

Executive Summary: Issues & Options

In summer 2005 the Council went through a first stage of consultation on a variety of key issues for the district of Bromsgrove that would form part of the core strategy. The responses received combined with policy changes at a regional and national level led to a number of new issues arising. A second period of consultation then took place over the summer of 2007. This document contains a summary of the consultation responses from both consultation periods.

Summary of Key Issue A - Location of Growth

Issue 1 – Location for growth

The majority of people felt that new housing and employment growth should be concentrated in Bromsgrove Town, with limited brownfield development in other settlements (i.e. Hagley, Alvechurch, Wythall).

Issue 2 – Areas of development restraint

Strong support was given to deciding which ADR sites to release only after housing and employment land allocations are known. It has been argued that this option is most in accordance with central and regional planning policy. It was suggested that we should consider the housing and employment requirements in the District and then analyse the most sustainable locations to meet the needs of both urban and rural population. If at this point the ADR sites score well in sustainability terms then their release should be considered for development.

Strong support was also expressed towards prioritising the release of existing designated sites from the Green Belt, with those around Bromsgrove being released first. It is believed that, in order to safeguard the long-term sustainable development of Bromsgrove, the ADR sites should be retained and prioritised. Once long term housing and employment requirements are known the District Council will then be able to release an ADR site if required.

Issue 3 – Previously developed sites in the Green Belt

Most people were in favour of allowing reuse of the existing footprint for the most appropriate use. It has been argued that in accordance with advice contained in PPG2 Green Belts, the Local Planning Authority should follow this option. It is felt that the second option, which suggests allowing re-use for employment does not accord with advice in PPG2 and neither does option 3, which suggests allowing for only very limited re-use (i.e. less than the original footprint).

Summary of Key Issue B - Housing for Everyone

Issue 1 – Type of Housing

A clear consensus has not been shown with regards to the future type of housing required in Bromsgrove. Most support was given to 'ensuring all schemes have a needs assessment for the type of dwellings being proposed'. Slightly less support was shown for more specialized housing for our aging population, and prioritising smaller dwellings whilst also ensuring an adequate supply of family housing. It has been suggested that a policy should be produced that would seek a mix of all dwelling sizes and types appropriate to each site.

Issue 2 – Provision of Affordable Housing

The majority of people favoured allowing limited general housing on brownfield sites with a high level of affordable housing provision, ensuring mixed developments. Less support was given to the idea of allocating land for affordable housing, and using Green Belt land adjacent to villages and Bromsgrove Town. It has been argued that development of affordable housing should be spread throughout the District. ADR's are appropriate locations for schemes including affordable housing and should be given priority in areas of identified need. They should also be used in preference to taking further land out of the Green Belt to provide for housing.

Issue 3 – Location of Affordable Housing

No clear consensus has been shown for this issue. Support has been given to locating affordable housing on brownfield sites in Bromsgrove Town, and spreading the distribution across the District. Slightly less people opted for concentrating affordable homes in locations adjacent to rural settlements.

Issue 4 – Supply of housing

No clear consensus has been revealed for this issue. It has been suggested that the Council should provide a modest and regular supply of housing in order to provide support for local facilities and the local economy. Such provision should allow for the provision of affordable housing and other special needs housing such as sheltered housing, care homes, etc.

Key Issue C - Rural Life

Issue 1 – Access to services in rural areas

Identifying mixed-use village centres for local services was considered to be the most sustainable way to ensuring that the villages contain a range of essential

services. This was closely followed by the idea of locating key services in the main settlements and improving transport links. Very little support was given to resisting change of use of all existing facilities in villages.

Issue 2 – Village growth

Most people are of the opinion that when determining village growth we should consider characteristics of village and supporting infrastructure before allowing new development. Allowing a wider mix of housing in rural locations to ensure essential facilities are maintained or become viable is also seen as an important consideration.

It has been argued that key settlements, including large villages with a full range of facilities, should be allowed to expand in order to provide support for facilities and to cater for the needs of the local population, particularly where these populations have access to higher order centres via public transport including rail.

Issue 3 – Supporting the rural economy

A clear consensus confirms that people consider businesses in rural areas should be supported by allowing limited extension of any existing businesses within villages with adequate infrastructure. No support was given to the idea of only allowing conversion of rural buildings to employment use.

It is felt that farming is the core of rural areas and needs to be assisted whenever possible. Rural diversification should be encouraged in order to ensure the success of these areas. Possibilities could include tourism and recreational uses.

Issue 4 – Getting about without a car in rural areas

No clear consensus for this issue. The majority of people equally favour the idea of ensuring villages have a range of facilities, and the idea that improvements should be made to transport links connecting the main service centres like Bromsgrove Town. It has also been suggested that the higher order settlements should be allowed to expand naturally to ensure facilities are both maintained and increased thereby increasing accessibility of these facilities to local residents. This would help to cut down the use of private vehicles and help to sustain rural transport and services.

Key Issue D – The Local Economy and Creating Jobs

Issue 1 – The future of the Bromsgrove economy

Most people are in favour of maintaining the existing balanced mixture of economies. It has been argued that the attraction of industries with higher paid jobs in Bromsgrove District will help to reduce the daily flow of population to other employment centres outside of the District.

Issue 2 – Location of new employment opportunities

The majority of people are in favour of small areas of employment within main settlements to support starter business and small-scale local firms. Support has also been expressed for redeveloping and extending existing sites to southeast and south of Bromsgrove. No support has been shown for the idea to balance provision in Bromsgrove Town by developing large business parks on Greenfield ADR sites to west of Bromsgrove (land currently in the greenbelt but identified for future development needs).

As a general comment on the location of new employment opportunities, it has been suggested that consideration should be given to opportunities for the reuse and adaptation of vacant or underused buildings within the main settlements to help promote new business growth as well as support wider regeneration objectives. This will also serve to conserve and enhance wider regeneration objectives, and the character and distinctiveness of the District's settlements.

Issue 3 – The Rural Economy

Strong support has been shown towards encouraging new business to locate in main settlements, whilst continuing to support existing business in the rural areas. Support has also been expressed for encouraging the reuse of rural buildings to provide small-scale office accommodation.

Issue 4 – Reuse of redundant employment sites

No clear consensus revealed for this issue. Support has been expressed towards promoting a mix of employment generating activities, and reuse for non-employment uses. Slightly less importance has been expressed for retaining sites for traditional employment uses only. It has been suggested that the Local Planning Authority, in accordance with PPS3, should consider favourably planning applications for housing or mixed-use developments, which concern land allocated for industrial or commercial use, or redundant land or buildings in industrial commercial use that is no longer needed for such use.

It has been suggested that Key Issue D highlights the conflicts inherent in the RSS and the potential implications for Bromsgrove. Whilst housing growth is restricted, Bromsgrove is encouraged to provide for economic growth as part of the Central Technology Belt within the designated High Technology Corridors. Whilst the latter may be aimed at redressing the daily commuting out of the District and will hopefully bring economic growth and increased prosperity for

Bromsgrove, if this is not matched by housing growth it is more likely to result in increased house prices in the District. This has the potential to actually maintain long commuting distances, as those who cannot afford to live in Bromsgrove have to commute into the District in order to work.

Key Issue E – Shopping & Bromsgrove Town Centre

Issue 1 – The role of Bromsgrove town centre

The majority of people favour the idea to promote modest expansion of Bromsgrove Town Centre to serve local needs. Less support has been expressed towards promoting the town centres expansion so as to compete with other popular centres, and promoting it as a specialist shopping location to attract tourists. It has been argued that Bromsgrove Town Centre should continue to be the main centre in the hierarchy within the District offering a wide range of shopping, tourist and leisure facilities to support local people as well as the wider population.

Issue 2 – The future of Bromsgrove town centre

Strong support has been expressed towards a mix of uses including shopping and leisure with retail being the main use. Retaining and enhancing the distinctive character of Bromsgrove town centre should be a key consideration in determining its future role and planning.

It has been argued that it would be unrealistic to imagine that Bromsgrove can compete with other established centres. Whilst shopping will continue to be an important activity, any proposals for the town centre should include policies fostering a mix of uses including leisure uses as a means of stimulating the evening economy and residential development to support the regeneration of Bromsgrove town centre.

Issue 3 – The role of other local centres

A clear consensus has been expressed for a mix of uses with shopping being the main use in other local centres e.g. Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Catshill, Hagley. It has been commented that new housing would support the viability of other local shopping centres.

Key Issue F – Learning, Leisure and Improving Health

Issue 1 – Provision of open space and green areas

The majority of support has been expressed towards targeting poorly provided wards and parishes in the District. Improving larger areas and providing a large

number of small accessible areas is also considered to be important. It has been highlighted that there is a need to provide a mix of strategically placed large parks as well as pocket parks in deprived areas. A mix of different types of open and green space would help to provide for a variety of needs. It is a concern that a lack of open space would be to the detriment of people's health and a lack of activity for children can lead to anti-social behaviour. An important point has been raised that mowed areas should be avoided, as people, especially children, need something to do on open space sites.

Issue 2 – Provision of health facilities

No clear consensus for this issue. Most people opted for safeguarding key accessible sites for future health service provision. Slightly less support was expressed for seeking the enhancement of existing key health service sites, and maintaining existing facilities. A key issue that has been raised on the subject of health is the need for people to have a GP who is easily accessible. It is generally felt that this is not the case for many people who live in rural areas. It has been suggested that we should safeguard key sites for future health service provision and undertake an assessment of current facilities to make sure they are being used and correctly located.

Key Issue G – A Safe and Well Designed Environment

Issue 1 – Safer Communities

Most people favour the promotion of designing out crime initiatives, although gated communities were not seen as an adequate response to the problems of crime. People generally feel that Bromsgrove is a safe place to live but there is still a fear of crime. It was argued that pubs and restaurants that open for the current licensing hours present no great problem in most areas. However, it was suggested that night clubs and similar establishments that remain open much later should be located in town centres or other areas where noise and rowdiness at closing time will not disturb residents. With regards to street lighting, there were concerns that too much lighting would cause light pollution. It was pointed out that quite often the wrong kind and too much lighting are provided in rural areas.

Issue 2 – A better designed local environment

No clear consensus for this issue. All three options are considered to be important. The prominence given to the importance of promoting good design in all new development in terms of its contribution to sustainable development and protecting local distinctiveness was welcomed. In view of the interrelationship between good design and the historic environment, it was considered that any design policy framework set out in the Core Strategy should incorporate specific

cross-references to the historic environment. It was suggested that young people should become more involved in the planning system and planning for their area, as they may then become proud of their area and less likely to vandalise and cause crime.

Key Issue H – Our Natural Environment

Issue 1 – The green belt and our rural environment

No clear consensus for this issue. Preservation of the natural environment is considered to be important. It has been suggested that wherever it is feasible, it should be preserved in conjunction with social and economic objectives, but occasionally it will be necessary to resolve a conflict in favour of development. Where that happens, some countervailing improvement should be sought elsewhere.

It has been commented that Green Belt policy is set out in PPG2 and is currently one of the few national planning policies that are reasonably clear. Despite this there is much misunderstanding of Green Belt by the public and it does not assist clear understanding when established policy is presented as “options” 1 & 2. Furthermore, “option” 3 is not Government Policy as the planning system is expected to balance environmental, social and economic objectives rather than give priority to environmental protection, other than in particular locations such as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) or a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Issue 2 – Flooding and water run-off

No clear consensus for this issue. Most people are in favour of requiring all new developments to have sustainable drainage systems. It has been pointed out that the options are not mutually exclusive and can all be appropriate depending on the circumstances. The public should be made aware that because of the reluctance of Local Authorities and Water Companies to adopt sustainable drainage systems, the burden of maintenance would fall upon owners of the development, including householders, if the requirement for all new developments to have sustainable drainage systems is pursued.

It has been argued that land in flood plains should be used as public open space, or remain in agricultural use. There should be no need to build in floodplains. Floodplains flood naturally and should be allowed to do so. Interference with the natural means of disposing of heavy rain should not be permitted.

Key Issue I – Getting Around

Issue 1 – Reducing the need to travel

The greatest support has been expressed for ensuring better access to everyday facilities. The promotion of local centres with key facilities would help to reduce peoples need to travel.

Issue 2 – Transport options in rural areas

No clear consensus for this issue. Equal weighting was expressed for ensuring better access to major service centres like Bromsgrove Town, and to seek the retention of essential rural facilities. Seek to locate services in larger village service centres was given less support.

It has been suggested that in order to meet the needs of local residents in rural areas and try and reduce dependence on the private car it is important to seek the retention of essential rural facilities. Paragraph 41 of PPG13 states that in remote locations well away from large urban areas, local authorities should focus most development comprising jobs, shopping, leisure and services in or near to local service centres, to help ensure it is served by public transport and provides some potential for access by walking and cycling. A specific issue raised regarding transport in rural areas was access to employment. Young people in rural areas can find it difficult to access employment because of poor transport links.

Issue 3 – Improving public transport options

No clear consensus expressed for this issue. The majority of people favour the idea of targeting key public transport interchanges for new development. Support has also been expressed for improving facilities at public transport sites.

There was support for employers to draw up green travel plans outlining ways in which employees could use public transport, cycling, or walking to get to work. On this point it was noted that monitoring of the green travel plans and making sure they are enforced was vital to their success. It was felt we should give employers incentives to make travel plans work.

It has also been suggested that we should ensure transport problems for the disabled and those with mobility difficulties are met by providing access to trains at the station, wheelchair accessible taxis, and help fund community transport.

Other issues raised included the distance from the train station to the town centres, and the poor quality of Bromsgrove Bus Station.

Issue 4 – Cycling, walking and motorcycling

No clear consensus for this issue. Slightly more support has been expressed for ensuring better linkages between new developments, and enhancing existing

facilities within and between settlements. In accordance with Paragraphs 76 and 79 of PPG13 it is considered that in preparing the core strategy Bromsgrove LPA should pay particular attention to the design, location and access arrangements of new development to help promote walking and cycling.

Key Issue J – Preserving the Past

Issue 1 – Designating and enhancing conservation areas

The majority of people have expressed interest in taking action first in areas where the threat to the historic environment is greatest. Slightly less interest was expressed for seeking enhancement of existing areas before designating new ones. In accordance with Paragraph 4.3 of PPG15, local planning authorities have under Section 69 a duty to review their areas from time to time to consider whether further designation of conservation areas is called for. It is considered that Bromsgrove should take account of advice contained in this document which suggests when considering further designations authorities should bear in mind that it is important conservation areas are seen to justify their status and the concept is not devalued by the designation of areas lacking any special interest.

Issue 2 – Protecting locally important buildings

Most people are in favour of ensuring policy encourages viable reuse of locally important buildings. Slightly less support was shown towards prioritising action to protect locally important buildings that are not currently within Conservation Areas.

English Heritage supports the general aims of the three options given under issue 2, although the preparation of a local list in the first instance would help to deliver the other options.

New Issue A – New Housing Growth

Four options were provided for the future growth of Bromsgrove, these were as follows:

- **Option 1** – All new development should be concentrated within the existing Areas of Development Restraint (ADR) and through the development of suitable brownfield sites
- **Option 2** – In addition to the ADRs a limited amount of Greenfield sites should be released adjacent to existing settlements, so that the aims of sustainability are fulfilled and the impact on existing infrastructure is minimised.
- **Option 3** – Growth should be apportioned in respect of the size of each settlement on both brownfield and Greenfield sites, including growth within Bromsgrove town

- **Option 4** – Sufficient Green Belt land should be released to cater for both locally generated and in migration housing needs.

In terms of responses from the general public there was greatest support for option 1 where new development should be concentrated within the existing ADRs and through the development of suitable brownfield sites.

The strongest objections were received from the general public to option 4 which suggested releasing sufficient green belt land should be released to both cater for both locally generated and in migration housing needs.

In conclusion the general public have shown the greatest level of support for development on brownfield sites and green field sites that have already been designated. There is a general consensus that further release of Green Belt land should be limited.

Responses from statutory consultees and the private sector have shown a level of support for all options, although greatest support was received for option 3.

Some respondents felt that there was insufficient supply of housing to cater for demand and this was creating greater affordability issues.

Sustainability is a key issue that has been raised by a number of respondents. Many feel that housing should be primarily located in the town of Bromsgrove. Elsewhere housing should be limited to only meeting local needs.

Some respondents felt that in addition to the ADR sites additional Green Belt land should be released for housing to cater for future demand in terms of in-migration and the needs of the existing population.

Issue B1 – Climate Change & Renewable Energy

The general public were given the opportunity to put forward their personal opinions of how the District of Bromsgrove should start planning to adapt to climate change and mitigate effects. Opinions were then sought of the 3 following options:

- New developments to obtain a set percentage of their energy from a renewable/low carbon source (in line with national and regional targets)
- New developments to achieve a set percentage, which is above national/regional targets of their energy from a renewable/low carbon source.
- Include a presumption in favour of applications for renewable energy technologies in the local area.

The general public have given overwhelming support for the need to adapt to climate change and mitigate its effects.

The greatest level of support was shown by the general public for option 1 where new developments have to obtain a set percentage of their energy from a renewable/low carbon source in line with National and Regional targets. This was seen as preference to setting percentages above National and Regional targets.

Support from the general public was also shown for option 3, but a presumption in favour of applications for renewable energy technologies could be achieved in conjunction with either option 1 or 2.

In general the private sector was most supportive of option 1. There was a general concern raised by many who felt that there were no special circumstances in the district of Bromsgrove that would warrant any policies above current government targets.

There was an element of consensus from the private sector that renewable energy should only be encouraged on sites where it is economically viable.

Comments from the West Midlands Regional Assembly suggest that only options 1 and 2 accord with policies contained within the RSS.

Issue B2 - Flooding

Four options were provided in relation to the issue of flooding and these were as follows:

- **Option 1** - Development on the flood plain should be avoided
- **Option 2** – Development which increases the risk of flooding elsewhere within the district and beyond the district’s boundaries should be avoided
- **Option 3** – Development should be designed to reduce the impact of flooding and prevent increases in flood risk through for instance, the inclusion of Sustainable drainage Systems (SUDS), water harvesting and innovative design solutions.
- **Option 4** – The inclusion of floodwater storage areas should be encouraged. For example future flood risk can be minimised by providing balancing ponds and naturalising watercourses.

The issue of flooding is clearly a concern for the residents of the district of Bromsgrove with strong support for options 1, 2, 3 and 4 which aim to reduce the impact of flooding and prevent increases in flood risk.

Statutory consultees and private sector firms also provided a level of support for the options although this was significantly below that of the general public.

Local residents also put forward some options to reduce flood risk such as ensuring water courses were kept clear and the potential for widening and deepening rivers.

Whilst the majority of the general public felt development should be avoided in floodplains some developers felt that provided suitable measures could be developed to minimise flooding then development in floodplains should not be ruled out.

Others felt that policies in relation to flooding do not need to be any more specific than what is contained with PPG25.

Issue B3 – Waste & Recycling

3 options were provided in relation to the issues of waste and recycling and these as follows:

- **Option 1** – New developments should include space for recycling (ie green bins) and encourage water-harvesting methods (for example, water butts) in their proposals.
- **Option 2** – New developments should include space for recycling (ie green bins), encourage water-harvesting methods, consider including community composting facilities and use of ‘grey water’ schemes where appropriate.
- **Option 3** – new developments should use a set percentage of recycled or sustainability produced materials in their construction where appropriate

Local residents understand the importance of recycling and have shown strong support for all 3 options in relation to methods of recycling on new developments.

There was also a level of support from statutory consultees and the private sector with option 1 proving to be the most popular. However, it must be noted that in some cases this issue appears to be a lower priority for some with a notable number choosing not to give an opinion.

It is considered that all 3 options are in general conformity with policies contained with the RSS.

Worcestershire County Council consider that policies should go beyond methods of waste minimisation and recycling by choosing future locations of where waste can be managed and recycled.

Issue B4 - Biodiversity

Four options were provided in relation to the issue of biodiversity and these were as follows:

- **Option 1** – Where possible all developments should provide some positive benefit for biodiversity and the natural environment.
- **Option 2** – Developments which cause unnecessary harm to biodiversity and the natural environment should be resisted wherever possible.
- **Option 3** – Prioritise the protection of biodiversity and the natural environment highly, but weigh this against social and economic objectives when considering development proposals.
- **Option 4** – Consider the impacts from development in a wider environmental context, paying attention to potential effects over the ability of biodiversity to adapt to climate change.

All 4 options generally received support from local residents however greatest support was given to options 1 and 2 which stress the importance of developments providing some positive benefit for biodiversity and ensuring that developments that cause unnecessary harm to biodiversity should be resisted. Option 3 received the greatest level of support from statutory consultees and the private sector; this is probably because the protection of wildlife is balanced against social and economic factors.

Many firms considered it unrealistic to expect improvements in biodiversity on all sites due to the cost implications.

It is considered that all 4 options are in conformity with the RSS but the Earth Heritage Trust feel that any policies should conform with PSS9 and make reference to geological conservation, RIGS and geodiversity.