

Property Strategy 2020-2025





Introduction



Cllr Peter Butlin
Deputy Leader and Portfolio
Holder for Finance and Property

Investing in Warwickshire is a fundamental part of our role as a County Council. We want Warwickshire to be the best it can be, sustainable now and for future generations. As a county, we boast a broad range of strengths that make Warwickshire a great place to be.

We benefit from a buoyant economy, significant business and housing growth, considerable community capital, much valued natural environment and town centres that are a vital part of local life. But looking ahead, we also face significant challenges, including demographic pressures and the impact of climate change.

As an organisation, we are equally well placed but face uncertainty over future funding levels and our ability to meet growing demand for the services we provide.

Our refreshed Property Strategy forms a core part of our strategic planning framework and supports the ambitions and priorities of the Council Plan. It aims to optimise the way we manage

our extensive portfolio of assets to ensure the best possible for our communities, business, partners and staff and is a key contributor to our commercial ambitions.

Our property assets are an important part of supporting and enabling us to transform the way we deliver public services with our partners and we aim to have an innovative and outward facing approach to the use of our assets to do this. Our property portfolio also plays an important role in supporting the delivery and transformation of our frontline services and our increasing move towards flexible and agile working.

We are committed and serious about tackling climate change and aim to ensure that our property portfolio is sustainably and efficiently managed so that it is fit-for purpose for the future.

This strategy is underpinned by a 'Property Offer' which sets out the guiding principles we will apply in making all of our property related decisions, which is in turned supported by robust planning and activity.



Rob Powell
Strategic Director for
Resources
Warwickshire County Council

1.

Purpose of our Property Strategy

Warwickshire County Council is responsible for a wide range of properties across the County. These properties enable us to deliver our service commitments. In addition our Real Estate holdings allow us to manage land and buildings to support our wider strategic objectives both now and in the future. The Council owns or operates from over 770 assets, made up of 2,558 buildings. The total floor area is 1,245,000 m² and the total land area is 3,382 Ha, roughly equivalent to 4,500 football pitches.

Our properties include

- Libraries
- Fire stations
- Country parks
- Children and Families Centres
- Houses
- Small holdings and tenanted farmland
- Highways, Depots and other parcels of land
- Business Centres
- Schools
- Office buildings
- Museums

Our Property Strategy sets out the choices we make in relation our land and buildings in order to:

- take opportunities to invest in new land and properties
- dispose of surplus land and property
- manage and maintain our properties over the longer term
- maximise our financial return on our properties (through greater income generation, improved efficiency and collaboration across the Directorates)
- maximise both our staff working environment and the impact on the people in Warwickshire

The property decisions we make are aimed at supporting the outcomes and delivering on the ambition set out in the Council Plan 2025

2.

Why do we need a property strategy?

The Council Plan 2025 has a clear vision to make Warwickshire the best it can be, sustainable now and for future generations. We act as Guardian for our land and buildings providing significant resources which support Warwickshire to achieve its vision. Our Property Strategy is central to supporting and delivering the two priority outcomes set out in the Council Plan;

Supporting People – how our land and property can best support Warwickshire’s communities and individuals to be safe, healthy and independent

Shaping Places – how our land and property can best help make Warwickshire’s economy vibrant and supported by the right jobs, training, skills and infrastructure.

Our Property Strategy adopts the following approach;

Our Property Strategy

- Takes a holistic and joined up approach
- Is ambitious, forward looking and sustainable
- Makes best use of Council resources
- Aims to provide high quality buildings
- Supports our climate change commitments
- Takes a balanced view of risk and opportunity

Benefits of an effective property strategy

- Creates transparency, consistency and coherence to our property decisions
- Influences the property decisions and choices we make
- Helps identify opportunities and influence strategic direction
- Provides a focus for our property decisions on our place shaping role and working with partners
- Provides a focus for our property decisions on supporting communities and customers
- Enables us to prioritise demands based on need and drives improved performance of our land and buildings

How does this fit with other strategies?

Our Property Strategy is a critical part of strategic framework and a key contributor to our medium-term financial strategy (MTFS), which in turn is aligned to the Council Plan 2025.

Our Property Strategy works alongside and complements a number of other Council strategies including;

- Commercial Strategy
- Capital Strategy
- Customer Strategy
- Heritage and Culture Strategy
- Economic Growth Strategy
- Fire and Rescue Asset Management Strategy
- Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy
- Our People Strategy

This suite of strategies enables us to take property decisions which are aligned and connected to other key elements of our strategic framework.

In delivering the Property Strategy we will continue to work with our partners to develop new strategies around key property holdings for the Council. This will include our own new Smallholding Strategy to detail both our ongoing investment in, and our management plan for, our existing Smallholdings. The Smallholding Strategy will also set out the basis on which we identify opportunities for strategic acquisitions and disposals.

3.

Drivers for our property strategy

Our drivers for holding reserves are to:

National, regional and local factors will shape our property requirements and decisions during the next 5 years. These include;

National level

- Government commitment to greater devolution with more freedoms and flexibilities promised
- Anchor institutions (such as health organisations) and their wider community focused role
- Existing legislation such as the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and new legislation such as the Environment Bill along with the national response to climate change

Regional level

- Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
- WMCA – direction, devolution and Mayoral elections

Local level

- The expected growth in population and households which will drive increased demand for services
- The estimated need for an additional 8,000 school places by 2025
- The number of Children Looked After by the Council which is projected to continue to rise
- Changes relating to Fire and Rescue related risks and vulnerability within the community
- The expected employment growth in Warwickshire by 2.4% between 2017-2025
- Our commitment to effective and collaborative working across the One Public Estate Programme with the aim of saving money and ensure maximum benefits for service/people

Climate change

The Property Strategy will align with the Council on the stated Climate Emergency. The Council Plan has a clear vision around ensuring our assets are sustainable and environmentally robust. We will work with key stakeholders to deliver our target of Carbon Neutrality across the operation of our Buildings by 2030. This will require input from the Estates team in a number of areas including:

- Data gathering and benchmarking
- Identification of, and investment in, new technology
- Supporting Planned Maintenance Programmes to extend the life of our buildings
- Divestment of surplus sites
- Reducing our Carbon Footprint when commissioning new projects

4.

Themes and Guiding Principles of our Property Strategy

Our property strategy is anchored around 4 key themes

Property and

- 1. Our Communities and Customers
- 2. Our Business and Economy
- 3. Our partners
- 4. Our staff

At the heart of our property strategy is our Property Offer. This comprises six commitments which underpin all our property decisions.



To deliver the Property Offer

We will

- Provide an active database of our estate holdings detailing ownership, location, size and value
- Align with a 'one Council' approach to investment, disposal and maintenance of our property portfolio and the decisions that we take
- Dispose of surplus land and buildings where this delivers the optimal return (financial or community) and in line with capital v income expectations
- Maximise occupancy in our land and buildings ensuring we identify and divest surplus sites in a timely manner
- Leverage Private Investment to support our Strategic Growth and Economic Development Opportunities
- Maintain our existing buildings through capital works which are prioritised, based on condition surveys and aligned to operational priorities
- Ensure our properties meet regulatory standards
- Deliver the Council's property related Climate Change targets and priorities
- Commission the construction of high-quality new buildings which meet energy efficiency standards
- Optimise the energy efficiency of our existing buildings
- Reduce our total carbon emission from the Councils Property Portfolio

Our Communities and Customers

We will

- Ensure that our customer facing properties (such as libraries, business centres, children's centres, country parks) are fit for purpose, accessible and meet the needs of the communities we serve
- Seek out opportunities to purchase land in Warwickshire in support of the priority outcomes in the Council Plan
- Use our land and buildings to support delivery of community based initiatives where these deliver our priority outcomes
- Ensure longer term strategic thinking is incorporated into the design and delivery of new properties
- Provide professional support and advice to enable the provision of the right properties in the right locations for now and in the future
- Support the Council in addressing the Climate Emergency, in particular by delivering Buildings which operate on a carbon neutral basis by 2030

Our Business and Economy

We will

- Proactively identify and pursue investment opportunities within Warwickshire in line with our Investment Strategy
- Identify a future supply of land that is suitable for housing and/or employment and/or service delivery needs
- Use our land to attract economic investment and maximise the rate of employment, business growth and skill levels in Warwickshire
- Invest in our portfolio of small holdings and seek to replenish our stock
- Secure the most advantageous returns (financial and/or community) on the buildings that we let to others
- Use our land and buildings to support delivery of our Commercial Strategy
- Manage our non-operational portfolio to encourage and maximise investment in Warwickshire.

Our partners

We will

- Work with partners to secure place-based outcomes for local residents
- Work with community organisations, partners and both public and private sector organisations to optimise the use of assets where it supports delivery of our priority outcomes

- Seek opportunities for collaborating with partners to deliver the most effective use of public assets (such as fire stations and training facilities)
- Maximise the value that we can drive from joint working across the Warwickshire public estate
- Drive our ambition through the Connecting Warwickshire (One Public Estate) programme

Our staff

We will

- Rationalise our office accommodation
- Promote a flexible and agile workforce who can work from the best place to work productively and to achieve the job
- Provide multiple locations and office bases across the county
- Ensure the working environment is fit for purpose and promotes our values and behaviours
- Deliver properties that are fit for purpose, in the right location and align to our service delivery requirements
- Create a working environment where staff feel safe, happy, healthy, valued and motivated with increased morale and engagement and reduction in absenteeism.

The Property Offer

Map all our assets (electronic database) – accurate data

Update condition surveys, understand performance and usage

Build a pipeline for disposals & acquisitions

Refresh the capital maintenance plan

Develop a one Council (corporate landlord) approach, including new financial framework and review of contracts/commercials

Create strategic property oversight group

Communities and Customers

Work with service areas to understand need & plan for future need

Build a pipeline for acquisitions

Ensure Council Strategies drive our property decisions

Build strategic capacity and capability within the property team

Prioritise investment in community facing buildings

Partners

Work with partners to develop options for maximising land use and public estate in Warwickshire

Proactively engage with Connecting Warwickshire

Develop pipeline of potential projects with partners

Lead on development of joined up public sector asset online portal

Business and Economy

Assess opportunities and options for investment

Set clear investment criteria

Identify priority areas and develop pipeline

Replenish small holdings stock

Review rental incomes

Staff

Establish road map to deliver property rationalisation across Warwick and Leamington portfolio

Develop options for investment in office accommodation

Increase density/ utilisation of buildings

Commission space planning options which support our values and behaviours

Decisions arising out of our Property Strategy will be taken by the Cabinet, Leader, Portfolio Holder, Council as appropriate.

Performance will be reported through quarterly performance reporting.

The Property Strategy falls within the remit of the Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee .

Our Property Strategy will be reviewed annually

March 2020