

## **Report of the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships.**

- My portfolio covers the economic development and regeneration agenda, town centre and strategic partnerships.
- One of my top priorities when I came into office was to ensure that the Council does all that it can to secure the economic prosperity of our district. This I believe is one of the most important challenges that we face as a Council and will require a long term vision and strategic thinking.
- Fortunately, we have developed a strong partnership approach to delivering our economic development agenda and our Economic Development Theme Group is going from strength to strength, with representatives from the business community, contributing their considerable expertise and knowledge to shaping our economic policy. I would like to place on record my thanks to members of the Theme Group in helping to drive the economic agenda forward and for giving up their time. In particular, I want to thank the chair and vice chair of the Theme Group Rob Spittle and Jon Till for their leadership and support over the last 12 months.
- As I detailed in my report to Cabinet back in April; the district does have considerable economic strengths and assets which we can build on. Bromsgrove is in general a prosperous district and our residents have the highest average weekly earnings in the West Midlands region. The Bromsgrove economy is currently faring well compared to neighbouring districts and we have seen over the last 12 months, new business investment come into the district. Furthermore, skills levels for local residents are higher than the regional and national averages and the district has a strong record in generating growth in small-medium sized businesses, particularly 'micro' businesses i.e. those businesses that employ between 1 and 9 people. Bromsgrove is home to a highly successful labour market with skilled resident workers serving the wider West Midlands region on a daily basis.
- We have seen additional investment by local firm Contract Flooring Solutions Ltd who have taken a new purpose built 50,000 square foot unit on Bromsgrove Enterprise Park, employing 160 staff. We have also seen Shirley Aquatics confirm that they will be re-locating from Solihull (their home of 70 years) to Becketts Farm, Bromsgrove, bringing with them 200,000 visitors per year and new jobs and investment. German manufacturer Teupen, also announced their arrival in Bromsgrove last year, opening its new UK and Ireland base in Stoke Prior.
- I can also report that good progress has been made in encouraging Bromsgrove based businesses to benefit from European funded support from various programmes promoted through our NWEDR service;
  - Proof of Concept – 7 businesses supported to develop new products / processes, 5 of which have received grants (average grant of £17,854)

- Worcestershire Business Accelerator – 4 businesses accessing growth planning support
  - Business Energy Efficiency Programme – 6 businesses received energy efficiency assessment, 1 of which has received a grant (£3,300)
  - Business Growth Programme – 7 grants (average £27,531)
  - Enterprise for Success – 25 entrepreneurs have participated in the start-up workshop
- Despite the solid current performance of the Bromsgrove economy, my report to Cabinet in April outlined a number of underlying weaknesses in the local economy which need addressing;
    - *Growth in Employment Following the Recession*- over the period of economic recovery 2009-2014 both the North Worcestershire and Bromsgrove economies stagnated registering zero aggregate job growth.
    - *Commuting patterns*- Bromsgrove is dependent on a mobile labour force for its prosperity with significant flows of labour on a daily basis occurring into adjacent local authorities.
    - *Local Wages*- the wages of those who work *within* Bromsgrove are lower than average; local wages were the sixth lowest in the West Midlands region in 2015 although they have shown recovery in 2016.
    - *Affordability of housing*- there is an imbalanced housing market and rising affordability issues particularly for low earner and median income householders; the property to annual income ratio in Bromsgrove is approximately 10.8:1 – generally a ratio of 4:1 is considered to be affordable.
    - *Economic Activity and Employment*- The economic activity rate has fallen from 86.8% in 2013 to 78.9% in 2016 this being caused by 3,300 workers leaving the labour Market.
    - *Demographics*; Bromsgrove has an ageing population, of the 30 Local Authorities in the West Midlands Region Bromsgrove has the tenth lowest proportion of residents in the 16-64 age group; Office of National Statistics projections from 2015 to 2024 show a fall of 2,000 people aged 20-54 and a growth of 8,000 in the 54- 90 year old groups. In this context it should be expected that the labour force will shrink unless the trends to early retirement by higher skilled groups are reversed.
  - To address these challenges I brought a report forward to Cabinet in April which set out a new direction of travel for this Council. The new vision is that Bromsgrove is re-positioned as a key economic centre and more opportunities are created for our younger people so that they can live and work within the district.

- I was pleased that my Cabinet colleagues shared my vision and endorsed a new set of economic priorities for this Council; it is worth recapping on these, so that all of Council is familiar with our new economic agenda:
  - **Driving economic growth;** the Council will work to position the district as an 'economic hub' that is part of a highly successful growth node located around the M5/M42/M40 corridor, building on and strengthening its existing assets;
  - **Improving connectivity;** Leading the drive to improve the district's internal infrastructure; this will require significant and long term investment in our network;
  - **Supporting new businesses and existing businesses to grow;** ensuring that this Council adopts an 'open for business' culture;
  - **Re-balancing our housing market;** ensuring that the supply of quality affordable new homes is increased for younger people and families;
  - **Developing key sectors;** considering new opportunities to develop high value sectors and industries in the district;
  - **Driving up and retaining skills locally;** improving the skills levels of the workforce to meet the needs of growing local companies;
  - **Improving our centres;** capitalising upon the renewed confidence in Bromsgrove Town Centre as a place to invest and working to develop our other key centres, ensuring that they continue to be vibrant and competitive;
  - **Partnership working;** maximising all of the opportunities offered by partnership working;
  - **Leading by example;** the Council will do all it can in its role as a community leader to drive forward the growth agenda
  
- To take this agenda forward, I will be leading an Economic Growth Task Group comprised of senior officers and key stakeholder such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships and the County Council to ensure that we deliver an 'early action programme' to support our priorities. Our work to re-position the Bromsgrove economy and create prosperity now and I will be encouraging all members of Council to pro-actively support this important agenda.
  
- Turning my attention to Bromsgrove Town Centre and our other key centres; the Council is very ably being supported to take forward this agenda through our Centres Manager, Cheryl Welsh who has developed excellent relationships with key stakeholders and traders in each of the centres. The Council is also continuing to push forward the regeneration of Bromsgrove town centre.
  - There has been a hub of activity surrounding a number of key town centre regeneration sites over the past few months. As members will no doubt be aware, the Waitrose store on Hanover Street Car Park opened on May 11<sup>th</sup> and has been trading strongly ever since. The new 6,000sqft store has brought approximately 50 jobs to the area. This £3.5m development signals the first phase of this particular development and the proposals for phase 2

are currently being considered by planning officers. The second phase will see further redevelopment of circa 25,000 sqft and will help to complement the Waitrose development, as well as providing a key focus for the southern end of Bromsgrove High Street.

- The retail revolution within the town continues at the northern end where Aldi have recently cleared their site to make way for their new store, which will provide new jobs and investment in the town. Across the road from this site, the redevelopment of the Bromsgrove Retail Park is now underway. This £4m development, being undertaken by IM Properties, will see the entire site redeveloped to create 5 modern retail units. The site is set to be anchored by a M&S Foodhall and further retailers are expected to be announced in due course. Finally, within this area of the town, the Council continue to work closely with the preferred developers of the Stourbridge Road Car Park site to bring forward a commercially viable development, which will complement the activity on the surrounding sites.
- The current activity within the Town Centre environment is not solely focussed on retail developments, however, with the assisted living developments on Recreation Road continuing apace. The development will see the delivery of an 81 bedroom care home, 66 bedroom extra care accommodation and 26 affordable apartments for older people and the first units are due to be occupied shortly.
- In terms of our 'centres management' work, the following is being taken forward by our Bromsgrove Centres Manager (BCM):

#### **Bromsgrove Town Centre**

1. **Car parking, access and servicing review.** Commissioning a consultant to advise on car parking within the town centre; this work is expected approximately 3 months; report expected October/November 2017.
2. **Radio Link Scheme** upgrade from analogue system to a digital system to support the retail and night time economy. Has the potential to be rolled out to neighbouring centres.
3. **Taxi Review** to strengthen and improve the taxi service in Bromsgrove town especially for the night time economy.
4. **Food Festival** CJ Events delivered their first Food Festival on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017. Received positive press and improved footfall. Will be repeated next year.
5. **Italian Market** scheduled for Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2017.
6. **Festival of Light Bromsgrove** large scale festival of light with 20ft illuminated puppets to parade through the town centre in partnership with Artrix.
7. **Bromsgrove Town Centre Management Task Group;** partnership of key decision makers to pro-actively resolve existing and emerging issues in the town centre.
8. **Best Bar None** national scheme to be launched in Bromsgrove on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017 at 57 Monkey's. Our BCM is the co-ordinator and instigated the

introduction of the scheme to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre and to improve the offer of the licensed sector.

9. **Place Team** monthly walkabouts of the town centre to identify environmental issues and agree solutions especially around business waste management and cleanliness.
10. **Farmers Market** has been put out to tender and advertised with an expected introduction of the market in August/September 2017.
11. **Better Bromsgrove** brand and website established. All marketing promotions are now under the #BetterBromsgrove branding to strengthen the identity of the town centre.
12. **Bromsgrove Town Centre Business Survey** online survey undertaken and results will be analysed week commencing 10<sup>th</sup> July 2017 with a feedback session to be arranged with businesses.
13. **Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan** is being developed with a view to it being brought to Cabinet in September.
14. **Urban Sports Event** BMX and Skate event with pro-riders delivered by King Ramps (Boardmasters) on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2017. This event will be expanded and grown year-on-year with an Urban theme.
15. **Marketing campaigns;** delivered a Christmas and summer brochure 'Better Bromsgrove Together' which attracted paid for advertising from businesses across the District centres. A Christmas 2017 brochure is planned – very well received by businesses and the community. Distributed via the Advertiser to over 40,000 households; 'Better Bromsgrove Love valentines' promotional event where businesses donated prizes and winners were picked from a Facebook and Twitter campaign.
16. **Bromsgrove Events Group** established by BCM to co-ordinate town centre events and marketing campaigns.
17. **Voids Audit** to inform a plan to positively promote empty properties; looking at the potential of offering incentives and working with letting agents.

## Rubery

- **Rubery Public Realm Enhancement Scheme**
  1. Led by the Centres Manager in partnership with Bromsgrove District Council, NWedR and Worcestershire County Council to deliver £100,000 worth of public realm improvements in Rubery Village.
  2. **Rubery Village Business Association** attended by Centres Manager to strengthen communication and relationship with Rubery Village businesses and community groups.
  3. **Christmas Light Switch On;** Bromsgrove Centres Manager working with BDC to build on the Light Switch On event.
  4. **Farmers Market** tender includes the delivery of one market in Rubery as a pilot.

### Hagley Village

1. **Car Park review** supporting the businesses to take part in the Parish led car parking review.
2. **Christmas Light Switch On**; first event held last year and was a roaring success with businesses reporting their busiest day's trading. Will take place again this year in November 2017.
3. **Public Realm Improvements**; low level public realm improvements have been identified.

### Barnt Green Village

1. **Car Park Review** BCM supporting businesses to take part in the Parish led car park review
2. **Christmas Light Switch On** BCM worked with businesses last year and succeeded in securing agreement from the majority of businesses to stay open an additional hour, those that did not open (estate agents, services) lit up their business shop window.
3. **Barnt Green Business Meetings** regular meetings are being held with the businesses and Parish Council; chaired by BCM
4. **Classic Car and Bike Event** on Sunday 02 July 2017, great success and will take place every other year. Approx 1,000+ people attended. Some businesses opened and offered "tasters" and promotions
5. **Barnt Green Buskers** event in August 2017 to bring a new musical dimension to the Village centre. BCM working in partnership with Artrix to ensure a quality event. This will be an annual event to build year-on-year.

### Alvechurch Village

1. **Neighbourhood Plan** Bromsgrove Centres Manager commented on business section of Neighbourhood Plan
2. **Business Survey** will be undertaken in August 2017 to determine business opinion with a view to a follow up business meeting
3. **Christmas Light Switch On** event planned for this year to strengthen the Village offer

### Catshill

1. An initial visit from the BCM to Catshill centre is to take place on 12<sup>th</sup> August to speak with businesses. There will be a follow up meeting to bring together the businesses, Parish Council and community groups to begin organising a Christmas themed event.