

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to bring forward the draft Herefordshire Local Plan - Core Strategy 2011 - 2031 (draft) for consideration by Council. This represents a key milestone and follows extensive public engagement beginning in 2007. It has been shaped by research, evidence, a series of public consultations, debate and discussions with neighbouring authorities, statutory undertakers and many others during the intervening period.

Thanks are due to all those who in whatever capacity or from whatever perspective have contributed to the formulation of this plan through an incremental process over the past six years. Your contribution has not gone unheard and has helped to test and shape our thinking throughout this time.

The Core Strategy and our efforts have focused relentlessly on the critical issues that relate to the way in which Herefordshire and its communities develop in the period up to 2031 and those areas that are crucial to its success.

The strategy must be viewed as part of a much bigger picture or jigsaw that includes a broad range of priorities that are inextricably linked and when combined will drive the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the County. Ultimately however, it will be the economic development that paves the way for a more prosperous and sustainable future and promotes social and environmental progress.

The reason for this can be clearly demonstrated by the wide research and evidence that has been gathered over a long period. This can be emphasised by the recently published *Understanding Herefordshire 2013: An integrated needs assessment*.

The challenges arise from significant demographic pressures that are building within Herefordshire are as a result of a fall in the number of children in the county since 2001, a population this is ageing more rapidly than many other parts of the UK, the resultant increase in the costs associated with adult social care; and the growth in our population over the last decade that is more than double that originally estimated.

Together with a demonstrable housing shortage including that which is affordable with Herefordshire having the worst housing affordability ratio (house prices remain at 8.6 annual earnings) in the West Midlands, an economic output that is low compared to regionally and nationally, has persistently low wages and an increase in the number of households experiencing fuel poverty (24% or around a fifth).

Changes to the national and local economic situation during the planning period have been factored into the strategy with proposed growth reflecting this. It is believed that when combined with the development of essential infrastructure, the strategy provides for a more robust and justifiable plan.

The long term future and sustainability of Herefordshire is at the heart of the plan and the strategy unquestionably marks a significant shift in this direction and provides a firm basis on which future generations can build.

This plan recognises the value and importance of our environment, our buildings, our landscape, towns, villages and rural way of life and is reinforced by the commitment that we have made to Neighbourhood Planning and the significant progress being made in this

regard. I believe that this strategy when combined with advantages of Neighbourhood Development Plans offers the best opportunity for communities to shape their own development within the overarching strategic direction provided by the Local Plan - Core Strategy 2011 – 2031 (draft).

Whilst I see the Core Strategy's passage through Council as an important stage in the process I would not wish anyone to believe that there can be any room for complacency.

There will be ongoing work and dialogue with stakeholders including the publication and making available of the documents that the Council intends to submit to the Secretary of State; who through the appointed inspector will test its legal compliance and soundness.

Even then the Core Strategy will not be set in stone but will be subject to regular review throughout its life enabling it to respond to changing circumstances.

I believe that the proposed Local Plan - Core Strategy 2011 – 2031(draft) will provide the framework for the future prosperity of Herefordshire and those who live, work and play here.

Russell B. Hamilton
Cabinet Member Environment, Housing & Planning

"Change is the law of life. And those who only look to the past or present are certain to miss the future" - John F. Kennedy