

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

19TH JUNE 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. M. Evans (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, J. Elledge, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, D. Hopkins, R. J. Hunter, H. J. Jones, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. McEldowney, D. J. Nicholl, S. T. Nock, S. R. Peters, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson (from Minute Item No. 21/25), J. D. Stanley, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr J. Leach, Mr B. Watson, Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. R. Bamford, Ms. N Cummings, Mr. M. Dunphy, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Ms A. Grimmett

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TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors A. Bailes, R. Bailes, J. Clarke, R. Lambert and H. Rone-Clarke.

Members were informed that Councillor S. Robinson had been slightly delayed and would be arriving at the meeting later in the evening.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In respect of Minute Item 23/25 – Bromsgrove District Plan – Councillors S. Ammar, S. Baxter, R. Hunter, B. Kumar and S. Peters declared other disclosable interests due to the fact that sites for consultation detailed in the report were located close to their homes.

Councillor S. Colella declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute Item 23/25 – Bromsgrove District Plan – on the basis that three sites for consultation detailed in the report were located within a mile of his home.

During consideration of this item, clarification was requested as to whether the proximity of a Member's home to any of the 400 sites that were subject to consultation needed to be declared, as Members commented that it was likely that all elected Councillors lived near to at least one site. Officers explained that Members were being advised that if there was a site detailed in the report that Members felt they might have an interest in, which could include due to the proximity of the site to a Councillor's home address, then for transparency they should declare this at the Council meeting. However, at this stage, there was no requirement for Members to leave the room during the debate or to

absent themselves from the vote because the decision at the meeting was not in relation to the individual sites.

Councillor C. Hotham declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute Item 23/25 – Bromsgrove District Plan – in his capacity as a member of Barnt Green Social Club, as one of the possible sites included in the consultation paper included the current location of the club.

Councillor J. Robinson declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute Item 23/25 – Bromsgrove District Plan – in relation to his employment by National Highways which would potentially be one of the stakeholder organisations engaged as part of the consultation process. Councillor J. Robinson also declared an other disclosable interest in this item on the basis that his wife worked for Birmingham City Council, which was another stakeholder organisation that might be engaged through the consultation process.

Councillor S. Robinson declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute Item 23/25 – Bromsgrove District Plan – in relation to her employment by Birmingham City Council which would potentially be one of the stakeholder organisations engaged as part of the consultation process.

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POLITICAL BALANCE

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Governance presented a report relating to the political balance at the Council.

Members were advised that this report had had to be prepared following changes to the political balance at the authority since the Annual Council meeting held in May 2025. There was the potential that a further report on the subject of the political balance would be presented for Council's consideration in July 2025, subject to the outcome of ongoing discussions between group leaders.

The figures presented in the political balance report were subsequently discussed by Members. Whilst the accuracy of these figures was not contested, concerns were raised that the allocation of seats in accordance with legal rules would result in the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board having a single vacant seat each. This was due to the fact that one political group which was entitled to seats on those Committees could not take up those seats because all of the group's members served on the Cabinet and there were legal and constitutional barriers to their participation as members of those particular Committees. Concerns were raised about the impact that having vacancies on those two Committees in particular could have on the transparency and effectiveness of the arrangements in place for challenging decision making, particularly by Cabinet.

To address these concerns, it was suggested that the Council could consider suspending the political balance and then allocating the vacant seats to political groups not represented on the Cabinet. The suspension of the political balance could not occur at this extraordinary meeting of Council as there was a legal requirement to give five clear working days' notice in the agenda for a Council meeting where it was proposed that the political balance should be suspended and this had not occurred. However, Members commented that this could potentially be achieved in time for the July meeting of Council.

The suggestion to suspend the political balance was discussed and in doing so reference was made to the fact that this could only be achieved if no single Member voted against the proposal at a Council meeting. Concerns were raised that there was no guarantee that consensus would be achieved. As an alternative, the suggestion was made that the Council could increase the number of seats on both the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and on the Overview and Scrutiny Board. Whilst this would still result in there being vacant seats on those Committees, it was suggested that this would result in the appointment of 11 Councillors to both bodies, in line with the current size of both Committees.

Members highlighted that group leaders had recently agreed to discuss the political balance at a meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group. The suggestion was made that this meeting could take place before publication of the agenda for the July meeting of Council in order to achieve some clarity on the different positions of the various political groups in respect of suspending the political balance. The impact of changing the number of seats on the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Board could also be considered at this meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1) for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year, the Committees set out in Appendix 1 to the minutes be appointed and that the representation of the different political groups on the Council on those Committees be as set out in that table until the next Annual Meeting of the Council, or until the next review of political representation under Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, whichever is the earlier.
- 2) Members be appointed to the Committees and as substitute members in accordance with nominations to be made by Group Leaders, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the minutes.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT PLAN

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) presented the Bromsgrove District Local

Plan Draft Development Strategy Consultation 2025 report for Council's consideration.

In presenting the report, the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and WRS explained that Council was being asked to debate the approval of a consultation on the formation of a District Plan. The report was inviting Members to agree to vote for 12 weeks of consultation. However, Members were not due to make any decisions at the meeting in respect of any sites for potential development and Council was asked to note that no decisions had been taken yet on any potential sites for development. Instead, the purpose of the report at this stage of the process was to invite Members to agree to consult with the public and other interested stakeholders on their views of what could be included in the Bromsgrove District Local Plan in the future.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licnesing and WRS commented that the Government was requiring local authorities to ensure the development of a certain number of homes in each authority's area by 2043. In Bromsgrove, a target of an additional 9,000 properties had been added to the previous target for the District, resulting in a requirement for 12,000 homes to be developed in the District by 2043. The Government also expected local authorities to develop new District Local Plans within 30 months of the implementation of the new plan making system. This would involve further rounds of public consultation, in addition to the process proposed in this report, and had been scheduled in accordance with the timetable detailed in the Local Development Scheme that had been agreed by Members in February 2025.

It was acknowledged that the process of identifying potential sites for development in Bromsgrove District was challenging. Members were asked to note that 89 per cent of the District was classified as green belt. In total, 400 potential sites for development had been identified. Some of these sites were considered to be more viable than others but all were subject to consultation.

The purpose of the District Local Plan was to provide a fully comprehensive document that could guide future development in the District. The content of the District Plan needed to complement the authority's vision, as detailed in the Council Plan. In addition, a District Local Plan should set out plans for development in the future. The drafting of a District Local Plan needed to involve consultation with interested stakeholders, including the public. At this particular stage, subject to Members' agreement, the consultation would launch on 30th June 2025. There would be various opportunities for the public to comment in this consultation process, including by submitting comments online and by attending public consultation events.

Prior to the publication of the report in the agenda for the meeting, Members had been invited to consider the various possible sites. All Members had been invited to attend meetings of the Strategic Planning

Steering Group (SPSG) at which options had been considered. Officers had also provided briefings to each of the political groups represented at the Council in turn. At the meetings, some Councillors had articulated their opposition to the presentation of one option in the report. However, the conclusion had been reached that it would be simpler to consult on one option. Members were asked to note that despite this approach, the public could still comment on all of the 400 possible sites that had been identified and any that had not been included in the report.

In concluding his remarks, the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and WRS urged all interested residents and other local stakeholders to submit comments in the consultation process. This would ensure that their views and concerns would be highlighted and would be taken into account as part of the process for developing the District Local Plan further.

Following the presentation of the report, Councillor C. Hotham proposed an amendment to the first resolution detailed in the report. This read as follows:

“Bromsgrove District Local Plan Draft Development Strategy Consultation *and other options* be approved, for a period of public consultation between *15th September and 8th December* in order to enable these and other potential proposals to come forward and to continue to be appraised as part of the plan making process.”

The amendment was proposed by Councillor Hotham and seconded by Councillor S. Colella.

In proposing this amendment, Councillor Hotham explained that his group had aimed to propose an alternative option at the meeting. Advice had been received prior to the meeting that this would not be permissible. Therefore, Councillor Hotham was proposing a different amendment on this subject for Council’s consideration.

At this juncture, the meeting was adjourned. This adjournment occurred between 18.45 and 19.14. Following this adjournment, Councillor Hotham confirmed that, based on detailed planning advice, he had decided to withdraw the proposed amendment.

During consideration of this item, Members requested clarification regarding the consequences of not approving the report for consultation at the meeting. The Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services explained that the Government specified that decisions on developments should be taken in accordance with the content of a Council’s District Local Plan. District Local Plans were designed to cover a period of 15 years and final copies of the District Local Plan would detail where development should occur during that time. The Government also required Councils to have a five-year supply of housing land. The Council did not have an up-to-date District Local Plan

or a five-year supply of housing land by the date of the Council meeting. In this context, the authority was obliged to consider any planning applications for development that were submitted by developers. There was also a distinct possibility that any such applications that were turned down by the Planning Committee would be subsequently approved at appeal. In addition to these considerations, there was the potential that the Government would use a provision to intervene with Councils that were not viewed to be progressing work on a new Local Plan. The first stage in the process of developing a new Local Plan was to agree a Local Development Scheme which detailed the timetable for a Local Plan. Bromsgrove District Council had agreed a Local Development Scheme at the Council meeting held in February 2025. The first stage in that agreed timetable would be to consult on possible options, which was the purpose of the report that was being considered at the meeting. Any slippage in the timetable would be monitored by the Government.

Members subsequently discussed the report in detail and in doing so commented on the following points:

- The significant level of public interest in the subject of the report and the need to ensure that public consultation undertaken by the Council was meaningful.
- The extent to which it had been appropriate to include only one option in the report.
- The different potential options that had been identified by some Members during the SPSG meetings.
- The extent to which Members' views about alternative options had been taken into account when developing the content of the report.
- The identification of 400 sites for possible development by developers, which had been discussed at meetings of the SPSG.
- The additional information in respect of potential sites that would be published on the Council's website on 30th June 2025, subject to Members' approval of the proposals detailed in the report. Officers confirmed that Members had had opportunities to review this information at meetings of the SPSG.
- The potential for residents and other interested stakeholders to identify other potential sites for development not included in the 400 sites that had already been identified. Members were advised that additional sites could be suggested in the consultation feedback.
- The extent to which it was appropriate to expect local residents to suggest possible sites for development.
- The process that had been followed in terms of reviewing evidence relating to different locations and how this had contributed to site selection.
- The housing market in Bromsgrove District and the difficulties that many local residents experienced in terms of the affordability of properties situated in the District.
- The number of households on the housing waiting list for social housing by the date of the meeting.

- The risks to Bromsgrove District, in terms of the potential for Government intervention, if the Council did not proceed with consulting on possible sites for development in line with the agreed Local Development Scheme.
- The risks to the District of developers submitting applications to develop any land in the District if work did not proceed on the Local Plan.
- The opportunities that had been provided to all Members to attend and participate in SPSG meetings prior to the Council meeting.
- The timing of the proposed public consultation and whether there was a risk that some residents might struggle to respond as this coincided with busy holiday periods.
- The fact that 12 weeks had been allocated to public consultation and the extent to which it was likely that many residents and other stakeholders would be unavailable for the full 12 week period.
- The risk of developers submitting speculative planning applications if the Council did not proceed with public consultation in accordance with the timetable in the Local Development Scheme and the impact that this could have on the local community.
- The views that many local residents had already expressed to Members on the content of the report prior to the Council meeting and the need for Members to ensure that these views were communicated to officers as part of the public consultation process.
- The action that many Members wanted to take, working with their communities, to address concerns they had about possible developments that had been identified in their wards.
- The previous public consultation exercises that had been carried out by the Council and the outcomes of these processes.
- The reasons why certain sites had been included in the single option, which included locations that Members commented had previously been identified as being at risk of flooding or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- The extent to which additional infrastructure would be made available to locations in which developments would eventually occur.
- The extent to which possible sites for development had been identified across all wards and whether some would be subject to greater levels of development in due course than other wards.
- The reasons why employment land had not been included in the report and whether further proposals in respect of employment land would be presented for Members' consideration at a later date. Questions were raised about whether the Government would be open to waiting for the Council to take further action in respect of the plan once sites for employment land had been identified.
- The extent to which Members had had opportunities to influence the content of the report that had been presented for Council's consideration.
- The need for important stakeholders, such as the Highways Authority, to be consulted as part of the process in relation to the infrastructure implications.

- The advice that had been received by Members from professional, trained planners when considering the possible sites and developing the report for consideration at Council.
- The possibility of developing some of the additional homes required in areas bordering the Birmingham conurbation and the extent to which houses built in this area would have access to appropriate infrastructure.
- The Government's position with regard to the potential development of green belt as well as grey belt land.
- The differences between green belt and grey belt land.
- The significant amount of green belt land in Bromsgrove District and the value of protecting this land to the benefit of future generations.
- The need to provide secure and affordable homes for the benefit of future generations.
- The fact that no decision had yet been made on any of the possible sites detailed in the report.
- The desire amongst some Councillors to reduce the burden on Parish Councils that might arise as a result of developing in certain wards in the District.
- The reasons why some sites that Members considered to be more appropriate locations for development in their wards had not been included in the option that had been presented.
- The evidence that some Parish Councils had already gathered and submitted in relation to the possible developments that could occur in their parishes and the extent to which this feedback had been taken into account to date.
- Previous planning applications that had been approved on appeal and the impact that similar applications in the future could have on local communities.
- The potential for local landowners to sell land in the District for development.
- The potential outcomes arising from modelling the data in respect of planning for the future.
- The impact that some of the possible developments, if they were eventually included in a final District Local Plan, would have in terms of the size of the populations in some wards and divisions in the District.
- The extent to which it was likely that developers would submit multiple speculative planning applications in the following couple of months, should the Council decide to postpone the launch of the public consultation process until September 2025.
- The rationale for including information in the report that considered wider implications, including potentially greater number of houses for development in the future than were required at this stage in the process.
- The extent to which Neighbourhood Plans developed by Parish Councils continued to be an important part of the Local Plan process. Officers clarified that Neighbourhood Plans continued to be relevant and could help to shape a level of detail relating to the

geographical area covered by that neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood Plans needed to include proposals for growth and the content of Neighbourhood Plans was taken into account by the Council.

- The extent to which there had been misinformation on social media in advance of the Council meeting regarding the purpose of this item of business and the decisions that Members would be taking at the meeting.
- The need for the Council to engage with hard-to-reach groups during the consultation period and to include multiple methods of consultation. Officers were urged to ensure that the Council used accessible methods of consultation that was inclusive and able to meet the needs of diverse groups in the local community.
- The need for independent analysis of the feedback provided in the consultation responses.
- The value arising from local residents discussing the infrastructure implications, particularly in relation to highways matters, with their local County Councillors.
- The need for sustainable development in the District moving forward.

During consideration of this item, Members questioned whether there were any planning rules which prevented the Council from bringing forward more than one option for consultation at this time. Officers confirmed that there were no specific planning rules which prevented more than one option from being considered. At the SPSG meetings, Members had considered various options. These options were:

- Option A - Development at Bromsgrove settlements plus edge of West Midlands conurbation;
- Option B - Development at Bromsgrove settlements only;
- Option C - Development along rail corridors only;
- Option D - Development at Bromsgrove settlements plus creation of, and improvements to, motorway junctions to the north and southwest of Bromsgrove town; and
- Option E - Development along the edge of the West Midlands conurbation only.

Council was informed that at the SPSG meetings there had been no consensus achieved amongst Members in respect of their preferred option. Therefore, the report was proposing Option A whilst taking into account points raised by Members during discussions at the SPSG meetings. This ensured that, whatever the final future content of the District Local Plan for Bromsgrove, there was a draft District Local Plan that could go out to consultation at this stage that was underpinned by evidence and which focused on sustainable options for development.

Prior to the vote in respect of this item, questions were raised about the potential to vote on the resolutions detailed in the report separately. This request was made on the basis that some Members highlighted that

they wished to demonstrate to the Government that they were in favour of public consultation but wanted to set on record their view that multiple options should have been offered for consultation. However, concerns were raised that separate votes in respect of the resolutions would be unnecessary because the resolutions were interconnected and could not be disaggregated. On this basis, Members were advised that they should vote either for or against the resolutions detailed in the report or abstain in the vote.

The resolutions detailed in the report were proposed by Councillor K. Taylor and seconded by Councillor S. Baxter.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3 a recorded vote was taken on the resolutions detailed in the report.

Members voting FOR the resolutions:

Councillors S. Baxter, A. Dale, J. Elledge, D. Forsythe, E. Gray, D. Hopkins, H. Jones, B. Kumar, M. Marshall, K. May, P. McDonald, B. McEldowney, S. Nock, S. Peters, J. Stanley, K. Taylor, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (18).

Members voting AGAINST the resolutions:

Councillors S. Ammar, S. Colella, S. Evans, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, D. Nicholl, J. Robinson and S. Robinson (8).

Members voting to ABSTAIN on the resolutions:

No Councillors (0).

Therefore, the vote on the resolutions was carried.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Bromsgrove District Local Plan Draft Development Strategy Consultation be approved, for a period of public consultation between 30th June and 22nd September 2025 in order to enable these and other potential proposals to come forward and to continue to be appraised as part of the plan making process.

RESOLVED to **NOTE** that

- 2) By endorsing the consultation members were not approving any one particular site for development at this stage and members were still entitled to form individual views on the merits of the possible sites identified for development.
- 3) Delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS to make any

minor technical corrections and editorial changes deemed necessary to aid the understanding of the documentation prior to final publishing.

(At the start of the debate in respect of this item, Members voted to suspend standing orders for the remainder of the meeting to enable the strategic Planning and Conservation Manager to speak and answer Members' questions.)

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TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 9.22 p.m.

Chairman