Herefordshire Council

Place Shaping Options Consultation - Leominster

Local Plan 2021-2041

June 2022



Leominster Place Shaping Options

Background

Leominster is a picturesque market town, located 12 miles north of Hereford and with a population of about 12,400 residents. Leominster is an important service centre for many parishes in the north of Herefordshire. The town centre is known for its antique shops and historic timber-framed buildings and it has recently been identified as a Heritage Action Zone. This will enable projects which will help improve the historic environment to stimulate economic growth and tourism potential. The historic buildings and narrow streets in the town centre retain much of the Medieval and Tudor characteristics, attracting many tourists into the town.

Current and emerging policy background

Core Strategy

The Core Strategy identifies Leominster as an area for strategic growth, allocating a minimum of 2500 homes to be provided in Leominster over the plan period.

- This is mainly to be accommodated through a Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE) located to the south west of Leominster.
- A southern link road had been included to help combat the traffic congestion and air pollution issues at Bargates.
- At present, the SUE has not progressed.

Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)

The Leominster NDP (2011-2031) tackles six key issues that Leominster will face up to 2031:

- Housing.
- Health and Leisure.
- Travel and Transport.
- Jobs and Business.
- Green spaces.
- Built Environment.

- The NDP includes the proposal for the Sustainable Urban Extension in line with the Core Strategy although expresses concerns about the scale of the development.
- It supports a southern link road to address congestion and air quality issues at Bargates in association with the SUE but also states its support for it being built even if the urban expansion does not go ahead.

- The link road is identified as a priority which must be achieved as early as possible to facilitate the delivery of housing.
- The NDP does not allocate any other housing sites but identifies a settlement boundary within which housing is considered acceptable subject to certain criteria.
- The NDP encourages new business development in the Worcester Road/Southern Avenue area and the Enterprise Park.
- New developments for retail, office, commercial, cultural and tourism in the town centre are also encouraged which are in keeping with the existing shop frontages.
- The NDP proposes that developments will be required to have regard to the proposals set out in Herefordshire's Green Infrastructure Strategy and sets out proposals to protect and enhance the green infrastructure and open spaces.
- Regarding highway infrastructure, the NDP suggests that development proposals include measures aimed at reducing the need to travel and encourage sustainable transport modes across the town and within new developments.

Market Town Investment Plan

The Leominster Market Town Investment Plan (MTIP) proposes a series of to encourage investment and tourism in the town, to enhance the public realm and to support the local economy. These include:

- Leominster Railway Station/Mobi Hub: Including a rail based park/choose and ride and improved active travel links across the town.
- Leominster Fire Station Relocation and Redevelopment: This could allow the site to be redeveloped as a mixed retail/housing scheme and open up riverside access.
- Leominster Incubation Hub: Supporting co-working and start-up businesses in the town.
- Corn Square Regeneration: This is identified as in need of investment to improve the visitor experience of the town.
- Marsh Court (Former Dales Site 15 acres): The re-development would open a key gateway to the town as a multi-purpose facility.
- Worcester Bromyard Leominster Greenway: a 16 km walking, cycling and horse-riding track.
- Old Priory Sale/Asset Transfer: A number of different uses are being considered to benefit the local community and visitors including: relocation of Leominster museum, a destination boutique hotel, cookery school, or an extended community asset.
- Visitor Economy: The development of tourism as a key strategic objective including repurposing of Corn Square and provision of new accommodation

Other local documents

Herefordshire Council's Updating and Screening Report identified that the location of the traffic junction where the A44 road (known as "Bargates") meets with Dishley Street and Cursneh Road in Leominster was exceeding the government's nitrogen dioxide (NO2) objective level. A Detailed Assessment of the air quality in the vicinity of Bargates, Leominster was therefore undertaken and an Air Quality Management Area subsequently declared as the government's nitrogen dioxide objective level was observed to regularly breach at several monitoring locations here. In accordance with statutory guidance and with an aim to improve the level of pollution at Bargates, Herefordshire Council has scoped 8 air quality actions and this report assesses these actions.

Leominster Town Council worked in partnership with Herefordshire Council and Balfour Beatty Living Places on the Leominster Market Town Study - Transport Plan (January 2020) to develop public realm and transportation improvements for Leominster. These include the appraisal of a number of and the next steps required to progress town centre enhancements around Corn Square and secure the delivery of the Southern Relief Road.

Issues from the Spatial Options Consultation

Key themes arising from the spatial options consultation:

- Social infrastructure in Leominster is limited although some argue that Leominster can accommodate growth and regeneration opportunities.
- The proposal for the SUE should be retained despite sites not gaining planning permission for development as there has been progress on the part of landowners between themselves and the council with regard to discussions going forward
- Others expressed concern over the deliverability of the SUE and recommended that other opportunities for Leominster should be identified instead.

Spatial option growth for Leominster

The preferred spatial option suggests an indicative target of approximately 1700 dwellings units within Leominster (in addition to around 420 commitments).

Capacity for development

Built April 2021- April 2022	Commitments at April 2022
15	approx. 420

Opportunities and constraints

Key constraints to development in Leominster are:

- Extensive areas at risk of flooding, particularly to the north of the town.
- Within the catchment of the River Lugg where some development is restricted due to high phosphate levels.
- Air Quality Management Area at Bargates. This potentially limits the potential for new development although as private car owners switch over to electric vehicles the pressures on the AQMA may become less. However the likely slower switch of goods vehicles from diesel to petrol is still likely to be an issue for a longer period.
- Traffic congestion through the town centre, particularly at Bargates and associated with the air quality issue.
- Landscape quality and key views in certain locations.

Other constraints include:

- Limited availability of suitable brownfield sites within the built up area.
- Relatively low delivery rates in comparison with Ledbury and Ross on Wye.

Key opportunities:

- The town enjoys a wealth of rich historical, cultural and architectural assets and the town centre is covered by the Leominster Conservation Area making this an attractive place to live work and visit.
- The Leominster High Street Heritage Action Zone funding will help regenerate and enhance the town to increase its attractiveness as a place to live work and visit.
- Potential for the established manufacturing sector to grow and expand.
- Railway station with direct links to Hereford, South Wales and Manchester. There is opportunity to increase rail passenger use through the establishment of a Mobi Hub as identified in the MTIP.
- Principle established for a southern link road associated with a sustainable urban expansion

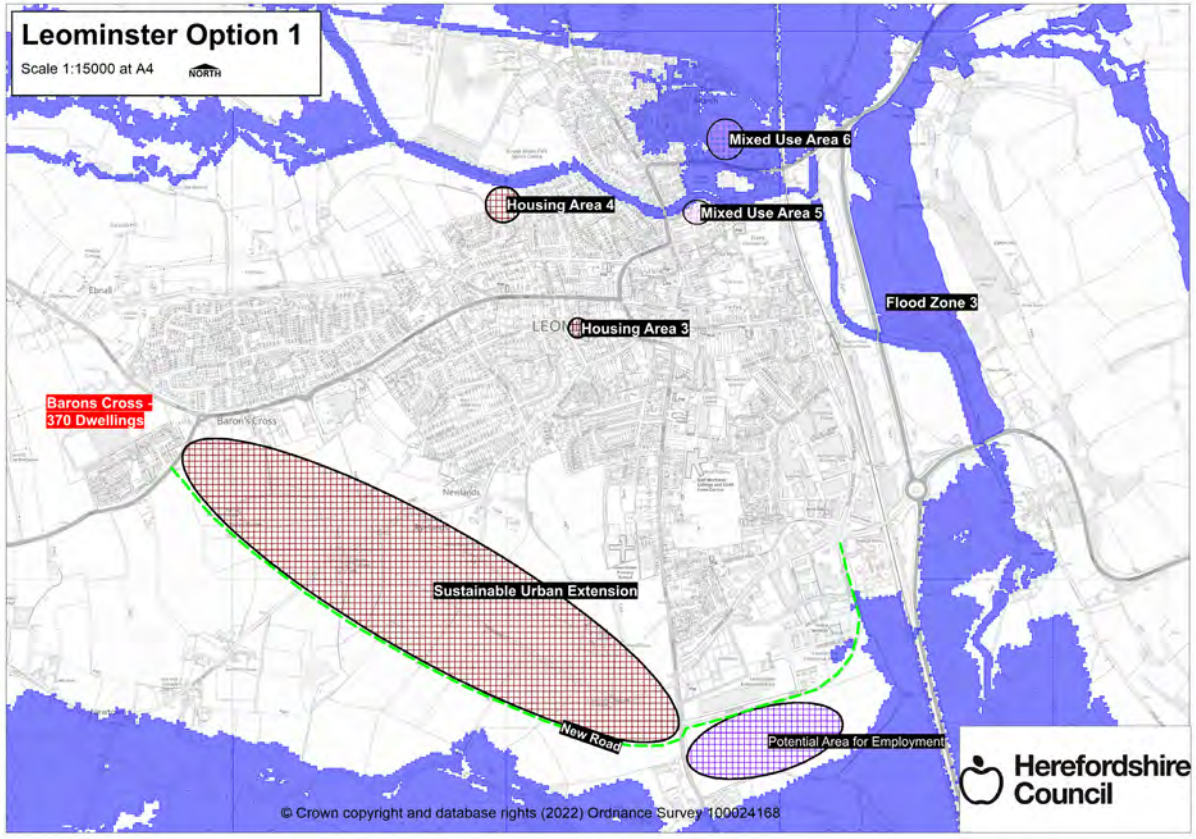
Options

Strategic housing growth options

There are two main options for future strategic growth in Leominster which are made up of different broad locations as shown on the map below. This section describes which broad locations are included in which option.

Option 1: Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE) to the south of the town with additional smaller scale town centre growth.

This option would carry forward the proposal for the Sustainable Urban Extension identified in the Core Strategy and would accommodate 1500 new homes and an associated link road. This proposal and additional small scale development in and around the town could achieve the 1700 dwellings. However in order to carry this forward from the Core Strategy, robust and convincing evidence would be required that this will come forward in the plan period.



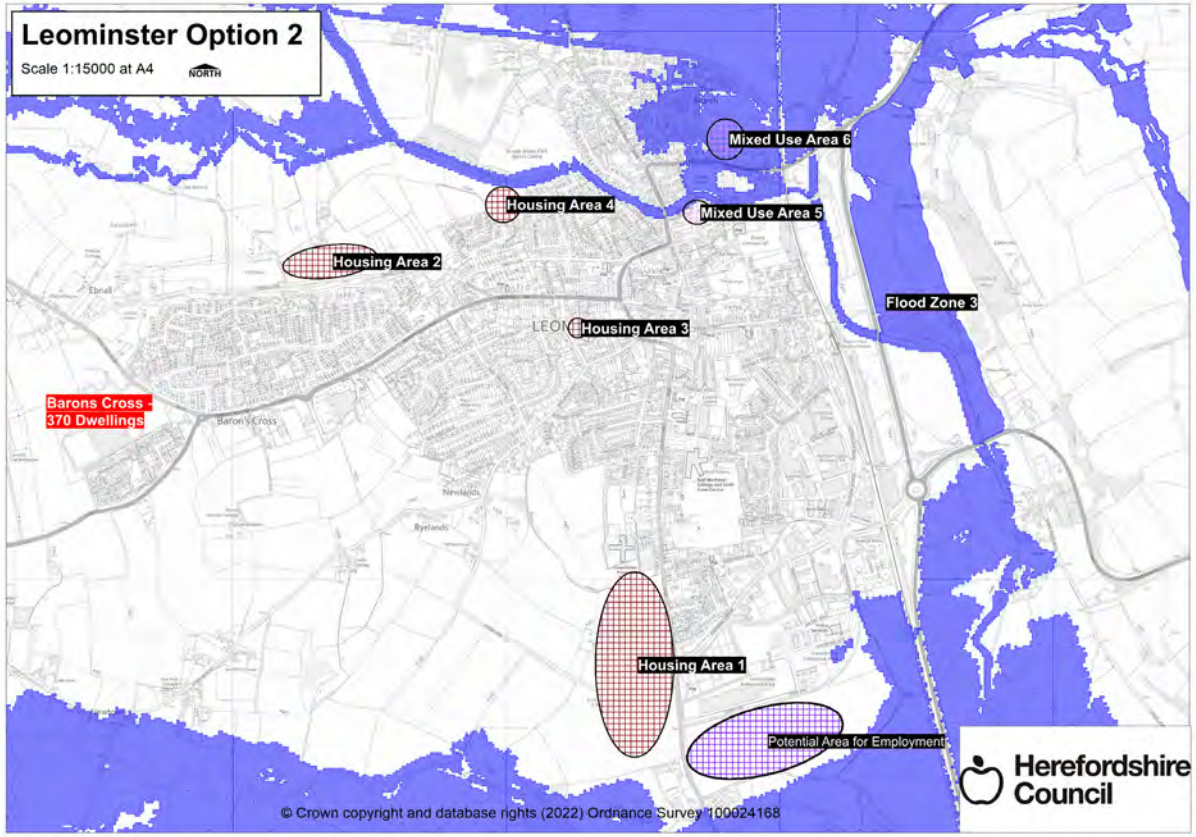
Opportunities:

- To develop a master planned high quality development. Policy LO2 of the Core Strategy identifies services and infrastructure that should be provided as part of the urban extension. However the update of the Local Plan provides the opportunity to review these to take into account new evidence and good practice in relation to climate change that has emerged since 2015.
- The associated link road would redirect traffic flows from Bargates which would help relieve the traffic congestion and improve the air quality.
- There would be an opportunity to create active travel links from the SUE into the town centre, the employment areas and to the railway station.
- The development of the SUE would support the take up of an extension of up to 10ha the south of Leominster Enterprise Park.
- Make use of available town centre brownfield sites.

Constraints:

- The Town Council makes clear that the delivery of a link road to ease congestion and pollution at Bargates is a priority, even without the Sustainable Urban Extension. However it is unlikely that the new road would be built as a stand-alone project.
- There has been lots of uncertainty on this proposal coming forward. If it cannot be guaranteed, the options to achieve the 1700 dwellings are limited.
- Contaminated land requires further investigation to understand impact on potential development.

Option 2: Development to the south of Leominster, North of Ginhall Lane and smaller scale town centre locations.



Land north of Ginhall Lane (area 2 on the map)

This area of land is part of a bigger parcel of land that was identified in the 2012 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) at which time it was concluded that there was potential to deliver housing on this site although there could be significant landscape impact. However given that Ginhall lane is relatively narrow careful consideration would need to be given to the highways accessibility of this area as well as whether car movements from this area would contribute to increased pollution and congestion at Bargates. It is estimated that approximately 100 dwellings could be located here.

Land south of Leominster, west of Hereford Road (area 1 on the map)

This would involve developing some of the land that is currently identified for the Strategic Urban Extension. The advantage of this is that it is unlikely to increase the negative impacts of traffic through the Bargates Area. However this area was considered to have high sensitivity in landscape quality terms and therefore this would need to be carefully assessed and any development would have to incorporate this into its design and layout. It is estimated that approximately 250 dwellings could be located here.

Opportunities

- Make use of available town centre brownfield sites.
- Retain opportunity for the larger urban extension to be developed beyond the plan period.
- Development that would have limited impact upon traffic congestion and pollution in the town centre.

Constraints

- The Town Council makes clear that the delivery of a link road to ease congestion and pollution at Bargates is a priority, even without the Sustainable Urban Extension. However it is unlikely that the new road would be built as a stand-alone project.
- Contaminated land requires further investigation to understand impact on potential development.
- More piecemeal development would not result in same scale of provision of new facilities and services that could be delivered in conjunction with a larger scale strategic development.
- Would not be able to accommodate the 1700 dwellings identified under Option 3 of the strategic spatial options consultation.

Smaller scale areas: Both Options 1 and 2 would include some additional town locations. These could include the following:

Land at Westfield Walk (area 3 on the map): following relocation of doctor's surgeries and pharmacy to new health hub site this would release this previously developed site for housing.

Land north of the Rugg/Radnor View (area 4 on the map): This area was identified in the 2012 SHLAA as a group of smaller sites. It was concluded at this time that there was potential to deliver housing on this site although there could be significant landscape impact. However there has been a planning permission on this site which has now expired. Careful consideration would need to be given to the highways accessibility of this area as well as whether car movements from this area would contribute to increased pollution and congestion at Bargates.

Land at Broad Street Car Park and the Fire Station (area 5 on the map): This is identified in the Leominster Market Town Investment Plan as an opportunity to relocate the Fire Station from its current location in Broad Street and co-locate it with the West Mercia Police Station on the Enterprise Park. This could allow the existing site to be redeveloped as a mixed retail/housing scheme as well as open up a higher quality river side area. However this site is potentially contaminated given former historic uses on the site and therefore this would need to be carefully investigated in order to determine the potential for the type and scale of redevelopment here.

Marsh Street/ Dales (area 6 on the map): This is identified as a site for mixed use development in the Leominster Market Town Investment Plan. Planning permission has recently been granted for a new health hub on part of this site. The MTIP suggests that other uses could include retail, employment, hotel and homes for older people. However as can be seen from the map this site is located in an area at risk of flooding (flood zone 3) which would represent a significant constraint to such development. However the flood maps is based on undefended zones and the lad is shown as an area benefitting from defences as it is protected the Leominster Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS) which offers protection to norther Leominster and has recently been improved by the Environment Agency with the stand of protection being increased. However the primary function of the FAS is to protect existing properties and not to enable development in what would be an otherwise unsustainable location. Therefore it would be necessary that any proposals satisfy the sequential and exception tests demonstrating that the proposals are safe and will not increase flood risk to third parties.

Environment:

Open Space:

- Enhance and protect the designated green and open spaces identified in the NDP and in particular Cockcroft Hill and Ryelands Croft which is a habitat for several protected species and a well-used area by residents.
- Improvement of the riverside walks including more lighting and widening of the paths.
- More green and open spaces around the Enterprise Park.

Green Infrastructure:

- To provide green infrastructure, paths and cycle ways to improve connectivity between existing green spaces, new and existing residential and employment developments and the town centre.

Heritage:

- Leominster has been designated as a High Street Heritage Action Zone which will enhance the town centre by resulting in improvements to the buildings' facade, implementation of traffic control measures, and improvements to Corn Square.
- A Conservation Area appraisal is currently being prepared.

Community:

Community facilities:

- Broad Street car park as a potential location for new community facilities and the Dales site which has been put forward in the Market Town Investment Plan.
- The NDP identifies a range of community assets that should be protected.

Education:

- It is likely that if the SUE was to come forward, provision of a new primary school and pre-school facilities would need to be considered.

Healthcare:

- Planning permission has been granted for a new health hub to be located on Marsh Court alongside Mill Street.
- The Built Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy 2021-2041 found that sports facilities in Leominster were well used by people within Herefordshire and were rated either good or above average. These sports facilities should be protected and should continue to maintain the quality of them.

Economy

Employment Land:

- Initial findings from the Herefordshire Employment Land Study (ELS) reports concluded that the Leominster Enterprise Park provides a successful mix of industrial and office uses with design and build options. The phased development at the Dales Site could give an opportunity for a mixed use development.
- The extension of the enterprise park of up to 10ha to the south which has been proposed in the Core Strategy is still considered to be a requirement independent of whether the SUE is developed. However the finalised ELS will provide more information on this and implication for the extent of any extension.

Transport:

- Significant issues with traffic flow through the town, causing congestion and air quality issues at Bargates. The provision of a link road would help address this issue.
- Developing a mobi hub at the railway station.
- Improvement to active travel links and creation of green highways to benefit people and wildlife.

Tourism:

- The market town investment plan and the NDP identifies a need for more sufficient quality hotel accommodation and to enhance visitor facilities and the visitor experience.