Clark - JPC P&DWP  
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