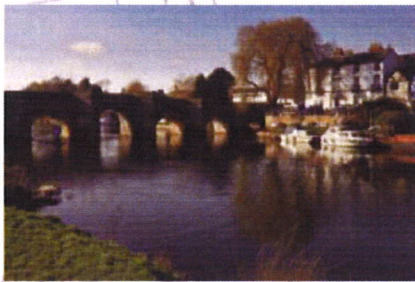


BIDFORD-ON-AVON - A JOURNEY FROM RURAL VILLAGE TO MAIN RURAL CENTRE

Elisabeth Uggerlose, Clerk to Bidford-on-Avon PC, reflects upon the challenges presented by rapid population growth

The riverside village of Bidford-on-Avon is situated by the River Avon in the County of Warwickshire. To the east is Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon; to the south is the small village of Honeybourne in the county of Worcestershire; to the west is the historic town of Evesham and to the north the Roman town of Alcester. It is within Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC) which is its Local Planning Authority (LPA).



The main character of Bidford-on-Avon lies in the central and oldest part of the village with its intimate scale, buildings and winding main street. It is significant that all the buildings of the 17th century are within 183 m from the church.

Until the 20th century the village did not extend much further than the single street along the north bank of the river. In the interwar and post war years, some development spread along Victoria Road, to the west and Waterloo Road, to the east, and especially to the east of Waterloo Road in the form of sizeable Local Authority housing estates.

Then came the 1970s – when all hell was let loose! It started with the traffic congestion on the bustling High Street and the increasing demands from the local community that something be done! And something was done. This was one of the most difficult periods of the Parish Council as residents were divided between the building of a relief road, which would go straight through the village and run parallel to the High Street, or a by-pass that would follow the old railway to the north of the village. Meetings were disruptive as both sides fought their corner. In the end, it was finance that decided the scheme (isn't this always the case?) and the relief road was built, effectively, cutting the village in half, starting the demise of the High Street and opening the village up to large, new developments to the north of the said relief road. The expression "unintended consequences" comes to mind!

Another decision that influenced the development in Bidford-on-Avon was being nominated one of the seven Main Rural Centres: the intention being that these towns and villages would be allowed to grow. This did not represent too much of a problem to those Main Rural Centres that were recognised Market Towns and saw new development as business opportunities, but the smaller villages lacked the infrastructure to allow for this rapid expansion – and Bidford-on-Avon suffered, and continues to suffer, from this lack of investment.







As mentioned, the 1970s saw Bidford-on-Avon's grand expansion. In 20 years, the population rose from 2,822 in 1971 to a whopping 4,826 by 1991, and it continues to grow. The current population of Bidford-on-Avon is now over 5,300.

Furthermore, from being a relatively small community working locally, it has become a village where over 75% of the working population commutes and spends little time in Bidford-on-Avon which has gone from being a village with a cohesive community to one where a large proportion of the population simply come home to eat and sleep.

And, with no approved Local Plan, developers simply keep on knocking at our gates. In the last 5 years permission has been granted for a further 430 dwellings, and there are 4 planning applications, for a further 244 dwellings, which were refused by the LPA's Planning Committee. So now we are just waiting to hear when they all go to appeal: one of them already has, so it is just a question of time.

But, Bidford-on-Avon is not giving up and is working hard to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan, the only weapon the local community has against indiscriminate development. If, as per the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) LPAs must support "sustainable development" it is up to the local community to protect Bidford-on-Avon for future generations.

Fact File:

	Bidford on Avon
	Population: approx. 5,300
	No. of councillors: 10 (all elected May 2015)
	Revenue budget: £252,930
	Parish council Band D £107.33
	No. of employees (FTE) 1