

Minutes of Sandwell Towns Fund Superboard

Thursday, 25 November 2021 at 3.00 pm
Meeting held online
Meeting not open to the public

Present: Chris Hinson, West Bromwich Local Board Chair
Geoff Foster, SCVO
Geoff Layer, Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership
Graham Pennington, Sandwell College
Mark Davis, SCVO
Sandeep Shingadia, Transport for West Midlands
Tony McGovern, Director of Regeneration and Growth
Councillor Danny Millard (In place of Councillor Maria Crompton)
Sgt Maria Fox, West Midlands Police (In place of Keeley Bevington)

Also present: Austin Bell, Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust
Alex Oxley, Planning Regeneration Officer
Alan Reynolds, Senior Planning Regeneration Officer
Clinton Felicio, Planning Regeneration Support Officer
Emma Parkes, Project Support Officer
Erroll Blackwood, Sandwell MBC
Jenna Langford, Towns Fund Programme Manager
Josh Singh, Senior Planning Regeneration Officer
Mark Evans, West Bromwich Town Hall Project Manager
Rob Lake, Albion Foundation



9/21 Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chris Hinson, Chair of West Bromwich Local Board, introduced herself as deputy Chair for the Town Deal Board in the absence of Jude Thompson. The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting of the Sandwell Towns Fund Superboard.

10/21 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from the following Superboard members:

- Jude Thompson – Chair of Sandwell Superboard
- Adrian Eggington – Chair of Rowley Regis Local Board
- Alan Taylor – Chair of Smethwick Local Board
- Kim Bromley-Derry – SMBC Interim Chief Executive
- James Morris – MP - MP Halesowen and Rowley Constituency
- Nicola Richards, MP – MP West Bromwich East Constituency

Apologies of absence were received from the following Project Leads: -

- Hayley Insley – Project Lead for Grove Lane Regeneration and Rolfe Street Canalside Regeneration
- Jane Lillystone – Project Lead for Town Hall Quarter

11/21 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

12/21 Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were received. Existing and continued declarations from previous meetings: -

- Wendy Brookfield- Project lead on Digital Den Project, West Bromwich.
- Adrian Eggington- Interest in Shaftesbury House site so will refrain from discussion with regards Sandwell MEC project, West Bromwich.
- Nicola Richards MP- Trustee of the Albion Foundation
- Alan Taylor – in relation to any matters relating to Sandwell College
- Geoff Layer – in relation to any matters relating to University of Wolverhampton
- Graham Pennington – in relation to any matters relating to Sandwell College.

13/21 Town Deal Local Boards

Chris Hinson, Chair of the West Bromwich Local Board, reported on recent local board meetings. Board members continue to be well engaged with the projects and good progress is being made on the development of the Full Business Cases (FCBs).

A number of proposed site visits are being arranged for local members to visit both the Town Hall and Retail Diversification Programme sites in December. This offer was extended to any superboard members that may want to attend. Superboard members were advised to contact relevant officers to arrange attendance.

From a programme management perspective, Chris reported to Superboard that all West Bromwich projects are now green RAG rated in light of the efficiencies made to the assurance process that will be outlined later in the meeting.

Both Alan Taylor and Adrian Eggington were unable to join this meeting to provide updates in their respective roles as Chairs of Smethwick and Rowley Regis Local Boards.

The Chair then invited Austin Bell, Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, to present an update on the Midland Met Learning Campus. This item was brought forward to allow the presenter to attend another meeting. The project level update is recorded within the original item 'Full Business Cases for Tranche 3 Projects'.

14/21 Tranche 1 and 2 Full Business Case Update

Jenna Langford provided an update on tranche 1 & 2 projects.

The tranche 1 Digital Den Project Summary Document and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan was submitted to DLUHC in October 2021. To date, a response is yet to be received.

The tranche 2 projects have both now been approved by SMBC Cabinet and can be submitted to DLUHC. Summary Documents and Monitoring and Evaluation Plans will be submitted by 14 January 2022.

Tony McGovern added that there was strong support from all politicians and offered thanks to those officers involved with getting them through the process to date.

Chris Hinson also wanted to note her appreciation and thanks to those officers who had worked on these proposals.

15/21 Towns Fund Assurance and Programme Update

Jenna Langford outlined a number of proposed changes to the assurance process for Full Business Cases. SMBC are now adopting an Assurance Panel approach which will deliver a number of time efficiencies.

The previous deadline of 10 November 2021 to submit FBCs to the Programme Management Office was unrealistic given the complexities.

The Assurance Panel is only applicable where projects receive external advice in the development of the FBCs, so this has now also been procured. Delegated cabinet authority was also sought so that senior officers can approve final submission to DLUHC. This approach saves time, resource and still provides robust due diligence.

This methodology was approved at 24 November 2021 Cabinet meeting and is therefore now fully enacted.

Tony McGovern reiterated that this route does not detract from the level of due diligence required for each of the projects.

16/21 Full Business Cases for Tranche 3 Projects

Smethwick Midland Met Learning Campus

Austin Bell, Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, provided an update on the Midland Met Learning Campus project. The project is progressing at pace and the team are now at RIBA Stage 2. Austin shared a number of conceptual design visuals to Superboard.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between partner organisations is close to being fully signed off and there have been positive meetings with the WMCA to drive the project forward.

The first draft of the FBC is expected imminently and the project is therefore in line to achieve the Towns Fund assurance submission date.

Austin outlined a number of risks and issues with the project. There is, given the conceptual nature of the scheme, a large contingency which should help with the issues around super-inflation of material costs.

Question raised by Tony McGovern, SMBC, around how the procurement process for the project will drive local community wealth.

Austin assured that local procurement metrics will be intrinsic to the procurement process and that work has been undertaken with Karen Richards, SMBC, to evaluate and understand the outcomes in terms of social value. A social value plan has been developed to sit alongside the project.

Question raised by Josh Singh, SMBC, around the environmental credentials.

Austin advises that the project is aiming for BREEAM outstanding and to be net carbon zero. Additionally, the project team are looking to reuse bricks from the City Hospital demolition where possible.

Action: Austin Bell to share the recently received sustainability report with the Towns Fund PMO for circulation. This will promote best practice in the borough.

Jenna Langford asked Austin to liaise with her Business Growth team to understand opportunities for local procurement. There is possibly the option to organise a meet the buyer event or distribute additional information to contractors to assist in this.

Action: PMO to arrange follow up meet between Austin and SMBC Business Growth to discuss opportunities.

Smethwick Albion Family in the Park

The Chair introduced Rob Lake from the Albion Foundation to provide an update on this project.

Rob advised Superboard that the project is now adopting a two-stage approach with a change in scope to certain elements of the project.

Rob advised on the revised outcomes including upgrades to the existing Regis Academy, improvements to Lewisham Park, new changing rooms and multi-use games area, all subject to further consultation.

Cost estimates were received yesterday and there is currently an identified funding gap. Quantity surveyor and architect are going back to revise design proposals to understand where efficiencies can be made.

There is an ongoing issue with regards payment of VAT which was not included in the original proposal. This also presents a budgetary challenge.

Mott Macdonald are now, as per the changes to assurance, supporting The Albion Foundation with the development of the FBC.

Question raised by Tony McGovern around the VAT implications.

Jenna Langford advised that SMBC Finance Dept have gone out to procure some specialist VAT advice to support the process as this is an issue with other projects also. PMO are also in discussions with DLUHC advisors on this topic.

Smethwick Grove Lane Regeneration

Clinton Felicio provided an overview of the Smethwick Grove Lane Regeneration Project.

Project team have engaged with agents dealing with the Cranford St site. A red book valuation has been completed and negotiations are underway.

The FBC is progressing with Mott MacDonald and SMBC are working closely with consultants to complete this.

Indicative demolition costs have been received and SMBC are in the process of procuring desk top site investigations.

Clinton provided Superboard with an overview of the local board views to date, in addition to a summary of the consultation that has occurred on the project to date. Further consultation will be undertaken as part of the Area Framework and Grove Lane Masterplan.

Remaining projects in tranche 3a were invited to provide short overview of their projects.

West Bromwich Town Hall Quarter

Mark Evans, SMBC, advised that the first draft of the FBC has been received from Mott MacDonald. This paints a positive picture and the benefit-cost-ratio is well above where it needs to be, which demonstrates good value for money.

Continuing to work with the design team to develop the proposals. Although the scope has now been revised down to the phase 1 development (Restoration and Renovation) only, due to the super-inflation of material costs.

Mark provided an overview of the key risks and consultation that has been undertaken to date.

Question raised by Sandeep Shingadia about external review of FBCs to ensure they are most likely to succeed on submission.

Jenna Langford advised that this aspect of external review is already being picked up by Mott MacDonald as external consultants in the development of FBCs. The councils Strategic Investment Unit (SIU) are also providing local assurance.

Smethwick Ron Davis Centre Expansion

Erroll Blackwood, SMBC, provided overview of the Ron Davis Centre project. Project seeks a two classroom addition to the existing premises.

Due to rising material costs, a modular build is being proposed which will mitigate against price rises.

Mott MacDonald are now also reviewing this FBC in line with new assurance processes.

Smethwick Rolfe Street Canalside Regeneration

Clinton Felicio provided update on the project.

Recently received conditions survey is being assessed to identify which buildings can potentially remain in situ. Desktop site investigation has now been completed and the initial costs of the demolition have been received.

Team are continued to work on a development brief for the site. FBC is progressing with Mott MacDonald and the team are working closely with them.

Consultation is ongoing as per the Area Framework and Masterplan.

Next steps are to continue to engage with occupiers, further scope the demolition works and progress the FBC in line with revised timescales.

Rowley Regis College

Alan Reynolds, SMBC, provided an update in the absence of Sandwell College project officers.

Concept designs have been developed and these were shared with Superboard.

Similarly, to others the FBC is now being developed by Mott MacDonald so the team are working with them to proceed. Motts have raised concerns about the level of contingency, in light of inflated material costs, and will work to identify potential efficiencies. The VAT issue highlighted previous is also applicable to this project.

Question raised by Chris Hinson around DLUHC's view on the impact of inflation of material costs and the impact on projects. Will additional monies be made available?

Jenna Langford advised that Central Government have yet to take an official position. The PMO do have regular meeting with government advisors and they are aware of this issue. It is, however, at this point best to assume that no further monies will be made available to deal with this issue.

Rowley Regis Canal Network Connectivity

James Dennison, Canal and River Trust, provided an overview of progress on the project.

Cost increases have also impacted the project which is now estimated overbudget. However, current estimates are based on initial information and are therefore worst-case scenarios. CRT are working to provide further details that will potentially help to reduce estimates and are in the process of utilising SMBC frameworks to enable wider quote reach.

Draft FBC has been appraised by both SIU and Motts and the feedback is broadly positive to date. CRT will continue to work up the FBC in preparation for submission to SMBC.

Proposed start date of Feb 2023 as there are a number of practical factors preventing delivery towards the end of 2022.

Superboard were invited to ask questions about the remaining projects in tranche 3b or 3c as an exception. No questions forthcoming.

17/21 Any Other Business

Question raised by Sandeep Shingadia with regards programme level risk register.

Jenna Langford confirmed that there is a programme level risk register and whilst it has not been shared previously, this can be shared with Superboard members for input and update.

Tony McGovern further commented that we will be in a better position to understand the programme risks once we have had sight of all FBCs at the beginning of 2022.

Action: PMO to include programme risks as an ongoing agenda item.

18/21 Closing Comments

Chris Hinson wished the SMBC Regeneration Team good luck at the Royal Town Planning Institutes Award ceremony taking place later that evening. The nominated project, West Bromwich Outdoor Market, was one of Towns Fund's accelerated projects.

Given that this was the last Superboard meeting of 2021, Chris passed on her best wishes for the festive period and thanked members for their attendance.

Meeting ended at 16:35

Contact: town_deal@sandwell.gov.uk