

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

Thursday 22nd July 2021 at 5:00pm
at Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street, Oldbury,
B69 3DB

Present: Councillor Moore (Chair)
Councillors Abrahams (Vice-Chair), Millar, Owen, C Padda

11/21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors M Gill, S Gill, Jalil and P Kaur.

12/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

13/21 Additional Item of Business

There were no additional items of business to consider.

14/21 Draft Black Country Plan – Consultation

The Board's views were sought on the draft Black Country Plan.

The Plan (formerly known as the Black Country Core Strategy) was the key document that would provide the framework to guide future planning decisions in Sandwell as well as the wider Black Country. It was based on national policy and guidance, an



assessment of local housing and employment needs, as well as meeting objectives that have been defined through an Issues and Options consultation in 2017.

The development plan for Sandwell currently comprised the Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS) adopted in 2011, the Sandwell Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document (2012) and Area Action Plans (AAPs) for Tipton (2008), Smethwick (2008) and West Bromwich (2012).

The Plan (BCP) would be adopted in 2024 and would replace the Core Strategy but, unlike the Core Strategy, the Plan would also allocate specific sites for housing and employment land uses. It would therefore 'carry forward' the allocations in the Site Allocations & Delivery Development Plan (SAD) the Area Action Plans in accordance with the Site Assessment Methodology but will also allocate additional new sites to meet need over the longer time period.

Based on the government's standard calculations, there was a need for 76,076 homes in the whole Black Country by 2039, as well as 564 hectares of employment land, based on a recent economic needs assessment. The urban capacity review for the Black Country, published in May 2021 as part of the preparation of the Black Country Plan, identified an urban land supply to accommodate just over 300 hectares of employment land and 40,622 homes. This means meant that there remained a significant shortfall of over 250 hectares of employment land and land for a further 36,819 homes.

The National Planning Policy Framework allowed for the review of Green Belt land in exceptional circumstances, which needed to be evidenced and delivered through the updating of local plans. The Black Country authorities had undertaken an extensive review of the Green Belt, its findings were taken into account in the Site Assessment process. It proposed that land for 7,719 houses and 47.8 hectares of employment land be allocated on land that was currently in the Black Country Green Belt. This equated to a little under 6% of the total Black Country Green Belt, of which 0.6% was in Sandwell MBC. The proposed sites were:-

Site	Ward	Type	Capacity
Charlemont Community Centre	Charlemont & Grove Vale	Housing	1
Painswick Close	Great Barr with Yew Tree	Housing	120
Tanhouse Avenue	Newton	Housing	50

Taking into account both urban and Green Belt land, there was potential across the Black Country to accommodate 48,341 homes and 354ha. Black Country Authorities were also undertaking Duty to Cooperate discussions with neighbouring authorities in Staffordshire, Shropshire and Solihull, asking them to accommodate some of the remaining shortfall in their areas. Discussions to date suggested that the need for between 151-173 hectares of employment land and 9,500 homes could potentially be “exported,” to these authorities, subject to their own local plan reviews. This left a shortfall of 18,235 homes and between 39 and 109 hectares of employment land to be pursued through further Duty to Cooperate discussions.

The Draft Plan also included a number of new and updated policies, including:-

- Climate Change policies on mitigation, energy infrastructure and managing heat risk.
- Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (contribution from Wolverhampton & Walsall)
- Refresh of the previous Policy CEN3: Growth In Strategic Centres to ensure it was effective and fit-for-purpose, reflecting the delivery of the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill metro extension and informed by the Car Parking Study.
- The affordable housing policy had been amended to reflect different levels of affordable housing on a geographical value area basis setting out a 10%-30% Affordable Housing requirement.
- Building design standards had been updated in line with national guidance.
- A range of new and amended planning obligations were recommended for inclusion in the Draft Plan, in relation to climate change, net biodiversity gain and Green Belt mitigation, education and health care provision.

An eight week public consultation would commence in August 2021.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- The West Bromwich Town Centre Master Plan set out the aspirations for the growth of the centre. It was anticipated that more than 200 homes could be developed.
- The loss of green belt land needed to be balanced against the need for housing land. The public would have the opportunity to submit views and concerns as part of the consultation.
- Sandwell had the biggest shortfall in housing land of all the Black Country authorities so there was reliance on the other authorities to provide land for Sandwell.
- Only a small portion of Sandwell's Green Belt had been identified to build 171 houses on, whilst neighbouring authorities had proposed sites within their Green Belt to support the provision of thousands of homes to help Sandwell and the Black Country to meet their need.
- Funding would be required from the Combined Authority for infrastructure and remediation to make some sites viable.
- It was not expected that developers would build at the rate that was required and Sandwell has never met its target to build 1,476 new homes a year. The Council worked closely with all developers to ensure that plans were viable and encourage suitable and sustainable development.
- There would be requirements on developers to meet standards in relation to energy efficiency and climate change.
- The type of employment land required would be market-driven, however, given Sandwell's history, it was likely to be for manufacturing.
- Consultation would take place online predominantly, but targeted work would also be undertaken with hard to reach groups.
- Whilst there was a requirement for developers to provide 25% affordable housing, this could be reduced if the developer could prove that it was not viable. The Plan would set a more affordable level.
- If developers were not forthcoming with developments to meet demand, the Council would consider setting up its own company to build homes.
- The Board would be provided with figures on the number of people in Sandwell who needed affordable housing, and the number of people on the waiting list for council properties.
- The Combined Authority was looking at different construction methods, including modular homes.

- The masterplan for the Brandhall Golf Course site would be subject to public consultation. The land was not currently public open space; however, the proposals to build housing on the site included a park, which would be publicly accessible open space.
- Despite challenges from the metropolitan leaders and other authorities losing Green Belt land, the government had not indicated that it would be changing the methodology used to determine the housing and employment land needs.

Members expressed concern about the sustainability of the proposal to build at Painswick Close, Yew Tree, as it was felt that the existing infrastructure would not cope with the additional demand.

Members expressed concern about the adequacy of digital consultation and felt that those communities directly affected by the proposals to build on Green Belt land should be targeted directly in the consultation.

The Board requested an update to a future meeting.

Resolved that the Interim Director of Regeneration and Growth undertakes targeted consultation with those residents directly affected by the proposals set out in the Draft Black Country Plan to build on Green Belt land in Charlemont & Grove Vale, Great Barr with Yew Tree and Newton wards.

15/21 Local Transport Plan (Movement for Growth) Review Green Paper

The Board's views were sought to inform the review of the Local Transport Plan.

The Local Transport Plan was a statutory document prepared by Transport for the West Midlands as part of the West Midlands Combined Authority in its role as Integrated Transport Authority. The Plan covered the seven West Midlands metropolitan local authorities and as such, formed the adopted transport strategy and policies for Sandwell.

The Plan set out the highway authority's policies, strategies, objectives and targets for improving transport over a five year period. Annual progress reports were submitted to the Department for Transport so that they could be used to inform the development of policies on local transport, inform and support policies on land

use and place making, inform decisions on capital funding for local authorities and monitor the delivery of objectives and targets.

The Board noted the achievements from the current Plan, which had contributed to securing significant amounts of funding from the Transforming Cities Fund, Housing Deal and West Midlands Future Mobility Zone.

To better inform the preparation of the 5th Local transport Plan, Transport for West Midlands had published a Green Paper: *Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands: a conversation about change*, which would form the basis for engagement with elected members, partner organisations, key stakeholders and the wider public.

The key drivers behind the new Plan were:-

- Tackling Climate Change.
- Creating a fairer society.
- Becoming healthier and more active.
- Supporting places and communities.
- Sustaining economic success.

These aligned well with the ambitions of the Sandwell Corporate Plan. The Plan would, along with the Black Country Plan, be a key element in the physical and economic development of the Borough.

The reviewed Plan would include separate area strategies for Coventry, Birmingham and Solihull, and the Black Country. These area strategies would provide more specific detail on the application of the strategy and the projects and programmes required to support them.

The final Plan would be approved by the West Midlands Combined Authority Board in Summer 2022.

Members of the Board made the following comments/observations:
-

- Behaviour change was needed, and personal mobility was key.
- E scooters were a nuisance in some neighbourhoods.
- The Council should look at other European cities to see how their success could be mirrored in Sandwell.
- The whole of West Midlands needed to be prioritised in terms of convenient public transport journeys, and not just journeys to Birmingham i.e. it was often quicker to travel the longer distance

by bus to Birmingham than it was to a local town centre, therefore people were more likely to choose to drive.

- The M6 motorway was a huge contributor to traffic congestion.
- There needed to be some focus on Sandwell's canal network, which had not been upgraded like other local authority areas.

Officers responded to members' comments/observations with the following points:-

- E-scooters were currently being trialled in some areas and the outcome of the trials would help to identify the best ways of integrating them into the existing transport network.
- The challenge was the same across the developed world, for example, Amsterdam and Copenhagen, still had comparable rates of car transport despite the high cycle usage.
- As an area synonymous with car manufacturing, decreasing car usage in West Midlands would be a challenge so incentives needed to be considered to make other modes of transport more attractive.
- There needed to be a trade off against improving the environment but also keeping life moving.
- Analysis of trips indicated that the congestion on the M6 was caused by short journeys, which was not the purpose the motorway was built for. It would be a challenge to change these behaviours. The toll road had not addressed the issue.
- Clean air zones were a useful method of driving change in particular areas but did not help to reduce carbon levels.

The Board asked for a further update in due course, as the development of the plan progressed.

16/21 Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy

The Board received the Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy for consideration.

Following the government's announcement that the sale of petrol and diesel cars would be banned by 2030, the Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) strategy set out a framework for how Sandwell could support the transition to ultra low emission vehicles.

The whole of the borough had been a designated Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2005, because of lower than average air quality across the borough. The strategy would

support a transition away from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles (the prime contributors to poor air quality) to cleaner electric ULEVs. It was forecast that a transition based on a 2030 ICE ban would, by 2025, result in a 12% reduction of transport Nitrous Dioxide (NOx) emissions and a 36.6% reduction in transport Particulate Matter (PM) emissions across the borough. By 2040 these reductions were forecast to be 83.4% and 90.1% respectively.

Following the Government's commitment to the country reaching net-zero Carbon Dioxide (CO2) emissions by 2050, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) had committed to the metropolitan area reaching net zero by 2041. This target had been matched by the Council for the borough and the Strategy would support the achievement of this. Transport was the biggest contributor to CO2 emissions nationally, regionally and locally (it was estimated that transport accounts for 38% of all emissions within Sandwell). It was forecast that a transition to ULEVs based on a 2030 ICE ban would result in a 4% decrease in transport CO2 emissions by 2025. This transition and resultant decrease in transport CO2 emissions would contribute to Sandwell meeting its own, regional and national emission reduction targets.

Members of the Board made the following comments and observations on the Strategy:-

- The Strategy was not ambitious enough.
- Accessibility and costs of ULEVs was a large factor affecting residents, and it was not felt that had been adequately addressed in the Strategy.
- Those people driving older vans should be targeted to encourage them to use cleaner vehicles.
- DPD was trailing the use of micro-depots and this should be looked at in sandwell.
- The number of electric vehicle charging points proposed was not sufficient to meet the scale of the challenge. The government needed to fund the installation of charging points nationally.
- What financial incentives e.g. grants were there to entice people change their vehicles to electric?

Officers responded to members' comments/observations with the following points:-

- Only 60% of households in Sandwell owned a car so it was not appropriate to push for a switch to electric vehicles and the

transport strategy was focussing more on shifting people to different modes of public transport.

- The majority of charging for electric vehicles would take place at home so the challenge was to provide sufficient, and fast, charging points away from the home.
- Funding was not forthcoming from the government to fund private grants.

On balance, the Board did not support the Strategy in its current form.

Resolved that the Board does not support the Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy.

17/21 Review Scope

At a work programming workshop held on 14th June 2021, the Board had decided to undertake a review into waste services and the cleanliness of the borough. A draft scoping document for the review was presented. The scope would remain fluid and could be amended as the review progressed.

The Board felt that it was important to consider the Council's contract with Serco and its performance as part of the review. Members also expressed concern about reported workforce issues within the organisation, that could have an impact on service delivery.

The Board agreed to set up a working group of the following councillors to carry out the review, however, input from the remaining members of the Board would be welcomed:-

Abrahams
Jalil
Moore
C Padda

The Chair and Vice-Chair would meet with officers, including the Interim Director of Borough & Communities to agree next steps and the detailed data that the working group required initially.

18/21 Work Programme

The Board noted its work programme for 2021/22.

Resolved that the following items be added to the Board's work programme:-

- Outcome of e-scooters trials.
- Grass cutting programme.

19/21

Cabinet Forward Plan

The Board noted the Cabinet forward plan for the period September 2021 to January 2022.

Meeting ended at 7.17 pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk