

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

Delivering Economic Growth in Bromsgrove

Progress and Priorities for the Next Twelve Months

Introduction

In the last quarter Bromsgrove District Council has continued to work with our public and private sector partners through the Bromsgrove Economic Priorities Group and the Bromsgrove Economic Theme Group to address the challenges and opportunities for delivering local economic growth. Recent independent research by Peter Brett Associates (PBA), commissioned by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR), has confirmed that whilst the district has a good track record in supporting start up enterprise more effort is needed to help the business grow and remain in the district and that they have access to a developing skills base. The Council, with its partners, has a large role to play in increasing the supply of available business and industrial accommodation in the short to medium term and to ensure a pipeline of new employment sites for future growth.

The PBA report rightly identifies the review of the Bromsgrove District Plan as the opportunity to consider future employment land provision. The NWEDR team are working with our planning team to do this. The team are also progressing negotiations with local land owners and developers to unblock existing employment sites and to encourage more inward investment.

Our business support programmes continue to help local people start enterprises, improve their business efficiency and reduce their energy costs, and help their acceleration through our various grant schemes.

Fundamental to our future planning for growth is the need to ensure improvements to local and regional transport provision. Good progress is being made in relation to the A38 corridor improvements and it is anticipated that the first phase of these improvement works will begin in 2019. However, there is also an urgent need for a new strategic transportation assessment to be prepared in order to guide future growth in the district. Rail connectivity is equally important to growth and the recent investment in Bromsgrove railway station provides us with the opportunity to consider appropriate development to complement this.

At the heart of our local economy and our local community is Bromsgrove Town Centre and the development, improvement and management of the town centre is a key focus of activity with further proposed investment in public realm and the development of underused and vacant sites. We also continue to work closely with the other Centres in our District via our Centres Manager and the implementation of the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy (2017-2020) We are of course not unique in facing challenges within our High Street but in Bromsgrove we have a good partnership with the local community, local retailers and other businesses to manage the town centre's development.

Together we are bringing more events and activities into the town centre and we are working with the highway authority on the design of lighting and further public realm improvements as well as bringing forward a further review of future car parking requirements.

Bromsgrove town centre has the potential to attract more independent businesses and to be a home for new start-ups. We are keen to work with land owners and developers to create more small business space and new commercial opportunities on vacant sites and in under used buildings.

Our priorities for economic growth also include developing our skills base to ensure local people can compete for future job opportunities and to build resilience in the local economy. As part of our planning for future employment sites we will consider more direct labour market inclusiveness and access issues and do this by promoting local employment agreements through policies in the revised Local Plan and delivering through associated Section 106 agreements.

Working with the North Worcestershire Employment and Skills Board, the County Council and Local Enterprise Partnerships, we are developing a package of support measures for people in work and for the future generations. This includes building stronger links between Bromsgrove schools and local employees through our successful “Opening Doors to Business” programme and expanding the work of Worcestershire Apprenticeships.

Finally, we are very aware of the importance of ensuring an adequate supply and mix of new housing and the subsequent impact this has on the economy. One of the key issues is the provision of new affordable homes and market housing for first time buyers and families. The Bromsgrove District Plan review will support this work and we will continue to seek opportunities to create new housing development including in and around the town centre which meet the specific needs of our economy.

Our Priorities for Work for the Next Twelve Months

Over the next year we will progress all of the above economic development work through a structured approach. We will be updating the Bromsgrove Economic Action Plan, capturing existing and future work programmes. Below are some of the specific priorities which will form the focus of our work with NWedR and in partnership with Bromsgrove Economic Theme Group, chaired by a local businessman:

- 1. Securing with our development partners the completion of the Bromsgrove Enterprise Park to provide essential business space to support the growth and expansion of local enterprises.**

We will work with developer and landowner Langtree to agree the basis for direct investment by the Council to unlock the last phases of the scheme. This may be by a combination of grant and loan. It is proposed that a full business case relating to this investment will be brought to Cabinet in January. Our aim is to create space for circa 25-30 new business through delivering industrial units to meet a specific gap in the market for growing businesses.

- 2. Delivering our business support programmes to ensure that local people starting enterprises or building their businesses have access to advice, funding and practical support.**

Working with partners our aim is to assist as many Bromsgrove businesses as possible who are eligible to access relevant support, including grant and loan

schemes, available through the LEP, Council and European funding. To assist with this we will organise an event in February to promote the various schemes and programmes. We will also identify specific opportunities to support independent businesses to locate and develop in the Town Centre.

3. Deliver key town centre development projects for tourism, leisure and business growth to address vacant and under used sites and premises and boost foot fall and economic activity in the town centre.

We are working with the developer of the Market Hall site to secure a viable, high quality scheme as phase 2 of this development. While this work continues we will look to consider a 'meanwhile' use for the site to bring economic activity and foot fall to this area of the town and improve its appearance in the short term. We continue to work with developers of other key town centre sites including Stourbridge Road to enable appropriate development to come forward.

4. Town Centre Management will be a continuing priority with the planning, design and funding of new lighting improvements, further works on public realm enhancement and exploring with local businesses the potential for a Business Improvement District.

To inform our town centre work and to provide information to support a possible Business Improvement District, we propose to conduct a full town centre business survey in January 2019. This will be an online survey, promoted by our centres manager to all businesses. Work is well advanced on the Christmas programme for the Town Centre.

5. Commissioning, in partnership with the highway authorities, a strategic transportation assessment to inform the location and scope for economic growth and the determination of new major employment and housing sites

There is a need to carry out a strategic transport assessment to identify the capacity for future development across the District, including assessing the potential of key transport nodes such as motorway junctions and railway stations. This work will help to provide the basis for assessing the quantum of employment land that can be developed and will ensure we are able to support business growth and inward investment.

6. Working with the Strategic Transport Assessment and through the District Plan Review we will work with local land owners and developers to create achievable plans for employment growth within the District to attract new inward investment and support business growth.

Our priority is to create a pipeline of sustainable employment sites and to ensure that these sites are accessible, have the appropriate infrastructure available and are commercially attractive. Our focus will be on ensuring sufficient space is available to allow our indigenous businesses to grow and thrive as well as providing space for inward investment, which will make it more attractive for people to live and work in

the area. The focus for inward investment will be on companies that add value and help to meet the economic ambitions of the district.

7. Securing the participation of local employers in the recruitment, training and development of the local workforce drawing on the skills and career programmes promoted in partnership with the LEPs, local colleges and training.

Our priority is to continue to develop programmes will help to upskill the local workforce, and provide training and employment opportunities for local people, including future generations. Our Opening Doors programme will be rolled out to more employers and we will engage more actively with the Careers Enterprise Council to ensure local schools in Bromsgrove have every opportunity to participate in these programmes and engage with local employers.

In all the above the Council will consider specific opportunities for direct investment to accelerate delivery. Such proposals will be brought to the Cabinet with full business cases for investment and considered in terms of value for money and return of investment.

During the course of the next year we will see proposals to change the wider landscape for supporting local economic development, particularly, but not exclusively in relation to the future geography of the Local Enterprise Partnerships. We will ensure Bromsgrove's interests are strongly represented in these processes of change, and that funding programmes supporting our work are maintained whenever possible.

Finally I am thankful to the continued work of Paul Spooner (Interim Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration) and all the team. I am also pleased to announce the appointment of Ostap – Taras Paparega to the permanent post of Head of NWEDR. Ostap who is likely to join us in January is currently the Regeneration, Heritage and Economic Development Manager at Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council.