

Locality master plans – Ross-on-Wye

1. About Ross-on-Wye Locality

With 23,400 residents (13% of the county's population), the Ross-on-Wye locality has the second largest population of the nine localities in Herefordshire and covers 278 km². It is situated in the south of the county and shares a border with Gloucestershire to the south east and Monmouthshire to the south west.

The area contains 26 parishes (inc. Ross-on-Wye parish), which reach from Brockhampton in the north east to Welsh Newton and Ganarew at the county's southern tip. Outside of the town the largest villages are Walford, Llangarron and Whitchurch; other smaller villages which act as service centres are Goodrich, Weston-under-Penyard and Lea. The area is well connected by road with the M50/A40 as well as a number of other A-roads running through the locality. There are no rail routes that serve the area. The county town of Monmouth is nearer than Hereford for the south of the locality (including Ross town), whilst Gloucester is around the same distance (30 minutes by car).

2. Services required

As a market town, Ross-on-Wye serves the needs of its residents, as well as those of the surrounding rural areas. In asset terms there is currently a requirement for Council services (including library, customer services, registration service arrangements, cemetery, primary and secondary education, children's and family services, household waste site, sports facilities, cultural offer), integrated health and social care services, blue light services and voluntary services. Parish and town councils are also likely to have more responsibility for the delivery of services needed by local communities and their needs need to be explored through the emerging Locality partnerships. A location plan of assets and a legend of facilities is supplied as part of this paper.

Two retained fire stations at Ross and Whitchurch, both will remain.

Police station in Ross.

3. Steps already taken

In January 2011 the former Tudorville Youth Centre was transferred from council ownership to a community trust with a revenue saving of c.£20k per annum and the removal of a £150k backlog maintenance liability.

In February 2011 the council vacated Swan House which was leased for the purposes of accommodating Ross INFO, TIC and Social Care Locality Services. These services were relocated to an extended and modernised Ross Library building to provide an integrated customer services offer. The TIC facility was integrated into the Heritage Centre to create a visitor centre serving the south of the county. The revenue savings from the disposal of Swan House were c.£125k per annum.

In April 2011 work was completed at the Ryefield Centre to incorporate a multi-agency office to facilitate flexible locality working for children's services professionals and staff from supporting agencies.

West Mercia Police has recently undertaken a substantial refurbishment of its Old Maids Walk premises. This property has very limited spare capacity and this, as well as a restricted covenant means relocation is unlikely in the medium term.

4. Asset reviews

A series of asset reviews have been undertaken within the county over the past 12 months. Potential options including the identification of opportunities for services to co-locate, as well as those properties no longer suitable for service delivery and therefore surplus to operational requirements and available for disposal (either to achieve a capital receipt or a community asset transfer) have all been assessed with the following objectives:

- More effective/efficient use of assets
- Improved public access to services
- Increased co-location and co-working across all sectors
- Reduced revenue expenditure by sharing and redesigning services
- Reduced county carbon footprint

5. Proposed work programme for locality

- Ongoing support has been given to set up a Community Interest Company to manage the Wilton Sports Centre and it is hoped that the first phase of a community asset transfer will be completed on 25th September this year.

As part of the overall work undertaken at a locality level, there are three potential assets that have been identified for disposal:

- As a result of the completion of the Ross customer services project, there is an area of land adjacent to the library which has now been declared surplus. As this land was initially acquired to enable that project, it is proposed that this is now disposed of in order to reconcile the overspend that has occurred in delivering this project.
- There is a possibility that a property known as 47a New Street, will become surplus in the near future as Wye Valley NHS is undertaking a review of its accommodation needs within the locality.
- During August 2011 the management of the Chestnuts Residential Home for the Elderly surrendered their lease and that property in the freehold ownership of Herefordshire Council and able to be disposed of at an estimated value of £1m.

6. Other work underway

- Ross-on-Wye along a number of other parishes in the locality (Kings Caple, Upton Bishop, Walford, Weston-under-Penyard and Whitchurch & Ganarew Group), have produced a Community Led Plan. Others, such as Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group, are at advanced stage in producing theirs.
- Discussions between Hereford and Worcester Fire and West Midlands Ambulance Trust have indicated the potential for co-location of services on the Hildersley site of the fire station.
- In July 2011, the Director for Places and Communities and the Strategic Asset Manager met with the Head teacher and representatives of Governors of John Kyrle High School with the option of co-locating youth and leisure facilities onto the school site. This is a very ambitious, long term proposal which would involve the refurbishment of the existing sports hall, relocating the swimming pool to the school site, as well as the transfer of the youth opportunities currently provided for at the Hill Street Centre. Also involved would be the disposal of the former Hildersley playing fields site and the development of new playing fields facility on land at Brampton Road, close to the school. This total project is likely to cost in the region of £6m and will need to be worked up in conjunction with the proposals for new housing allocations within the LDF and will require the approval of Sport England as a statutory consultee, given the disposal of playing fields. Initial discussions and a high level feasibility study are being undertaken with a view to presenting these to the School Management Team and Halo Leisure at the end of September. Further feedback as to whether the proposal is feasible will also be provided at the end of September.
- Locality services for health and social care are primarily based at the Ross Community Hospital although some dedicated space has been made available at the Ross Library building using some spare capacity identified within the registrars accommodation. There are aspirations from Pendeen GP surgery to relocate and expand. No site has yet been identified