

PILOT LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT: EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR HEREFORDSHIRE

Herefordshire's Journey to Prosperity Action to 2020

1. PURPOSE

This paper sets out the case for a Local Area Agreement for Herefordshire. The paper has been prepared following discussions with Government Office for the West Midlands and has been developed with the full support of the Board of Herefordshire's Local Strategic Partnership (The Herefordshire Partnership).

The Herefordshire Partnership Board includes representatives of Herefordshire Council, Advantage West Midlands, West Mercia Constabulary, Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, Business Link West Mercia, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Learning and Skills Council, Herefordshire Association of Local Councils, Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly and an observer from Government Office for the West Midlands.

Letters of support from key partners are attached.

2. VISION

A Local Area Agreement would provide Herefordshire with a significantly enhanced opportunity to continue on its journey to prosperity. The proposal is to deliver our shared fifteen year vision with local partners to tackle disadvantage and transform the economy of the County by 2020.

The vision is focused on transforming the local economy, with Hereford City as the hub driving the regeneration of the whole County. This reinforces the role identified for Hereford as a sub-regional employment and service centre in Regional Planning Guidance.

Our Vision is that:

Herefordshire is a place where people, business and an outstanding natural environment will together bring about sustainable prosperity and well-being for all.

The diagram attached at Appendix 1 illustrates how this vision will be turned into reality using the Local Area Agreement as a focus for co-ordinated action.

3. CONTEXT – THE NEED FOR ACTION

Herefordshire is a rural County of some 176,900 people situated in a peripheral location on the edge of the West Midlands Region adjacent to the Welsh Border. The County is one of the most sparsely populated counties in England. About one-third of the population lives in Hereford City, a third in the market towns and a third in rural areas.

Herefordshire is one of England's 42 lagging rural areas as defined by DEFRA on the basis of a basket of socio-economic indicators. The County's rural regeneration needs are recognised by the European Commission and the UK Government, with much of the County having Objective 2 status. The majority of the County also forms part of Advantage West Midlands Rural Regeneration Zone.

The City of Hereford lies at the heart of the County with a population of approximately 60,000 people. It performs the role of the main employment and service centre serving the County and is the main place which people look to for jobs, shopping, training etc. The City includes the South Wye area, where some 16,000 people live largely in former Council housing. The South Wye area has been the subject of an SRB Programme since 1998, and has achieved significant success in attracting funding - drawing some £7.5 million investment to the area, which, alongside a successful Education Action Zone, has made a substantial difference to basic skill levels. Despite some progress, there is clear evidence that South Wye continues to be an area of urban deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 confirmed that five of the ten super output areas (layer one) that make up South Wye are within the 25% most deprived in the Country.

The State of Herefordshire report provides a detailed analysis of the County's position against a range of recognised indicators. Please see www.herefordshirepartnership.com to view a full copy of the report.

In summary, the headline issues which the County needs to address are:

- **An ageing population**
- **Out-migration of young people**
- **A low skills base**
- **Low incomes**
- **A vulnerable, low value-added industrial structure**
- **Diversity – managing change in the cultural mix of the community**

4. ACTION PROPOSED

In essence, the action proposed is to bring together existing regeneration programmes in Hereford City (linked to the Objective 2 spider - the geographic focus of this European Structural Funds programme in Herefordshire) into a single transformational regeneration programme to ensure that Hereford is able to succeed as a major sub-regional employment, service and retail centre that will act as a focus for the long term regeneration of the whole County.

The action will concentrate on prioritisation, partnership and pooling of budgets a single Hereford City programme based on delivering:

- Higher skills
- Better infrastructure
- Higher paid jobs

The concrete outcomes will be:

- a vibrant and prosperous City centre
- a successful and prosperous community in South Wye, including an unblocked Rotherwas Industrial Estate
- the Herefordshire Learning Village

These outcomes will in turn have a significant impact on rural Herefordshire including its market towns and will help to maintain balance in the County's economy.

This approach will deliver joined up action and ensure a step change in the City's performance. The joined-up approach will also ensure more efficient delivery of individual programmes consistent with the Government's drive for efficiency. A single programme will provide reduced management and monitoring costs and will ensure the opportunity for shared procurement, as well as providing the basis for linking activities in individual programmes to produce better overall results.

If we don't take action the unacceptable alternative is that Hereford and Herefordshire become a steadily declining backwater, robbed of vibrancy and dynamism, and so unable to make a full contribution to the life of the West Midlands Region.

5. WHAT WILL BE ACHIEVED

Targets will be set for the four key blocks set out below which the Government has identified as the focus for the second phase of Local Area Agreements:

- Children and Young People
- Safer and Stronger Communities
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Economic Development and Enterprise

Our agreement will negotiate local priorities and targets for each of these blocks within the context of the national picture. The economic development block will be seen as the key driver and the following specific outcomes will have been achieved by 2020:

- Income levels raised – reducing the gap between Herefordshire and West Midlands average by at least 50%
- Skill levels raised – at least 10% more people at NVQ Level 3 and above

- Targets will be negotiated for substantial gains in terms of health, safety and older people contributing to their communities, with more older people in the workforce as a result of having gained higher level skills.

At the end of the Local Area Agreement Herefordshire will have:

- A sustainable economy, with reduced reliance on outside intervention
- A high-skilled more prosperous population.
- A dynamic partnership leading a process of continual renewal on the journey to prosperity

6. HOW HEREFORDSHIRE WILL DELIVER

Governance

See diagram setting out governance arrangements at Appendix 2.

It is proposed that the Local Area Agreement will be managed by the Herefordshire Partnership Board as an integral part of the delivery of the reviewed Herefordshire Plan (scheduled for January 2006). Strategic decisions, performance management and reporting arrangements, will be overseen by the Board.

The day to day implementation and co-ordination of the agreement will be managed by a dedicated Executive Steering Group of the main partners. This will form part of its wider remit for the delivery of the Herefordshire Plan and LPSA 2G.

Strong linkages will be established with the existing local delivery partnerships in Hereford and it is proposed that a local co-ordinating group is established at which the Chairs of the existing delivery partnerships are brought together to review progress and act as a standing consultation mechanism, as well as to ensure that implementation is devolved to the local community wherever that's the best way to get results.

The Council, will be responsible for leading the Partnership in the delivery of the Local Area Agreement. It will be the accountable body for pooled and dedicated funding. This will be buttressed by clear agreed accountabilities of individual partners for their respective contributions.

Community consultation

Community consultation will be undertaken on the basis of the consultation principles set out in the Council's Community Involvement Strategy, a copy of which is attached for information at Appendix 3.

Delivery

The Local Area Agreement will be delivered by pooling a range of mainstream and external funding programmes into a single Hereford City programme which will be directed at addressing the key priorities identified in the agreement. It is estimated that expenditure in excess of £100 million will be involved. Much of this will need to be committed by the Council and its partners but there will also be a requirement for

substantial match funding from outside sources such as Advantage West Midlands, Government and the European Union.

This programme will be delivered by the creation of a dedicated team within Herefordshire Council's Social and Economic Regeneration Service working closely with key officers from a range of other Council services, and with nominated staff from other partners in the Local Strategic Partnership.

7. STRONG TRACK RECORD

Partnership Achievements

Herefordshire has a strong track record of effective partnerships and can also demonstrate a track record of piloting new Government initiatives.

As one of twenty-two New Commitment to Regeneration Pathfinder Authorities, Herefordshire was one of the first areas in the Country to establish a Local Strategic Partnership and to complete a Community Plan. The Herefordshire Partnership and Herefordshire Plan have been at the forefront of LSP and Community Planning development and continue to be held up nationally and regionally as examples of good practice.

The Partnership continues to mature. Improvements are being made to its Performance Management framework, so that it focuses on key performance indicators, targets and accountabilities for delivery. The individual partners have a strong track record of quality service delivery. Herefordshire Council is a 'Good' authority and the Primary Care Trust, West Mercia Constabulary, and Learning and Skills Council are also high performers.

The Partnership has been in operation since 1998 and has effectively overseen the delivery of the Herefordshire Plan. Key achievements include:

- Securing Rural Regeneration Zone and Objective 2 status
- Securing and delivering a successful Education Action Zone and South Wye SRB Programme
- Delivering Lifelong Learning activity linked to voluntary sector providers
- Cultural Pathfinder
- Putting Sustainability at the heart of activity in a ground breaking partnership with the Bulmer Foundation and Forum for the Future
- Crisis Management – successfully dealing with Foot and Mouth and Fuel crisis
- Successful LPSA leading to negotiations on LPSA 2
- Developing a dynamic partnership owned Economic Development Strategy
- A successful Sure Start initiative

The partnership has made significant progress against some of the key indicators in the State of Herefordshire report. For example between 2000-01 and 2003-04 Herefordshire's employment rate increased from 77.9% to 78.6% significantly outperforming the West Midlands and Great Britain. Another key area where there

has been some success has been the increase in the percentage of working age adults qualified to at least NVQ Levels 2 and 3, further work is however required to improve percentage of working age adults qualified to NVQ Level 4 which will be a key driver for the local economy.

Existing Activity

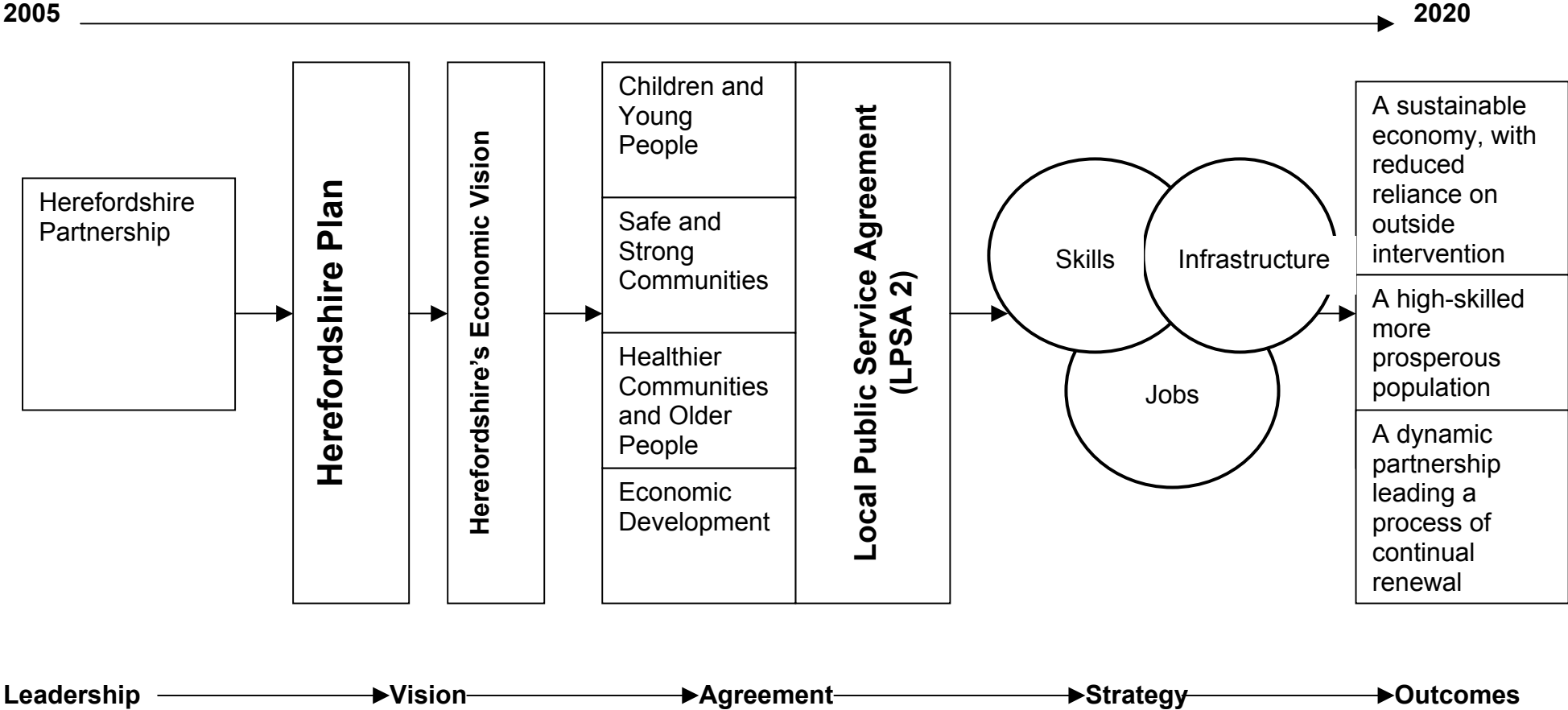
There is an existing focus on a number of closely linked individual priorities which support Hereford City's role as the hub driving the regeneration of the County.

The key priority projects and programmes each with their individual management and funding arrangements include:

- The South Wye SRB Programme
- Edgar Street Grid redevelopment
- Hereford City Centre Regeneration
- Rotherwas Access Road
- Herefordshire In Touch SRB Programme
- Herefordshire Learning Village

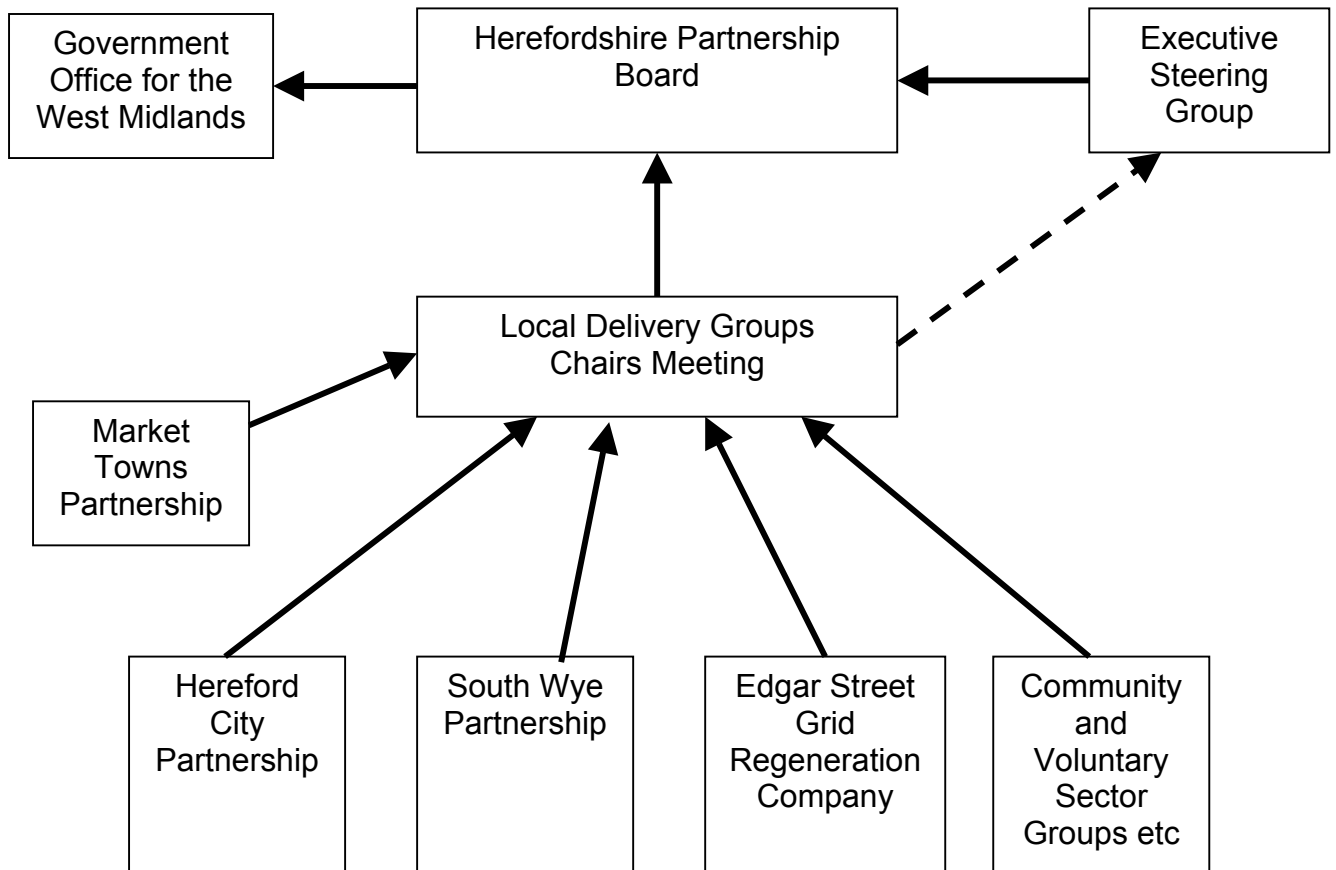
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HEREFORDSHIRE LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT



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Proposed Governance Arrangements



Appendix 3

Consultation Principles

Opinion should be informed

Consultation will aim to seek informed public opinion and not just instant reaction. Whenever possible, the council's communication mechanisms will be used alongside consultation to inform and stimulate public interest, particularly in relation to major strategic and countywide issues.

Decisions should be based on evidence

The council will adopt clear processes of consultation that, wherever possible, produce results that are measurable and can be evaluated objectively.

Purpose should be clear

Any consultation will contain a clear statement describing why it is being carried out and how the results will be used. The way the consultation links to the council's wider corporate aims, work programmes and statutory policy framework will also be described.

Consultation should be well planned and timely

Consultees will be given adequate time to prepare their response. It is recognised that the length of time will vary depending on the time of year and the level of response that is being sought. Sufficient time will be allowed for the results of consultation to be collated, analysed and considered, so that the results of consultation feed directly into the decision making process.

Consultation should be inclusive

Consultation will aim to be inclusive. To achieve this, the council will give particular consideration to the needs of people with impaired sight or hearing or who have learning difficulties; people whose first language is not English or who cannot read at all and people who might have problems with physical access such as people in wheelchairs and people with pushchairs. In addition, the council will take steps to ensure that the views of younger people, older people, people from ethnic minority communities and others whose views are frequently excluded or overlooked, are actively sought as part of consultation that is inclusive and representative of the community as a whole.

Methods should be appropriate and well-managed

The council will use a wide range of public consultation methods. They will be used appropriately, reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of each method and will be

managed with a clear understanding of the particular skills, knowledge and resources that consultation requires.

Results should be acknowledged and fully considered

The full range of views expressed during consultation will be acknowledged and attention drawn to areas of agreement and disagreement. The results of public consultation will be weighed carefully together with other evidence and considerations.

Accessible feedback should be given

Accessible feedback will be provided both on the results of consultation and on how they have been used, in order to encourage greater public participation in the future.

Effectiveness should be evaluated

The effectiveness of major public consultation will be evaluated and the results shared to encourage broader lessons to be learned. Evaluation will consider not only the number of responses received but also the quality, cost and timeliness of the consultation and the overall usefulness of the results in helping to inform decisions.