

# Portfolio Holder Annual Report

Portfolio: Planning, Regeneration,  
Economic Development and Local  
Transport

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Greg Chance

## Year: 2012/13

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1. Please provide a summary of services/areas covered within the remit of the Portfolio.

### Development Plans

The evidence based work (Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)) was completed regarding housing need in the Borough. Based on recommendations of the SHMA, it was agreed with Bromsgrove District Council to commence joint work under the Duty to Co-operate in respect of cross boundary growth.

The team has been re-drafting policies in light of the proposed change from the Core Strategy to Local Plan No.4, to reflect changes arising from the National Planning Policy Framework and to take account of previous consultation responses. Some of these have been to Members but more are to follow at the end of 2012, early 2013.

### Development Management

Performance figures for the determination of planning and other applications remain similar to the previous year notwithstanding that some staff are now working on Transformation. Enforcement cases have declined slightly, and joint working with Bromsgrove continued, although this will cease in the autumn due to a member of staff requesting to reduce his hours. Appeals casework has been low, which reflects well on the outcomes of planning applications. Transformation work is progressing and the following months are likely to see significant changes as the Transformation Team work towards rolling out new and different ways of working.

### Local Land Charges

This continues to be a shared service hosted and managed by BDC and work continues to streamline the operations to increase similarity across the two areas. Monitoring of this will continue to ensure efficiencies are realised.

### Building Control

The first year of the North Worcestershire Shared Service has seen changes in methods of working and improvements in customer focussed procedures. The resilience and flexible approaches to meet customer demands, which are possible with a larger team base, are being exploited. Progress on the Shared Service Business Case has been good with some key objectives being met. Other key objectives, particularly mobile working, are not yet met due a range of corporate wide factors reported via the Client Management Group.

## 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 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

Recruitment to the North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) team has been completed, with the team delivering a shared service across Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest, including working from offices at Redditch BC. The focus for the year has been establishing the service: developing delivery arrangements with both Greater Birmingham and Solihull (GBSLEP) and Worcestershire (WLEP) Local Enterprise Partnerships. The Redditch Business Leaders group was established to enable strategic businesses to inform the economic development and regeneration priorities of the Borough and engage the business community in delivering those priorities.

The team are successfully delivering business support through the business start up and booster grants and supporting development work on the new (GBSLEP) ERDF funded business support and grant package. They continue to manage the markets function and the Redditch Business Centres and are supporting the development of initiatives to address skills issues. The Team is working to bring forward the development of key employment sites and aiding colleagues in planning to bring forward development sites in the town centre.

## Local Transport

*Redditch Branch Line Enhancement Scheme:* Officers have liaised with representatives of Network Rail and the Planning Inspectorate regarding this scheme which involves the construction of a passing loop between Redditch and Alvechurch to enable 3 trains per hour to operate between Redditch and Birmingham. Planning Officers have provided an initial response to the formal consultation proposals, the draft assessment of need and the draft planning statement which will be used to support the scheme.

*Choose How You Move 2:* This three-year project will encourage residents, businesses and visitors to use more sustainable modes of transport. Although still in its infancy, the project has made significant progress as detailed in the sections below.

## 2. Performance

### 2.1. Please detail areas of good performance over the past year.

#### Development Plans

The preparation of the Local Plan and associated evidence base continued with the necessary collaborative working with neighbouring authorities. There are clearly sensitivities associated with the cross boundary growth issue but officers have liaised well with Members at both BDC and RBC to keep them informed and aid decision making.

#### Development Management

The team continues to meet or better performance targets for the determination of planning and other applications although it is accepted that the number of applications remains relatively low due to the economic recession.

As part of the ongoing planning transformation work, efforts are being made to identify measures which will help us to assess the success and effectiveness of the decision making process rather than concentrating on a mainly target driven approach. Such measures would seek to concentrate on real outcomes and how well we are meeting our customers' aspirations.

#### Building Control

The Shared Service Business Case acknowledged the potential for a reduction in service levels immediately after the new service was created and until it was bedded in. Fortunately, continued customer feedback requests and statistical reporting have shown this not to be the case. 100% of all applications continue to be determined within the target 5 week date and 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. Private sector competition continues to see erosion in some areas of work however active marketing and site specific fee tendering procedures now in place appear to be mitigating the issue to some extent. The savings highlighted within the Shared Service Business Case have been met.

## Town Centre Partnership

There has been an increase in membership and interest from businesses. Two applications for funding were put forward (Portas bids) with support from Town Centre businesses and although in the face of stiff competition, these were unsuccessful, it was nevertheless a good example of collaborative working.

A Business Vitality Scheme project team has been set up to implement and monitor the High Street Innovation Grant, with the project being launched in September 2012.

A Town Centre Partnership website was established.

Early contact was made with the new owners of the Kingfisher Centre (Capital and Regional) and an ongoing dialogue established over town centre initiatives.

Work has continued towards achieving redevelopment of the Church Road site.

Important contributions were made by the Town Centre Co-ordinator towards events organised to celebrate St Georges Day, the Diamond Jubilee, Olympic Torch and the Halfords Tour Series Bike Race

## Economic Development and Regeneration

### *a) Business support*

- Delivered 20 New Business Grants creating 22 new jobs with a further 6.5 jobs anticipated to be created within 12 months. Three Business Booster Grants were given, creating or safeguarding 10 jobs.
- Supported the development of a new ERDF funded scheme through GBSLEP that will deliver business advice and support, and provide grant funding for business expansions.
- Established regular meetings of the Redditch Business Leaders group.
- Commenced work on the Overview & Scrutiny review of the Markets function.
- Developed a business plan for the Redditch Business Centres.

### *b) Regeneration*

- Identified the 'Eastern Gateway' as a strategic employment site and undertook initial discussions with relevant landowners and adjoining planning authorities to identify development constraints.
- Commissioned a development study of the Church Road site in collaboration with Planning colleagues and with the Homes & Communities Agency and PCT as key landholders.

### *c) Skills*

- Commissioned a study of skill shortages and issues experienced by local businesses.
- Supported development work by manufacturing employers and NEW College of initiatives to improve employability skills and

routes into manufacturing employment for young people – including employer involvement in developing and delivering training and apprenticeships.

### Local Transport

*Choose How You Move 2:* The following is a 'snapshot' of some of the individual aspects of the project that have been completed over the past year:

- Successful Launch event of the Choose How You Move 2: Redditch Project
- Successful Halfords Tour Series Bike Race in May
- Stakeholders workshop initiated collaboration partners
- Phase 1 of Individual Travel Marketing (ITM) completed in Church Hill, Matchborough and Winyates. ITM involves door-to-door contact with residents' aims to get the whole population of Redditch more active by increasing awareness of the sustainable transport choices available such as walking, cycling and passenger transport
- Bus Stop Audits completed
- Communication with workplaces initiated
- Communication with all schools established
- Infrastructure audits completed
- Data collection for Evesham Road project completed

## **2.2 Please detail any areas of concerning performance in the year**

### Development Plans

The lack of guidance and clarity following the demise of the Regional Spatial Strategy and until publication of the National Planning Policy Framework, meant it was not possible to plan ahead as usual or keep customers informed of progress. This needs to be improved for the coming year.

### Building Control

The continued poor economic situation remains a consistent threat to income levels and depression within the public and private construction sectors will impact upon income. 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 and these posts have been left vacant without an adverse effect on the customer.

## Economic Development and Regeneration

The Redditch Business Leaders Group identified skills gaps as a key issue for businesses during the year and commissioned a sample survey of businesses to research the issue. The survey indicated that businesses have difficulty in recruiting younger employees (particularly those without employment experience) because of a lack of employability skills including time keeping and discipline, communication skills and team working skills. As a result, collaborative work is underway between NEW College and local employers to engage businesses more closely in the development and delivery of apprenticeships and training.

### **3. The Year Ahead**

#### **3.1 Please detail the Portfolio Holder's main areas of focus in 2012/13.**

##### Development Plans

Continue to progress Local Plan No.4 towards consultation in early 2013;  
Continue collaborative work with neighbouring authorities resulting in a joint consultation with Bromsgrove District in early 2013;  
Gather information, research and evidence to support the Local Plan ready for this to be consulted upon towards the spring/summer of 2013;  
Publish and submit the Local Plan with aligned timescales with Bromsgrove District Council as soon as possible in 2013.

##### Development Management

Progress transformation work including the roll out of new working methods, with the focus on identifying new measures and meeting customer aspirations.

##### Building Control

The continued implementation of the Shared Service Business Case is a priority. This will introduce mobile working, a trainee post and further diversification of the service. It is hoped further cohesion of team members will occur and continued improvements to customer focussed procedures will be made.

##### Town Centre Partnership

Progression of the Town Centre Strategy priority projects focusing on Church Green Landscape Plans;  
Continue with a Town Centre Events programme;

Launch of the Business Vitality Scheme through the Town Centre Partnership with the aim of encouraging new businesses into vacant premises;

Carry out a Feasibility Study for Church Road Redevelopment and ongoing work with the project team.

### Economic Development and Regeneration

#### *d) Business support*

- Continue to promote and deliver New Business and Business Booster grants; promote and deliver a new ERDF funded scheme through GBSLEP that will deliver business advice and support, and provide grant funding for business expansions.
- Support the Redditch Business Leaders Group to develop a strong and strategic business voice and inform economic priorities and engage businesses in the delivery of those priorities.
- Complete the Overview & Scrutiny review of the Markets function.
- Deliver the Redditch Business Centre Business Plan.

#### *e) Regeneration*

- Continue to work with landowners to bring forward the 'Eastern Gateway' strategic employment site.
- Complete the Church Road development study and work with Planning colleagues and with the Homes & Communities Agency and PCT as key landholders, to bring forward the development of the site to support regeneration of the town centre.
- Undertake a study to identify the economic potential of Redditch and inform future regeneration work.

#### *f) Skills*

- Continue to support manufacturing employers and NEW College to improve employability skills and routes into manufacturing employment for young people – including employer involvement in developing and delivering training and apprenticeships.
- Work with GBSLEP and WLEP to identify practical action to address skills issues in the Borough.

### Local Transport

*Redditch Branch Line Enhancement Scheme:* Officers will prepare a Local Impact Report regarding the proposal and seek Members' views on the scheme. Further representations will be made, if necessary via a Local Inquiry.



*Choose How You Move 2:* The following are some of the individual projects to be delivered in the short-term:

- Delivery of personalised travel plans to residents
- Launch of workplace pilot with New College, Redditch
- Results of schools survey expected
- Walking and Cycling improvement schemes to be delivered
- Evesham Road corridor (Headless Cross) improvement scheme to be implemented
- Installation of transport kiosks
- Artwork implemented at local bus shelters and potential themed bus shelter for the Choose project.
- Continuation of Individual Travel Marketing (ITM). The Choose travel advisers will be visiting every neighbourhood in Redditch to engage with households and sign people up to participate.