

## Bromsgrove District Council 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016

### Report of the Portfolio Holder for Planning Services and Housing

#### Aligned to Help me to Find Somewhere to Live in my Locality

I am pleased to present an update report to the Council about the areas covered by my portfolio. In doing so I would like both to look back over recent events and forward to emerging issues. I will begin by talking about housing and housing strategy going forwards in Bromsgrove.

- **Homelessness** – homelessness is always a good indicator of the health or otherwise of a local housing market, and I am happy to be able to report that, despite some economically challenging times, homelessness remains relatively stable in Bromsgrove – the homelessness acceptance figures from BDHT are as follows:

Year	Homelessness acceptances
2015 to Q3	68
2014	58
2013	75
2012	77
2011	70

It is also encouraging to note that the prevention of homelessness in Bromsgrove is on the increase – the number of cases where homelessness has been prevented – for example by finding alternative accommodation quickly, or by using mediation to resolve a dispute in the family home, has risen significantly in recent years. In 2010, preventions stood at 155. In 2014, BDHT prevented homelessness on 266 occasions.

- **Affordable housing** – As members will be aware, we regularly negotiate up to 40% affordable housing provision in our Section 106 agreements with developers, and Bromsgrove continues to be an area that's attractive to house builders – currently we have 13 sites with planning permission, which we anticipate will yield a total of 1377 homes in the next 3 years. 477 of these homes will go on to be owned by local Registered Providers, such as BDHT, who will be adding them into their affordable homes portfolio. This will help us continue to address the housing needs of Bromsgrove residents, and I am pleased to be able to advise that the number of households on the housing register currently stands at 1506, down from 3708 in April 2013. This means we are able to provide local households with the biggest housing need a realistic chance of securing a new affordable home in the near future.

- **Traveller incursions** - despite some negative media coverage locally, the Council has actually worked very closely with the Police and other partners in recent years to ensure traveller incursions are moved on in a timely way in Bromsgrove, balancing the rights of travellers with those of the wider community. Data shows that the vast majority of these incursions take place on private land, which is no surprise, given the rural nature of the district. Where incursions have taken place on Council-owned land, on average, the matter is resolved within ten working days, including appointments at court. I am also pleased to advise that action taken by local businesses and land owners has seen a significant reduction in traveller incursions in the Buntsford area of our district.
- **The immediate future** - whilst we have a successful track record of intervening constructively in the Bromsgrove housing market, there's certainly no room for complacency. The government is clear that we should be creating the right conditions so that first-time buyers can enter the market, as well as taking steps to help tenants and landlords flourish in the private rented sector. So we are currently working our way through the implications of future changes in welfare reform, and the Housing and Planning Bill 2015, as well as exploring the best way to support the private rented sector in Bromsgrove, given the changes that have been made to improve safety and standards in that area.
- The progress of the Bill is fundamental to understanding what the future might look like in housing terms, and it's likely to bring challenges with it. The Bill covers a diverse range of topics from starter homes to right to buy for registered housing providers, and from rogue landlords to pay to stay for higher earning social tenants. The incoming legislation also covers a number of related planning themes, including tightening up local plans and unblocking brownfield sites. All in, the Bill, when it becomes law, will shake up the housing market nationally and locally, and we need to be ready for that. As a result, I have asked officers to monitor the Bill's progress through Parliament and to ensure the Council is fully briefed about all the implications and challenges in housing terms once these become clear, so that we can make the most of the opportunities ahead.

### **Report of the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration**

I am pleased to present an update report to the Council about the areas covered by my portfolio. In doing so I would like both to look back over recent events and forward to emerging issues. As ever the planning department has been extremely busy with 799 applications lodged between Sept 2014 and September 2015. Of these 799 applications, 89% were granted, demonstrating the Council's commitment to sustainable growth within the area, in line with the goals of the NPPF.

## **Bromsgrove District Plan**

The Bromsgrove District Plan has seen delays since it was first submitted, with the Planning Inspector initially highlighting a number of issues, one in particular being the assessment of housing needs. Whilst the delay is certainly frustrating, statistics show that we are not alone, with a third of local plans undergoing examination delayed due to the changing requirements for housing needs assessments and the onerous examination procedures. More recently as part of a continually changing planning system the government has promised changes to the way in which Local Plan examinations will be carried out, with an emphasis on a more streamlined and pragmatic approach, it is hoped this will be reflected in the on-going proceedings. Significant progress has been made recently with supplementary documentation submitted in December 2015. This work prepared jointly with Redditch and in response to a request from the inspector reconfirms the comprehensive rationale for the proposed housing allocations on the edge of Redditch, providing a narrative of all evidence supplied. This is due to be discussed at the re-opened examination in March 2016, which should see the plan take a significant step towards being found sound and subsequently adopted.

The Strategic planning team have also been engaging with Worcestershire County Council Highways on addressing the infrastructure issues; this has resulted in a Major scheme bid for government infrastructure funding being prepared alongside a number of new models and tools to help better assess the requirements for infrastructure from new development. As part of this work a successful briefing was held with members in December and an agreement reached with WCC to ensure more collaborative working takes place.

## **Development Management and Enforcement**

It has been an eventful and challenging year for development control within Bromsgrove, however, I am pleased to be able to deliver positive news as we have proactively sought to address the delays in processing applications and deliver a more efficient, but still high quality service. The Service has successfully increased its decision making percentage for major applications from 24% to 63% (period December 2013 – December 2015). This brings us above the target of 50%, which should see us taken out of designation later in the year.

The Planning Service has good appeal statistics and a reputation for taking time to provide developers with quality advice, helping to ensure the right developments are built in the right places. The fact the no developer has chosen to bypass the local decision making process and take their application straight to the planning inspectorate can be directly attributed to the excellent service the Council provides and the strong relationships that are held with local developers.

In terms of Enforcement issues, many cases continue to be closed because of successful negotiation. However, when formal action has been necessary the

Council has been successful at appeal. There have been 6 enforcement appeals in the past 12 months with a success rate of 100% for Bromsgrove Council.

### **Economic Development and the Townscape Heritage Initiative**

The Planning team continues to work closely with colleagues in Economic Development to support the regeneration of Bromsgrove Town Centre. A major planning application has been submitted for the Market Hall site and officers continue to work to support the appropriate development of other key sites within the town centre boundary.

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, it is anticipated that a major planning application for the site known as the 'Redditch Eastern Gateway' will be submitted to the Council from the developer, Stoford Developments Ltd. Although the site is primarily allocated in Bromsgrove's Local Plan to serve Redditch's employment needs, it does represent an opportunity for Bromsgrove with important new jobs created in the district's travel to work area. The development could potentially deliver more than 1 million square foot of new office and industrial space and create approximately 1500 new jobs.

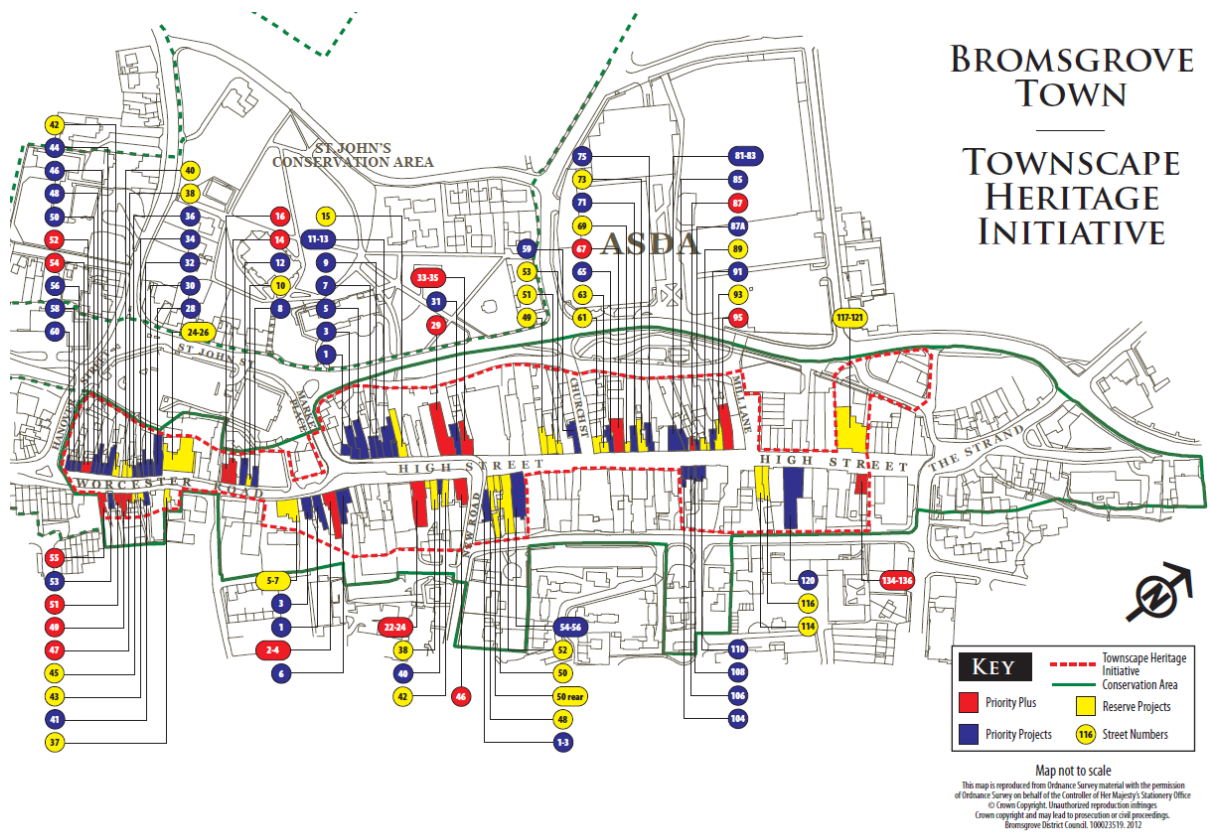
We are continuing to see the benefits of the Townscape Heritage Initiative, which has seen £1.2 million of National Lottery funding alongside £400,000 from Worcestershire County Council, used to regenerate the Bromsgrove town centre (See Map 1). To date we have seen significant public realm improvements including the highly successful repaving of the High Street, along with the improvement of a number of shop fronts including the Bedroom Centre, British Heart Foundation (See Picture 1) and the Bank Solicitors (See Picture 2). Looking forward to 2016, there promises to be even more, exciting projects, with the iconic 1-3 New Road, formerly the Hope Pole Inn, set to undergo work, whilst a number of other key properties are also in the pipeline.

### **Building Control**

At a time of increased competition from the private sector, the building control department has managed to achieve an overall increase in its application numbers and enquiries. This has been done whilst continuing to offer exceptional non-fee earning services, such as dealing with dangerous structures, building demolition and general, impartial advice.

### **Conclusion**

As I have said, it has been a challenging year for the Planning Service; however, there are real positives which can be taken forward into 2016. The adoption of a Local Plan will be advantageous to all parties, as greater control is taken over development in the area. The improvement and continued success of the different sections of the department will be beneficial for us all.



Map 1: Bromsgrove Townscape Heritage Initiative Area Map



Picture 1: British Heart Foundation



Picture 2: Bank Solicitors