BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK WORKING PARTY

15th October 2009

DRAFT BROMSGROVE TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK

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 purpose of this report is to inform Members on progress regarding the preparation of the draft Bromsgrove Town Centre Health Check.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That Members note the progress on the preparation of the draft Bromsgrove Town Centre Health Check.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Town Centre Health Check is an important component of the evidence base to support the regeneration of Bromsgrove town centre. The draft findings will be used to:

- inform the Local Development Framework, such as the Draft Core Strategy Core Policy 9: Retail and Town Centre Regeneration and the Bromsgrove Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP)
- assess the success of retail policies within the adopted Bromsgrove District Local Plan
- assist with retail planning and development management in Bromsgrove town centre.
- serve as baseline data for future health checks to compare with

3.2 The consultation paper on a new Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Prosperous Economies (draft PPS4) published in May 2009 suggested a range of data that may be useful in establishing a robust evidence base for development plans. Although the draft PPS is not a material consideration, the proposed range of data if collected, provides a useful economic overview of the district, county and region. Relevant data are therefore collated and presented in Chapter 2 of the document.

3.3 Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres (PPS6) states that local authorities should monitor the health of their town centres and how it is changing over time. The town centre health check follows the methodology, i.e. collecting information for the twelve indicators, stated in Chapter 4 of PPS6. Findings of the indicators and a SWOT analysis of the town centre are presented in Chapter 3 and 4 of the document.

3.4 Much of the information for the health check is obtained from other sources and as such members will have been presented with parts of this information in other forums, it is the intention of the Strategic Planning section that the Town Centre Health check will be regularly updated to ensure the most up to date information for the performance of the town centre is all contained with one report.

4. DRAFT BROMSGROVE TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK

Data Collection

4.1 Data included in the report are mainly collected through:

- desktop surveys, such as visiting and downloading information from the relevant websites
- residents' questionnaire undertaken for the Town Centre AAP in 2008
- street surveys undertaken in summer 2009 for the town centre primary, secondary shopping streets and other streets within the town centre zone outlined in the Bromsgrove Proposals Map 2004
- pedestrian flow surveys in the primary shopping areas in summer 2009
- the Goad category report and Goad Retailer Address Data for Bromsgrove, 2008, which covers the primary shopping areas and most of the secondary shopping areas
- a local estate agent

4.2 However, due to the lack of information, two indicators - 'the intentions of retailers to change representations' and 'land values and the length of time key sites have remained undeveloped' – are not reported on. It is not envisaged that the Council will have access to the relevant data unless the Council subscribes the online database system provided by CoStar FOCUS (http://www.focusnet.co.uk).

Town Centre Health Check

Diversity of main town centre uses

4.3 There are 343 businesses/ vacant units in the town centre, almost half of the shops are for retail use (44%/ 152 units), followed by vacant shops (15%/ 50 units) and A2 financial and professional offices use (13%/ 44 units). The rest are made up of uses with 20 or less units: A3 restaurants and cafes (6% / 20 units), sui generis (5% / 18 units), D1 non residential institutions (5% / 16 units), B1 business use (4% / 14 units), A5 hot food takeaways (3% / 12 units), A4 drinking establishments (3% / 11 units), D2 amenity and leisure use (1% / 4 units), B2 general industry (0%/ 1 unit) and B8 storage or distribution (0%/ 1 unit).

4.4 In the primary shopping area, 86% of its shops fall within use class A. 67% of all A1 retail uses (including charity shops) locate in this area (102 units), this is followed by A2 professional and financial services (57% / 25 units) and A3 food and drink (70% / 14 units). 100% of the B2 uses were found in the primary shopping area but this percentage figure is slightly distorted as only 1 B2 use was recorded (the Bromsgrove Printing Co. on Worcester Road). 19 vacant units (38% of the total vacant units) were also recorded in the primary shopping area.

4.5 In the secondary shopping area, 66% of its shops fall within use class A. They are A1 use 35% (22 units), A2 use 10% (6 units), A3 use 3% (2 units), A4 use 5% (3 units) and A5 use 13% (8 units). In accordance to the PPS6 definition of secondary shopping area, the uses in this area are more diverse than in the primary shopping areas. 5% (3 units) are used as B1 offices, 3% (2 units) D1 and 6% (4 units) SG. 12 vacant units were recorded in the secondary area, making up 19% of the total units in the secondary shopping area.

4.6 For areas outside the primary and secondary shopping areas, 46% of the units fall within use class A. The rest of the units fall within use class B (10%), use class D (27%) and other uses (12%). 19 vacant units (17% of the total units in this area) were recorded in this area.

4.7 The Goad Category Report for Bromsgrove (2008) illustrates that floorspace in Bromsgrove town centre was dominated by comparison goods followed by service and convenience goods. In terms of floorspace, Bromsgrove has a significantly lower proportion of convenience goods and leisure services but significantly higher proportion of retail service and financial & business services than the UK average.

4.8 Locationally, most respondents prefer to see shops and restaurants spreading along the length of the High Street. Respondents also want to see a theatre or cinema and more restaurants and cafés in the town centre to encourage more evening visitors.

The amount of retail, leisure and office floorspace in edge-of-centre and out-of-centre locations

4.9 On the edge of centre, a number of use class A shops were found on Worcester Road, Birmingham Road, Recreation Road and Crown Close such as an Asda store in Market Street and some small independent shops, restaurants, salons, etc. Some professional businesses were also recorded at St John Street, Birmingham Road and New Road. The only leisure facility on the edge-of-centre the Dolphin Centre is just 200m away from the primary shopping area.

The potential capacity for growth or change of centres in the network

4.10 The land uses surrounding the town centre zone can act as a physical barrier to the future expansion of the town centre. But within the town centre zone, several sites/ areas may have development opportunities. They are the bus station, the Market Hall & George House, the car park and recreation ground by Asda, the police and fire stations, the library, Recreation Road and the Dolphin Centre.

Retailer representation

4.11 Among the five categories of national multiples identified in the Goad Category Report, Bromsgrove town centre has no national multiples presence in the department stores and supermarkets categories but has presence in the mixed goods retailers, the clothing and the other retailers categories.

4.12 Despite the presence of the national multiples and some other well known retailers, 83% of the respondents of the Bromsgrove Town Centre AAP survey considered the range of shops as very poor or poor and the range of eating as adequate/ good. Over half of them considered more small independent and specialist shops, a department store or more national chain stores would make the town centre a better place to shop.

Proportion of vacant street level property

4.13 The Goad Category Report (2008) shows that there were 24 units (9.68%) of vacant retail & service outlets in Bromsgrove town centre, which were 8% lower than the UK average. In terms of floorspace, the total floorspace recorded vacant was 49,300sq ft. (9.01%) which was higher than the UK average. This indicates that vacancies occurred mostly in bigger units.

4.14 At the time of the street survey (June 09), 15% or 50 units were vacant. This is significantly higher than the figure recorded in Goad (9.68%) and above the 12% England and Wales average. The distribution of these vacant units were spread throughout the centre and varied in size and configuration, ranging from big units like the old Woolworth store to small units in the Strand Centre.

Shopping rents & commercial yields on non-domestic property

4.15 The area to the front of the shop is normally referred to as ‘zone A’. Zone A rent refers to the rental value for the first 6 metres depth of floorspace in retail units from the shop window and it is the most valuable area of the shop. According to the West Midlands Retail Market Overview (Autumn 2008), prime in-town retail rents in the West Midlands fell on average by -0.6% and well below the UK average of 1.1% during May 2007 to May 2008. This places the region last in the regional ranking for 2007/08. Ranked number ten is Wolverhampton with its zone A rent at £130 per square foot. Figures of Bromsgrove’s rent were not available at the same period, but in July 2009, the High Street Zone A rent is thought to be around £50 to £60 per square foot, although due to commercial sensitivity this information is very hard to acquire.

4.16 The commercial yields on non-domestic property shows the capital value of the non-domestic properties in relation to their expected market rents. The level of yield broadly represents the market’s evaluation of the risk and the long term profitability of the centre for retail, office and other commercial developments. Broadly speaking, low yields indicate that a town is considered to be attractive. In 2009, the yield for shops in Bromsgrove was around 6. For comparison purpose, the yield of Barnsley, Doncaster, Huddersfield, Leeds & Wakefield in 2007 were 7.25, 5.50, 7.00, 4.25 & 6.75. In other words, among these centres, Leeds centre in general was seen by investors as having the lowest market risk and higher long term profitability for retail, office and other commercial developments.

Pedestrian flows

4.17 The pedestrian count was carried out at four points in the morning, midday and afternoon peak on a Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The survey points are the main entry/ exit point of visitors to the High Street due to the different locations of car parks and public transport stops.

4.18 The Saturday farmers market was found to have the highest footfall at all times of the day, except at location point 1 on the Friday afternoon peak when performance of a music band near location point 1 had attracted many school pupils to the town centre after school.

4.19 If it was not due to the heavy rain at the time of survey on Friday midday (at location points 2 and 3), it was expected that the Friday midday and afternoon footfalls would be consistently higher than Thursday's.

4.20 Footfalls were therefore higher on the two outdoor market days (Friday and Saturday) in this survey. However, future pedestrian counts should be carried out on different days to verify if the higher footfalls were results of the outdoor markets or the fact that generally there are more people out for shopping on Fridays and Saturdays.

4.21 The footfall of the location points show that the busiest part of the shopping areas is the north of the High Street (i.e. location point 1 where Argos is), followed by the Asda crossing (i.e. location point 5).

Accessibility

4.22 A significant residential areas located close to the town centre and the flat topography of the town (apart from area to the east) means that the town is readily accessible to pedestrians and cyclists. The availability of free cycle parking, benches, public toilets and signage also encourage people to visit the town centre on foot or by bike, although no clearly defined cycle routes could be seen as a barrier to some people who would like to cycle into the town.

4.23 Although parking is within a short distance to the town centre, visitors from all car parks, except the Parkside car park, need to cross the roads to reach the High Street. This can cause inconvenience and safety concerns to pedestrians and visitors especially those with disabilities and young children.

4.24 The bus stops and taxi ranks are conveniently located beside the main shopping areas, but connections to the Bromsgrove train station are not considered good.

4.25 The main shopping streets are pedestrianised and shops have ramps for wheelchair users, pedestrian crossings have special tiles for the visually impaired.

Perception of safety and occurrence of crime

4.26 Compare to the 2007-08 crime figures of St Johns ward where the town centre lies within, there is a fall in burglary, robbery, violence against the person and other offences in 2008-09 but an increase in criminal damage, drug offences, fraud & forgery, anti social behaviour and theft & handling. There are 20 CCTV cameras in the town centre area and they operate 24 hours. All of the car parks in Bromsgrove town centre are covered by CCTV cameras and this helps reduce the risk of car related crime.

4.27 The High Street in Bromsgrove town centre is a pedestrianised area and it creates a strong sense of enclosure. Although this creates a nice shopping environment, it affects the perception of safety to pedestrians after dark. The high enclosure means that pass-by traffic is unlikely to see what is going on in the street. The upper floors of shops currently are mainly used as shop storage or offices and there is a lack of natural surveillance outside shops' trading hours and office hours.

State of the Town Centre Environment Quality

4.28 The major transport routes such as Brimingham Road, Kidderminster Road, Worcester Road, Stourbridge Road entering Bromsgrove are all poorly defined. There are no gateway features to inform people their entrance to Bromsgrove town centre. The image of the town to the pass-by traffic is bad. It is dominated by the rear views of the High Street such as Crown Close and Windsor Street. These areas are mainly the backs of buildings used for parking and have poor boundary treatment. Similarly, there is a lack of enclosure to the town centre car parks and the streetscape is often left open and poorly defined. The connecting routes that link the car parks and surrounding roads to the High Street are enclosed by poor quality buildings and blank side elevations.

4.29 The whole primary shopping areas and most the secondary shopping areas fall within the town centre conservation area, which contains a variety of building styles and add character to the town centre.

4.30 The Council has been monitoring the air quality in the district against several health based air quality objectives. In 2008, three locations were identified to have gone over one of these objectives (the annual mean nitrogen dioxide objective) and one of them located within the town centre (16 Worcester Road). In 2007, two other town centre locations (Davenal House on Birmingham Road and Strand House on the Strand) were also identified as failing to meet the objective but they had now fallen just below the objective in 2008. Road vehicle traffic is the cause of the air quality issue in these locations.

<u>The SWOT analysis</u>

4.31 Based on the findings above, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the town centre are identified as follow:-

Strengths
▪ Presence of national multiples in mixed goods, clothing and other

retailers categories. ▪ Good bus station location. ▪ Pedestrianisation of the main shopping areas. ▪ Town centre conservation areas. ▪ Regular street markets. ▪ Good network of CCTVs. ▪ Relatively flat topography of the town.
Weakness
▪ Limited retail and food offer. ▪ Proximity of competing centres. ▪ Closure of the Tourist Information Centre. ▪ Insufficient short stay parking. ▪ Poor and irregular connections to the train station. ▪ Busy and poor crossings to the main shopping areas. ▪ Poor facilities for cyclists. ▪ Busy traffic at the Stourbridge Road and Birmingham Road junction. ▪ Littering. ▪ Poor quality façades. ▪ Poor rear view and function of High Street. ▪ Poor image of town centre to pass-by traffic. ▪ Growing vacancy level and lack of decorations in vacant shopfronts. ▪ Increasing number of crimes. ▪ Limited natural surveillance at night time.
Opportunities
▪ National multiples in the department store and supermarket categories and retail and food offer at the potential development sites. ▪ More frequent farmers' or specialised markets. ▪ Pedestrianisation of Market Street. ▪ New link road to connect the town centre and A38. ▪ Regular connections with the new train station. ▪ Improved signage and walking/ cycling network to encourage sustainable travel. ▪ Environmental improvement at the Spadebourne Brook and the High Street. ▪ More frequent litter patrols. ▪ Shopmobility scheme. ▪ Night time economy. ▪ Efficient use of rear areas of main shopping areas. ▪ More quality shops to meet the potential demand of the relatively high income residents. ▪ To build on the strong services growth in the region.
Threats
▪ Potential town centre AQMA designation. ▪ Potential increase of crime levels.

5. NEXT STEPS

5.1 The town centre health check will be updated on an annual basis to make sure up-to-date information is available to support the Core Strategy and the Town Centre AAP.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct financial implications in the development of the town centre health check. This document has been written in house and form part of evidence base for the Core Strategy and the Town Centre AAP.

7. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

7.1 Objective 1 Regeneration - Priority Town Centre
The town centre health check has identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the town centre and these will be used to support the retail policies within the Core Strategy and the BromsgroveTown Centre AAP.

7.2 Policies within the core strategy and the BromsgroveTown Centre AAP will direct where, when, what and how developments should be built in the town centre up to 2026.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Town Centre Health Check is a key evidence to inform the Core Strategy and the Bromsgrove Town Centre AAP. Once adopted the Core Strategy and the Bromsgrove Town Centre AAP will become part of the Statutory Development Plans for the District required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and prepared in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

- Inability to produce development plan document which is judged to be sound by the planning inspectorate and therefore resulting in non legally compliant Strategic planning service

9.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

Risk Register: Planning and Environment
Key Objective Ref No: 6
Key Objective: Effective, efficient, and legally compliant Strategic planning Service

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Town Centre Health Check identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Bromsgrove town centre. These findings will affect the development of the Bromsgrove Town Centre AAP. How the

Bromsgrove town centre is going to be regenerated could have a significant impact on consumer choice such as the range of shopping, leisure and local services in the town centre.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Accessibility is one of the key indicators of the town centre health check. The findings will contribute to the Bromsgrove Town Centre AAP.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 Except the purchase of the Goad Category Report, the Town Centre Health Check has been carried out and written in-house and has therefore ensured value for money.

13. 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	The Town Centre Health Check informs the Core Strategy and the Bromsgrove Town Centre AAP which will shape future development in Bromsgrove town centre.
Environmental	

14. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	No
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

15. WARDS AFFECTED

All wards can be affected by the health of the Town Centre although the primary impact will be felt in St Johns Ward.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Draft Bromsgrove Town Centre Health Check - Appendix A
- Bromsgrove Town Centre Regeneration Area Action Plan Survey (2008)
- Goad Category Report, Bromsgrove (2008)
- Town centre street survey (summer 2009) – available upon request in excel format.

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