

**Minutes of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment
Scrutiny Board**

**14th September, 2017 at 5.30 pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Hickey (Chair);
Councillors Ahmed, Allcock, Ashman, Crompton,
Dhallu and Rouf.

Apologies: Councillors Price and Tagger.

5/17 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th July, 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

6/17 **Sandwell Cycling Infrastructure Programme 2017/18 and 2018/19**

The Board was advised that the Sandwell Cycling Infrastructure Programme was referred to scrutiny by Cabinet on 26th July 2017 to consider questions raised by Councillor Hickey and P Hughes.

The Strategic Policy Manager outlined the report and response to questions raised by scrutiny. He advised that projects were well spread across the Sandwell area. He advised that the topography in the Rowley Regis area meant that there were fewer cycle routes and that there were slightly more in Smethwick but generally there was a good spread across the Borough.

The Board was advised that Sandwell's Cycling Strategy was developed in 1999, the strategy was subsequently adopted in the Unitary Development Plan and Black Country Core Strategy. The recent reviews of the Black Country Core Strategy and Sandwell Site allocations and Delivery Development Plan meant that the cycling

Economy, Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board 14th September 2017

strategy was due to be reviewed, scrutiny would be involved at this stage.

From the comments and questions from the Board the following responses were made and issues highlighted: -

- There were different categories of cycle route: -
 - off road – specific approval required;
 - shared footpath;
 - segregated off-road;
 - on carriageway – specific approval required.
- The classifications of cycle route:
 - Mandatory – only cyclist, continuous white line and the road must be wide enough;
 - Advisory – vehicles only go in if there is not a cyclist in there, dotted line and road could be any width.
- The Canal and River Trust maintained the canals and the footpaths and funding had been allocated from Centro and the West Midlands Combined Authority.
- Canal cycle routes had a slightly different status to other cycle routes due to not being available all year and the winter maintenance regime.
- There was regular inspection and maintenance of cycle lanes on highways. The schedule of inspections would be circulated to the Board.
- On-road cycle routes had issues such as drains and rubbish kerbside. The off-road cycle routes were preferable which required less maintenance.
- Anti-social behaviour along canal routes was regulated with Canal and River Trust bye-laws. A copy of the memorandum of understanding would be shared with Members to outline the working arrangements.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Policy Manager for his presentation.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Scrutiny Board receives the response to questions raised at Cabinet 26th July, 2017 and forwards further comments arising from the discussion to the Cabinet Members - Regeneration and Economic Investment and Highways and Environment for consideration when determining the cycle infrastructure

Economy, Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board
14th September 2017

programme for 2017/18 and 2018/19.

- (2) that the draft Sandwell Cycling Strategy be considered by the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board as part of the Work Programme 2017-18.

7/17

Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Investment

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration provided a verbal progress report relating to his portfolio. He introduced Executive Director - Neighbourhoods, Alison Knight and the Director Housing and Communities, Alan Caddick recently appointed to Sandwell Council.

The Cabinet Member advised that performance figures for development management had consistently exceeded Government performance targets regarding the determination of planning applications. He advised that the integrity of the planning system depended on fast and effective enforcement action and that there was work taking place to manage the Council's 'Grot Spots' using Town and Country Planning Act section 215 powers to tackle unsightly land and buildings.

The Cabinet Member summarised progress in a number of key work streams as follows:-

- Unauthorised Encampments - Progress had been made including the development of new protocols and a policy document, a three-year temporary planning permission to take forward the creation of the traveller's transit site in Black Patch and a significant fall in the number of encampments in Sandwell compared to 2016. The actions taken were positive and the Cabinet Member was maximising every aspect of the legislation to address issues when they presented.
- West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Update – The WMCA was more established, in Sandwell officers were working to access funding and work on the land reclamation fund was ongoing.

Economy, Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

14th September 2017

- Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) – The LEP continued to support further applications for funding, including several site investigations, where land may be bought for housing, including several large sites which tie in with other regeneration work in the Borough.
- Business Improvement Districts (BID's) – There was a focus on regenerating town centres and the BID was a good way to bring partners together to engage businesses and partners in wider regeneration of town centres. A BID put a small levy on businesses for them to join together and determine the way services for businesses in the area were decided, these could include street cleaning or regular events in the Town Centres and anything else that the BID agreed for the town centre. The Cabinet Member advised that the BID could put in place services over and above what the Council could do and provide additional services to the Town Centre such as additional CCTV camera's and free parking. The West Bromwich BID had worked well and the Wednesbury BID had stalled due to a legal challenge being lodged with Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). A response to DCLG had been prepared for submission and progress of this BID would be monitored. The Cabinet Member advised that a trader's forum could be considered as an alternative however a BID had more appeal to business owners and investors.
- Wednesbury Market Relocation – Plans are being developed to look at how the Town Centre could look in the future including the market, public realm and connectivity between the great western metro stop and Wednesbury Town Centre.
- Carrington Road Shops – Work is ongoing to tackle the condition of this area.
- Demolishing sites – Five dilapidated buildings sites had been approved for demolition and were in the programme. Demolition would tackle previous failures to decide on what to do with the sites.
- Land not owned by the Council – Land banking and land where permissions had been granted but never acted on was an issue which the Authority had little power to act. The Authority could raise a discussion with the landowner but could not compel the

Economy, Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

14th September 2017

landowner to develop the site. A change in legislation would be needed to change this issue.

- Redevelopment of a 12-acre former cast iron foundry site in Bromford Road, Oldbury. The site had been vacant for 20 years. Four separate permissions to build a retail park had been granted but no development had taken place. The retail park may be obsolete due to changes over 20 years in online shopping. The Board suggested it may be timely for a discussion with the developer.
- Notable Land Sales – Land sales continued to provide good capital receipt for the Authority and encourage development, business rates and employment opportunities.
- Councillor Gavan had been appointed to the Business Ambassador role. The role was to meet with companies, have conversations to generate leads, discuss historical issues and develop better relationships with the top 50 fastest growing companies in borough.
- New Land Disposal Protocol – The Protocol was put in place as a result of the Wragge Report, the Land and Asset Management Committee made recommendations to dispose of land and property interests to the Council's Cabinet, which retained the decision-making power.
- Midland Metropolitan Hospital Update – The hospital development was on track for completion by Spring 2019. Collaborative working was ongoing in relation to the eight identified priorities:
 - the future of remaining sites
 - public safety / public realm, traffic movement and street lighting
 - development of multi-story car park on London Street
 - express bus service from West Bromwich sites
 - pedestrian links to Icknield Port Loop
 - pedestrian and cycle routes to Rolfe Street station
 - re-opening of the canal spur
 - surrounding housing developments and their impact on community infrastructure.

Economy, Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board
14th September 2017

- Council House Building – There was ambitious council house building programme across the Borough with 72 units being completed since 2016 and a further 337 with approval to be built (or purchased off plan) and an additional 150 units awaiting final approval to proceed from Cabinet. There was potential to link the council house build sites to the funding for land remediation through the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) making sites more feasible.
- Alternative types of housing construction – The Walsall based factory that produced flat pack timber frame housing to Accord Housing Association delivered an energy efficient house that resulted in tenants paying up to 60% less in gas and electricity bills. The Board welcomed further scrutiny of energy efficient housing solutions and alternative construction methods to reduce the environmental impact of housing. The Board further suggested that the needs and demands of Council housing solutions be taken into consideration when taking a creative look at alternative housing construction models.
- Birchley Island/ M5 Junction 2 - The scheme involved the construction of a through-roundabout. The major scheme business case was complete and discussions were ongoing with the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and the West Midlands Combined Authority to put together a funding package. Land and property acquisition would be required and therefore the earliest date for construction would be early 2019, but this was dependant on the funding being secured and whether a public inquiry into the land acquisition would be required.
- M5 Junction 1 – A major capacity improvement was required at junction 1. Feasibility work was in progress to establish options for further consideration. The timing of the scheme was dependent on funding and on the delivery of other projects taking place on the West Midlands motorway network. It was unlikely that any scheme could be started before 2021.
- Rail Franchise – The Board welcomed the award of the franchise to operate local rail services in the West Midlands to West Midlands Trains Ltd. The benefits to Sandwell would mean service improvements and extras for service users such as free wifi. West Midland Trains Ltd would take over the services from London

Economy, Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

14th September 2017

Midland on 10th December 2017.

- Metro Extension – Clearance of land and structural and environmental surveys were being undertaken, the land required to progress the extension was being identified and letters were due to be sent to affected owners/occupiers. Construction on the Metro Extension was expected to commence during 2019 and expected completion 2023.

The Board was appreciative of the Cabinet Member's progress report. There was further discussion relating to the 'Right to Buy' and the pressure it put on Sandwell housing stock. The Director - Housing and Communities indicated that Councils had to work with the Government Policy, but that selling off the higher value Council stock would have an impact on Sandwell's overall housing stock.

In response to a query the Board was advised that Transport for West Midlands had just commissioned work relating to park and ride, particularly around rail travel. There was more to do in relation to the Sprint project and in relation to payment for park and ride.

In response to questions about the potential for encouraging a University to build in Sandwell and what schools and other infrastructure was being considered to support the programme of house building across the region, the Cabinet Member advised that the issue of school place planning was being considered by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board and that there was no demand for a university in Sandwell. However, a campus from an existing university may be an option to explore should demand arise in the future.

Resolved:-

- (1) that a report be submitted to the Board providing on major development programmes and projects, including an update on the 12-acre former cast iron foundry site in Bromford Road, Oldbury;
- (2) that the Executive Director – Neighbourhoods and the Director - Housing and Communities investigate land owned by neighbourhoods that could be used for house building;
- (3) that the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board (BCSMB) be requested to look into alternative

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Economy, Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board
14th September 2017

types of housing construction be considered as part of the Work Programme 2017-18.

8/17 **Vice-Chairs Working Group update**

Councillor Ashman provided feedback from the visit to the Oldbury Job Centre on 13th September 2017. She advised that there was a lot of support to help the 18-24-year-old age group and that the Council was working closely with Department for Works and Pensions (DWP), businesses and specific youth employment programmes such as the Black Country Impact programme in Sandwell.

The Vice-Chair advised that the Oldbury Job Centre was working closely with the Troubled Families Team to help those furthest from work into employment and that an advisor was co-located at the Copse. She advised that the introduction of Universal Credit in Sandwell in 2018 may add further pressure to people out of work, on low wages or with low skill levels.

The Job Centre visit and discussion had highlighted that people were living longer and that there may be a need for them to work longer, however the nature of the work may need to be considered depending on the physical and mental demands of the role.

The Vice-Chair reviewed the scope for the work group and determined to re-focus the work on Employment and Skills of the over 50's, and work around 'Fuller Working Lives' and 'No Desire to Retire' programmes.

(Meeting ended 7:20 pm)

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