



Bromsgrove
District Council

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Bromsgrove District Local Plan

TOPIC PAPER:

Settlement Hierarchy Review

June 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This Topic Paper sets out the background to the function of settlements within Bromsgrove District and includes an audit of the main services and facilities currently available in each settlement. Using the results of this audit then enables recommendations to be made as to the appropriate settlement hierarchy for use in the emerging Bromsgrove Local Plan. The evidence presented here demonstrates that the settlement hierarchy will form the basis of delivering future sustainable growth in the district.
- 1.2 The settlement hierarchy ranks settlements according to their size and range of services or facilities. The Local Plan will identify the overall levels of growth and the site allocations necessary to deliver this growth, which in order to be sustainably located will be made in accordance with the findings of this Settlement Hierarchy Review.
- 1.3 The settlement hierarchy assists in determining what makes a sustainable location for development, together with other technical evidence such as the Site Assessment & Site Selection Methodology and Outputs (SSM). It will be for policies contained within the emerging Bromsgrove District Local Plan to set out the final settlement hierarchy for the district and how development proposals will be judged in accordance or otherwise with such policies.

2. NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 Whilst there is no direct reference in national planning policy to utilising a settlement hierarchy in the course of strategic plan-making, there are a number of requirements in the NPPF which are relevant to how strategic policies should determine sustainable locations for development when seeking to plan for long term growth needs. Relevant NPPF extracts are included below, with the most pertinent text to producing settlement hierarchy evidence shown **in bold**.

#77: The supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements **or significant extensions to existing villages and towns, provided they are well located** and designed, **and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities (including a genuine choice of transport modes)**. Working with the support of their communities, and with other authorities if appropriate, **strategic policy-making authorities should identify suitable locations for such development** where this can help to meet identified needs in a sustainable way.

#83: To promote sustainable development in rural areas, **housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services**. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.

3. UNDERTAKING THE REVIEW

- 3.1 The first stage of the settlement hierarchy review was to determine which settlements in the district were to be considered. As a starting point, this Topic Paper has reviewed all settlements included in the existing Bromsgrove District settlement hierarchy¹, as shown in the table below:

Existing Settlement Hierarchy (Policy BDP2)
Main Town
Bromsgrove
Large Settlement
Alvechurch
Barnt Green (including Lickey)
Catshill
Hagley
Rubery
Wythall (including Drakes Cross, Grimes Hill and Hollywood)
Small Settlement
Adams Hill (Clent)
Belbroughton
Beoley
Blackwell
Bournheath
Burcot
Clent
Cofton Hackett
Dodford
Fairfield
Finstall
Holy Cross (Clent)
Hopwood
Lower Clent (Clent)
Romsley
Rowney Green
Stoke Prior

- 3.2 Additionally, the Review has considered several settlements not part of the existing hierarchy. These are small settlements without defined settlement boundaries in the adopted Local Plan (BDP, 2017), however each contains a sufficient level of dwellings and/or local services to warrant consideration in this settlement hierarchy review.

Additional settlements considered

¹ As listed in Table 2 of Policy BDP2 of the Bromsgrove District Plan (2011-2030).

Bentley
Bordesley
Hunnington
Tardebigge

- 3.3 Once settlements to be considered had been determined, this Review identified a range of services and facilities which would constitute the criteria for assessing the sustainability of individual settlements. Criteria has attempted to capture the most common and important services found in towns and villages, which indicate the potential sustainability of a settlement. Data has been collected via a range of sources, mainly via desktop analysis using tools such as aerial photography and GIS mapping, but also through use of local knowledge, site visits to settlements, and data or information available from service providers.
- 3.4 The settlement hierarchy has therefore been established based on the range of services available within each settlement and on this basis their potential to provide a suitable local infrastructure to support growth and reduce the need to travel. A scoring system has been devised based on the availability of each of the services and facilities in each settlement.
- 3.5 Services and facilities considered to be more essential for everyday needs or of greater benefit to the sustainability of a settlement have been given a score of 2 or 3 points whereas other uses have been given a score of 1 point. Each settlement has been given an overall 'Services Score' based on the local services and facilities available within the settlement.
- 3.6 Greater nuance was considered necessary in relation to the scoring of both the proximity and frequency of bus and train services and therefore a range of scoring from 0-4 points reflects the importance of these criteria to the sustainability of a settlement. More detail regarding this points scoring is given in the table below:

BUS	Category 1: Service to higher tier centre at least twice per hour (daytime) with some evening/weekend service	4 points
	Category 2: Service to higher tier centre at least once per hour (daytime) with some evening/weekend service	3 points
	Category 3: Less frequent than once per hour but still several times per day during 'working hours'	2 points
	Category 4: Only once or twice per day service	1 point
RAIL	Category 1: Station within 3km; service at least twice per hour	4 points
	Category 2: Station within 5km; service at least once per hour	2 points

- 3.7 Each settlement has been given an overall public transport score to reflect its accessibility to bus and train services. Combining the services score and public transport score for each settlement gives a combined total score.

4. RESULTS OF THE SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY REVIEW

- 4.1 The results of the exercise outlined in paragraphs 3.3-3.7 above, including scores assigned to each settlement, are shown in the spreadsheet at Appendix A.
- 4.2 The results of the services/facilities audit shows that the existing BDP settlement hierarchy remains wholly fit for purpose. Bromsgrove urban area and the six existing larger village settlements (Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Catshill, Hagley, Rubery and Wythall) are clearly the most sustainable locations in terms of the services within the settlements and their greater accessibility due to better access to public transport.
- 4.3 There is a wider range of scoring amongst the smaller settlements tier (Tier 3) of the hierarchy, ranging from very small settlements predominantly comprising residential properties with little, if any, local services, to much larger settlements with a range of services and more akin to sustainable locations in the larger settlements tier (Tier 2) of the hierarchy.
- 4.4 In particular, when seeking a high level of service provision for existing services available within a settlement boundary coupled with accessibility to other higher tier settlements via sustainable transport options, the settlements of Belbroughton and Stoke Prior are considered to be most sustainable within the smaller settlements tier of the hierarchy.
- 4.5 There are differences between settlements showing greater sustainability on service provision and settlements showing greater sustainability on accessibility. For example, Barnt Green and Belbroughton are not too dissimilar in service provision scoring but the greater accessibility of Barnt Green, in particular due to its railway station on the Birmingham-Redditch cross city line, increases its overall sustainability and therefore its inclusion in Tier 2 of the hierarchy.
- 4.6 A further example, albeit highlighting a different issue to the above, is Fairfield and Finstall (both Tier 3 settlements). One has much better service provision but poorer public transport accessibility (Fairfield), whereas Finstall has fewer facilities within the settlement but greater accessibility to nearby Bromsgrove town due to the frequency of public transport (bus) provision. As a result, these two settlements end up with a similar overall score.
- 4.7 In summary, this Topic Paper confirms that the existing Bromsgrove District settlement hierarchy, as set out in Policy BDP2 of the existing Bromsgrove District Plan (2017), remains fit for purpose and appropriate for basing future decisions on regarding sustainable locations for growth in the emerging Bromsgrove District Local Plan.

APPENDIX A: SETTLEMENT SCORING RESULTS

See 'Settlement Hierarchy Review' page at

<https://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/policy/planning-policies-and-other-information/bromsgrove-district-plan-review/evidence-base/>