

SWDP 12: Employment in Rural Areas

- A. Where rural areas are referred to in this policy, this means Category 1, 2 and 3 villages, lower category villages and the open countryside, all as defined in SWDP 2.**

Protection of Existing Employment Sites

- B. To help promote rural regeneration across south Worcestershire, existing employment sites in rural areas that are currently or were last used for B1, B2, B8, tourism, leisure and /or recreation-related purposes will be safeguarded for employment-generating uses during the plan period. Proposals to change the use of such sites to any non-employment-generating purpose will need to demonstrate that the site has been actively marketed for employment, tourism, leisure or recreation purposes for a period of at least 12 months and that it is no longer viable for an employment-generating use. Details of what is required of a marketing exercise are contained in Annex F.**

Expansion of Existing Employment Sites in Rural Areas

- C. The expansion of existing employment sites in rural areas will be supported where it has been demonstrated that intensification of the existing site is not viable or practical.**

Farm Diversification

- D. Proposals to diversify farm businesses for employment, tourism, leisure and recreation uses will be permitted providing:**
- i. The proposed new use does not detract from or prejudice the existing agricultural undertaking or its future operation.**
 - ii. The scale of activities associated with the proposed development is appropriate to the rural character of the area.**
 - iii. Wherever possible existing buildings are used to reduce the need for additional built development.**
- E. Where planning permission is required for the residential conversion of a building as part of a farm diversification project, it will only be granted where a marketing exercise⁽³⁵⁾ has shown that employment, tourism, leisure and recreation uses are unviable.**

35 The marketing exercise should follow the requirements set out at Annex F.

Reasoned Justification

1. The Employment Land Review (2011) demonstrates that the rural employment market across south Worcestershire is characterised by bespoke individual property requirements. Small local businesses are likely to require freehold property, which is difficult to deliver speculatively in advance. The provision of new rural employment sites should be considered favourably during the plan period, provided it is not harmful to the integrity of the settlement or landscape character. It is important that such developments are offered on flexible terms.
2. In addition, employment sites that fall vacant should be actively marketed before their conversion to an alternative use such as residential and the consequent loss of a facility / service providing important local jobs. The timescales and range of the marketing exercise will need to have regard to the nature and scale of the site and buildings and the prevailing economic conditions.
3. There is a need to maintain a positive approach to farm diversification activities; such development should not, however, be permitted to jeopardise future agricultural production.

Rural Employment Opportunities

4. South Worcestershire's economy is characterised by the dispersed location of a number of employment sites and small businesses, including home-working arrangements, throughout the rural areas. Within rural areas, agriculture, horticulture, food processing and distribution remain a vitally important part of the local economy, particularly in the Vale of Evesham and in the south and north-west of Malvern Hills. An important focal point for the strategy is the further improvement of the economic prospects for those living in the rural north and west of Malvern Hills, beyond the main employment centres.
5. This policy should also be read in conjunction with policy SWDP8 E.