



# Overview & Scrutiny Committee

No Direct Ward Relevance

9th October 2012

## PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORTS: QUESTIONS AND SUBJECTS FOR DISCUSSION WITH COUNCILLOR GREG CHANCE, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PLANNING, REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT

The following questions have been suggested by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These questions will be posed to Councillor Greg Chance, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Transport at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Tuesday 9th October 2012.

- 1) *Please could you outline what you consider to be:*
  - a) *The successes within the remit of your Portfolio?*

### Development Plans

There has been progress on the Duty to Cooperate in Plan Making. Redditch Officers working closely with Officers in neighbouring Bromsgrove and Stratford Districts have intensified the background work and will shortly be reporting on the review of Green Belt areas around the Borough. The evidence base underpinning the Local Plan is almost complete, and the Council has what it considers to be robust growth scenarios from which to project future housing and employment growth to meet the needs of the Borough. The Core Strategy has been amended to a more Local Plan style approach, and Members, through Planning Advisory Panel, have been discussing all policy approaches and wording to make these changes. This means that a well considered Plan can be brought for a recommendation for consultation in 2013.

### Development Management

The team has continued to exceed national targets on decision making, and producing high quality decisions with few challenges.

There has been some success with enforcement appeals this year on high profile cases. In addition there has been significant involvement in Transformation, with new procedures being trialled.

### Building Control

100% of all applications continue to be determined within the target 5 week date. (Over 90% within a self imposed target of 3 weeks). The service BSI 9002:2008 accreditation has been subject to a successful annual audit. Eight additional local partnerships have been created (formal working ties with architects and developers) resulting in workload retention and financial advantages. The savings highlighted within the shared service business case have been met.

### Town Centre Partnership

A successful Town Centre Events Programme was delivered and a number of projects identified in the Town Centre Strategy were progressed. The Town Centre Partnership has worked well and had

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input into the review of Market Services and the work carried out by the Task Group looking into Disabled Access. Work has continued with the Church Road Redevelopment Project Group.

### Economic Development and Regeneration

The Team has:

- Supported the establishment of Redditch Business Leaders group involving key business leaders and Karen Lumley MP to help bring a business perspective to the Borough's economic priorities and development and identified skills together with land and property shortages as two key issues with a number of business leaders struggling to find the right property and/or development opportunities to enable their businesses to grow in Redditch.
- Undertook an employer skills survey through the Redditch Business Leaders which highlighted issues of employing young people in particular
- Early scoping and presentation to Business Leaders highlighting potential alignment of public sector and private sector ambitions adjacent to Ravensbank and Warwick Highway... the 'Eastern Gateway' concept which involves land falling within Bromsgrove District and Stratford-Upon-Avon District. It is envisaged that the site could play an important role in helping to grow the Redditch economy and safeguarding existing Redditch businesses and jobs.
- Working with the PCT and Homes and Communities Agency to bring forward regeneration of the Church Green area of the Town Centre

#### ***b) Areas of concern within the remit of your portfolio?***

### Development Plans

There are risks with the timetable for the Local Plan because they are aligned with neighbouring Local Authorities. Because of this reliance on the progress of neighbouring authorities, it is possible that external pressure on them (such as Birmingham growth potential into Bromsgrove) could de-rail the Redditch Plan. There should be some concern about the changes to the National Planning system because of the pressure on Local Authorities to have a Plan in place. Growth is needed and evidenced for Redditch but the Plan does not yet reflect that; however with very little land availability in Redditch there could be a lot of development pressure through planning applications. Progress on the Local Plan is critical to give the Council a Plan from which to base decision making.

### Building Control

The continued poor economic situation remains a consistent threat to income levels. Depression within the public and private construction sectors is directly impacting income levels. Whilst the new shared service team continue to function well and customers' needs are being met, the numbers of applications and resultant fees charged remain affected. Two staff members have left in the last 12 months. These posts have been left vacant without an adverse effect on the customer.

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## Town Centre Regeneration

- Funding for both Redditch Town Centre Partnership and Town Centre Landscape Improvements
- Impact of recent traffic order on businesses in Church Green East
- Ongoing concerns about the level of business rates
- Current economic climate and the impact with developers coming forward for regeneration sites

## Economic Development and Regeneration

- Need to consider regeneration of the Borough's District centres
- The present NWedr Manager is leaving so there will be a need to maintain momentum until a new manager is recruited.

### 2) *Regarding economic development and regeneration in Redditch:*

#### a) *What are your plans to encourage new business start-ups in the town?*

Through existing resources and by working in partnership with Worcestershire County Council, North Worcestershire Economic Development & Regeneration has been able to fund a total of 22 new business start up grants (of £750.00 each) from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011. Each business will also have successfully completed a new business start up course delivered locally by specialist business advisors. This package of support is due to be enhanced, towards the end of 2012, through an ERDF funded programme to which NWedr is supporting whereby the new business start up grant is proposed to be increased to £1,000. This is within the existing budget. For year 12/13 it is anticipated that up to 20 new business start-ups will be awarded.

#### b) *To what extent does Redditch have a cross-section of housing types to accommodate both employees and employers?*

Policy B(HSG).4 of Local Plan 3 deals with the density standards applied to residential development. The supporting text points out that within residential development, and particularly on larger sites, there will be a variety of densities. Having various densities will have the advantage of helping to secure a mix of size and type of housing and this in turn will help meet the needs of different types of households. The draft Core Strategy will similarly encourage a mix of house types.

The Worcestershire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA, Feb 2012) records the housing stock in Redditch as:

Detached - 31.2%	(Worcestershire Highest)
Semi-detached - 31.8%	(Malvern 48.1%)
Terrace - 29.1%	(Wyre Forest 41.5%)
Purpose built flats - 6.5%	(Redditch highest in WCC)
Converted flats - 0.8%	(Worcester 7.2%)
Other (e.g. a temporary or mobile home) - 0.4%	(Malvern Hills 2.2%)
	(Malvern Hills 1.7%)

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51.3% have 5-6 rooms, 27.3% have 4 rooms or less and 21.2% of properties in Redditch have 7 or more rooms.

The SHMA will be updated annually by Worcestershire County Council. The next update is anticipated in December 2012 and will take account of the 2011 census.

**c) *Within the emerging local plan, what is being done to encourage local developers to build?***

There is nothing within the emerging Local Plan to specifically encourage local developers (or any other developers) to build. Sites in Redditch are generally developed by a range of developers, with smaller sites often being developed by local developers. The emerging local plan identifies development sites of a range of sizes. The Government requires Local Authorities to have a 5 year supply of housing sites which it believes will help 'get Britain building'. The emerging Local Plan aims to establish and maintain a 5 year housing land supply. However, it remains to be seen if having a supply of sites will encourage development to happen because it is also dependant on a number of other factors (such as availability of finance).

**d) *Is the focus of the 'Eastern Gateway' strategic employment site being placed on generating new employment or housing development?***

The focus for the 'Eastern Gateway' strategic employment site is on employment.

**3) *What are your plans for the regeneration of:***

**a) *Town centre***

- Town Centre landscape improvements are due to be presented at committee in November where Members will be asked to review the information and advise Officers on budgets and intended timescales for the phasing of the project.
- A project group has been set up between North Worcs EDR, Worcs Healthcare Trust and the HCA to investigate the regeneration of the Church Rd site. This involves the procurement of a commercially focussed appraisal of the Redditch Town Centre Strategy (2009) leading to deliverable development propositions for key sites and prioritisation of necessary action to realise opportunities over the short/ medium and long term; and
- Redditch Town Centre Partnership are also working on the following projects to revitalise the Town Centre;
  - 'Pitch Your Plan' is a Town Centre Business Vitality Initiative that aims to help attract new, specialist independent retailers, cafés/bistros and restaurants to set up business in the old town area of Redditch around the Church Green, Alcester Street and Unicorn Hill. The initiative, run by Redditch Town Centre Partnership, specifically aims to support those operators and specialist retailers offering a niche product range that will positively contribute to the overall town proposition. More information can be found at [www.pitch4redditch.co.uk](http://www.pitch4redditch.co.uk)

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- Work is continuing with regards to providing events through out the year such as St Georges Day, Speciality Markets and Christmas Events. The RTCP are also working with Leisure Services to produce a bandstand programme throughout the summer months.
- Redditch residents and shoppers will soon be able to benefit from discounts and special offers from town centre shops and businesses thanks to a new loyalty scheme being introduced by RTCP. Redditch will be one of the first locations in the UK to launch 'TikTap', which utilises a new innovative technology developed by 2ergo, the company behind Orange Wednesdays. The system allows shoppers, by use of smart phones up to 5 years old, to locate offers and exclusive promotions redeemable in store via their mobile phones.

### ***b) Train station and its local environment***

Dialogue is continuing with the owners of the derelict site adjacent to the Train Station on Edward Street and the agents acting on their behalf to progress the site and provide a planning perspective.

### ***4) What plans do you have to engage local people, especially elderly residents and young people, on their aspirations for the town?***

The following objective is included within the RTCP action plan '**Ensure the town has a strong and varied economy, and provides a positive customer/shopper/ visitor experience**' with the action being '**Set up customer focus groups to explore their views on the town centre and their shopping experiences**'. RTCP will also look to do online surveys on the TCP website.

### ***5) What are you doing to ensure that the proposer submitted for traffic surveys are based on current and not historic data and will cover all the roads that are likely to be affected by development?***

Traffic surveys or Transport Assessments are required for residential development proposals of over 100 dwellings or for other development over certain size thresholds. It is expected that each of these relevant proposals will be accompanied by a Transport Assessment that uses the Redditch Development Model and identifies the relevant junctions and routes for highway traffic and these will be different in each case. Worcestershire County Highways are therefore a key stakeholder involved with pre-application discussion on relevant planning applications. Worcestershire County Highways would raise any concern about methodology with the planning department and the applicant should there be an incorrect judgement about traffic flows.

### ***6) Regarding European Regional Development Funding (ERDF):***

#### ***a) How much funding is expected to be received in Redditch?***

Worcestershire LEP - Start up Advice, Grant & Booster Grant funding: Redditch Borough Council's contribution towards the Worcestershire proposal aims to draw down up to £30,000 of ERDF funding from October 2012 to March 2015.

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Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP – Business Development Programme comprising a Financial Support package and High Growth Business advice: North Worcestershire aims to draw down up to £23,625 of ERDF funding from October to March 2015.

**b) How will the funding received used to support young people setting up new businesses? Is there any provision in the ERDF to support this?**

The ERDF funding is not specifically aimed at young people, though they will be entitled to apply for it as long as they meet the qualifying criteria. The North Worcs EDR service will look to encourage take-up with this age group taking opportunities to promote through local networks including liaison with FE providers etc.

**7) Regarding Choose How You Move 2:**

**a) How do you define 'sustainable transport' as part of this?**

Sustainable transport includes the use of walking, cycling, bus, rail and taxi/community transport options and any other modes of transport which lower the levels of carbon used in moving. Methods which encourage a shift away from the private car use are encouraged.

**b) How will residents, businesses and visitors be encouraged to use sustainable modes of transport?**

There are numerous elements to the Choose How You Move 2 Package which will be implemented over the 3 years period. The elements fall under 13 key headings and a single example of what will be implemented has been detailed next to each one, please note this list is not exhaustive (but can be provided on request).

- Reducing the need to travel: delivering the high speed broadband agenda – Capital investment in upgrading the BT cabinets in rural locations to the south of Redditch.
- Information kiosks – capital investment in the provision and upgrade of six information kiosks at a number of locations in Redditch.
- 'Choose in the Park events' – Three major annual events to be held in the Arrow Valley Country Park to showcase sustainable modes of transport.
- Individual travel marketing/planning – individual travel marketing to 27,000 households in Redditch to promote the use of sustainable modes of travel as modes of choice.
- Intensive marketing campaign – investment in expertise to develop a marketing plan, a programme of marketing campaigns and supportive printed material.
- Teen and young adult travel training – Appointment of a 'Move it' Officer who would work with teens and young adults attending the upper schools and colleges in Redditch.
- Adult travel training - of a 'Move it' Officer who would work with a range of vulnerable adult groups in Redditch.
- Schools sustainable travel intervention programme - Revenue investment in a comprehensive schools sustainable travel intervention programme, including updating of Travel Plans.

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- Workplace sustainable travel intervention programme - Revenue investment in a comprehensive workplace sustainable travel information programme, including development of Travel Plans.
- Walking and Cycling Route Enhancements - Capital investment in surfacing and drainage improvements to walking and cycling routes.
- Improving Safety and Security through Investment in Infrastructure - Capital investment in some of the 'worst' underpasses, bridges and at-grade crossings in Redditch (to be defined through consultation with local residents.)
- Evesham Road improvements.
- Passenger Transport Infrastructure Improvements - Capital investment in the renewal and replacement of all bus stop infrastructure (including shelters, flags, timetable cases, hard standings etc) along the three principle bus corridors.

**c) *What are you expecting to achieve from this project?***

Some modal shift that will also have wider social-economic benefits.

**8) *What is being done to address any skills shortages issues being experienced by local businesses?***

Redditch Business Leaders undertook a sample survey of employers in the latter part of last year to identify skills issues that they were experiencing. This highlighted the difficulties that local employers have in recruiting young people (up to the age of 24) who are perceived to lack appropriate work experience and basic employability skills. This has led to an initiative being developed by NEW College and local engineering employers, to develop an engineering apprentice academy that would enable the College to work collaboratively with those employers to provide direct and relevant experience and routes into employment.

In addition, as a member of both Greater Birmingham and Solihull and Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnerships, Redditch is involved in discussions with the LEP's Employment and Skills Boards around the development of skills – including the Birmingham and Solihull City Skills Fund which aims to establish business 'champions' in key sectors to identify and address sectoral skills issues.