

Minutes of Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**Tuesday, 28 February 2023 at 5.00 pm
at Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillors Taylor (Vice Chair), Fenton, J Giles, Kaur, Owen and Rahman.

Also Present: Mr D Magher (Wednesbury Action Group)
Angela Poulton (Associate Director of Primary Care – Black Country Integrated Care Board)

Officers: Tammy Stokes (Service Manager – Growth and Spatial Planning), Sue Moore (Group Head for Education Support Services), Alison Blakeway (Economic Development Project Manager), Andy Thorpe (Healthy Urban Development Officer), Kate Harris (Assistant Planner), Alex Goddard (Democratic Services Officer) and John Swann (Democratic Services Officer).

8/23 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simms (Chair), Abrahams, Gavan and Z Hussain.

9/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

10/23 Additional Items of Business



There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

11/23 Friar Park Urban Village

Further to Minute No. 5/23 (9 February 2023), the Board received an overview of the Friar Park Urban Village Masterplan proposals. The site represented one of the largest brownfield development opportunities in the West Midlands region.

Following the completion of the concept stage, the Masterplan was seeking endorsement to set the principles and minimum quality standards for the scheme. The design, tendering and planning application stages would be progressed upon the completion of the Masterplan.

The Service Manager – Growth and Spatial Planning outlined that key principles were:-

- Decontamination of the Friar Park site;
- Provision of 10 hectares of open and green space;
- The building of 630 new homes, 158 of which would be affordable;
- Potential expansion of the Millennium Centre.

The draft Masterplan had been amended subsequent to public consultation taking on board feedback from the consultation. It was noted that response rates had been low, however the majority of feedback was supportive of the scheme.

Various representatives from relevant directorates and external bodies were in attendance to facilitate an in-depth analysis of the Masterplan.

The Board heard from a representative of Wednesbury Action Group who expressed reservations regarding the scheme. In particular the following points were highlighted:-

- Construction works would place additional demand upon the Highways Network;
- A local bus route was due to cease operations which could create additional car usage;
- An increase of residents in the locality would increase pressure upon schools and GP practices;
- The number of responses to the public consultation had been low;

- Environmental studies, including noise, air and light assessments were minimal;
- The locality had high levels of pollution and this development could cause the air quality to deteriorate.

A baseline transport report had been conducted based on an assumption of 830 properties rather than the proposed 630, which identified no highways safety concerns. A modest increase in traffic during morning (396 trips) and afternoon (441 trips) peak times had been identified, however this was manageable within the existing highways network.

The Board heard that representations had been made by the Council to Transport for West Midlands to preserve existing bus routes. In addition, the scheme had incorporated pedestrian and cycle routes to ensure journeys would be able to be made sustainably.

The Group Head for Education Support Services outlined that calculations had estimated that 138 primary school places and 62 secondary school places were needed upon delivery of the scheme. These places would be met via the existing school provision; there was sufficient availability in line with Schools Admissions Code requirements to meet the additional need.

School provision would be continuously monitored as the development progressed, it was not anticipated a new school would be required, however if demand was higher than predicted this could be met via funding from the Schools Capital Programme.

Air quality measuring stations were utilised, and the air pollution levels were found to be consistent with the average for Sandwell. To safeguard air quality the Masterplan had ensured that properties were to be 15 metres away from the rail network and vegetation corridors were planned to absorb pollution from vehicles.

The Associate Director of Primary Care – Black Country Integrated Care Board outlined that GP coverage in the locality was in line with national performance, with six practices close to the site accepting new patients. There were no concerns about capacity of GP practices as a result of the scheme, however the ongoing challenges faced in primary care were noted by the Board.

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

- There was a 3% surplus of school places in Sandwell, allowing the Council to manage capacity.
- Five new secondary schools in the Borough were due to open by September 2023 to meet demand.
- School place demand projections were updated annually to ensure local provision, allowing children to walk to school, therefore reducing vehicle emissions.
- Assessing GP registration demand had been complicated as the age demographic of the future residents was unknown.
- The capacity of GP practices wasn't a concern, however additional places could be mobilised if required.
- GP Practices had invested heavily in telephony, however the ambition of the Black Country Integrated Care Board is for patients to be able to access Primary care via multiple routes.
- There was high demand for housing locally, with 142 non-transfer applicants on the housing waiting list residing in Friar Park.
- The Council had nomination rights for 100% of new builds and 50% of properties being re-let, individuals would be nominated from the housing waiting list.
- The scheme had designated 25% of new homes as affordable units to ensure it was viable, additional affordable homes would increase the cost of the project.
- There were no plans to classify properties as 'first homes' as this would reduce the number of individuals nominated for a property from the housing waiting list.
- A Local Lettings Policy would be explored that could allow deviation from the Council's Allocations Policy to best meet specific local needs.

- Ground inspections had identified heavy metals and other toxins in the soil, these contaminants would be removed and treated to meet Environment Agency standards.
- Proposals for community allotments were to be pursued subsequent to toxicology soil testing.
- Landscaping plans had included proposals for wildlife corridors and sustainable urban drainage to introduce wet areas to increase biodiversity.
- Vegetation barriers were considered beneficial to trap carbon and mitigate the impacts of air pollution.
- The traffic assessment conducted by a consultancy firm had calculated the increased journeys by using a national database based on similar urban communities.

The Board thanked attendees for contributing to the meeting and enabling an in-depth discussion to take place on the Friar Park Urban Village.

Resolved:-

- (1) that Cabinet consider in detail the following as part of the consideration of the Friar Park Urban Village Masterplan:-
 - (a) Air Quality
 - (b) The methodology used to determine projected additional demand on the highway network
 - (c) Clarity around the provision of Affordable Housing in the development
 - (d) Further detail around the provision of electric vehicle charging points
- (2) that, if Cabinet approves the Friar Park Urban Village Masterplan, it be requested to ensure that:-
 - (a) the use of a Local Lettings Policy on the site be explored;

- (b) regular air quality monitoring is undertaken as the development progresses and once it is complete;
- (c) different options to utilise appropriate vegetation to help address air pollution is considered for the site.

12/23 Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

The Board noted its Work Programme for 2022/2023 and received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

Meeting ended at 6:41pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk