

North Somerset Council

Report to the Strategic Planning, Economic Development and Regeneration Policy Scrutiny Panel (SPEDR)

Date of Meeting: 25th November 2020

Subject of Report: Junction 21 Enterprise Area new vision

Town or Parish: Various

Officer/Member Presenting: Jane Harrison, Head of Economy

Key Decision: No

Reason: Update report for information / discussion

Recommendations

To note and discuss the potential role for Junction 21 Enterprise Area (J21EA) in the future.

1. Summary of report

This report provides an overview of the key questions officers will be considering when developing a new vision for J21EA. It seeks input from SPEDR on these topics.

2. Policy

A renewed vision and market position statement for J21EA supports both Corporate Plan objectives and the new Economic Plan which states a commitment to increase the number of jobs in the Enterprise Area.

3. Context

J21EA represents a focal point for employment and commercial investment in North Somerset. There have been notable successes: NSEA Hive, Weston College Construction training centre, Food Works SW, speculative development schemes and the creation of c.1,500 jobs in manufacturing, technology, service sector and professional services and other sectors that support business– hotel, petrol station, nurseries etc. However, significant drivers are leading to the need to rethink J21EA's role and purpose in North Somerset's economic future:

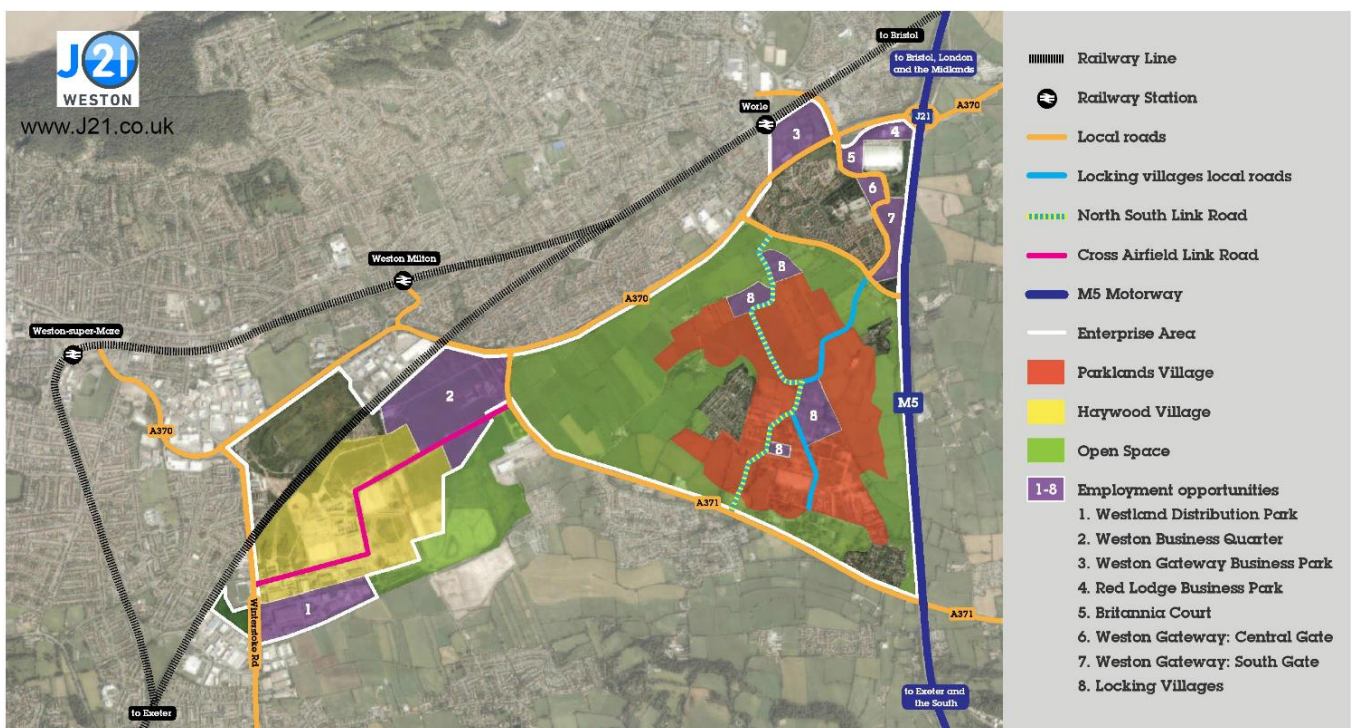
- Covid-19's impact on the office market – many property agents are anticipating a move from businesses towards 'distributed working'. Instead of employees being tied to centralised offices, staff may start to work in different and dispersed locations. This could reduce demand for traditional offices and change the future purpose of J21EA.
- Weston Placemaking Strategy and a need to better respond to socio-economic issues in Weston - The Placemaking Strategy for Weston identifies the need for good quality jobs to support the town's residents. This requirement needs to look beyond the town centre boundary and consider what J21EA can do to reduce the level of deprivation for certain parts of Weston.

- Gravity Enterprise Zone (635-acre enterprise zone in Bridgwater) – The proximity of Gravity to J21EA and potential synergies between businesses and supply chains needs to be explored, with potential linkage to Hinkley Point C supply chain (mechanical & engineering phase and operational phases) and Bristol Airport day to day operations.
- North Somerset Council Employment Land Review (2018) and WECA Employment Land Spatial Needs Assessment (2020) both provide a robust evidence base demonstrating demand and market position of J21EA. Both report that local business demand, particularly for ‘grow on’ premises below 5-8,000 sq. ft. space has been persistently strong over several years. NSC has a leading role in creating the conditions to unlock and meet that demand. As of September, occupation of light industrial space in all parks is around 95%.
- The potential of a Freeport operating at Bristol Port – a Freeport is an area where goods in transit are exempt from customs duty. Bristol Port intends to make an application to be a Freeport and there is the possibility that Freeport sites do not need to be contiguous – meaning they could be located on J21EA.
- New policy and strategy context in the form of:
 - NSC Corporate Plan
 - Local Industrial Strategy
 - A new Economic Plan
 - West of England and North Somerset recovery plans
- Opportunities that emerge from the Western Gateway and work at the West of England around internationalisation and foreign direct investment.
- Opportunities the development of a new Local Plan presents to capture investment through unmet commercial demand and revise policies that reaffirm NSC’s commitment to skills and employment growth.

The Economy Team are in the early stages of developing a re-positioning statement to help J21EA to respond to these drivers. This will primarily aim to improve J21EA’s investment attractiveness.

4. J21EA background

J21EA covers the area shown below adjacent to Junction 21 of M5:



J21EA includes the Weston Villages development sites (Haywood Village, Parklands Village and the Weston Business Quarter), but extends beyond that to include sites at West Wick at Winterstoke Road. It includes 72ha of employment land “ready to go” with outline planning consents, infrastructure and a Local Development Order in place. NSC owns land at the Weston Business Quarter and at Parklands.

Enterprise Area status was granted to J21 in 2011/12, as well as to six other strategic employment locations across the West of England. This was part of the £1bn West of England “City Deal Economic Development Fund” (EDF) with government, allowing infrastructure to be forward-funded against growth in the collective Enterprise Area business rates. Amongst other projects, the EDF has helped fund the North South Link road, improvements to West Wick roundabout, and more recently, Metrowest. 50% of business rate growth from the area is pooled across the West of England to repay such investments over a 25-year period (the remaining 50% supports our revenue budgets).

The location was chosen in large part because it was already designated for growth, including several designated employment sites. This was linked to a wider “employment-led” strategy for Weston as a whole, embedded in the Local Plan as a requirement for 1.5 jobs per dwelling, the rationale being the creation of a more balanced local economy and reduced out-commuting. The aspiration was to create 10 – 15,000 new jobs across Weston, of which around 9,000 would be at J21EA.

5. Initial scoping questions

The Economy Team will be developing a new vision for J21EA to support us with future promotion and marketing. To support this work SPEDR are asked to provide their thoughts on the following key questions:

- Are there any drivers or challenges we’ve failed to outline in section 3 which we should be considering?
- How can J21EA be positioned to attract investment?
- What are the sectors we could focus on to help J21EA have a clear vision?
- Which corporate objectives could J21EA respond to/ prioritise?
 - Low carbon inward investment
 - Provision of jobs for tackling deprivation in Weston
 - Provision of jobs to respond to redundancies and impacted sectors from Covid-19.
 - Increasing business productivity

Author:

Jane Harrison, Head of Economy