

Small Town Centres Project

November Update

Project Work Plan

| Stage | Content |
|--|---|
| Extensive Research Phase | |
| Determine location of English small rural towns | Analysis of population of built-up areas as recorded in the 2011 and 2021 Censuses |
| Analysis socio-economic conditions of small rural towns | Analysis of demographic and socio-economic structure of small towns from 2011 and 2021 Censuses and other datasets (e.g. Mid-year population estimates, NOMIS datasets) |
| Conduct Survey of Local Economic Development Officers & Town/Parish Clerks/Councillors | <p>Provide supporting evidence about socio-economic challenges and opportunities for small towns. Assist in selection of case studies by obtaining insights into changes in small rural towns</p> <p>Identify potential participants. Draft and agree survey questions. Create on-line questionnaire (JISC on-line survey). Pilot questionnaire. Distribute questionnaire links. Extract response data and analyse.</p> |
| Case Studies | |
| Interviews | Identify potential case study locations, and interviewees. Prepare semi-structured interview protocol. Conduct interviews. Transcription of interviews. Analysis of interviews. |
| Analysis and Write Up | |
| | Analyse and review evidence from stages 2, 3 and 4 above. Decide on structure for the report and hence the evidence. Create draft for comment by T&F Group and SG. Then revise / finalise the report. |

Some initial themes

- Pockets of deprivation, often obscured by apparent affluence
- Low wages, seasonal employment, high house prices
- Second homes contributing to housing unaffordability, and empty properties for much of year
- Declining services, including public transport
- Ageing population, youth outmigration
- Sustainability/Net Zero
- Visitor Economy

Some initial themes

- Visitor Economy

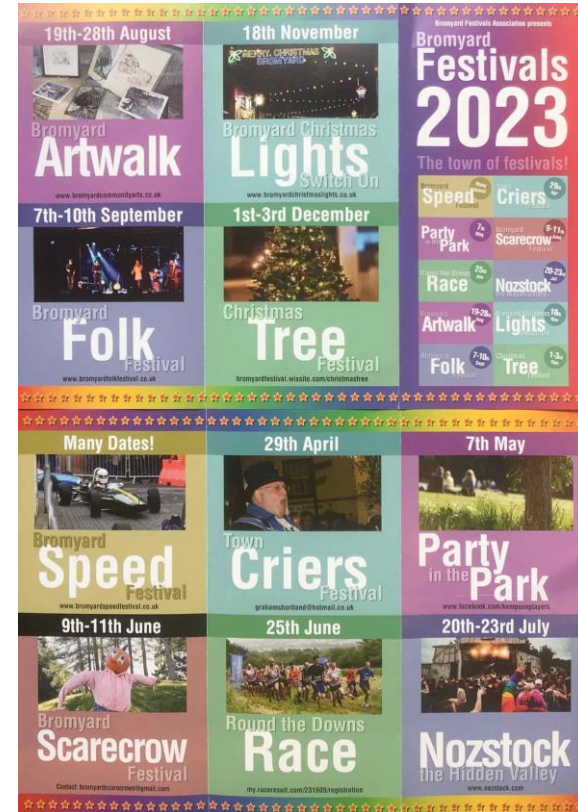
"We will ... create a thriving visitor economy ... The expansion of town markets, tourist trails for walking and cycling, the direct link to local food and drink production, festivals, promotion and the development of accommodation all feature to some extent in each investment plan" (Rose Regeneration, 2021)

"the visitor economy is weak"

"low wage economy based on hospitality and retail, only chance for a decent wage is to move out"

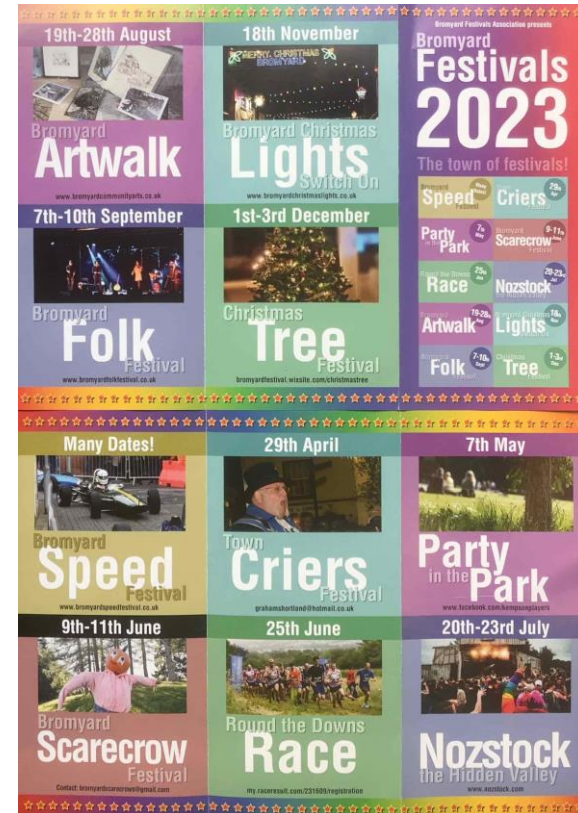
"some of the independently run businesses ... have little embedded value and as shopkeepers retire, there will be few buyers for the business as a going concern. ... a concern at the numbers of town centre businesses run as 'hobbies' - closing early to provide the business owner with a balanced lifestyle" (BAS Consultancy 2020)

Festival Economies



Festival Economies

"Key strategic objectives include making Bromyard ... a place which is recognised regionally, nationally and globally for its artisan food and drink culture and experiential tourism offer, operates as a gateway for walking and cycling and has a national profile in terms of its festivals and events"



Festival Economies



Festival Economies

"Scope to ... increase the Town Market and other attractions including festivals ... support local producers through expanded market and increased visitor numbers through expanded Market and other activities – festivals etc."

"Market square improvements to encourage a sustainable street culture and evening economy, supporting a market, festivals, and arts projects and including a performance space"

"development of a permanent festival site will underpin the success of a key county visitor attraction"

Food and Drink Economies

"Support the development of more local food and drink related business and identify the opportunities for physical premises investment in this context ... [The town] ... and the surrounding villages [are] home to a number of food and drink manufacturing businesses which would support the development of the town's visitor economy".

- Breweries/cideries/wineries/distilleries
- Artisanal food producers
- Café culture
- Local food
- Farmers/maker markets

Food and Drink Economies

"A market is held every Friday at the Civic Centre and Market Hall offering a wide variety of stalls. The Saturday Makers Market, held on the first Saturday of each month, showcases artisan crafts, homemade producers and tasty food from the local area".

"[Town Council] is already committing funds and seeking grants to renovate the 17th Century Market House ... Two options are being considered, one is to 'glass in' the ground floor of the Market House, and the second is to ... terrace the Market Apron and create a central focus to the Town Centre. E.g. on non-market days extending the popular 'tables under the market house' service. It will also create opportunities to hire out the ground floor of the Market House".

Food and Drink Economies

"the masterplan proposes ... developments to reinforce the north and centre of the town. This cluster of projects takes advantage of the high-quality townscape (at Market Place, the arcades, the river and Moneys Yard) to create a leisure, cafe and independent retail focus. Market Place and its town market needs to be reinstated as a destination and can draw inspiration from Retford ... in Nottinghamshire ... The Retford scheme focuses on creating a stage for the thriving weekly market, town events and encouraging a new café culture around the edge".

Food and Drink Economies

"the market hall ... is in disrepair and needs significant investment ... As a consequence of current market failure it is unlikely that normal development equations would lead to this level of key high street investment. This is particularly true in view of the need to think about long term re-visioning of the High Street. Many of the approaches proposed to redeveloping commercial space, which supports commercial development do not fit traditional investment models"

Concluding Comments

- Festival and food/drink economies were not the only themes to emerge within research
- Highlights local innovations and ambitions in small town economies, but also the presence of significant challenges



- Still to complete some interviews, before aiming to complete draft report by end of month.