

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK WORKING PARTY

15TH OCTOBER 2009

**DRAFT BROMSGROVE TOWN CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER
APPRAISAL**

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor Mrs J Dyer
Responsible Head of Service	Dave Hammond, Head of Planning & Environment Services
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Bromsgrove Town Conservation Area was originally designated by Worcestershire County Council in 1968 and was extended in 1983 and again in 1989. No formal review of the Conservation Area has been carried out since then, although a brief report on the merits of the area was prepared in 2007.
- 1.2 The Council has a statutory duty under s69(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to designate any areas which they consider to be of special architectural or historic interest as Conservation Areas, and under s69(2) to review such designations from time to time. The Council has a further duty under s71(1) to formulate and prepare proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its Conservation Areas.
- 1.3 A character appraisal and a set of management proposals for the Bromsgrove Town Conservation Area have now been produced in accordance with the guidance given by English Heritage. Although published by the Council, local amenity societies and residents will be encouraged to contribute to and comment on the draft document through a formal consultation process. This normally lasts for 6 weeks and includes a public meeting and an exhibition in the local library.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Approval is sought to begin a formal public consultation on the draft character appraisal, proposed boundary revisions and management proposals.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The purpose of a Conservation Area character appraisal is to identify the factors and features which make an area special, based on an in-depth assessment of an area's buildings, spaces, evolution and sense of place. This is the first step in developing a management plan for the continued preservation and enhancement of a Conservation Area. An appraisal

evaluates the positive, neutral and negative features of the area and suggests opportunities for improvement. It is not unusual for the boundary of a Conservation Area to fluctuate over time as the area evolves, and an assessment of the current and potential boundaries is normally part of the appraisal process

- 3.2 The Conservation Area review has highlighted some potential boundary changes to focus on the main retail area and the alleyways leading beyond. It is therefore proposed that the small areas on New Road and Chapel Street and the area to the South of Hanover Place be omitted from the boundary, as they have little visual or architectural relationship with the main part of the town centre. The area around St. John's will also be omitted from the boundary to become a separate Conservation Area, because of its physical severance from the rest of the town centre and unique individual character.
- 3.3 A copy of the draft character appraisal has been attached to this report and includes the set of management and enhancement proposals under its Appendix 3. This is not an absolute list but outlines the main issues which need to be addressed and possible tasks and timescales. The main management issues it is felt need to be addressed are:

- Quality of the public realm
- Quality of shopfronts and signage
- Effective maintenance of historic buildings
- The increasing number of vacant retail units
- Vacant upper floors of historic buildings
- Advertising of the street market
- Marketing of the town's heritage
- Environmental improvements to Spadesbourne Brook

It is anticipated that the Council would explore partnership funding schemes with Worcestershire County Council, English Heritage or the Heritage Lottery Fund to pursue some of these issues and challenges in a coordinated way. An initial meeting has already been held with English Heritage as preparation for a small grant scheme of £40,000 in 2010/11 (£20K from EH, £20K from BDC/WCC). This would be targeted primarily to shopfront improvements and building repairs to historic buildings in the town centre. The Council shall also be preparing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a 5 year Townscape Heritage Initiative grant scheme in the town centre.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 The next step is to carry out a formal consultation period on the draft appraisal, proposed boundary changes and the draft management plan. Any comments received shall be summarised and reported to the Planning Committee.

- 4.2 As Conservation Area Character Appraisals cannot be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents the final document will be submitted for approval by the Planning Committee to give it some additional weight at planning appeal. Previous planning inspectors have held that character statements are a material consideration in determining planning applications if they have been through some form of public consultation and internal approval process.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None, the cost of producing and consulting on the Conservation Area character appraisal is being covered by approved budgets.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The proposed boundary changes to the area would need to be formally re-designated and a new Conservation Area designated around St. Johns Church. These changes would then need to be advertised in the Bromsgrove Advertiser and in the London Gazette, and notifications sent to GOWM, English Heritage and the Land Registry.

7. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

7.1 Objective 1 Regeneration: Priority 2 Town Centre

The completed character appraisal shall be used as part of the evidence base for the forthcoming Area Action Plan, which in turn supports the council objective to regenerate the town centre.

7.2 Objective 2 Improvement: Priority 3 Customer Satisfaction

The character appraisal will demonstrate the willingness of the Council to promote the regeneration of the town centre and will help address some of the negative comments received during the AAP Issues and Options consultation. It is hoped that this document will also improve the negative perception the Bromsgrove Society has of our management of the historic built environment.

7.3 Objective 3 Sense of Community: Priority 8 Community Engagement

The main purpose of an appraisal is to highlight the importance of the historic environment and engage the local community in their cultural heritage. The draft appraisal will be made available on the Council's website, in the local library, at the Customer Service centre in the Dolphin Centre and the Council House to ensure that it reaches a wide audience. The historic built environment is often seen as a traditional and elitist subject and we hope to address this by providing a more inclusive and accessible conservation service to the local community.

8 **RISK MANAGEMENT**

8.1 These risks are being managed as follows:

Risk Register: Planning and Environment

Key Objective Ref No: 5

Key Objective: Effective, efficient, and legally compliant Strategic Planning Service

Key Control: Carry out Conservation Area character appraisals and management plans in accordance with national planning guidance

Action: 5.6, Carry out Town Centre and Belbroughton Conservation Area appraisals

9. **CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Consultation to be carried out in line with legislation and adopted standards contained in the Bromsgrove District Council Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

10. **EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None

11. **VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 All work carried out by in house conservation team

12. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Procurement Issues	None
Personnel Implications	None
Governance/Performance Management	None
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998	None
Policy	Will help inform future planning policies in the Town Centre AAP
Environmental	None

13. **OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Portfolio Holder	Yes - informal briefing.
Chief Executive	No
Executive Director - Partnerships and Projects	No
Executive Director - Services	No
Assistant Chief Executive	No
Head of Service	Yes

Head of Financial Services	No
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No
Head of Organisational Development & HR	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

14. WARDS AFFECTED

St. Johns

15. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Draft Bromsgrove Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal

16. CONTACT OFFICER

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