



### Leader's Report to Council – 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014

Since Council last met at the end of July, there have been several exciting and important developments in the work that Wyre Forest District Council is doing to secure regeneration and economic growth in the district.

The announcement by Amtek of a £5 million investment at the former Lawrence's recycling site was excellent news. Working with Worcestershire County Council, we have attracted an international firm with its headquarters in India to invest in a manufacturing facility that will serve the automotive industry and create 100 new highly skilled jobs in the next 12 to 24 months. The new facility is part of the company's expansion plans to meet the growing demand for aluminium components and reinforce Kidderminster's extensive role in the automotive industry.

The company has paid tribute to the pro-business attitude of the two Councils, in quickly offering a substantial package of support that convinced the Amtek Board that the Kidderminster site was the right place to invest.

DMS Chromium, which is located in the Firs Industrial Estate, is another local supplier to the automotive industry. It has unveiled plans to invest in an expansion of its factory that will help create in excess of 50 jobs over the next 3 years. The Council has worked closely in supporting the company to ensure that this investment comes forward, by agreeing to sell the company the freehold to the site that it has leased from the Council for many years. It is right that we should back growing local companies where we can.

I am also pleased to inform Council about the success of the SPACE incubator unit at Hoo Farm. Less than a year since opening, there are seven fledgling and growing businesses already in occupancy and another one joining in early October. All the businesses are either newly established or using SPACE as a stepping stone for growth after setting up in their back bedroom or garage at home. There is a good mixture of businesses ranging from website designers to an upholsterer, a merchandise distributor and company that strips down motorbikes and selling the parts. There are only 3 units left now before SPACE will be fully occupied, and the current take up is ahead of our plans for its start up year.

A key decision will be taken by the County Council's Cabinet tomorrow on its investment of £1.5m into the £2m project to improve the public realm in Kidderminster town centre including the creation of Exchange Square. At the other end of Vicar Street, good progress continues to be made by Henderson Global Investors in moving forward their ambitious plans to expand Weavers Wharf. As part of the redevelopment, Crown House will be demolished and we expect to be able to announce the timeline for demolition shortly. The Council has acted to support the redevelopment by being prepared to use its compulsory purchase powers if necessary. However our expectation is that the property owners will be able to negotiate satisfactory compensation with the developers and arrangements for

relocating their businesses as appropriate, including relocating the Job Centre Plus office within the town.

Last week's latest economic statistics show how Wyre Forest is leading the way in Worcestershire. The work we do is contributing to the positive impact for local people in reducing unemployment. In the year to August 2014, there was a fall of 866 in the unadjusted claimant count. This was a drop of 1.5%, significantly greater than any other area in Worcestershire and ahead of the county, regional and national reductions (-1%, -1.2% and -1.1% respectively). Within the overall figures, Kidderminster has seen a reduction of 1.8%, again a much greater fall than any other urban area in Worcestershire. It is particularly pleasing to see this pattern reflected in the fall in youth unemployment, down 220 or 3.0% in the year to August 2014. Again this is better than county, regional and national performance (-2.2%, -2.7% and -2.3% respectively).

The progress outlined in this report is testimony to the vision and investment made by the Council in economic regeneration and planning. Businesses and investors have confidence in being able to bring forward projects, and they know that our positive working relationship with the County Council and the two Local Enterprise Partnerships means that Wyre Forest is a good place to invest and grow. I expect that further positive announcements will be made in the coming months.

I am delighted to be able to report that as part of my commitment to genuine staff engagement and a desire genuinely to listen to the views of staff that I am holding a number of "meet the leader" sessions. A number of staff have already kindly taken me up on the offer which I have found exceptionally interesting and helpful. All members have the opportunity to take place in the next "meet up" with staff which will be held at 5pm on Wednesday 15 October in the chamber, and I encourage all members to make the effort to attend.

Finally, the summer has seen a fantastic range of events organised by Wyre Forest District Council's staff, such as the very popular Country and Western festival in Stourport, the Kidderminster Arts Festival which goes from strength to strength and the "cinema in the park" event in August. KAF focussed on commemorating the centenary of the First World War, and the street art installation showing outlines of fallen soldiers – one for each man from Kidderminster who lost his life – was an impressive and emotive display. I attended the screening of Mamma Mia in Brinton Park, which was again very well supported, and it was fantastic to see approximately 2,000 local residents in the park. I would like to congratulate the arts and events team for their contribution which, this year, has also seen them achieve significantly higher income and donations to help support these activities in future.

**Cllr Marcus J Hart**  
**Leader of the Council**