



Worcestershire's Strategy for Restart and Recovery

September | 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to the Worcestershire economy. The initial economic shock has been substantial and is expected to lead to a period of global and UK recession, local areas face immediate challenges impacting across all sectors, businesses and jobs.

Worcestershire County Council, District Councils, Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and business support organisations continue to face the urgent task of understanding the evolving implications and how Worcestershire can respond effectively. This has required a rapid diagnosis of the local economic conditions and their impacts.

In order to support the economic recovery and growth over the next 2 -3 years, the county needs to deliver a longer-term strategy to respond to inevitable changes in the business environment and markets across our communities, linking to government's plans to create a cleaner more resilient economy.

Working together, the county and district authorities along with the regulators and representatives of the business community, the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Business, Worcestershire Regulatory services, the NFU and Worcestershire Business Central have met regularly since March to develop an economic recovery framework.

The strategy for Restart and Recovery has focused on five key areas:

- 1** Accelerating investment in major schemes;
- 2** Delivering coordinated, timely and accurate information about national programmes to the business community;
- 3** Focussing and enhancing current business support programmes available across Worcestershire and Greater Birmingham LEP Areas to support recovery;
- 4** The use of direct resources to support specific demands and opportunities including the Here2Help initiative.
- 5** Ensuring we have the best information we can – national analysis and local data.

This strategy is driven from analysis of the impact of Covid-19 across key components of the local and regional economy. This includes the delivery of two business surveys to establish relevant baseline data and establishing performance measures that, when monitored over time, will inform and prioritise further interventions.

Seven Priority Areas:

In response, plans have been developed across seven priority themes, the aim of the plans are to guide investment that is needed to build future resilience against the changing economic environment and the impact on markets. Areas such as the role of high streets, the demand and supply of commercial property, transport operations and tourism.

1. Business Intelligence

Developing our evidence base, we will gather and analyse research and business intelligence as well as undertaking local business surveys to inform the county's response. We will work closely with our local business support organisations to understand findings from their members and utilise this information. We will share the findings with government to inform on how they can support our local economy, highlighting issues we feel are critical to Worcestershire.



IT/Cyber



Manufacturing



Tourism and
Leisure



Construction



Health and Care



Agriculture and
Horticulture



Creative Tech

What the Business Said: Worcestershire Business Restart & Recovery Survey - June 2020

The summary of results is based on a total of 301 responses received to the online survey during June 2020.

Almost 50% of respondents said their business was **either in survival mode with the majority of staff furloughed** or ticking over with **staff furloughed** but **still operating** to some degree.

9.6% of respondents stated that the **business was in crisis**; **40%** of these are in the **tourism, hospitality & retail** sector.

54% of businesses had furloughed staff; over **one third of businesses** furloughing staff have furloughed between **81-100% of their workforce**.

59% of businesses said that they have staff **working from home**; almost **50%** of these have **81% or more** of workforce working from home.

Other actions taken; the **largest proportion of respondents** said that they had **to adapt** products and services (**45.8%**) followed by temporary business closure (**33.3%**) and reduced employee working hours (**25.3%**).

2. Information for businesses

We will ensure as a partnership that businesses are routed through our local growth hubs Worcestershire Business Central (WBC) and the Greater Birmingham & Solihull Growth Hub (for businesses in the north of the county); and we will ensure that a consistent message is communicated to our business community.

The partnership will continue to seek the views of business to ensure information continues to be relevant and is provided in multiple formats, e-shots, telephone calls, website and webinars through all

partners; an ongoing active programme of e-shots and webinars hosted by various partners covering specific and generic issues have been scheduled with over 80 events planned/delivered to date. Focus will also be placed on key themes to promote locally including preparation for EU Exit.

As government announces further support for businesses WBC will filter relevant information, scheme criteria etc and communicate with the wider partnership and relevant businesses.



3. Business support

Worcestershire already has a comprehensive business support offer, partners are reviewing current provision and exploring the opportunity to repurpose existing work streams. New developments under existing work streams include:

- A new Innovation platform, providing an ask, search, find facility, collaboration space and advice from experts
- Here2Help Business – A new £3.5m programme launched by Worcestershire County Council July 2020
- Partners have risen to the challenge of ensuring government funding reaches local business e.g. Business Support Grants (£124.5m Business Support Grants administered by district councils)
- Development of an enhanced growth hub service
- Elevate technology - digital adoption (supporting the implementation of new technology and applications),
- Elevate Growth – focus on recovery and resilience support.
- Enterprising Worcestershire - support for start-ups and early stage businesses.
- Step Forward - a programme that is available to businesses in the North of Worcestershire via GBSLEP
- Opportunities within the Low carbon sector, and support for improved resource and energy efficiency.

Additional support is required in the following areas:

- Manufacturing – supporting smart factory concepts, onshoring of operations and supply chain resilience
- Recognising the opportunities a green recovery will bring to the local economy
- Graduate Employment Leadership and Management
- Opportunities in the health and care sector and the demand for increased technological solutions
- New Service and Product Development, supporting companies to identify new markets
- Providing flexible business incubators and flexible workspaces
- Encouraging investment into Worcestershire





4. Transport and Infrastructure:

With new ways of working, there will need to be recognition that improved digital and energy infrastructure will be key to rapid economic recovery. Investment particularly in digital infrastructure – both broadband and mobile connectivity (including 5G) will help to develop greater economic resilience.

Partners will work together to re-start construction activity on all major construction projects and bring forward investment decisions on priority schemes and work together to reduce the impact of flooding on the local economy. Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership will ensure the County benefits from national programmes such as the Getting Building Fund, digital investment and green infrastructure grants to bring forward the delivery of significant infrastructure plans.

Current schemes include:

- Worcestershire 5G
- Improvements on; Southern Link Road, A38 and Pershore Northern Link
- Kidderminster Station,
- Active Travel schemes
- Improvements to walking and cycling provision to reduce congestion

5. Employment and Skills

Worcestershire LEP and Worcestershire County Council has launched the Worcestershire Careers Helpline, supporting 16-24s and the Worcestershire Jobs Match helpline – using National Careers Service

Work is already underway to consider the impact on both current and last year's students from year 11 and 13, considering the support required to prevent an increase in those young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) over the coming months. This includes a focus on those young people most at risk over this time and increasing the support available to them. We will work with Department for Work and Pensions on a joint Youth Hubs initiative – delivering a hub and spoke holistic support model for 16-24 from a physical location as well as acting as an intermediary for the HM Governments Kickstart scheme for Worcestershire business community to encourage employment of 16-24 year olds and prevent long term unemployment.

The priority focus for skills needs to be consideration in the immediate term to focus on job retention rather than job growth. We will continue to develop the Digital Skills Strategy for the County and work with schemes to combat long term unemployment, as well as assist with redeployment and identify those industries where there are opportunities.

We will prioritise the co-ordination of current support schemes/providers around unemployment and support for employers which will include:

- Launch Jobs and Courses website for Worcestershire
- Continue to offer the Worcestershire Careers Helpline for young people to gain help and support
- Work with National Careers Service to improve offer
- Educate all partner services on the available support for those seeking return to work
- Demystify the current skills offer for Employers
- Promote to employers the #PlanforJobs created by HM Government to aid recovery and support prevention of long-term unemployment especially the Kickstarter scheme.





6. Town Centres

District Councils are leading this area of work and have looked at the implications for each of the main towns following the phased reopening of retail and leisure outlets.

The need for transformative change across town and city centres has been apparent for some time due to changing shopping habits and the increase in online trading. The Coronavirus pandemic has accelerated the need for intervention and change.

District Councils have led the immediate safe reopening and recovery of town centres in line with Government guidelines and supported by the Reopening High Streets Safely funding opportunity. Each Town has developed its own plan to aid the reopening and sustainability of the centres to support the message “Town centres open, safe and healthy”. District Councils have also been looking at promoting access to open spaces to support healthy living and exercise.

Under the current guidelines councils have been implementing changes to the public realm to ensure safe distancing and have been supporting town centre businesses to re-open safely, ensuring that their staff and customers are confident about returning to the town centre environment once again. The role of the Business Improvement Districts in Kidderminster, Redditch and Worcester has been particularly important during this period, ensuring innovative ways to encourage businesses to trade and customers to return safely. The Government encouraged the use of pavement licences under Business and Planning Act 2020 to permit businesses to operate on pavements and other public highways and this function is being delivered across Worcestershire by Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

The time is right now to think carefully about the medium to long term future of town centres and the country collectively faces a ‘watershed moment’ in that respect; it is unlikely that we will ever see towns returning to be the centre for national retailers to occupy, there will be a much greater emphasis on local producers and independent traders, for community uses and residential occupation in the towns of the future, and we need to start planning for that eventuality now in order to ensure our town centres retain their viability as places where people want to visit and businesses can successfully trade from.

Partners will work together on the submission of proposals for Future High Streets Funding schemes in Worcester & Kidderminster and the Towns Fund applications for Redditch and Worcester. In addition town centre prospectuses will be developed for the towns in Malvern Hills and Wychavon.

7. Tourism

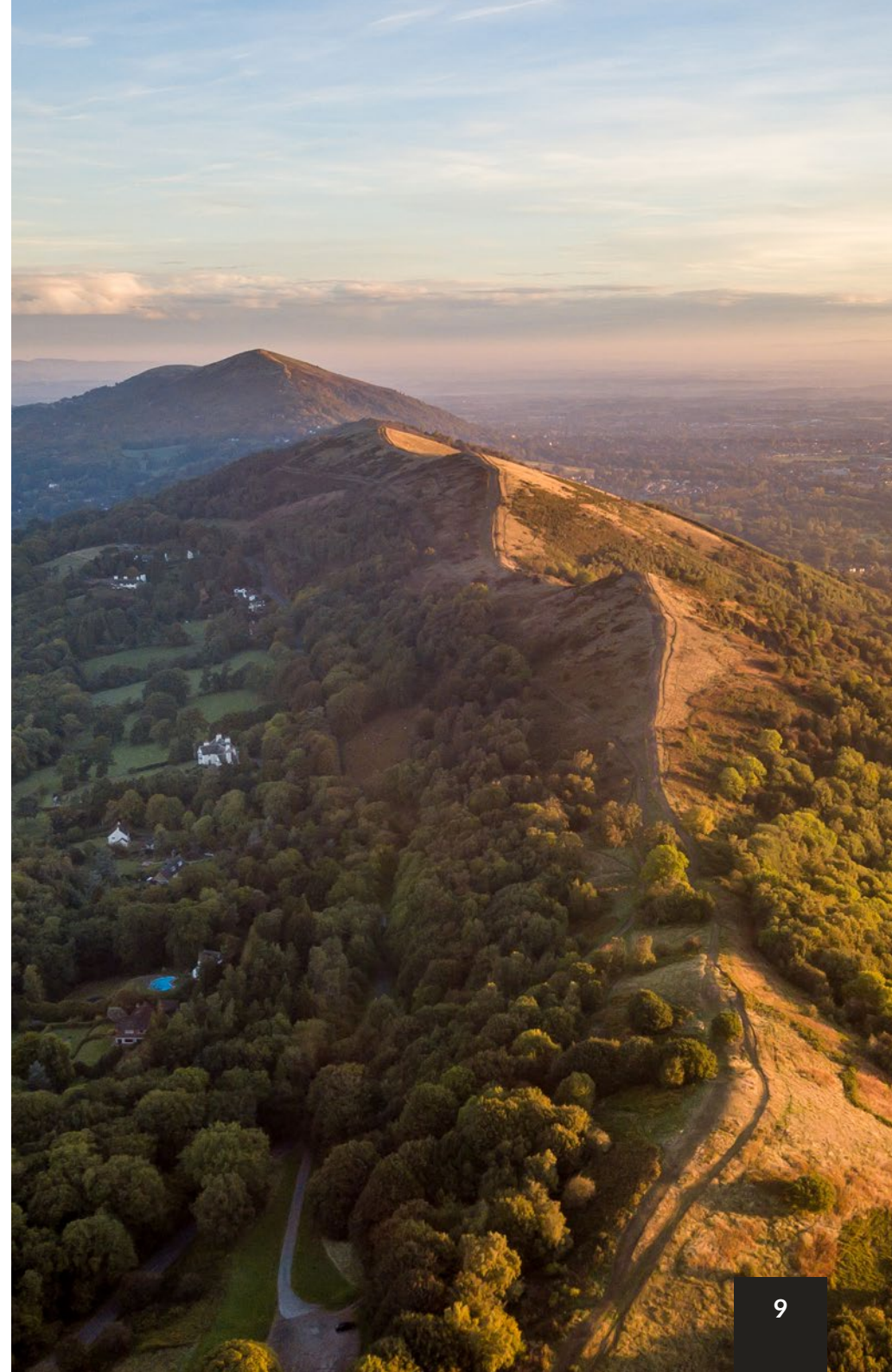
The lockdown restrictions have had a particularly pronounced impact on this sector. Under the Visit Worcestershire brand and working together, local councils are developing a series of joined up local campaigns to promote Worcestershire as a destination, linked to key attractions, destinations and activities. Development of regional and national campaigns is underway to include themes such as:

- Great outdoors (linked to wellbeing)
- Historical Worcestershire
- Staycation Trends
- A Family Destination

The Visit Worcestershire website and online platforms have been reviewed and updated to support the upcoming campaigns and to provide an engaging digital front door for the county. Promotion of the County as 'safe and open for business' targeting key trends, to encourage tourism both day trips and overnight stays providing consumer reassurance, Social campaigns supporting opening of local food, hospitality and attractions include:

- A local pride campaign #MyWorcestershire
- #FoodieFriday and
- Escape, Explore, Enjoy (staycation campaign)

The partners will continue to develop a new strategic plan for Tourism which looks at supporting the sector, developing the Worcestershire offer and promoting the County on national platforms. Key opportunities for development include creating links with Visit Britain and major events/ tourism assets in Worcestershire and bordering areas e.g. Three Counties, Severn Valley Railway, West Midlands Safari Park, Festivals and the Commonwealth Games 2022.



It is important that we continue to measure the impact of the COVID 19 on the economy and the effectiveness of our interventions. We will do this by measuring local impact in terms of the number of businesses we support and the results of these interventions including the amount of jobs safe guarded and jobs created, as well as people supported to start a business, we will also monitor the amount of young people supported and the number of people assisted into employment through the co-ordination of government schemes.

We will also monitor national statistical data at a local level paying particular attention to the claimant count, business births, business deaths and productivity levels. As well as impact on Apprenticeship numbers, and on our young people in terms of those not in education, employment and training, and uptake of national support schemes such as Job retention Scheme, Business interruption local scheme and self employed income support scheme.



