

Bridgnorth Town Plan – 2012

NOTE: This document is an extract of those sections of the Town Plan that contain the outputs of the work and recommendations. Please see the full Town Plan for information on the approach taken to develop it and the statistics collected.

Introduction

Current Position

Bridgnorth has a proud and ancient history, but like many other small market towns throughout the country it has struggled in recent years to retain its status and independence against the social and financial pressures of larger neighbours - Wolverhampton, Kidderminster and Telford.

Over the past eighty years both manufacturing and agriculture have introduced automation with the result that whilst productivity has increased, the rural labour force has drastically decreased. This has encouraged firms to concentrate their activities in larger centralised factories, on major transport routes and where there is a large, technically educated work force. This resulted in the loss of the town's major employers in the Carpet, Electronics and Aluminium industries and was instrumental in bringing about major changes in the social fabric of the town.

- A) Regional housing policies encouraged major house building in Bridgnorth, where there was little employment to support it and where costs make purchases by local inhabitants difficult.
- B) More of the working population now has to commute to surrounding towns for employment with the result that they spend less time (and money) in the town, with increased traffic congestion and pollution.
- C) The closure of the adult education facility has meant that youngsters have to travel out of town for their further education and entertainment, with similar results as detailed in item B.
- D) Our traditional "agricultural community" who used Bridgnorth as its "market town" is greatly reduced, being replaced by a more mobile "commuter workforce" who work and shop in the larger surrounding towns, having greater choice.
- E) Between the 1970's and today, Bridgnorth lost many of its administrative responsibilities to regional Bodies and County & District Authorities, making it difficult for the town to initiate essential change.

The Future

Whilst Bridgnorth has suffered from the demise of its industrial heritage, it has survived by its ability to attract tourists from the surrounding urban conurbations because of its location on the cliff top overlooking the river valley, the river Severn, the ancient stepped walkways linking the river with the town and its medieval street pattern, its two iconic churches, the steam and funicular railways, and its avoidance of the worst of the 1960's town centre redevelopments.

In 2009 legislation was introduced by Central Government to make Shropshire a Unitary Authority with the recommendation that the County's market towns be granted additional administrative responsibilities such as the promotion of their own bye-laws, Parking Policies,

Infrastructure Maintenance and Enforcement Powers. It was further envisaged that Bridgnorth would become a signatory to the proposed Shropshire Charter.

For a number of years communities have been encouraged to “look at themselves”, analyse what they saw and produce Plans to guide their future development. The implementation of such Plans becomes the responsibility of Councils and other agencies, but their production is to be placed firmly in the hands of the Community – they are to be Community-Led Plans.

The proposal to produce a Bridgnorth Town Plan was put forward by the Mayor and Town Clerk at a series of public meetings in September 2009, where the concept of a “Community-Led” Plan was outlined. The Town Plan Steering Committee (the Committee) was formed from volunteers with a variety of backgrounds and involvement in various aspects of community life. Their remit was to seek the views of the residents of Bridgnorth on the immediate and long-term development of the town, and to use these views as a basis for a Town Plan.

In line with the “Community Led” concept the Committee was constituted as an independent body, to act with the cooperation of the Town Council in the production of the Bridgnorth Town Plan.

A further outcome of initial meetings was the collection of people’s ideas about what is “good, bad and ugly” in Bridgnorth and its surroundings.

Analysis of these ideas showed that they could be collated under a series of headings, and thus a list of aspects of the life of Bridgnorth, about which views had been expressed, was produced. The Committee believed that these headings could form the framework for the Questionnaire, and could be used to obtain the data needed to produce the Community-Led Town Plan. Other consultations around the community, over the ensuing months, confirmed this belief and so the Questionnaire, having eleven headings listed in this document, was prepared and posted to all residents.

Thanks should go to the wider community who made valuable contributions to this process, to the hard working Committee who benefited by consulting other Town / Parish Plans which were in the public domain, and to the Community Council of Shropshire for their advice and support.

Issues and Actions

Town Appearance

Bridgnorth is widely appreciated as an attractive market town with many historic buildings and a unique character that attracts many visitors. Positive comments reflect in particular the high standard of presentation and maintenance of the castle grounds of which the town should be proud. However, responses have highlighted concerns about the current state of repair and maintenance of other areas of the town, particularly the steps, castle walk and riverside, and about the prevalence of general litter, chewing gum and dog fouling in the town centre.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- Bridgnorth Steps - 39% dissatisfied – 126 comments reflecting concerns about the poor state of repair and hazards, such as litter, broken bottles, rats, handrails and inadequate lighting.
- Riverside - 33% dissatisfied – 140 comments related mainly to poor maintenance of the river banks (overgrown and untidy) and the amount of rubbish in the Bylet.
- Castle Walk – 78% satisfied but 102 critical comments (overgrown, dog fouling, poor lighting) and requests for more benches.
- Severn Park – 68% satisfied – 68 comments reflecting concerns about poor facilities and maintenance (dog fouling) - suggestion for a visitor centre, toilets, more bins and improved play area.
- Town centre – 77% satisfied but with 171 comments highlighting poor maintenance, cleaning litter, dog fouling, chewing gum and pigeon droppings from footpaths, and gaudy shop fronts.
- Historic buildings – 84% satisfied – some critical comments about the condition of Newmarket buildings, Bishop Percy's House, the town hall and modern shop fronts that are out of character with a market town.
- Castle Grounds – almost 100% satisfied – suggestions include more benches with higher seats for the elderly and more events that make use of the bandstand.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Shropshire Council to repair and maintain the Bridgnorth Steps and Riverside Walk lobby for action with urgent remedial work and a longer-term maintenance plan, and source additional funding, as required.
2. Castle Walk – investigate responsibility for controlling vegetation on the cliff face and take action to ensure regular maintenance.
3. Town Council to review facilities and maintenance of Severn Park.
4. Liaise with owners and planning officers regarding presentation and maintenance of historic buildings and shop fronts.
5. Town Council to consider requests for improved seating in the castle grounds and investigate the possibilities for more events that make use of the bandstand.

Environment

Questionnaire responses show that a majority of Bridgnorth residents (slightly more than two thirds) are generally satisfied with council services for clearing household refuse and public litter bins although there are several suggestions for how this might be improved. There is strong support for weekly collections, especially of biodegradable material in hot weather, and for door to door collection of plastic for recycling. Comments reflect the well-publicised dissatisfaction with Shropshire Council's proposals for a waste distribution and recycling centre in Faraday Drive.

There are significant concerns about general litter in the town, especially after market days, and about the extent of dog fouling on footpaths and public spaces.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- Dog fouling – 49% dissatisfied and 148 comments – call for enforcement, perhaps by employing a dog warden to Issue fines.
- General litter (30% dissatisfied) and emptying of litter bins (24% dissatisfied) 115 comments about particular areas of the town that need attention (these are listed in the appendices).
- Refuse collection – 27% dissatisfied, with 182 comments mainly related to the need for collection, especially for food waste which could be recycled for energy recovery, and for more Recycling, with a suggestion that lids are provided for recycling bins.
- Fly tipping – 26% dissatisfied with 26 comments indicating areas where this is a particular problem.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Convey concerns to Shropshire Council to be linked with the outcome of this recent survey.
2. Extend scope of recycling and investigate energy recovery for biodegradable waste.
3. Ongoing liaison between Town and Shropshire Councils regarding the quality and delegation of services.
4. Recruit volunteers to help clear litter from residential / public areas.
5. Display warning signs at known fly-tipping sites and pursue prosecution of offenders.
6. Shropshire & Town Councils to Investigate funding for the possible appointment of a local dog warden.

Health

Questionnaires indicated a generally high level of satisfaction with local NHS services:

- 80% satisfaction with Bridgnorth Hospital and Medical Practice.
- 63% satisfaction with local accident and emergency services 62% satisfaction with local NHS dental services.
- 86% (excluding “No Comments”) expressing appreciation of the local maternity unit.
- 40% of respondents expressed an opinion in favour of a ‘drop in’ surgery.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- Difficulties in getting an appointment to see a doctor quickly, especially if a patient is requesting an appointment with a particular GP (typical waiting times up to two weeks).
- Surgery waiting times frequently too long.
- Difficulties in getting through to reception by telephone, especially at busy times.
- Poor out of hours service – request for a local 24-hour accident and emergency service.
- Shortage of NHS dental health provision in the town.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Pass on detailed findings to local health care managers and request a meeting to consider responses and the appropriate way forward.
2. Support the local ‘health care user group’ with NHS representation. Review progress and focus on improving services.

Sports and Leisure

The balance of responses relating to local provision for sports and leisure was generally positive:

- 56% satisfied with local sports facilities compared with 27% dissatisfied.
- 64% satisfied with theatre and concert venues compared with 20% dissatisfied.

While the bar charts indicated that a majority were satisfied with the availability of the Bridgnorth Sports and Leisure Centre for public use, only 5 of the 171 written comments were positive and many indicated that they thought it wrong that the Endowed School should have the 'lion's share' of daytime use of facilities. There were particularly strong views about limited access to adult swimming time. Some indicate that the Centre needs improving or enlarging while others call for a new purpose-built public sports facility with full day time use and adequate parking.

There was a lower level of satisfaction with play and leisure facilities for children and young people:

- 38% satisfied with play areas for children compared with 27% dissatisfied.
- 15% satisfied with facilities for teenagers compared with 42% dissatisfied (43% no comment).

There were 71 comments about children's play areas calling for better facilities on Crown Meadow, the Grove and Severn Park where the cost of parking is prohibitive for some families.

Only half of the respondents expressing a view about leisure use of the River Severn were satisfied with 151 comments representing a range of opinion, some for more boating and some against, but with a general view that the river banks should be more accessible for walking.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- Conflict and disparity between school and community use of the Leisure Centre, including parking.
- Low availability for daytime adult swimming sessions.
- Sports facilities out of date and poorly maintained.
- Poor quality and maintenance of play equipment for children – lack of toilets and adequate parking.
- Strong feelings that better provision is needed for teenagers.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Issues and concerns about access to leisure facilities raised with Shropshire Council.
2. Campaign for a new purpose-built community leisure facility in the town, including swimming.
3. Seek support for more activity centres for teenagers.
4. Further investigation of the use of the River Severn, including facilities at Severn Park (public toilets).

Life-long Learning

Responses indicate a high level of dissatisfaction with local provision for life-long learning and a feeling that the town has been disadvantaged by the closure of the FE College. Less than 20% of respondents indicate that they are satisfied with local provision and 44% returned 'no comment'. Many seem unaware of opportunities provided through the library, community centres and local secondary schools.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- Town disadvantaged by loss of the College
- Cost & time involved in travel to other towns to attend courses

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Engage local providers (Library, schools, voluntary groups) in discussion about the range and quality of opportunities for adult learning.
2. Encourage better advertising of local provision for life-long learning and adult classes.
3. Further investigation of specific interests and needs through leafleting.

Employment/Training for Work

Responses show a very low level of satisfaction with local opportunities for employment and training (less than 10% satisfied overall). Comments reflect an overall feeling of despondency about this situation and that many are forced to travel to larger towns to find employment or to access appropriate training.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- With the closure of factories like the Aluminium factory there is a lack of local employment opportunities.
- Limited scope locally for apprenticeships and training.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Working with Shropshire Council and business leaders to explore new ways of stimulating the local economy and promoting new enterprise in the area.
2. Investigate the possibility of negotiating short term reductions in rent and rates to encourage new businesses to move into the area.

Traffic and Transport

The majority of respondents were **satisfied (?)** with current provision for parking, but about half were dissatisfied with public transport. There was no clear consensus in this section of the questionnaire concerning the possibilities for provision of a new, out of town 'park and ride' facility, with approximately half of the respondents in favour.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- Insufficient parking for the town centre – current provision too expensive with no discount for regular users including people who work in the town.
- Car parks are not well signposted.
- Local bus service is inadequate and fails to meet needs – requests for more bus shelters.
- General dissatisfaction with the maintenance of roads and pavements – particularly potholes.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Further discussions with Shropshire Council about provision for parking in Bridgnorth with possible negotiations to bring about more local control of car parks.
2. Invite more participation in the local transport liaison group and bring forward new proposals that reflect local needs – involve representatives from voluntary transport groups.
3. Lobby Shropshire Council for an improved maintenance service - request a copy of a maintenance strategy with clear priority and performance criteria and consider establishing a local liaison group.

Shopping and Town Facilities

This was a substantial section of the questionnaire covering fourteen aspects of local shopping and facilities. Responses showed a very high level of satisfaction with the local library service (90% satisfied) and with the number of pubs and restaurants in the town (85% satisfied). Approximately three quarters of respondents were satisfied with the availability of locally produced foods, but over 40% indicated dissatisfaction with the variety of shops and facilities, and the number of charity shops. There were 91 comments calling for more variety of shops, with a larger supermarket / DIY store, and 100 asking for more independent shops that might be encouraged through lower rates for small businesses.

A quarter of respondents were dissatisfied with the appearance of shop fronts (24%) and control of business signage (27%). There was a high level of dissatisfaction with the number of charity shops (43%) and this view was supported by 174 written comments.

More than half of those expressing an opinion were dissatisfied with toilet facilities. Written comments (82) complained that public toilets are not conveniently located, close too early and are too costly. Some felt that toilets should be free of charge.

The results showed that although only 39% were in favour of full pedestrianisation of the High Street 69% were in favour of pedestrianisation on market days.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- Need to encourage more independently owned shops to increase the range of choice and to maintain the image of a vibrant market town – requests to expand the 'local traders' market'.
- Concern over apparent lack of control of shop front design, and signage that is inconsistent with the image of an historic market town – some concern over 'A' boards obstructing pavements.
- High level of dissatisfaction with local toilets, with high charges and inadequate facilities for nappy changing.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Establish / revitalise a discussion forum for local traders with representation from the Town and Shropshire Councils and other relevant bodies to consider ways to promote local trade, including a review of business rates and other underlying costs that may inhibit the growth and development of locally owned High Street shops and businesses.
2. Review current use of market stalls with reference to trading legislation and develop a strategy to promote and encourage diversity with an appropriate focus on local trade and produce.
3. Establish a dialogue with the local planning authority in relation to shop frontage advertising, and set up a local planning group to review planning applications to an agreed design brief.
4. Engage in discussion with regional managers of national chain stores that are represented in the High Street, and encourage them to adapt shop fronts to better reflect the character of the town.
5. Lobby the Town Council to consider the findings from the questionnaire so as to facilitate the transfer of control of public toilets from Shropshire Council to the Town Council.
6. Seek funding for High Street pedestrianisation on market days.

Housing

Responses to the questionnaire reflected a generally low level of satisfaction with housing provision, with only a third of respondents expressing satisfaction in relation to most of the questions raised. There were 114 comments highlighting the lack of affordable homes in Bridgnorth with new developments including too many executive houses and not enough starter homes. There is a concern that local people may be moving away from Bridgnorth because of cheaper rented accommodation in nearby towns, and a suggestion that vacant property, including space above shops in the High Street, could be converted into flats. Only 60% of respondents expressed an opinion about retirement and residential care homes, but the significant majority of these (over 80%) indicated that they were satisfied.

MAIN CONCERNS

- Shortage of affordable housing for authority with a request for a response, purchase or rent particularly in relation to the
- Maintain the distinct historic character proportion of affordable homes of Bridgnorth as a small market town by opposing future major housing or commercial developments.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

1. Present survey findings to the planning authority with a request for a response, particularly in relation to the proportion of affordable homes in new property developments.
2. Lobby Shropshire Council for greater local influence on planning decisions through the Town Council and take steps to ensure that new developments reflect the character of Bridgnorth.
3. Encourage local property owners to consider conversion of surplus space, for example vacant rooms above shops or offices, into low cost accommodation for single people or couples.

Tourism

Most questions in this section drew a positive response, with over 70% expressing satisfaction with the current provision. There were 101 comments reflecting a general feeling that more could be done to promote Bridgnorth as a tourist centre, and there were suggestions that tourist accommodation in the town could be improved, and extended. There was praise for various festivals and events arranged in the town, but one in four respondents were dissatisfied with support for these shown by the local authorities, and several suggested that more grant funding should be made available.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- Better advertising and promotion of Bridgnorth as a tourist destination.
- Updated and improved signage.
- More support from the local authorities and media for local festivals and events.
- Better liaison with Severn Valley Railway as one of the main tourist attractions for the town.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. More involvement with a group, having a common interest in promoting Bridgnorth as a tourist centre, including the local tourist association, Severn Valley Railway, voluntary arts groups, local businesses and Council representatives, to work on a tourism development strategy for Bridgnorth.
2. Liaise with the press over promotion and reporting of events that might attract tourists – possibly producing an occasional tourist supplement in the Bridgnorth Journal.
3. Review and update signs through liaison with the local Councils.

Crime and Safety

The large majority of respondents (85%) expressed satisfaction with daytime public safety in the town. Fewer (50%) expressed satisfaction with night time public safety, perhaps reflecting concerns about high levels of drinking and other anti-social behaviour that featured in written comments. Approximately half of the respondents indicated dissatisfaction with policing of town and residential areas, and a third expressed dissatisfaction with the ease of communication with the police force, particularly out of hours. There were mixed responses related to CCTV and the effectiveness of police community support officers.

MAIN CONCERNS:

- High level of anti-social behaviour associated with drink, drugs and speeding.
- Lack of 'visible' policing in the town (166 comments).
- Difficulty in contacting the police in the evenings and at weekends – telephone calls directed to a distant call centre and limited opening hours at the local police station (30 comments).
- Need for stronger enforcement of speed limits in and around the town (103 comments)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Pass a detailed report to the local police and policing authorities for response.
2. Consider ways to improve liaison between the police, local authorities and community groups.

Business

Of the 47 responses to the Business Questionnaire most were involved in either Retail or Professional services, each having up to ten local people in their workforce.

55% of the businesses had a supply chain within a 25 miles radius of Bridgnorth, with 19% exceeding 100 miles. These businesses do not appear to have any problem with staff recruitment locally, only 9% having difficulties. Moreover, 62% were satisfied with employment training facilities.

Most employers thought that they would benefit from a town strategy to encourage new business. However, they were "Unsure" about an economic development strategy for the Town. This would only be acceptable with full participation at the planning stage. Moreover, businesses were unaware that the Town Council is the "Market Authority".

MAIN CONCERNS:

- More supermarkets would have a detrimental effect on small retailers.
- High cost of parking for their workforce.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

1. Concentrate on encouraging small retail outlets in the Town centre, with industrial / manufacturing centred on existing estates
2. Investigate the possibility of having reduced cost, segregated parking areas for businesses.

Youth

The Questionnaire was sent to the two Secondary Schools and published on the Town Plan Web-site. There were 436 responses of which 52% were female. Only 1% of respondents were in the age range 17 / 19 years with the majority of 53% being aged between 14 to 16 years and 45% aged between 11 to 13 years and 1% under 11 years.

The questionnaire focused on leisure activity with the aim of assessing the requirement for youth leisure facilities.

1. "Not including School time, how often do you use the Leisure Centre?"
32% never used the facility and 39% used it occasionally. Only 9% used the Leisure Centre more than once per week, with 15% using it once per week.
2. "Please list your Leisure Centre activities. (Outside School hours.)"
Swimming (the most popular activity with 61% of the replies), Football, Hockey, Badminton, Squash, Gym/Fitness.
3. "Do you travel out of Bridgnorth for any Leisure Activity?"
YES: 33% NO: 67%
4. "Please list the activities." (in another Town
Swimming, Football, Rugby, Golf, Ice Skating, Cricket, Tennis, Dance, Cycling, Rock climbing, Paintball, Karate, Running, Basketball, Skate park.
5. "Are you a member of any organisation / club that caters for leisure activities?":
YES: 23% NO: 77%
6. "If you are a member of an organisation then please list them here"
Bridgnorth: Netball, Golf, Rugby, Health & Fitness, Football, Cricket, Northgate Swimming. *Highley:* Severn Centre. *Sedgley:* Football. *Claverley:* Tennis.
7. "Do you take part in independent leisure activity that does not involve an Organisation?":
YES: 35% NO: 65%
8. "Please list the type of independent leisure activity."
Running, BMX, Skateboard, Badminton, Football, Gym, Swimming, Squash, Rugby, Walking, Ice skating, Tai Chi, Horse riding.
9. "How satisfied are you of the provision of Leisure Activities in Bridgnorth?"
No comments recorded.
10. "Please list any facility for leisure that you would like to be provided in Bridgnorth.":
The full list of activities is shown in Appendix C.

Concluding Remarks

Bridgnorth residents made known their views about the town in their replies to the questionnaires. The Bridgnorth Town Plan Steering Committee have carefully considered what was presented to them and this document encapsulates the views of residents.

From analysis of statistical data and comments contained in this report the Steering Committee have generated an "Action Plan" which is set out in the form of a five-page spreadsheet detailing 39 actions that we recommend are the focus of the Town Council's activities over future years.

The results of this Town Plan survey have shown Bridgnorth area residents desire for an improvement in many aspects of the community, ranging from the environment to public safety, which could be assisted by a transfer of resources, both financial and legal, from the Unitary Council to the Town Council.

With the current financial difficulties, it is seen as even more crucial that funds are secured to enable the Town Council to carry out the "Actions" prioritised in the Town Plan.

Moreover, the analysis suggests that Bridgnorth Town Council should widen its control to have greater influence over, for example local planning matters, byelaws and tourism, with the implication that housing and business become more suited to local needs.

In addition, the government's initiative on "localism" should make it easier for the local community, under the Town Council's leadership, to bring about changes highlighted in this report. We expect to see devolution of responsibility to the Town Council with the necessary funding to allow the wishes of local people to be implemented.

This "Action Plan" should inspire much activity for the Town Council and should be a powerful tool in its hands as it seeks to obtain funding from Shropshire Council and other agencies. The document should provide additional proof that these actions are fully supported by the residents of Bridgnorth in any discussions about possible transfer of services from the Unitary authority or in negotiations for additional funding from other bodies.

This Town Plan is an ongoing process with reviews to be made every two or three years when residents will be able to assess progress and outline further initiatives. It is envisaged that this process will be monitored and assisted by an organisation set up with that specific constitution, with the ability to co-ordinate specific project groups and seek additional funding as required, to support the Town Council in the implementation of the Town Plan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Town Plan Steering Committee acknowledge the work done and support by the following people and organisations during the two year period leading up to the production of this Town Plan:

Ian Wellings:	Past Chairman
Ray Gill:	Chairman
Lindy Macdonald:	Secretary
Mike Proudman:	Treasurer



Bridgnorth Schools

Committee:

Lawrence Banbury :	Promotion Activities
Ann Clarke:	Promotion Activities
Martin Edwards:	Town Plan Sub Group
Sue Morris:	Promotion Activities
Sharon Morris:	Questionnaire Sub Group
Heather Poole-Gleed:	Questionnaire Sub Group
Tammy Ratoff:	Analysis Group
David Richardson:	Questionnaire Sub Group
Sally Themans:	Publicity
Vanessa Voysey:	Web Site Group
Brian Davies:	Town Centre Management Partnership
Mike Rainsford:	Civic Society
Mike Pead :	Civic Society
Mike Grocock:	Low Town Action Group
Nick Bunn	Planning Advice

Town Council Reps: Norman Cottrell. Don Gibbons. Brian Jones.

Support Members:

Shropshire Council: Tom Brettell. Vicky Turner.

Bridgnorth Locum Town Clerk: Anne Wilson

Assisting Groups:

Bridgnorth Town Council

The Community Council of Shropshire

Shropshire Council

Edward Marshall: Chairman, Low Town Action Group

Peter Miller: Director, Bewdley Development Trust

Chris Dimond: Chairman, Cleobury Country Ltd

Photographs: David Cooper. Eddie Brown.

Project funded by: **Bridgnorth Town Council.** **Shropshire LJC**

The Community Council of Shropshire

