

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

10TH SEPTEMBER 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), S. J. Baxter (Deputy Leader),
B. McEldowney, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr J. Leach, Mr B. Watson, Mrs. C. Felton,
Mrs. R. Bamford, Mr S. Parry, Mrs. R. Green, Ms. T. Ainscough,
Mr M. Cox and Mrs. P. Ross

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**TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE
BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR 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**

With regards to the consideration of urgent business it was recorded that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 9th September 2025, the Board had voted to agree that the Chairman of the Board should submit a request on behalf of the Board that Cabinet consider, as an item of urgent business, whether to extend the current public consultation period for the Local Plan. This item had been considered necessary to raise as urgent business because the consultation period was due to end on 22nd September 2025 and there were not due to be any further meetings of either the Cabinet or Council prior to the end of the consultation period nor was there sufficient time to schedule any further meetings prior to the end of this consultation period.

The Leader stated, that as detailed in the Supplementary Documentation 2 - "Consideration of whether to make a recommendation that Council extend the period of consultation for the Local Plan. The Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services had agreed that this could be added as an urgent item of business for consideration at the meeting, following receipt of a form from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board on behalf of the Board requesting that Cabinet discuss this matter as an item of urgent business. This request had been approved by the Leader, as Chairman of the Cabinet.

The item has been added in accordance with requirements set out in paragraph 5.2 of the Access to Information Rules, at Part 9 of the Council's constitution".

It had not been possible to include this item in the Cabinet agenda when that was published because the request had only been received from the

Overview and Scrutiny Board after the agenda for the Cabinet meeting had been published.

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CONSIDERATION OF WHETHER TO MAKE A RECOMMENDATION THAT COUNCIL EXTEND THE PERIOD OF CONSULTATION FOR THE LOCAL PLAN

The Leader made the following announcement –

“As Members will be aware the consultation process provides several ways for our residents to engage with the local planning consultation process.

Members of the public can;

- Write in
- Email in
- Use the commonplace platform
- There is a phone number manned between 10 and 4 Monday to Friday to support any local planning queries

Members will appreciate that some councils indeed our council did not historically use a platform. This is an additional step that we have introduced to promote greater accessibility and engagement and is proving to be our residents preferred form of engagement.

Recognising that this is a hugely important topic and the tremendous response that we have received to date. I think we should respond to our residents requests to extend the time by 4 weeks to maximise public engagement”

Clarification was provided that should Members be in agreement then additional communications would commence in order to inform residents that the consultation period was being extended by 4 weeks.

In response Councillors S. J. Baxter and P. J. Whittaker both commented that they were also in attendance at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting and were in agreement with extending the consultation period by 4 weeks.

Members subsequently discussed the consultation and commented that they had found the commonplace platform easy to use but it was very cumbersome. Some had therefore submitted a response to the consultation via email.

Members questioned if there would be any concerns or response from the Government should Members agree to extending the consultation period.

In response the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services informed Members that the Government was extensively promoting Local Plan making, seeking significant building developments.

The Government might not comment on an extension to the consultation period by 4 weeks. However, going forward, each time the Council changed the Local Development Plan (LDP), the Council could be challenged.

The Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services further stated that there were two elements to consider, the Council's Website and the commonplace platform. Officers could change the information on the Council's website, but not on the commonplace platform. The Council's website included a section on 'Frequently asked questions' and could more prominently place and promote the phone number that was manned between 10:00am and 4:00pm, Monday to Friday.

Members added that there had been mixed reviews from residents. Some had found the commonplace platform 'clunky' whilst others had not. Residents in one ward area had produced a 'user' video to assist other residents.

Members suggested that having a 'step by step' guide on the Council's website would be helpful.

The Leader commented that she would welcome anything that helped to make the commonplace platform easy to use and encouraged residents to respond.

Members questioned if an extension to the consultation period would affect the confidence of developers.

In response the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services commented that a 4 week extension could be viewed differently by different people. The Council could be seen as 'dragging our feet'. The pragmatic response to residents was that the Council was progressing and trying to adhere to the Council's LDP timelines and that any further re-jigging would be as tight as possible. To date Officers had not received any significant comments from developers, however, Officers were expecting comments to be received later.

As highlighted by the Leader, there were a number of ways for residents to respond to the consultation.

Cabinet then discussed the information with regards to the number of visitors to the commonplace platform (23137), the different respondents (1901) and the individual respondents (4377).

Members commented that this should not reflect on the effort made by Officers who had organised and attended 19 different events to inform and engage with residents on the LDP.

The Leader then invited Councillor S. R. Colella to address the Cabinet.

Councillor Colella thanked Members for being given the opportunity to raise his concerns.

He explained that he had been informed that the commonplace platform software issues were raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 9th September 2025, and that Board Members had discussed an extension to the consultation period.

As a District Councillor he had raised his concerns and the concerns of his residents about the commonplace platform with the Councils' Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager. Two of his residents had looked at the commonplace software and had found it to be 'clunky' and full of bugs. They had also carried out analytical and output performance checks.

Concerns were raised that the commonplace platform was too complicated to complete a response. Ultimately, this needed to be looked into. Some Cabinet Members had commented that they had found it 'clunky' and difficult to navigate. Residents had lost information on their responses and information submitted was not always saved.

Cabinet was urged not to extend the consultation period, but instead to look at the issues / concerns raised. Residents had encouraged other residents to respond. Members should focus on the consultation ending on 22nd September 2025. Concerns were raised that extending the consultation period would be received negatively. Instead, it was suggested that Members should close the consultation on the agreed date, pause and then take stock of the whole consultation. Questions were raised about whether the consultation had reached everyone and whether people returning from holiday were not aware of the consultation.

The suggestion was made that the Council should close the consultation and go through the analytical and statistical data.

In response the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services, highlighted that whole Local Plan process was complicated, and there was a high level of scrutiny. People would have to invest time in what would be a long process and then be invited to sit before the Planning Inspectorate. It was positive that the Council had enabled residents to have their say via a range of forums and to put forward their views, in what was a complicated process. The commonplace platform was introduced to give people another choice to respond.

If people were experiencing problems, there was a team of Officers who were ready to serve residents. Officers kept a log of issues received and Officers were happy to speak with residents directly. Officers expressed hopes that people would think that shaping the district up to 2024 was an important process to engage in.

Cabinet was informed that people were put off by the complexities of the system and questions were raised about how much the software cost? The suggestion was made that the Council had invested heavily, and it was not a good use of public money. In this context, it was suggested that it would not increase the response rate by extending the consultation period. The diagnostic data needed to be looked at.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor S. T. Nock also addressed the Cabinet.

Councillor Nock stated that he would emphasise that at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 9th September 2025, Board Members had unanimously voted in favour of taking action that would extend the consultation period.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor J. W. Robinson subsequently addressed the Cabinet.

Councillor Robinson took the opportunity to express his thanks to the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services and her team, and also to the Councils' Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager, and his team.

Councillor Robinson stated that he had attended four consultation events over a period of ten weeks. He would ask Members as to why they wanted to extend the consultation period. A problem with the commonplace platform had been identified by residents, the system needed to be sound, and the Council needed to be open. Cabinet Members were looking to go out with further communications about extending the consultation period, with a system that was 'clunky.' Instead, it suggested that the Council needed to give residents assurances that the system was working.

In response the Leader explained that Members were looking to extend the consultation period as there had been a tremendous response and Members wanted to enable residents that had experienced issues to be helped and assisted by Officers. The additional communications would show residents that their voices should be heard and that Members wanted to ensure that everyone had had a chance to respond. For transparency the Council wanted people to be fully engaged and encouraged to respond / assisted to respond.

Cabinet Members added that for the number of hits received, the response rate to the consultation was good, the Council had achieved 10%, which was a good conversion rate.

Questions were raised again regarding the reasons given for extending the consultation period.

The Leader emphasised, that as highlighted during the course of the meeting, there were a number of ways for residents to respond to the

consultation. Future communications would detail this, and also useful information / guidance should people choose to use the commonplace platform.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor C. A. Hotham also addressed the Cabinet.

Councillor Hotham explained that he clearly understood the issues raised, but he had some questions with regards to the constitution, the urgent decision and what would happen if Members decided not to go ahead with extending the consultation period.

The Assistant Director Legal Democratic and Procurement Services (and Monitoring Officer), reassured Members that the correct process had and would be followed. As this was a Council decision, ultimately Cabinet could not determine the matter but could make a recommendation to Council. Should Members conclude that an extension was required, this would need to be determined as a Council function through an urgent decision.

The Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services took the opportunity to respond to questions raised by Members on the number of new dwellings to meet the Council's housing land supply by 2043 (12,000), the number of dwellings included in current developments (3,000), with 9,000 dwellings left to be provided. Between now and the adoption of the LDP, any large windfall sites would be taken off the 9,000.

Further questions and debate followed on the Council's 5 year housing land supply.

Members commented that it needed to be made clear in any communications, how to use the commonplace platform and other ways to respond. People may have been looking at gathering information and were now ready to respond.

The Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services assured Members that a well prepared press release / messages would be generated, also taking into account the comments and suggestions made by Members during the course of the meeting. Officers were there to help and it was noted that very few Members had passed on information with regards to residents experiencing issues or needing help with replying to the consultation.

The Leader thanked all Members in attendance for their input.

RECOMMENDED that the Local Plan consultation period be extended by four weeks.

The meeting closed at 7.50 p.m.

Cabinet
10th September 2025

Chairman