



# **M54 Growth Corridor – Strategic Options Study**

On behalf of Shropshire Council

Final Report

June 2019

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**Prepared By: Simon Phillips/Latisha Dhir**

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For and on behalf of GVA Grimley Limited, trading as Avison Young

# Executive Summary

This strategic Study identifies five potential development sites within the M54 corridor that could help realise Shropshire's Vision. It offers an economic rationale for bringing forward these strategic sites to drive economic growth in the future.

The M54 corridor is a key strategic gateway for both Shropshire and its neighbouring local authorities and is identified as a key growth Corridor for both employment and residential development, resulting from the strong transport links present and critical mass from the presence of nationally significant education, training and employment opportunities. The corridor is extremely well placed to deliver growth within the key sectors identified within Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy particularly advanced manufacturing including engineering (with strong links to aviation), innovative healthcare and environmental technologies.

It is recommended that the Council should:

- Prioritise the strategic employment sites at J3, Cosford and Stanton Road to drive forward the County's corporate objective of economic growth whilst also delivering balanced employment and residential growth;
- Prioritise employment sites that help redress the current imbalance between residential and commercial sites;
- Develop a robust employment land, economic and market led evidence base to robustly underpin the Local Plan review and provide delivery certainty;
- Maintain momentum by continuing dialogue with all site promoters, land owners and key stakeholders to confirm the deliverability of their proposals to enable development; and
- Engage in cross boundary discussions with Telford to consider the opportunity provided by the Lord Stafford site.

The timing and conditions are right given the once in a generation review of the Green Belt for Shropshire to drive forward their corporate economic growth objectives and bring forward strategic sites along the M54, a location ripe for investment.

These potential allocations will provide 'fit for purpose' employment land that meets the needs of the modern occupier and responds to market demand. This approach will assist in diversifying the economy by attracting occupiers in higher value sectors that drive economic productivity and retain talent in the County.

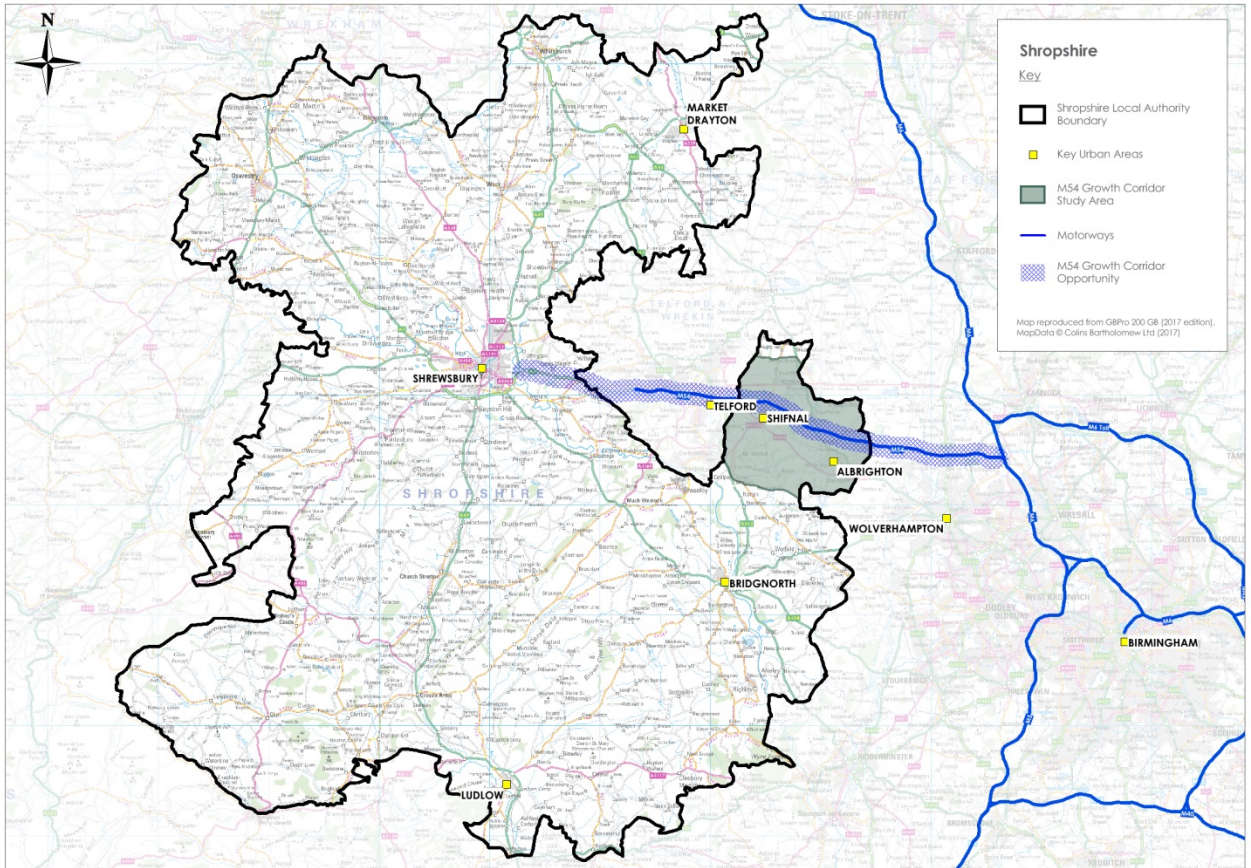
A balanced approach to economic and housing growth advocated through the Local Plan Review process is the best means to support the development of an 'exceptional circumstances' case for Green Belt release.

The strategic employment offer needs to be complementary to and not in competition with neighbouring locations (both within and outside of Shropshire) so that it distinguishes its offer from that provided locally. We recommend that a sector/market niche that builds upon Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy objectives, meets both local and inward investor needs and integrates into the existing offer/critical mass is a priority i.e. advanced manufacturing/engineering/automotive supply chain.

# 1. Introduction

1.1 Avison Young was appointed by Shropshire Council to prepare a strategic desktop study to assess the extent of the opportunity associated with the M54 corridor and identify potential locations/sites for both employment and residential development to drive economic growth in the future along the M54 Corridor. The following plan shows the study area in the context of the wider County (Figure 1.1) and the M54 Corridor.

Figure 1.1: Shropshire in a West Midlands Context

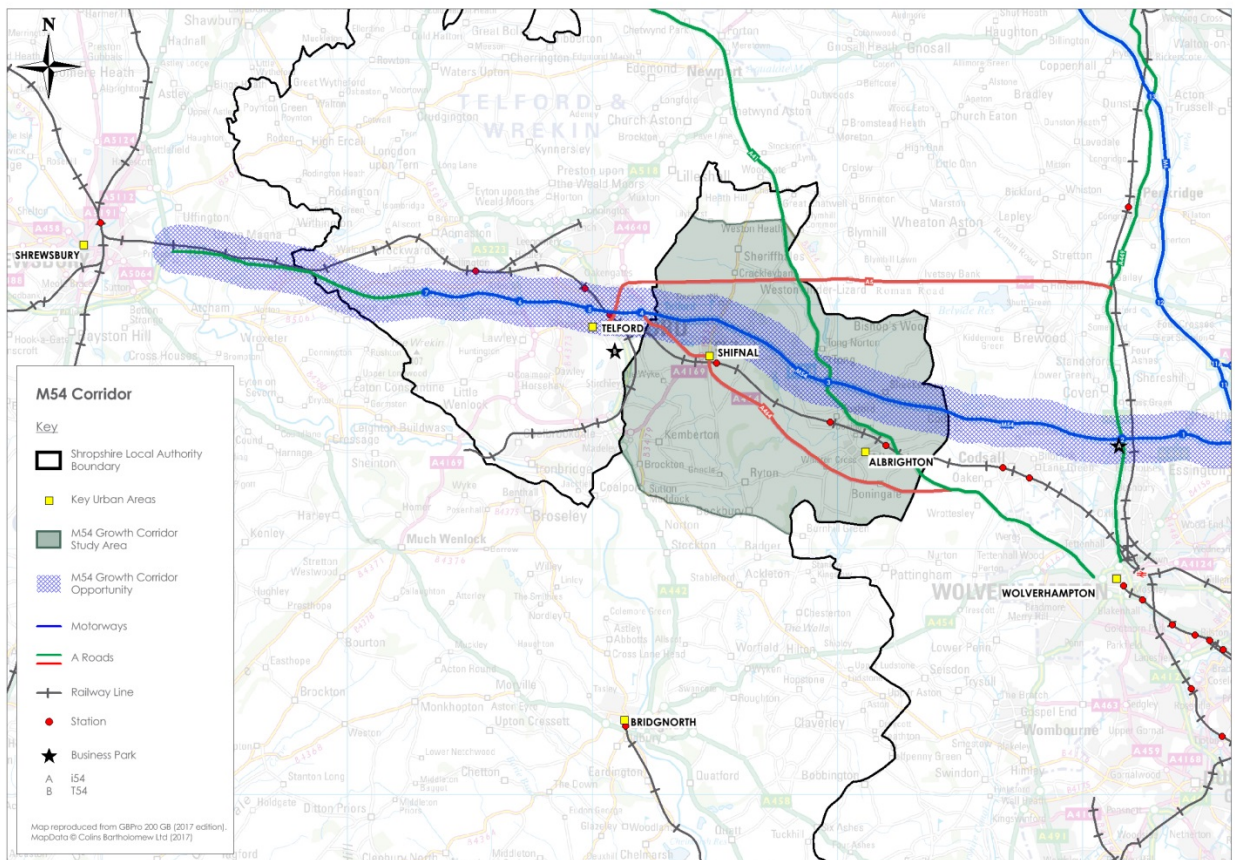


Source: Avison Young (2019)

- 1.2 The M54/A5 corridor is a key east-west road and rail transport corridor between Shropshire and the West Midlands. The M54 corridor is a key strategic gateway for both Shropshire and its neighbouring local authorities and is identified locally and regionally as a key growth Corridor for both employment and residential development, resulting from the strong transport links present and critical mass resulting from the presence of nationally significant education, training and employment opportunities.
- 1.3 Shropshire’s Economic Growth Strategy identified the M54 as a strategic corridor which reinforces Shropshire’s close proximity to the West Midlands and a significant development location linked to clustering and supply chain opportunities. The Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire also identifies a number of key growth sectors that are performing well in Shropshire and within which there is considered significant growth potential. The M54 corridor is considered to represent a location extremely well placed to support a number of these opportunities, particularly advanced manufacturing including engineering (with strong links to aviation), innovative healthcare and environmental technologies.

- 1.4 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), of which Shropshire is a non-constituent member, is also assessing options to accommodate housing and employment growth arising from the three Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) Strategic Economic Plans. The draft West Midlands Spatial Investment and Delivery Plan<sup>1</sup> (July 2018) identified 27 potential corridors/strategic development opportunities, one of which being the M54 corridor. This was identified as a key strategic growth corridor particularly around junctions 3 and 4. It stated that the M54 corridor has potential for significant employment growth focusing on key sectors set out in Shropshire’s Economic Growth Strategy linked to the advanced manufacturing opportunities to create a hub maximising the opportunity at i54 (a site with Enterprise Zone Status and direct motorway access, i54 is one of the most sought after business parks in the Midlands) and RAF Cosford (a military base and airfield which is at the centre of the RAF’s mission to deliver flexible, affordable, modern and effective technical training that meets the needs of the UK’s Armed Forces now and into the future). The opportunities associated with these sites will be considered in greater detail later within this report.
- 1.5 In this light and in order to drive critical mass this Study has focused upon strategic development sites situated between Junction 2 (Wolverhampton) and Junction 4 (Telford) of the Motorway that fall within Shropshire Council’s administrative area as shown in Figure 1.2 below. This map also highlights how opportunities along the M54 corridor can extend into Shropshire along the A5 corridor.

Figure 1.2: The M54 Corridor



Source: Avison Young (2019)

<sup>1</sup><https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s2639/2019.02.13%20HLDB%20Revised%20SIDP%20appendix%20to%20covering%20paper%20-%20Public%20paper%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

- 1.6 This Study has focused on the opportunities within the M54 corridor but was cognisant of and influenced by the wider Shropshire catchment, its labour force, key employment sectors, skills and the key locations of both employment and residential development.
- 1.7 The corridor benefits from its close proximity to existing international businesses playing a key role in growth sectors including advanced manufacturing and engineering. It is highly accessible to the highway network and will benefit further from planned investments in road and rail infrastructure in neighbouring areas. The corridor includes key training institutions at RAF Cosford and higher education facilities both of which add to the offer of the corridor as a location for investment.
- 1.8 The study seeks to highlight the means by which the core objectives set within Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy (2017-2021) through supporting and growing new and existing businesses, attracting inward investment and by continuing to develop and retain skills within the local area can be achieved. The delivery of these objectives will enable Shropshire to achieve their vision by ensuring that it remains a great place to live and the opportunities to learn and work are enhanced and as a result economic potential maximised and productivity increased.
- 1.9 It was clear from the outset that there was a 'will' within the Council to drive economic productivity and provide a better balance between employment opportunities and residential accommodation. This strategic study will start to identify the means by which such a 'step change' can be delivered.
- 1.10 The Council are well aware of the challenges of delivering large scale development; not least the requirement for Green Belt release in key sustainable locations to realise an employment led vision.
- 1.11 The potential significant economic benefits of supporting investment in strategic locations like the M54 and the contribution they could make to the future growth of Shropshire and the West Midlands will be key considerations to an exceptional circumstances case for Green Belt release. Indeed, the importance of fostering economic growth is supported by national planning policy as paragraph 80 of the NPPF highlights the importance of economic growth in planning stating:

*"Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development".*

- 1.12 To inform the Study we have:
- Undertaken a comprehensive baseline review of available information forming part of the strategic planning and economic policy context, with the key messages/drivers for change identified;
  - Engaged with a wide range of key stakeholders from the public and private sectors who are active in the area;
  - Undertaken a comprehensive assessment of potential growth locations/options focussing upon strategic sites, the M54 junctions, the rail corridor, existing settlements and expansion of employment areas; and
  - Considered potential strategic locations to accommodate both employment and residential growth in the future.

- 1.13 The outputs of this Study, by its strategic nature, just start to touch the surface of what will be required as it pulls together the key messages from the evidence base and identifies potential locations for future development. But, what it does provide is a clear direction of travel for the Council to consider and key next steps required to take the opportunity sites forward.

## Delivering the Vision

- 1.14 The Shropshire landscape is predominantly rural in character with population concentrations in settlements ranging from Shrewsbury with a population of just under 73,000 inhabitants to smaller towns and villages across Shropshire. Within and adjoining the study area Shifnal and Albrighton represent the main residential areas and employment locations.
- 1.15 Shropshire is a very diverse county and provides a generally attractive living environment and as such is a desirable location to live. There are some affluent areas of the County, including parts of the East of the County, which benefit from strong transport links and proximity to employment opportunities. Parts of the County are also very attractive to retirees. In these locations, these factors have led to issues of affordability and lower levels of local employment retention and productivity. Affordability issues in other parts of Shropshire are influenced by other factors such as relatively low incomes.
- 1.16 The reasons for Shropshire's comparatively poor economic productivity are well rehearsed as the economy focusses on lower value GVA (gross value added) sectors such as agriculture and tourism with employment in higher GVA sectors low. Whilst decline is expected in traditional manufacturing industries other areas of manufacturing and engineering are expected to grow i.e. aviation. Shropshire will need to create opportunities and the employment sites to attract investment to counter any decline in traditional manufacturing jobs.
- 1.17 Anecdotal evidence provided via the engagement undertaken suggested that some local businesses are struggling to attract local staff due to the high property prices and concerns over affordability restrict potential employees from living locally. This would need to be tested via a Business Survey. That said the area has a low level of unemployment and a skilled but ageing population, but nevertheless these factors, in part, are constraining economic growth and will need to be addressed to bring about 'change' and tap into the County's unrealised potential i.e. the provision of suitable skilled jobs for local graduates to access.
- 1.18 Taken together these factors have, in part, led to difficulties of both working and living in the area and it experiences high levels of out commuting as working age people seek employment in neighbouring areas which provide a greater variety and availability of jobs. These are key issues that need to be addressed to retain working age people in the area through the provision of a range of employment types/levels/skills and a balanced portfolio of affordable homes. This Study cannot, by its nature, provide all the answers but it can identify the means by which Shropshire can start to shift its economic geography to one that redresses the balance between employment and residential accommodation.
- 1.19 Over the last ten years, the economic geography of Shropshire's neighbouring authorities has started to change following investment in strategic employment locations targeting investment in key growth sectors i.e. automotive, advanced manufacturing and engineering and attracting both national and international

- occupiers. Of most relevance are the developments of the i54 Business Park, Wolverhampton, at junction 2 of the M54 and the T54 investment hub, located at junction 4.
- 1.20 With Enterprise Zone status, the i54 is recognised as one of the most desirable places to invest within the West Midlands. Key occupiers include Jaguar Land Rover, Eurofins and Moobs. The development of this area involved major infrastructure works including the construction of a new junction off the M54 and improved public transport links. The site is fully occupied and offers 230,000 sqm of employment floorspace over a 97 hectare site. As a result of this success, Wolverhampton City Council (partnered with South Staffordshire District Council) have recently obtained planning consent for a western extension offering up an additional 60 hectares to bring forward for employment which will create a further 1,600 new jobs.
- 1.21 The West Midlands Combined Authorities (WMCA) draft Spatial Investment and Delivery Plan identified a high growth zone, situated around three core employment opportunities: West Midlands Interchange (Four Ashes, South Staffordshire), Western extension to the i54 Development (Wolverhampton) and M6/M54/M6 Toll Link (South Staffordshire). This triangle of opportunity will provide an integrated approach to the scale, movement and distribution of growth around the M54 which it identifies as one of its corridors of opportunity.
- 1.22 The T54 development provides an extension to the existing Stafford Business Park and an opportunity for inward investors to locate along the corridor in close proximity to i54 and a readily accessible pool of labour market skills and sector expertise. Supported by the Marches LEP it is hoped that it will help shape the economic future of Telford. Polytech, one of the largest occupiers of the T54 development, operates their national planting service here and provide over 100 jobs. The Austrian firm is the leading developer of plastic parts within the UK and Europe, and thus contributes towards the national significance of the M54 as a desirable location to invest.
- 1.23 There are clear linkages between i54/T54, with over 40% of occupiers coming from within the automotive industry, which is a key growth sector within Shropshire. Allocated as a committed employment site within the Telford and Wrekin Local Plan, further extensions to the T54 site are currently being promoted to encourage opportunities for employment use.
- 1.24 The development of both sites has raised the profile of the M54 as an attractive investment opportunity for businesses given the direct infrastructure links to the north and south and therefore a key opportunity corridor for economic growth.
- 1.25 The location of RAF Cosford within the M54 corridor is a major asset and draw for visitors, military personnel and students with many activities linked to the development of the engineering sector and its supply chain. It is our view that the complete integration of RAF Cosford as part of the developing employment offer along the M54 corridor is central for Shropshire's vision to be realised. The site currently offers military and advanced manufacturing training, with future plans to establish a hub for science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) courses and the RAF Cosford Museum which is a key visitor draw.
- 1.26 Proposed infrastructure developments in the vicinity are attractive to the market and instil confidence with potential investors that the ease of movement and accessibility of future employment sites is a priority. There are a number of major infrastructure projects being delivered or proposed within adjacent areas, connecting the West Midlands to regional investment opportunities, which will further raise the profile of Shropshire as an accessible investment location. These projects include:



- M6/M6 Toll Link Road – proposed link road between M6 Junction 2 and M6 Toll link road;
  - West Midlands Interchange – proposed freight line, supported by WMCA, at Four Ashes;
  - A new relief road to ease congestion to the north west of Shrewsbury;
  - HS2 Phase 2 – providing high frequency trains connecting the West Midlands to London and Manchester via Crewe; and
  - Revised train timetable for trains between Birmingham and Shrewsbury, providing up to three trains an hour.
- 1.27 Alongside this, discussions have recommenced on the viability of the western orbital motorway to provide access from the M5 at Junction 4A to the M54 at Junction 2.
- 1.28 We have considered other existing key assets that we believe will help contribute to the delivery of the Council's corporate economic growth objectives. While they are not opportunity sites in that they won't provide additional floorspace they will play an important role in helping shape the 'offer' of Shropshire in the future.
- 1.29 Launched in 2014 University Centre Shrewsbury (part of the University of Chester) was developed in partnership with Shropshire Council. Recent investment in new teaching research and laboratory space has focused on two areas with significant potential for growth in Shropshire: Environmental Science and Technology and Medicine Health Sciences and Care. A third emerging specialism has arisen in Digital Innovation.
- 1.30 Linked to the agri-tech sector, Harper Adams University in Telford and Wrekin is a world leader in agri-tech research and the second largest land based institution in the UK. Harper Adams lies some 13 miles from Junction 3 of the M54. In its capacity as a specialist University it has well established links with companies and organisations in the food and land-based sectors. It incorporates the Midlands Regional Food Academy (RFA) at Harper Adams, an educational facility that also provides technical and business support and promotes awareness and understanding of food and the food industry.
- 1.31 The University also includes the National Centre for Precision Farming which is developing automation, drones and autonomous systems. It was also the first to use agri-tech to support autonomous farm vehicles, crop/soil condition mapping and augmented veterinary. The Agricultural Engineering Precision Innovation (Agri-EPI) Centre at the University is a multi-million-pound hub for the development, testing and sharing of technologies to boost productivity in farming and the food supply chain bring together researchers, tech/engineering companies and food businesses, from farmers through to retailers. The Hub seeks to help provide engineering and precision agriculture solutions for the Agri-Food industry and to develop new high-tech start-up business.
- 1.32 Led by a consortium of local companies, the Marches Centre of Manufacturing and Technology (MCMT) operates two state-of-the-art manufacturing training facilities at Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth. MCMT covers more than 40,000 sqft of dedicated learning space with access to a CNC Zone, advance fluid and power controls and the latest robotics and metrology.
- 1.33 Working in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton, Telford has developed an Innovation Campus which will link together the entrepreneurial success of T54, alongside the growing interest in the Midlands

Engine. The Telford Innovation Campus, located in Priorslee, has developed a reputation for knowledge transfer through creating opportunities for collaborative research and development. The campus caters for four key centres; Faculty for Science and Engineering, Centre for International Development and Business, School of Engineering and Faculty of Social Sciences, also providing student accommodation, a Conference Centre with the capacity to hold up to 360 delegates and the E-Innovation Centre (EIC).

- 1.34 EIC was launched in 2006 and has established itself as one of the leading business accommodation facilities in the region, with modern and stylish office space which is ambitious, visionary and innovative. Currently the EIC houses some of the most innovative new companies linking businesses to advanced technologies and resourceful techniques. This vision reiterates the importance of acknowledging new innovative methods in the workplace and ensuring employment opportunities in the future offer flexibility for agile working conditions.

## Changing the Economic Geography

- 1.35 For too long Shropshire has watched its neighbouring local authorities drive forward and achieve success with their ambitious economic growth agendas seemingly content to play a different role in maintaining the status quo of this predominantly rural authority.
- 1.36 But, things are changing, Shropshire Council has a clear corporate objective to deliver economic growth through increased productivity and bringing forward employment sites, but this needs to be set within the context of the Local Plan Review which is advocating a balanced growth of employment and residential development.
- 1.37 The M54 corridor in Shropshire is at the centre of the infrastructure network, within the hub of the West Midlands Combined Authority and Midlands Engine and with the 'book ends' of development (I54/T54) at both Junctions 2 and 4 of the M54 the timing is right to look at strategic locations along the M54 corridor for development to drive forward balanced and sustainable economic/residential growth and contribute towards changing the economic geography of Shropshire.
- 1.38 In alignment with sustainable development principles it is probable that Shropshire will look to bring forward strategic sites that offer both housing and employment. Such sites will look to meet the needs of the County and could also look to accommodate shortfalls in both employment land provision (up to 300 hectares) identified in the Black Country Authorities employment land review and strategic housing sites as articulated in the Land Commission Study report prepared for the Combined Authority urban areas.

### Structure of report

- 1.39 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:
- **Section 2:** Planning and Economic Context;
  - **Section 3:** Stakeholder Engagement;
  - **Section 4:** Development Opportunity Sites; and
  - **Section 5:** Conclusions and Next Steps.

1.40 If you require any further information, please contact either of the Avison Young team as below:

**Simon Phillips**

Director

T 0121 609 8265

E [simon.phillips@avisonyoung.com](mailto:simon.phillips@avisonyoung.com)

**Latisha Dhir**

Senior Planner

T 0121 609 8168

E [latisha.dhir@avisonyoung.com](mailto:latisha.dhir@avisonyoung.com)

## 2. Planning and Economic Context

2.1 This section provides an overview of the planning and economic policy context within Shropshire of relevance for this study.

### The Local Plan

2.2 The adopted Local (Development) Plan for Shropshire covers the period from 2006 to 2026. It consists of a series of documents setting out both higher level strategic policies and detailed policies and specific proposals to guide development. The adopted Local Plan documents are:

- Core Strategy DPD (2011);
- Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan (2015); and
- Any adopted formal Neighbourhood Plans.

2.3 The Shropshire Core Strategy identifies overall development requirements and sets out the Council's vision, strategic objectives and broad spatial strategy to guide future development and growth in Shropshire to 2026. The SAMDev Plan seeks to deliver the Core Strategy, through identification of deliverable sites for development and policies to appraise development proposals.

2.4 Adopted formal Neighbourhood Plans form part of the Local Plan and provide a community-led framework to guide future development and growth within the specified Neighbourhood. The scope and detailed content is locally tailored and a number of Communities are seeking to progress Neighbourhood Plans. However, currently in Shropshire there are only two adopted formal Neighbourhood Plans, these are for Shifnal and Much Wenlock.

### Local Plan Review

2.5 Shropshire Council is currently undertaking a review of the Local Plan. The purpose of the review is to allow the consideration of updated information on development needs within the County; reflect changes to national policy and our local strategies; to extend the plan period to 2036; and to provide a Local Plan which will help to support growth and maintain local control over planning decisions during the period to 2036.

2.6 Maintaining an up to date Local Plan will support local growth by generating certainty for investment in local development and infrastructure through a policy framework that establishes an up to date and objective assessment of development needs and supports sustainable development in Shropshire during the period to 2036.

2.7 The Local Plan review is informed and underpinned by an extensive evidence base. This M54 Strategic Options Study will form part of this evidence base for the ongoing review of the Local Plan.

2.8 Thus far, there have been three stages of consultation on the Local Plan Review. These were:

- The Issues and Strategic Options Consultation;
- The Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development Consultation; and
- The Preferred Sites Consultation.

2.9 Further stages of consultation on the Local Plan review will occur during 2019.

2.10 Key emerging proposals within the ongoing Local Plan Review include:

- 'High' housing growth of 28,750 dwellings, equivalent to an average delivery rate of 1,430 dwellings per year for the whole of Shropshire;
- Existing housing completions, commitments and allocations amount to around 18,500 dwellings, so the net additional housing now required is around 10,250 dwellings;
- Balanced employment growth\* to deliver around 300 hectares of employment development at an average rate of 15 hectares of employment land per year;
- The existing employment land supply amounts to 223ha, giving a net requirement for around 80ha of new employment land. However, this is a minimum requirement and some additional land over and above this minimum is likely to be needed;
- An 'Urban Focused' distribution of development: - Shrewsbury – around 30% - Principal Centres – around 24.5% - Key Centres – around 18% - Rural Areas – around 27.5%; and
- Development at strategic sites such as Ironbridge Power Station and Clive Barracks, and potential new Garden Village settlements in strategic locations.

*\*'Balanced employment growth' seeks to positively influence economic performance in Shropshire. The aim is to deliver a sufficient scale of employment land to provide enough jobs to achieve a sustainable balance with the preferred housing requirement. It also seeks to achieve a significant 'step change' to the economic structure and performance of the Shropshire economy to support the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy. This will be achieved through the range, choice and location of the new employment land to be provided in the revised Local Plan.*

2.11 Preferred sites and appropriate windfall allowances have been identified for the Strategic, Principal and Key Centres considered within this study and the proposed Community Hubs, which are the more sustainable rural settlements identified through the Hierarchy of Settlements Assessment.

## Green Belt

2.12 Green Belt is a national planning designation and strategic tool to prevent urban sprawl. National Policy (as specified within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)) makes it clear that Green Belt is designed primarily to prevent the spread of development and the coalescence of urban areas, and is designated because of its position, rather than its landscape quality or recreational use. The five purposes that Green Belt serves are:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
  - d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
  - e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 2.13 To this end the NPPF seeks to limit new development in the Green Belt, except that specifically listed, expecting very special circumstances to be demonstrated in support of any inappropriate development proposals.
- 2.14 The Green Belt within Shropshire forms the western edge of the Metropolitan Green Belt. A significant portion of Shropshire's rural landscape east of the River Severn in the south east of the County is within the Green Belt, including the M54 corridor which runs in a broadly east-west direction east of Telford.
- 2.15 The broad extent of the Shropshire Green Belt was established in 1975 as part of the West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt surrounding the West-Midlands conurbation and Coventry.
- 2.16 Its extent within Shropshire does not reflect any detailed analysis of the environment or the sustainability of growth but reflects a desire to constrain development and prevent the urbanisation of the countryside. Decisions that informed the delineation of the Green Belt were made in light of local development requirements and pressures identified at that time.
- 2.17 The Government requires changes to the Green Belt to be made through the Local Plan process and for any proposed release of Green Belt to provide for the longer term, enduring well beyond the Plan period. It is expected that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where justification and satisfactory evidence, known as 'exceptional circumstances' for doing so can be provided.
- 2.18 The Green Belt within Shropshire was last subject to review during the preparation of the Bridgnorth Local Plan 1996-2011 (adopted in 2006). If changes to the Green Belt are proposed as part of the current Local Plan review, this will need to include demonstration of 'exceptional circumstances'. This includes consideration of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development, including planning for economic growth, housing need, health and wellbeing, accessibility, heritage and environmental factors. The relatively poor performance of any land against Green Belt purposes, is not in itself, an exceptional circumstance that would justify release of the land from the Green Belt. Conversely, better performing Green Belt may be appropriate for release where exceptional circumstances are demonstrated.

### **Green Belt Stage 1 & 2 Studies**

- 2.19 A two-stage assessment of Green Belt in Shropshire has been commissioned from specialists in this field and published by Shropshire Council to inform the Council's ongoing Local Plan Review 2016-2036.
- 2.20 The Studies are a response to the need for Green Belt Review which was identified as a requirement during the Examination of the current adopted Plan (SAMDev) and subsequently in the Examination Report (2015). A Green Belt Review also allows the Council to examine a range of options, including Green Belt release, in considering an appropriate strategy to meet the growth objectives of the Local Plan Review and Shropshire's potential development requirements beyond 2036.

2.21 Whilst the Green Belt Assessment (Part 1) considers the performance of Green Belt across Shropshire against the Government specified ‘purposes’, the Green Belt Review (Part 2) is focused on considering the potential of land around identified settlements and strategic geographical locations to provide for development needs and support a sustainable pattern of future growth in the County to 2036 and beyond.

### **Shropshire Green Belt Assessment (September, 2017)**

2.22 The Stage 1 Green Belt Assessment divided all the Green Belt within Shropshire into 85 discrete land areas and assessed the extent to which they serve the Green Belt purposes defined within the NPPF, specifically:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

2.23 The aim of this Study was to assess the relative performance of the Green Belt within the whole of Shropshire against these specific purposes.

### **Shropshire Green Belt Review (November 2018)**

2.24 The Stage 2 Green Belt Study draws on the findings of the Stage 1 Green Belt Assessment regarding the contribution of parcels to Green Belt purposes, but also considers the harm of removing parcels and Opportunity Areas from the Green Belt.

2.25 The Stage 2 Green Belt Study looks in greater detail at 29 ‘Opportunity Areas’ around identified settlements in/adjointing the Green Belt, Cosford village and military base (which is identified as a major developed area) and other strategic locations along the M54/A5 corridors with a focus on Junctions 3 and 4 of the M54.

2.26 The 29 Opportunity Areas, including those within the M54 corridor, were identified by Shropshire Council as broad locations to provide areas of search around established settlements and strategic corridors and locations. They provide a means to test options in Shropshire Council’s consideration of potential allocations of land for housing and employment development (and associated infrastructure), or to safeguard land to allow for future development needs. They were also used as an opportunity to assess the potential Green Belt impacts of promoted development locations.

2.27 In summary, the Study objectives were to:

- Present the findings of the Stage 1 Green Belt Study and the performance of the identified parcels around settlements against the five nationally defined purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the NPPF;
- Provide clear conclusions on the potential degree of ‘harm’ that may occur if parcels and Opportunity Areas were to be released from the Green Belt. This considers the contribution of the areas to the Green Belt purposes and the potential impact on the wider integrity of the Green Belt and Green Belt boundaries if they were to be released; and

- Outline potential 'design principles' that could be applied to the Opportunity Areas that have been assessed to minimise potential harm to the wider Green Belt.

### Role of Green Belt Studies

2.28 Consideration of the harm to Green Belt that could result from the release of land for development is an essential aspect of establishing the exceptional circumstances for making alterations to Green Belt boundaries. However, there are other important factors that also need to be considered in order to establish the necessary 'exceptional circumstances', most notably the environmental and sustainability effects of development such as impacts on landscape quality, biodiversity value, heritage, flooding, traffic generation, infrastructure and economic requirements. These considerations are outside the scope of the Green Belt Study but are acknowledged as important in establishing the necessary 'exceptional circumstances' for making alterations to Green Belt boundaries. These matters will be considered and evidenced separately by Shropshire Council who has already published a number of relevant evidence base documents.

### Study Conclusions

- 2.29 Whilst the ideal would be to minimise harm to the Green Belt, it may be that the most sustainable locations for development will result in high harm to the Green Belt. In each location where alterations to Green Belt boundaries are being considered, planning judgement will be required to establish whether the sustainability benefits of Green Belt release and the associated development outweigh the harm to the Green Belt designation.
- 2.30 The assessment of harm to Green Belt purposes does not draw conclusions as to where land should be released to accommodate development but identifies relative variations in the harm to the designation. It does however note that whilst development on Green Belt land may inevitably lead to some degree of encroachment into the countryside within the Green Belt, for most of the opportunity areas assessed, the strategic function of the West Midlands Green Belt within Shropshire will not be affected by the releases of land. The Areas of Opportunity which are exceptions to this and the reasons for this are set out in full in the published report.

## Economic Growth Strategy

- 2.31 The Oxford Economics Baseline Forecasts of Employment and Job Growth in Shropshire, highlights the widening gap between the level of economic gross value added (GVA) per job within Shropshire compared to the national average GVA per job. With the direct, indirect and induced economic benefits per job being less in Shropshire than nationally, it is fundamental that Shropshire identifies locations to accommodate employment in order to boost job levels and the overall GVA in the local economy.
- 2.32 Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy 2017-2021 responds to this, identifying a commitment and ambition to grow the Shropshire economy. The vision is to maximise the economic potential of Shropshire and increase productivity by fully utilising the benefits of the special environment and high quality assets present *"for Shropshire to be the best place to do business and invest, and to be a country renowned for its pull of talent and expertise"*.
- 2.33 The strategy has six priority actions to:



- Target actions and resources where there are economic opportunities;
  - Enable businesses to start, grow and succeed;
  - Deliver infrastructure to support growth;
  - Meet skills needs of businesses and people’s aspirations for work;
  - Promote Shropshire to investors; and
  - Build our reputation as a Council that is ‘good to do business with’.
- 2.34 Shropshire has a number of sectors that are performing well locally and provide an attractive opportunity for businesses to invest in the area. Supported by a cross initiative with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), four sectors have in particular been recognised for future growth potential and a key driver for developing Shropshire’s economic profile:
- Advanced manufacturing including engineering, agri-food and agri-tech;
  - Food and drink processing;
  - Health and social care; and
  - Environmental science and technologies.
- 2.35 ONS, BRES 2017 indicates that there were 125,000 employee jobs in Shropshire in 2017, which represents an increase of 10,000 compared with 2010 (+8.7%). The number of employee jobs in both the West Midlands and Great Britain has risen faster than in Shropshire over the 7 year period to 2017 (+11.6% and +11.2% respectively).
- 2.36 ONS, Business Demography, 2017 indicates that compared with the national and regional averages, Shropshire supports a low business start-up rate. 1,265 new businesses were established in Shropshire in 2017. With fewer businesses closing this year (1,215), the active business base has increased to 13,600.
- 2.37 As a percentage of the total number of active businesses, the start-up rate in Shropshire is comparatively low, at 9.3%, compared with 13.1% nationally and 13.4% in the West Midlands. However, business closures rates are also lower than national and regional averages, at 8.9% in 2017, compared with 11.4% and 12.3% regionally and nationally respectively. In Shropshire, 18 fewer businesses were set up per 10,000 of the population compared with the national average in 2017, while the number of closures per 10,000 people was seven lower. Shropshire does support a high number of businesses per 10,000 of the population which reflects the high number of micro businesses in the county. This information is taken from the emerging SHMA for Shropshire.
- 2.38 Shropshire promotes a good portfolio of employment land where the industrial market is significantly larger than the office market, which is primarily focused in Shrewsbury. Shropshire also supports a large number of micro and small businesses although there are fewer large employers than regional and national averages, indeed around 90% of enterprises in Shropshire employ less than 10 people and only 0.2% of enterprises employ more than 250 people.
- 2.39 Table 2.1 below illustrates the percentage of enterprises and employee jobs by sectors:

Figure 2.1: Comparison of Business Counts and Employment, 2017/182

	% of enterprises	% of employee jobs	Average no. jobs per enterprise
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	21.4%	3.0%	1.1
Mining, quarrying & utilities	0.4%	1.2%	21.4
Manufacturing	5.2%	9.6%	14.6
Construction	11.0%	5.6%	4.0
Motor trades	3.3%	3.0%	7.3
Wholesale	4.1%	4.4%	8.5
Retail	6.2%	9.6%	12.3
Transport & storage (inc postal)	2.8%	3.8%	10.9
Accommodation & food services	6.1%	8.8%	11.5
Information & communication	4.1%	2.2%	4.3
Financial & insurance	1.3%	1.0%	6.0
Property	3.3%	2.2%	5.2
Professional, scientific & technical	13.1%	8.0%	4.9
Business administration & support	6.5%	4.0%	4.9
Public administration & defence	0.7%	3.8%	45.2
Education	1.4%	8.8%	51.2
Health	3.4%	15.6%	36.4
Arts, entertainment, recreation	5.6%	5.2%	7.4
	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>8.0</b>

Source: Shropshire Council (2019)

2.40 It is apparent that agriculture, forestry and fishing represent the highest percentage of enterprises in Shropshire (over 20%) but supports only 3% of employees. Health accounts for just 3.4% of enterprises but 15.6% of employees whilst education accounts for 1.4% of enterprises and 8.8% of employees. These two sectors, along with public administration and defence, have the highest average number of employees per enterprise. At the other end of the scale, the professional, scientific and technical sector accounts for 13.1% of enterprises but just 8% of employees, while construction is represented by 11% of enterprises but just 5.6% of employees.

2.41 Sectors experiencing the highest level of job growth since 2010 are:

- Profession, technical and scientific: +6,000 jobs;
- Accommodation and food services: +3,500 jobs;
- Property: +1,500 jobs;
- Arts, entertainment & leisure: +1,000 jobs; and
- Construction: +1,000 jobs.

<sup>2</sup>Table prepared by Shropshire Council Information, Intelligence and Insight Team, using ONS (2019), BRES 2017, IDBR 2018 © Crown Copyright. Please Note: This does not include business proprietors, of which there are approaching 7,000 in the agricultural sector in Shropshire.

- 2.42 The property and mining/quarrying sectors both expanded substantially in 2017 in terms of the number that they employ at +69.2% and +33.3% respectively. In contrast, sectors which have declined the most in terms of employment since 2010 are:
- Public administration and defence: -1,750 jobs;
  - Retail: - 1,000 job;
  - Manufacturing: -1,000 jobs; and
  - Finance and insurance: -750.
- 2.43 This shows that a stepped change is needed if an increased focus on opportunity sectors is to be achieved and GVA per job boosted. This will require fit for purpose employment land and premises to meet the requirements of the modern occupier. The most attractive locations, for businesses to locate, are areas situated close to key arterial routes, including the M54. For ease of movement reasons, we would expect this trend to continue and as such, this provides direction for this study.
- 2.44 The WMCA's Strategic Economic Plan<sup>3</sup> (SEP), alongside Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy, have each outlined ambitious plans for growth over the next 5-10 years. The WMCA SEP aims to raise per capita GVA (gross value added) across the West Midlands to the national average by 2026, increasing to an additional 5% by 2030. This is further supported by Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy which seeks to increase GVA by 12% between 2017 and 2021.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/1382/full-sep-document.pdf>

### 3. Stakeholder Engagement

3.1 In this section we provide an overview of our approach and the key findings of the extensive stakeholder engagement undertaken to inform this study.

3.2 Stakeholder engagement is widely recognised as a valuable tool to obtain views and opinions on key market and industry changes, whilst also providing an avenue to explore and discuss opportunities which may not be available within the public domain. As well as recognising the existing quantitative evidence base about Shropshire’s economy, this study sought to utilise stakeholder engagement as a key tool in generating fresh qualitative data to inform the economic vision for the future plan period.

3.3 It was agreed with Shropshire Council to engage with a selection of representatives across the private and public sectors that have an interest in the economic growth of Shropshire and would have a perspective on the study. Each stakeholder was invited to be part of the study, through either a face to face conversation or telephone call. The engagement was devised around three key themes with the option for stakeholders to provide any further additional information:

- Views on Shropshire’s economic vision;
- Opportunities and Constraints to deliverability; and
- Locations of appropriate growth.

3.4 Following discussions with Shropshire Council, a comprehensive list of key stakeholders was confirmed as follows:

**Figure 3.1: List of Stakeholders**

Neighbouring Local Authorities/ Housing Market Areas (HMA’s)	Public Sector Bodies	Landowners/ Promoters
Walsall Council	West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)	Berry’s
Wolverhampton City Council	Marches LEP	Advance Planning
South Staffordshire District Council	Ministry of Defence	Morris Properties
Staffordshire County Council	Harper Adams University	Savills
Telford and Wrekin Council		Bidwell’s

Source: Avison Young (2019)

3.5 Prior to the engagement, each stakeholder was briefed on the purpose of the study and the reasons for their involvement in informing the study given the studies brief. We were encouraged by the willingness of the stakeholders to engage and were able to consult with all stakeholders but one.

3.6 In ensuring conversations were honest and transparent, stakeholders were informed that all their comments would be non-attributable, and that key occurring messages will be reported in a holistic and anonymous manner.

3.7 The following key themes were gleaned from this engagement and we summarise the opportunities and challenges that these provide below:

## Opportunities:

- Shropshire's corporate objective to deliver economic growth and opportunities for provision of strategic employment locations along the M54 corridor was largely supported as an ambitious and potentially nationally significant opportunity amongst key stakeholders. With growing interest in the West Midlands as an area to invest, linking to wider funding availabilities. Stakeholders supported the desire to accommodate growing demand along existing infrastructure links and to raise the profile of the area as a location for investment;
- The M54 corridor is perceived as a desirable location for businesses particularly following the success of adjacent developments within neighbouring local authority areas i.e. i54/T54;
- Infrastructure improvements planned or in the pipeline within the M54 corridor itself and with indirect benefits for the corridor i.e. West Midlands interchange, M6/M6 Toll Link, Shrewsbury north western relief road, HS2 and increased frequency of rail services between Birmingham and Shrewsbury will help realise the objectives of the Economic Growth Strategy and further raise the profile of the M54 corridor as a location for investment;
- The potential for a Midlands High Growth Zone for employment situated around three core employment opportunities: West Midlands Interchange (Four Ashes, South Staffordshire), Western extension to the i54 Development (Wolverhampton) and M6/M54/M6 Toll Link (South Staffordshire) received stakeholder support as it linked Shropshire's vision into the growth zone objectives and the delivery of a holistic strategy for the scale and distribution of economic growth around the M54 and in the wider conurbation; and
- Support was noted with regard to the provision of additional supply of employment land to deliver local sustainable employment with greater productivity in the following growth sectors:
  - Automotive/Engineering/Advanced Manufacturing; and
  - Food Manufacturing and agri-tech.

## Challenges:

- Some neighbouring local authorities felt that Shropshire's economic growth objective could isolate neighbouring areas and links to wider infrastructure and sector development;
- The delivery of further employment led sites could be a competition to other established locations in neighbouring areas;
- Some stakeholders failed to realise the full extent of the economic growth potential provided by the M54 and its adjacent sites feeling that it should instead be seen as a corridor of movement that provides yet to be realised opportunity;
- The timing raised queries regarding its relevance and purpose by some neighbouring local authorities. Some felt that an economic growth objective was too ambitious and aspirational particularly in light of

the current uncertainty in the European market and could lead to negative trends by narrowing gaps between settlements and boundaries; and

- Shropshire's rural geography and swathes of land in the Green Belt will be a major constraint to development with any proposals needing to clearly explain and justify an 'exceptional circumstances' position to enable development. This is widely recognised and acknowledged by the local authority and all key stakeholders.

3.8 An overview of other key stakeholder comments can be found in Appendix A.

## Summary

3.9 The study areas location in relation to neighbouring areas offers opportunities of collaborative working to deliver a sustainable approach for growth, movement and development. This support for integrated working was acknowledged by key stakeholders with particular interest in the links to current sector growth and infrastructure improvements.

3.10 Despite some reservations made regarding the timing and aspiration for economic led growth, Shropshire has an opportunity to pursue a vision that is innovative, locally led and positions themselves as a potential location for investment in the West Midlands.

3.11 Whilst it is recognised that considerable progress has been made in recent years on identifying target markets and the county's unique selling points careful consideration will need to be given to how they position themselves within the local property market in order to differentiate their specific target market/offer from the employment land offers of neighbouring authorities.

3.12 It will be essential that Shropshire identifies it's 'niche' to provide a complimentary and not competing offer to other more established employment locations and an appropriate balance between providing for local employment opportunities alongside developing an offer and portfolio of sites that will be attractive to local, national and international inward investors. It will be this investment that will help deliver the required 'step' change and grow the economy to fulfil the Council's objectives.

## 4. Development Opportunity Sites

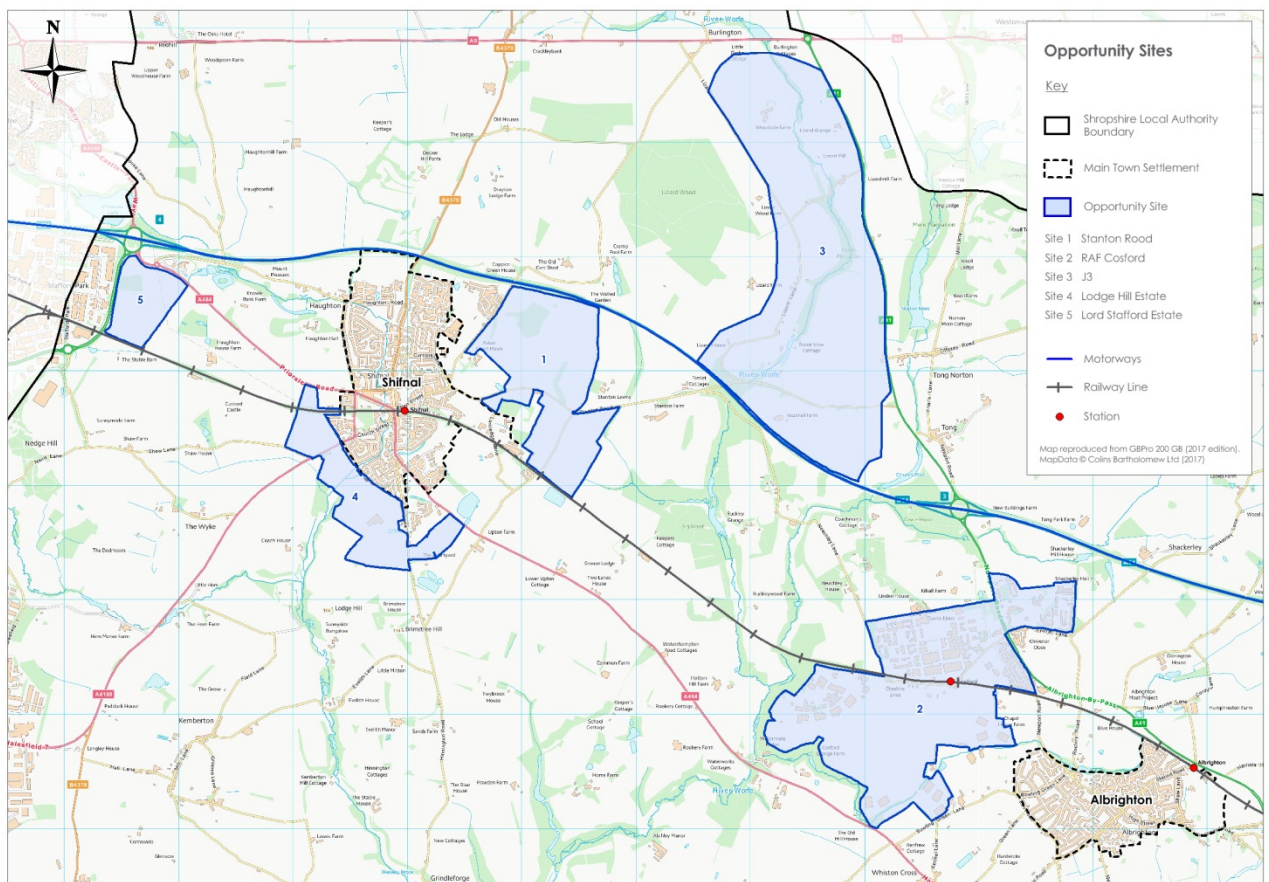
4.1 In this section we identify potential opportunity sites that could help deliver the objectives of Shropshire’s economic growth strategy.

4.2 To align with the recently commissioned West Midlands Strategic Employment Sites Study (also being undertaken by Avison Young with Arcadis) which will be published as part of Shropshire Council’s evidence base it was agreed that this Study would mirror the definitions applied there in identifying strategic sites as follows:

*Strategic employment site’s over 25 hectares which could attract nationally or internationally mobile business activity.*

4.3 Five opportunity sites (see Figure 4.1) that fall within this definition and size threshold were identified by the Council on the basis of their awareness of emerging proposals from land owners and promoters through the Local Plan Review process.

Figure 4.1: Opportunity Sites



Source: Avison Young/Shropshire Council (2019)

4.4 These sites were assessed by the consultant team as prospective strategic sites to accommodate future growth needs. For each site detail is provided on the sites location, type and scale of the proposed

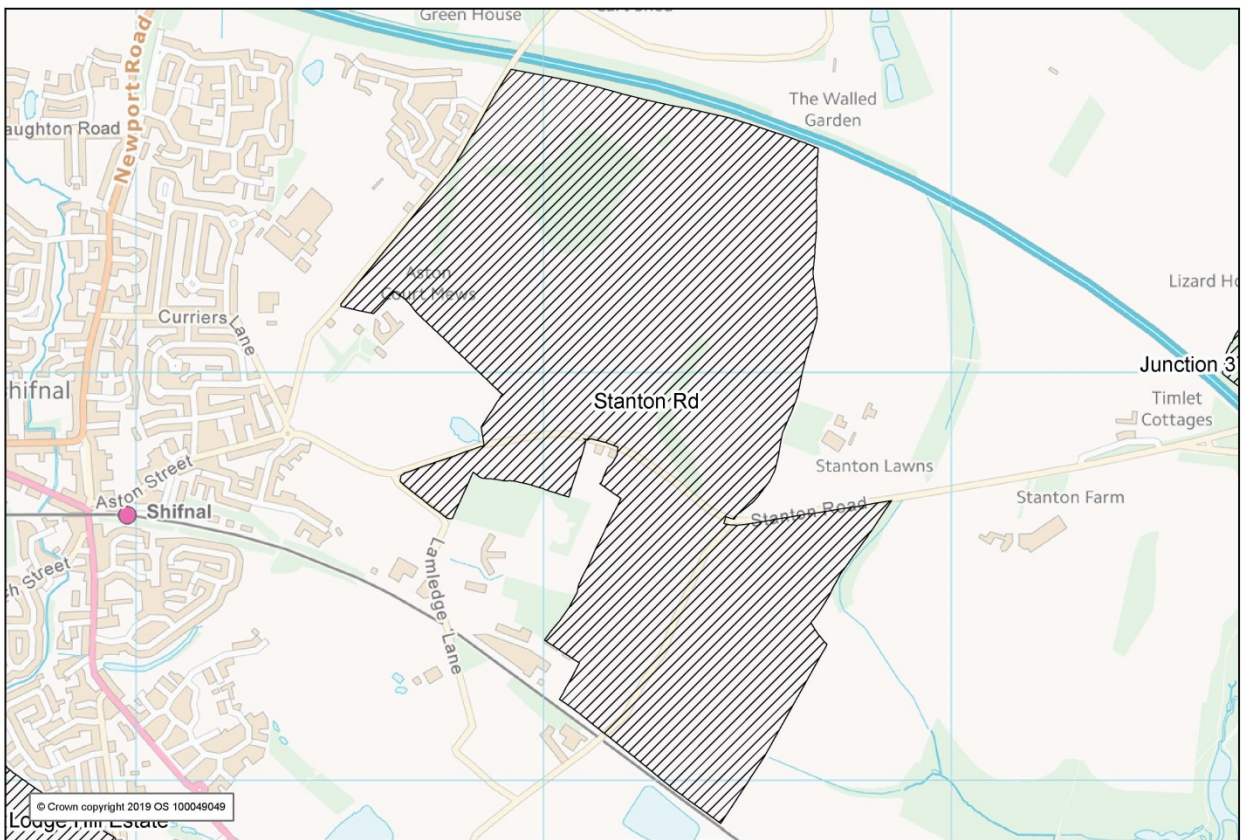
development, current use, key constraints to development, planning position, deliverability, ownership, key adjacencies, local context, target market sectors and the economic case for development.

4.5 For the avoidance of doubt details pertaining to these sites has been obtained through the collation of information from baseline assessments, Local Plan representations and stakeholder engagement which has included the promoters of the sites.

4.6 We consider each of the five sites in turn below:

## Site 1 - Stanton Road

Figure 4.2: Stanton Road Opportunity Site



Source: Shropshire Council (2019)

### Location and Context

4.7 The site is situated to the East of Shifnal between Junction 3 and 4 of the M54. As the site can be accessed by Stanton Road there is potential to reduce traffic pressure on the town centre. It could provide an extension to the existing business area at the Lameledge Estate and there are circa 70 hectares of land promoted for development (40 ha promoted for employment floorspace to the south with the remainder to the north promoted for residential uses).

4.8 The site is located within the Green Belt and is currently in agricultural use. The site is being promoted for consideration for allocation in the Local Plan Review by Advance Land and Planning on behalf of the land owners the Ruckley Estate.



4.9 Stanton Road and Lameledge Lane are established employment areas catering for the local market with some of the stock in a dilapidated state that is not fit for purpose for the modern occupier. It is our understanding that there is demand for the provision of fit for purpose accommodation to meet both local and national needs and to strengthen the employment offer in this location. It is recognised in the Local Plan review preferred sites consultation that the availability of land and premises for business purposes is limited in Shifnal. Whilst the adopted Local Plan provided some employment land, the supply of employment sites in the town has been depleted (much of this land did not ultimately result in employment uses).

#### Economic Case

4.10 There is clear synergy with the existing employment offer in this location and the provision of fit for purpose employment floorspace will strengthen the overall offer and could potentially stimulate investment within the existing site.

4.11 The site benefits from close proximity to the M54 and the opportunities this provides; to RAF Cosford indicating that it could be an attractive location for businesses seeking to collaborate with and benefit from the training and skills development available; and adjacent residential development which will be attractive to businesses looking to both consolidate and grow in the area or those looking to invest and relocate.

4.12 We understand there to be interest in this location from local businesses who are particularly interested in relocating existing operations back into the County.

4.13 The development could contribute to Shropshire's vision of balanced growth through providing employment land to help address the current imbalance between housing and employment. There is also scope to provide housing which has been promoted on the northern element of the site. In combination this would provide an option to co-locate residential and commercial uses, however given the shortage of employment land in Shifnal the delivery of employment land will remain the priority.

4.14 In light of the current imbalance of residential over employment land in this location the initial focus to drive economic growth should be the employment land elements which when brought forward could unlock the residential development both in this location and at Site 4 (Lodge Hill).

4.15 It is understood from the site promoters that the early phases of any employment development on the site would likely accommodate demand from known occupiers who are looking to relocate into Shropshire. Indeed we are aware that dialogue is ongoing between site promoters and interested parties and this could come forward for development before 2026 (subject to the outcome of the Local Plan Review). Such investment will be a boost to the local economy. The site promoters consider that this would represent a short term response to the imbalance in Shifnal between residential and employment. The site promoters consider that later phases have the potential to provide balanced growth of housing and employment development.

4.16 We understand from the site promoter that the first phase of the site will provide opportunity for a single larger employer that could not be accommodated elsewhere. In addition to this, later phases could include a mixture of smaller fit for purpose employment units to satisfy local demand and/or provide a mixed offering for small/medium businesses in addition to accommodation for a single larger employer.

- 4.17 The site promoters consider that this investment could deliver up to 450 new jobs into the area and further raise the profile of the area as a location for investment.
- 4.18 The site is adjacent to an existing occupied employment area where a natural extension would bring economic and social benefits to existing local businesses and potentially stimulate investment in the existing site. The accessibility to local employment would further support the principles of a 'high growth strategy' as per aspirations in the local plan review through enabling businesses to grow and succeed. The delivery of such will benefit the economic profile for Shropshire as a whole.

#### Constraints

- 4.19 Local improvements/upgrades will be needed to Stanton Road to aid accessibility including a signalled junction and services/utilities upgraded.
- 4.20 Whilst the site promoters have indicated that the land has no special landscape designation or value, no heritage value, little ecological value and is not at risk of flooding, all such constraints and issues will need to be assessed and tested by the local authority as part of the sites promotion to enable development. The site is located within the Green Belt.
- 4.21 It is important therefore that the local authority take a pragmatic approach to this site balancing and mitigating the constraints alongside the opportunity to provide circa 40 hectares of employment land and the economic benefits this will yield.

#### Target Market

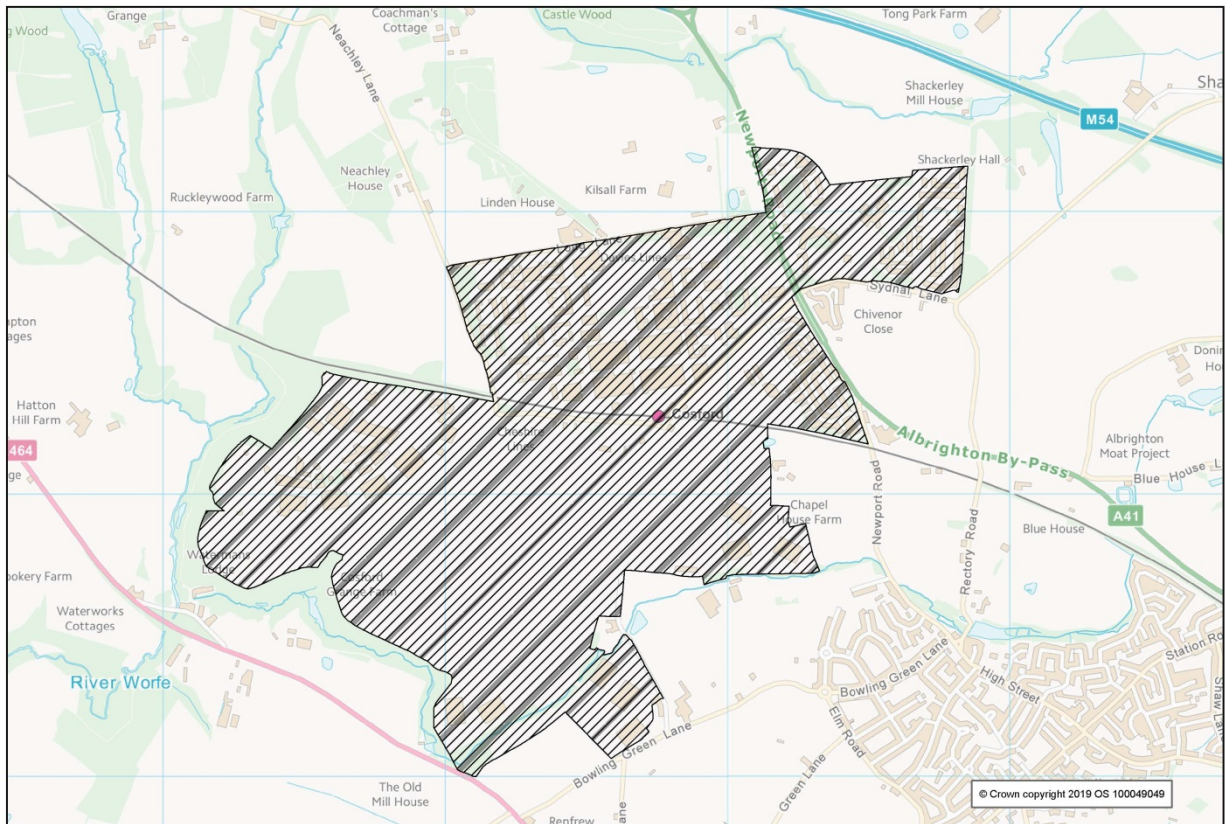
- 4.22 It is anticipated that the employment land element of the site will provide a product that ties in with the growth sectors outlined in the economic growth strategy. In particular we would expect this site to focus on larger employers to accommodate inward investment demand and could also meet local employment needs through fit for purpose smaller units. This will contribute to the provision of a balanced portfolio of employment land to meet local, national and international demand.

#### Next Steps

- 4.23 There is an immediate requirement to bring forward employment land in Shifnal to help re-balance the town's economy and property market following extensive (1,600 units) housing permissions that are well advanced. This site has the potential to help redress this imbalance and contribute to the wider employment land needed in the County. We recommend that the Council maintain dialogue with the land owners/promoters of the site to progress this opportunity site that could go some way to meeting the authority's economic growth agenda.

## Site 2 - RAF Cosford

Figure 4.3: RAF Cosford Opportunity Site



Source: Shropshire Council (2019)

### Location and Context

- 4.24 RAF Cosford is located in the Green Belt and extends to circa 250 hectares. It is located to the west of Albrighton and south of Junction 3 of the M54 with direct access to Cosford train station providing regular train links between Shrewsbury and Birmingham.
- 4.25 The built form of Cosford is predominantly focused around military needs and those of the associated Air Museum including museum buildings, hangars, personnel housing and a training centre. RAF Cosford is a major part of the Defence College for Technical Training (DCTT) and centre of their objective mission to deliver flexible, affordable, modern and effective technical training that meets the needs of the UK's Armed forces for both the present and future. Areas of the site are also used by the West Midlands Air Ambulance and West Midlands Police.
- 4.26 There are a number of units based at the site, including those associated with the DCTT and specifically the Defence School of Aeronautical Engineering and a number of lodger units. The site is well utilised, with between 2,500 and 3,000 people located on the site at any one time (excluding visitors to the Museum).
- 4.27 In addition to the training centre, there are also more than 400 dwellings accommodating more than 1,700 people on site, many of which are military personnel. There is also a growing importance of tourism with in

excess of 100,000 visitors to RAF Cosford annually, with over half these visits made during June/July, when the Air Show takes place.

- 4.28 The site is owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), The MoD have identified RAF Cosford as 'receiver site' within the 'Defence Optimisation Programme' and a centre of excellence for both UK and International Defence Training within the 'Better Defence Estate Strategy'.

#### Economic Case

- 4.29 RAF Cosford is a unique asset to the M54 Growth Corridor which should be utilised to maximum effect to drive economic growth. It offers a training and skills hubs, museum, key worker accommodation and adjacent land used for aircraft training. There are therefore significant opportunities to retain and enhance skills and upskill the labour force through intensification of existing uses and developing its educational and training role.
- 4.30 The MoD are planning a £40 million ten year investment at the site to develop a hub for training, skills and development with the intention that this will be a pre-eminent training centre for a third of the UK's forces. To facilitate these plans, the MoD and their consultants have made representations to the Council promoting the release of the site from the Green Belt.
- 4.31 Proposals on the site could also represent a catalyst for commercial development in the County, and in particular within the M54 corridor, as businesses look to locate in close proximity to benefit from the synergy this provides.
- 4.32 Cosford is part of the Defence College of Technical Training, with recognised apprenticeships for advanced engineering and aero system management. This opportunity is enhanced further by the recent announcement of plans to establish the Whittle Institute and Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) hub at RAF Cosford linking to nearby further and higher education establishments, which will in turn generate employment opportunities and up skilling for school leavers and service personnel re-entering the market.
- 4.33 The core benefits to RAF Cosford and its contribution to the regional economic profile should not go unnoticed. The opportunity presented incorporates Shropshire's aspirations to retain local talent, up skill, create and foster environments of thriving economic activity and raises the profile of Shropshire as an innovative and self-sustaining economic country.
- 4.34 The draft WMCA SIDP supports the need to build upon the regions environmental strengths and identify long term sustainability objectives, focusing on 'resource' based businesses. RAF Cosford offers an opportunity to link to this wider initiative through existing services on site.
- 4.35 RAF Cosford is a key asset within Shropshire as both a tourism destination and, in alignment with the economic growth strategy, as a hub for advanced manufacturing/engineering expertise and training, employment and skills development. It has the potential to draw investment into the County due to the attractiveness of locating in close proximity, given the added value that such adjacencies could provide.

## Constraints

- 4.36 The scope for intensification, (re) development proposals, in particular by non-military uses will be significantly influenced by existing and future operational requirements including flight paths, security, the differentiation of uses on site, access and functional requirements.
- 4.37 Opportunities to intensify and expand the site are constrained by the sites location within the Green Belt. Furthermore, opportunities to expand the site to the south east are limited by the close proximity of the village of Albrighton.
- 4.38 This is a strategic development opportunity which will potentially impact the capacity of the existing services and facilities in adjoining service centres to varying extents given the provision of supporting infrastructure within the site. The site is located adjacent to Cosford train station, and therefore any further development will need to be mindful of existing infrastructure, its capacity and sustainable connections (there may be an opportunity to benefit from West Midland Trains proposals to increase services between Shrewsbury and Birmingham to three trains per hour).

## Target Markets

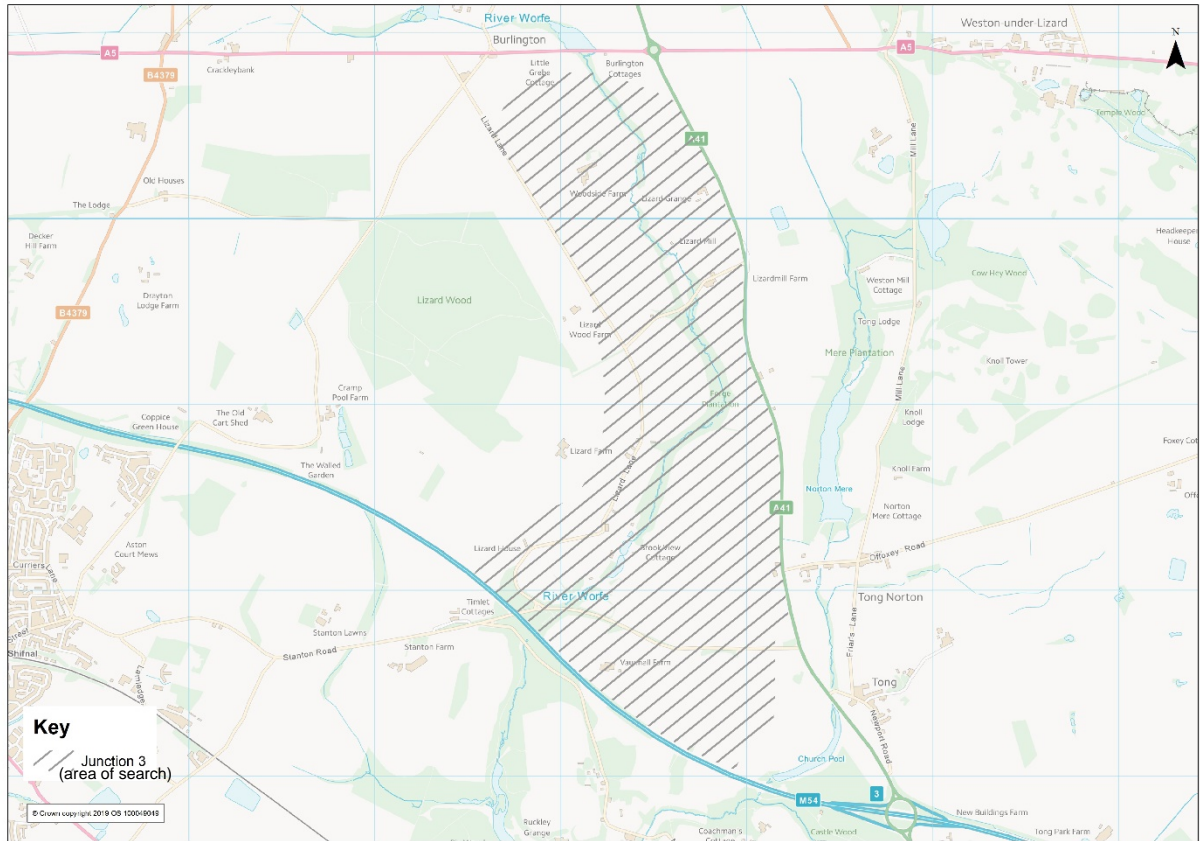
- 4.39 Any release of land from the Green Belt is in its infancy but if it was progressed through the Local Plan Review, would most likely focus on providing sufficient land to future proof the site for future operational defence requirements as well as catering for an expanding educational and tourism role. The emerging STEM hub at RAF Cosford would be accessible by both military and civilian personnel and would be a focus for developing engineering training and excellence.

## Next Steps

- 4.40 RAF Cosford has been considering the feasibility of providing an innovation hub on site for engineering training and excellence and regularly partners with the RAF Museum and other organisations like the John Egging Trust, Northrop Grumman, Tablet Academy UK, RAF Cadet and RAF Youth and Engagement teams to provide STEM residential activities throughout the year.
- 4.41 It is important going forward that these opportunities are promoted to generate linkages between STEM and school/university leavers, and in turn promote engineering and advanced manufacturing within the local area.
- 4.42 We recommend that dialogue with the MoD is maintained by the Council to ensure that the opportunities that this key asset provides are utilised and the synergy's fully understood to enable the site and its offering to become a catalyst to drive economic growth, this is likely to require the release of the site from the Green Belt.

### Site 3 – Junction 3 (J3)

Figure 4.4: J3 opportunity Site



Source: Shropshire Council (2019)

#### Location and Context

- 4.43 The site is situated within the Green Belt and has direct access to J3 of the M54 and the A41 Newport Road. Nearest train stations are Cosford (around 1.5 miles), Albrighton (around 2 miles) and Shifnal (around 2 miles).
- 4.44 The site is owned by the Bradford Estate and is situated in the north-eastern corner of Shropshire to the west of the village of Tong.
- 4.45 The extent and proposed use of the site is still under consideration by the land promoters, but it is understood that both have been scaled back from the original ambition in 2017 to deliver a new town of circa 10,000 homes to the current proposals for circa 50 hectares of employment land and 3,000 homes to the west of the A41.
- 4.46 The site is currently not allocated and is being promoted by the site promoters for inclusion within the Local Plan Review.

#### Economic Case

- 4.47 The site promoters consider that the site could provide an innovative strategic employment hub, serving Shropshire, and the wider West Midlands, by offering opportunities for new businesses seeking to locate in the

County due to its accessibility and prime location. The area's strength as a hub for engineering training and skills development is further enhanced by the close proximity of the site to training and engineering/advanced manufacturing sector expertise and Further/Higher Education at RAF Cosford, University of Wolverhampton Telford Innovation Campus at Priorslee, Harper Adams University and the Marches Centre for Manufacturing and Technology at Bridgnorth.

- 4.48 A concept which is being explored by the site promoters is the potential to include within the strategic employment site an 'innovation and skills centre' linked to nearby Further and Higher Education establishments. This would be accessible to all the companies within any employment provision, as well as the surrounding area, and could provide training courses in a vocational specialist skills environment, tailored to the needs of the supporting firms. The aim is to provide a pathway to improved productivity, as well as in service skills escalation for employees. This would provide benefits for the wider area in terms of talent retention, reduced out commuting and enhanced earnings, thus improving housing affordability.
- 4.49 The site will provide opportunities for training, employment and skills development. The proposal provides opportunities and potential synergies with the future growth aspirations of RAF Cosford in terms of promoting employment growth linked to the increased focus of the base as the RAF's Centre for engineering and aeronautical training. There are also plans to establish the Whittle Institute and STEM hub at RAF Cosford which would help develop RAF Cosford as a hub for engineering training and excellence.
- 4.50 Any strategic employment offering here would be closely linked to the proposed intensification of engineering at RAF Cosford (Site 2) and would provide a complementary not competing offer to neighbouring areas. A key objective would be to provide supply chain opportunities and growth in key target sectors. Strategic development of land at J3 would complement growth potential in the Cosford area, for example, promoting employment growth linked to the increased focus of the base as the RAF's Centre for engineering and aeronautical training.
- 4.51 The site could provide housing for the required RAF labour force and the option for existing or departing personnel to establish businesses within the local area and/or out of service re-training available within the strategic employment park element of the scheme. We understand that the landowner's representatives are in discussion with the MoD/DIO about such matters.
- 4.52 The site promoters are seeking to establish a long term strategic vision for this site. This vision would see development commencing in the next 5-10 years, with development then ongoing for some time.
- 4.53 The Study recognises the substantial economic benefits that would arise from the development coming forward and its potential to help deliver Shropshire's growth ambitions. The promoters have previously indicated that the site's development could yield £300 million in gross value added through the delivery of new employment floorspace by occupiers in high value sectors. This would need to be confirmed as proposals are developed.

#### Constraints

- 4.54 This is a strategic development which would result in the formation of a self-contained settlement, meaning all the services, facilities and infrastructure which traditionally accompanies a settlement will be required. It may also impact on existing villages and infrastructure. There are no detailed plans at present however it is

understood the development will require high level infrastructure works to service both the employment and residential development.

4.55 The proposed scale of development would require a large release of Green Belt land in a location which is not specifically associated with an existing settlement.

4.56 The proposed development would need to show how it would mitigate the following:

- Scale of development in relation to existing settlements and pressure on local facilities;
- Pressure on existing infrastructure links;
- The timing of delivery of housing and employment in light of prevailing market conditions; and
- Environmental impacts etc.

4.57 We are aware of a number of technical reports being prepared by the land owners agents that start to address these key questions and whose outputs will inform decision making on the sites planning status moving forward.

4.58 We consider that the Council should adopt a pragmatic approach when assessing the merits of the site against the landscape characteristics. In light of the scale of development, it would be prudent to work with the promoters to ensure appropriate mitigation can be managed and delivered.

#### Target Markets

4.59 A market report by Savills confirmed that the sites employment offer could be seen as:

- A location for smaller/local businesses as part of the supply chain for larger occupiers at i54/T54 and other sites in the West Midlands;
- As a centre of excellence in low energy initiatives and specialist sustainability skills, building upon and working with the advanced engineering expertise at RAF Cosford; and
- As a location for a new 'Training and Skills Hub' linked to nearby Further and Higher Education establishments.

4.60 The supply chain opportunities linked to the current and proposed future activity at RAF Cosford align closely with the growth sectors referenced in the economic growth strategy including but not limited to engineering, advanced manufacturing, innovative healthcare and environmental technologies. Other target markets include defence, cyber security and the automotive industry.

4.61 There is also an opportunity to develop a centre for innovative housing construction and off site modular housing design. This is a growth area within the housing industry and one that could help differentiate Shropshire's offer from that of its neighbours.

#### Next Steps

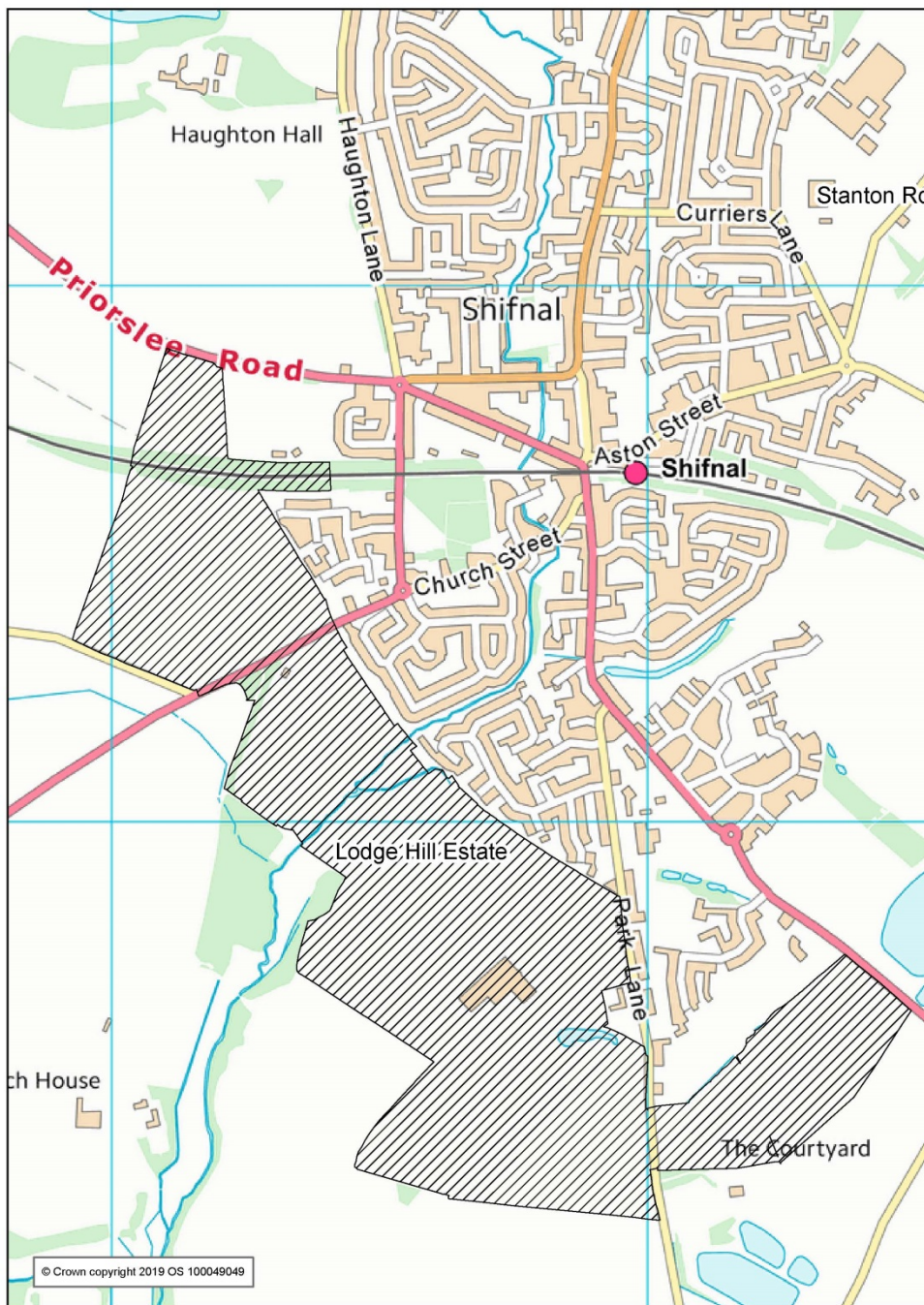
4.62 The site is in a prime location relative to the motorway and rail network and is controlled by a single landowner who is engaged in the local plan review process. It thus provides Shropshire with a significant opportunity to deliver development to support economic growth and housing requirements.



4.63 Shropshire Council should seek to clarify development options with site promoters, encouraging detailed consideration of constraints and progress of a draft masterplan and information on extent/type of development and programme for planning application/delivery to define timelines and determine the extent that the site could meet strategic housing and employment needs.

### Site 4 - Lodge Hill Estate

Figure 4.5: Lodge Hill Estate Opportunity Site



Source: Shropshire Council (2019)

## Location and Context

- 4.64 The site is located within the Green Belt to the south east of Shifnal with strong existing connections to Shifnal but has no direct access from the M54.
- 4.65 We understand that the site consists of circa 35 hectares of land which is being promoted for predominantly residential led development alongside a proposed local centre and site for a school. The site promoters have indicated that they have no plans to provide traditional B class employment floorspace in this location.
- 4.66 The site is not allocated and is being promoted through the Local Plan Review. It is owned by Wallace Land which is represented by Berry's.
- 4.67 The site is bounded by residential areas to the north and east, with proposals to increase housing further east of the site. The main employment areas in Shifnal are located to the east of the town where it benefits from good accessibility further east (and onto the M54) but poor connectivity to the west (necessitating travel through the town centre).
- 4.68 There is no current employment land to the west of the town where it would benefit from better road connections to the west (although this would then suffer from poor connectivity to the east, necessitating travel through the town centre). There is potential for the scheme to address this through provision of a link road from the A464 Priorslee Road with the A4169 Bridgnorth Road and A464 Wolverhampton Road. There are no detailed plans at present however proposals by the site promoter suggest that the residential accommodation delivered would respond to Shifnal's housing need and provide key worker accommodation. The southern boundary of the site would abut open (Green Belt) countryside and therefore consideration of the wider context, in preventing urban sprawl, should be encouraged.

## Economic Case

- 4.69 It is considered that residential development would be economically viable and could deliver much needed affordable housing. However, in order to achieve balanced growth, any housing provision on the site would need to be supported by the provision of employment development, either on the site or on another site associated with the settlement (potentially at Site 1 (Stanton Road)), particularly as it is already recognised that there is a need for more employment provision to balance existing housing commitments.
- 4.70 If the site were promoted for employment uses in the future, viability would depend on the ability to address constraints to the site, particularly access.

## Constraints

- 4.71 The site is situated on the south-western edge of the settlement within the Green Belt. The only accessible route for commercial and HGV vehicles to access the site during construction is through Shifnal town centre and residential areas. This is unsustainable and raises concerns on a number of levels including safety, air quality and noise etc and in essence constrains development. This is reinforced by proposals, as part of Shifnal's Integrated Transport Scheme which seeks to provide traffic calming, improve highway safety and accessibility and ease congestion within the town centre by discouraging vehicular through access.

### Next Steps

4.72 It is recommended that the Council maintains dialogue with the land owners and promoters on their proposals and approach to mitigating the known constraints to development. Subject to the outcome of this the site could be available with a 10 year delivery period but most likely would not be brought forward until beyond 2036.

## Site 5 - Lord Stafford Estate

Figure 4.6: Lord Stafford Estate Opportunity Site



Source: Shropshire Council (2019)

### Location and Context

4.73 The site is located within the Green Belt, is not allocated but is being promoted via the Local Plan Review by Savills on behalf of the land owner, Lord Stafford. It is situated directly east of Telford, west of Shifnal, in the gap between the two settlements. It is also immediately south of Telford motorway services and J4 of the M54.

4.74 Its development would make efficient use of existing assets as the site is well located for access to and from J4 of the M54, the A464 and A442 strategic road network. It is located immediately to the east of the principal employment zone in Telford, at Stafford Park, which borders the site across the A464 and offers an opportunity to collaborate with other businesses and access to the workforce. Given its adjacency to the

built up area of Telford it provides an opportunity to deliver sustainable development given complementary adjacent development and to secure benefits for both the Shropshire economy and Telford.

- 4.75 The site promoters have proposed a mixed use/employment led development offering up to 53 hectares for B1, B2 and B8 uses.

#### Economic Case

- 4.76 The development could provide much needed additional employment land to meet Shropshire's requirements and the latent demand over the administrative boundary in Telford.
- 4.77 Telford is well regarded as a key investment location and there are key adjacencies that could be built open given the towns desirable strategic location, investment successes, accessibility and demand for employment floorspace.

#### Constraints

- 4.78 The site is located within the Green Belt adjacent to the built form of Telford.
- 4.79 Whilst employment activity is present locally, it is acknowledged that this is cross Local Authority boundaries. Furthermore any development of the site could be perceived as part of Telford.
- 4.80 Whilst this is acknowledged the application of strategic planning principles should not be constrained by local authority boundaries and sites should instead be assessed on their own merits and the contribution they make to driving economic growth and productivity.
- 4.81 The site is adjacent to the commercial area of Telford which it is recognised could be perceived as both a constraint and opportunity as the sites location currently plays an important role in maintaining clear boundaries between the two local authority areas of Telford and Shropshire, the settlements of Telford and Shifnal and the prevention of urban sprawl.
- 4.82 Any development of this area would require Shropshire to work collaboratively cross border with Telford.
- 4.83 Shropshire will need to ensure that they carefully balance their current and emerging Local Plan policies alongside the merits and deliverability of cross border opportunity sites.

#### Target Markets

- 4.84 Target sectors for employment are yet to be determined by the site promoters, but we would expect them to tie in with the growth sectors outlined in the Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire.

#### Next Steps

- 4.85 The site promoters' vision is for the site to come forward within a 5-10 year period and has been identified as an extension to the current T54 development.

- 4.86 Shropshire Council should liaise with the land owner and their representatives alongside Telford and Wrekin Council on the development and refinement of the emerging proposals/masterplan, extent/type of development in order to make an informed decision on the site.

## Market Demand

- 4.87 As we have referenced market demand exists in Shropshire for both employment and residential accommodation. We summarise this below:

### Employment

- Stronger employment land demand to the east of Shropshire along the M54 due to accessibility to the north/south highway network and adjacency to key business locations/high profile occupiers;
- Demand for supply chain occupiers in advanced manufacturing, automotive, engineering sectors to supply tier 1 suppliers locally; and
- Demand for small employment premises close to Shifnal to meet local employment needs.

### Residential

- High levels of residential demand around Shifnal and a lot of new schemes recently consented and on site; and
- The quality of life, accessibility and rural geography make this area of Shropshire attractive to residential development, but affordability and meeting housing need will have to be addressed in any future allocations.

## Delivery

- 4.88 The financial viability, delivery and phasing of land will be critical to the implementation of strategic land in the period to 2036. At this stage there is insufficient detail on the scale of the proposals on the five opportunity sites and so it is not yet possible to advise further at this point.
- 4.89 Whilst it is our opinion and anecdotal market evidence points to latent demand for both employment and residential land, it could be valuable to undertake a fuller assessment to quantify this demand.
- 4.90 We understand that the Council are updating their employment land review and economic needs assessments which will provide robust up to date evidence on target sectors and quantum of employment land supply and demand. Based upon econometric demand forecasts the latter will provide an indication of both the quantum of and type of demand that could be accommodated in Shropshire in the next plan period (up to 2036).
- 4.91 We recommend that once the employment land review and economic needs assessments have been completed and greater certainty has been provided by site promoters on the proposed location, scale and timescale of the opportunity at each of the five sites that market reports are prepared. This could provide:

- A view on the potential scale of employment and residential demand both currently and over the next plan period to 2036;
- An indication of viability based upon development appraisals of the proposed scale of development at the opportunity sites;
- Advice on any financial 'gap' and the routes to plugging this including public sector intervention and potential delivery mechanisms to be considered; and
- An indication of both the land/site value and the scale of any uplift i.e. increased Business Rate income.

## Summary

- 4.92 This Study provides a review of the extent of the opportunity associated with the M54 corridor, key opportunity sites within the corridor and draws out the economic rationale for bringing forward strategic sites. This will help inform any Council led presentation of an exceptional circumstances case to enable Green Belt release.
- 4.93 The M54/A5 corridor is a key east-west road and rail transport corridor between Shropshire and the West Midlands. The M54 corridor is a key strategic gateway for both Shropshire and its neighbouring local authorities and is identified locally and regionally as a key growth Corridor for both employment and residential development, resulting from the strong transport links present and critical mass resulting from the presence of nationally significant education, training and employment opportunities.
- 4.94 The M54 corridor is considered to represent a location extremely well placed to deliver growth within the key sectors identified within the Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire, particularly advanced manufacturing including engineering (with strong links to aviation), innovative healthcare and environmental technologies.
- 4.95 The key opportunity sites will need to be tested alongside other options and current and emerging planning policy with land owners/promoters and dialogue maintained to understand proposals for mitigating constraints.
- 4.96 Representations have been lodged as part of the Local Plan Review for all five sites and we understand that these representations and emerging evidence will be formally considered but that dialogue has occurred between the Council and all the land owners/agents and this should be maintained.
- 4.97 It will be essential moving forwards that the Council maintains regular dialogue with the promoters of all five sites to determine which they could allocate in the period up to 2036 and safeguard thereafter.
- 4.98 All sites to a greater or lesser extent fulfil the objectives contained within Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy and could either alone or in combination contribute to the delivery of balanced economic and housing growth as advocated in the Local Plan Review. They could provide new jobs for local people in market facing higher value sectors leading to increases above current levels in gross value added (GVA). They could also provide new housing of a range of types, sizes and tenures, thus offering a choice for both existing residents and those moving into the area to access the new jobs created.
- 4.99 The Council should:

- Maintain dialogue with promoters of all sites but focus particularly on those that can deliver in the current plan period.
- Sites 1-3 should perhaps be prioritised given their proposed offer, geographical location and proximity to each other and key assets in the West Midlands conurbation. These triangle of sites to the east of the M54 corridor provide real opportunities to drive forward the corporate objective of economic growth whilst also delivering balanced employment and residential growth;
- Prioritise employment sites to help redress the current imbalance between residential and commercial sites in this locality i.e. Sites 1-3 & 5;
- Engage in cross boundary discussions with Telford to consider the opportunity provided by Site 5; and
- Seek clarity from the promoters on their proposals, programme and the economic outputs i.e. number/type of jobs and GVA from each of the five sites.

## 5. Conclusions and Next Steps

5.1 This final section draws together the key conclusions and next steps from this Study.

### Economic Growth

5.2 The timing and conditions are right given the once in a generation review of the Green Belt for Shropshire to drive forward their corporate economic growth objectives and bring forward strategic allocations to meet market demand and diversify the economy by drawing in occupiers in higher value sectors that drive economic productivity and retain talent in the County.

5.3 A balanced approach to economic and housing growth advocated through the Local Plan Review process is the best means to support the development of an ‘exceptional circumstances’ case for Green Belt release.

5.4 It’s time for Shropshire to drive forward their own ambitious economic growth plans through delivering strategic mixed use sites as either future allocations or by identifying safeguarded sites for beyond the Local Plan Review period. It will be essential that the strategic employment offer is complementary to and not in competition with neighbouring locations (both within and outside of Shropshire) so that it distinguishes its offer from that provided locally.

5.5 The location is ripe for investment:

- Strategic corridor location book ended by Wolverhampton to the east and Shrewsbury to the west closely related to the West Midlands conurbation and the associated opportunities provided as part of the Midlands Engine;
- Adjacent to international occupiers dominant in target growth sectors i.e. advanced manufacturing/automotive/engineering;
- Accessible to the infrastructure network and set to benefit from pipeline infrastructure investment in road/rail in coming years; and
- Close to higher education and training institutions including key assets i.e. RAF Cosford, Harper Adams University, University Centre Shrewsbury.

5.6 We consider and anecdotal market evidence indicates there is latent demand for ‘fit for purpose’ employment land to meet the needs of the modern occupier for both inward investors and local occupiers which will help Shropshire meet their economic growth objective. There is also continued demand for residential given the high quality of life possible within the area.

5.7 A sector/market niche that builds upon Shropshire’s Economic Growth Strategy objectives, meets both local and inward investor needs and integrates into the existing offer/critical mass is a priority i.e. advanced manufacturing/engineering/automotive supply chain.



## Development Opportunity Sites

- 5.8 As we have commented throughout this report it is recommended that the Council should adopt a holistic and balanced approach, when assessing the merits of the sites in light of the findings of the Green Belt Assessment and Review and other constraints.
- 5.9 It is widely recognised that to deliver the vision of balanced economic and housing growth an exceptional circumstances case will need to be developed to justify any Green Belt release. It is our view that the corporate economic growth objective that seeks to increase productivity, deliver new jobs for local people and contribute to the reduction of levels of out commuting alongside the balanced employment and housing growth proposed in the Local Plan Review will have a greater chance of success than a purely residential led scenario.
- 5.10 It makes economic sense due to opportunities for cross-subsidy and accessibility that the delivery of new employment accommodation would be more sustainable if co-located alongside new residential development. Therefore, and in light of the need to protect and enhance the areas rural amenity Shropshire’s proposed balanced employment and housing led growth will complement the development of the ‘exceptional circumstances’ case.
- 5.11 This strategic study has started to explore these issues and to identify potential development sites that could help realise Shropshire’s Vision. In conclusion we provide below our thoughts on the constraints and opportunities for development for each of the 5 sites with a recommendation that Sites 1-3 are prioritised at this stage:

**Table 5.1 – Site Recommendations**

Opportunity Sites	Key Findings and Recommendations
Site 1 Stanton Road	<p>The area which lies adjacent to the Lameledge Estate and could provide a natural extension to the existing employment area.</p> <p>The development of this site could contribute in part to meeting Shropshire’s vision of balanced growth and could provide much needed employment land to address the current imbalance between residential and employment uses in the area.</p> <p>We recommend that an informed view be taken to enable mitigation of constraints to enable development to bring forward this strategic opportunity site and bring forward much needed employment accommodation.</p>
Site 2 RAF Cosford	<p>RAF Cosford offers a skills and training hub and is a key tourism destination with the Museum an attraction. The DIO are committed to the site and are considering the feasibility of providing an innovation hub on site for advanced manufacturing/engineering expertise.</p> <p>The site provides residential accommodation, various buildings, hard standing, sheds and training hubs within its boundaries and is thus seen as a major developed area in the Green Belt. It is important to acknowledge therefore that the site operates and currently contains urbanising influences within their core boundaries.</p> <p>RAF Cosford plays a key role in delivering Shropshire’s core growth objectives. The development of parts of this site for employment uses for operational defence requirements and advanced manufacturing/engineering excellence as part of an innovation hub/educational training facility will contribute to the delivery of Shropshire’s economic growth vision providing a facility that existing and future occupiers would benefit from. This would raise the profile of the asset and area as a location for</p>

	investment, would be attractive to the market and may lead to the development of a cluster of businesses in this sector.
Site 3 J3	<p>These proposals look to bring forward significant employment and residential development as part of a new Garden Village. This directly responds to Shropshire’s economic vision of balanced employment and housing growth in an accessible location.</p> <p>The Study recognises that substantial economic benefits would arise from the development coming forward as a strategic employment site that targets occupiers in key growth sectors and its close proximity to RAF Cosford and its provision of education and training. The site could also contribute significantly to the realisation of Shropshire’s economic growth ambitions as it would provide both employment and residential development.</p>
Site 4 Lodge Hill Estate	The site could deliver additional residential accommodation but is currently constrained due to poor access (it can only be accessed via the town centre which would be unsustainable for HGV traffic) and so its deliverability appears dependent upon a new link road to open up the site.
Site 5 Lord Stafford Estate	The site is adjacent to the Telford urban area, with clear synergies with existing commercial uses, but lies within Shropshire. The site would deliver additional employment floorspace. The sites location adjacent to the commercial area of Telford would mean dialogue between the two Local Authorities is needed. The site also lies in a strategic gap between Telford and Shifnal.

## Next steps

- 5.12 Whilst it is recognised that the delivery of Shropshire’s corporate economic growth objectives are in their infancy it is essential that momentum is maintained. We therefore recommend the following key next steps:
- 5.13 Update the employment land evidence base and complete an economic needs assessment to:
  - Consider impact of BREXIT on forecast demand;
  - Reflect current market conditions;
  - Confirm the extent of ‘supply’ in key locations; and
  - Ensure that the new Local Plan evidence base is robust and the Plan ‘sound’.
- 5.14 That market reports follow once greater certainty has been provided on the proposed location, scale and timescales of the opportunity at the five sites, that provide advice on the:
  - Scale of employment and residential demand both currently and over the next plan period to 2036;
  - Viability of the proposed scale of development at the opportunity sites;
  - Financial deliverability of the proposals with consideration given to any ‘gap’, the role of public sector intervention and potential delivery mechanisms; and
  - Value of development land and the scale of any uplift i.e. increased Business Rate income.
- 5.15 A promotional document is prepared to further raise the profile of the M54 corridor, preferred opportunity sites, the offer and key sector strengths/assets to the market.
- 5.16 A Business Survey is commissioned to understand the current situation with regard to staff retention/attraction.

5.17 Conversations continue with:

- Landowners/promoters of opportunity sites to confirm scale of development/deliverability; and
- Engagement is maintained with key stakeholders.

# Appendix A- Summary of Stakeholder Comments

Corporate Economic Vision	Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance of vision in light of changing working culture – working from home / agile working</li> <li>• Integrated approach – rural areas need to have urban connections to be sustainable</li> <li>• Eastern Shropshire is accessible to rural Shropshire but also part of the commercial West Midlands</li> <li>• Desirable investment area</li> <li>• Lack of representation from sector industries on Shropshire employment vision</li> <li>• Economic vision is too aspirational as the more people push out of the conurbation, the less attractive the market is</li> <li>• Need, demand, sustainability and infrastructure need to interlink</li> <li>• Artificial boundaries – the study should seek to include core growth zones such as i54/T54</li> <li>• Corridor of movement rather than growth</li> </ul>	<p>Infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Midlands Interchange</li> <li>• Western Orbital</li> <li>• Revised train timetable – 3 trains every hour (to be implemented by 2022)</li> <li>• HS2</li> <li>• M6/M6 Toll Link</li> <li>• Freight line</li> </ul> <p>Sector Growth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Automotive</li> <li>• Manufacturing</li> <li>• Food Manufacturing</li> <li>• Industrial</li> <li>• Link to existing supply chains</li> </ul> <p>Collaborative Working:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High growth zone</li> <li>• Housing settlements</li> <li>• Universities</li> <li>• Integrated approach</li> <li>• Access to funding</li> <li>• Expression of interests received from Sectors outside of Shropshire as potential new businesses/relocations</li> <li>• Integrated approach with the Black Country</li> </ul> <p>Settlements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shifnal – attractive market area for housing and employment with existing services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greenbelt</li> <li>• Being competitive to retain newly skilled trades and labour</li> <li>• Attracting a future workforce – speed of housing v access to employment</li> <li>• Funding availability</li> <li>• Impact on existing highway networks</li> <li>• Employment and housing synergies</li> <li>• Narrowing the gap between settlements and local authorities</li> <li>• Urban profile – lack of research into employment in Shropshire</li> <li>• Transport modelling</li> <li>• Junction 3 is an unsustainable location</li> <li>• Industrial coming forward may outstrip and damage the investment out of centre</li> <li>• Demographic trends – people who move to Shropshire are aware of their commute or seeking to retire</li> </ul>

	<p>available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Albrighton</li><li>• RAF Cosford – compliments West Midlands history and skill base for engineering</li></ul> <p>Skills and Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Harper Adams – statistics show a strong retention of students accessing employment within the West Midlands</li><li>• Overseas students accessing housing within the West Midlands</li><li>• Potentially opportunities for Live Work developments within the corridor</li></ul>	
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# Contact Details

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## Enquiries

Simon Phillips

0121 609 8265

Email [simon.phillips@avisonyoung.com](mailto:simon.phillips@avisonyoung.com)

## Visit us online

[avisonyoung.co.uk](http://avisonyoung.co.uk)

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## Avison Young

3 Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2JB

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