

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

16 November 2022 at 5.00pm
in Committee Room 1 - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

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

Officers: Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth), Andy Miller (Strategic Planning and Transport Manager), Rina Rahim (Towns Fund Programme Manager), Wayne Moore (Planning Assistant), Alex Goddard (Democratic Services Officer) and John Swann (Democratic Services Officer).

37/22 **Election of Chair**

In the absence of the Chair and Vice- Chair at this point in the meeting members were requested to elect a chair for the meeting.

Resolved that Councillor J Giles be elected to the Chair for this meeting.

38/22 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simms (Chair), Gavan and Owen.

39/22 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

40/22 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022 are confirmed as a correct record.

41/22 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

42/22 **Towns Fund Update**

Further to Minutes Nos. 31/21 (30 September 2022), 23/22 (10 March 2022) and 34/22 (14 July 2022), the Board received an update in relation to the **Towns Fund**.

All 16 projects in Sandwell had been approved by Government, with payments for 2022/23 having been received by the Council as the Accountable Body. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities regularly received financial profiles and returns for this period were due to be signed off by the Section 151 Officer for submission by 16 December 2022.

The Towns Fund Project Manager outlined that the programme was time limited, running until March 2026. She further provided a summary of progress for the three towns in Sandwell that had been selected to benefit from the Towns Fund:-

- West Bromwich projects had progressed well, with works currently underway in the town centre (Urban Greening project) and construction to commence shortly at sites including the Sandwell Mechanical Engineering Centre.
- Smethwick Connected had delivered Phase 3 on time and on budget; with other Smethwick projects having incurred timescale slippages due to difficulties acquiring the sites.
- Rowley Regis projects had progressed successfully, with design works for Blackheath Bus Interchange having commenced in June 2022 and the estimated completion date for the Satellite Education Hub was May 2024.

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

- The Towns Fund project had worked alongside the Asset Team, to identify sites that could benefit from Regeneration within timescales.
- Penalty clauses were contained within the contracts between the Council and external project applicants to safeguard the investment made by the Council. The Board requested a copy of these penalty clauses to be circulated.
- Slight delays had occurred in developing the Midland Met Learning Campus due to design issues, with the architect replaced in September 2022.
- Utilisation of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) typically would result in timescale slippage of longer than 12 months, but remained an option in certain circumstances to acquire sites.
- Smethwick Connected would provide an uninterrupted cycle path from Birmingham to Oldbury.

Members agreed that a future Towns Fund Update would be brought back to Scrutiny in due course.

Resolved that a Towns Fund Update be brought back to a future meeting of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board.

43/22

Black Country Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

The Board received the Report on the **Black Country Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (BCLCWIP)** which was due to go out to public consultation.

The BCLCWIP had aimed to double the number of journeys made via bicycle by 2025, and following consultation and subject to Cabinet approval, was due to be published in Spring 2023.

The Board heard that the BCLCWIP would sit alongside the existing Sandwell Local CWIP (See Minute No. 18/19 (10 October 2019)) and the West Midlands regional plan, complementing existing cycle infrastructure, having the

intention for routes to be used for commuting purposes as well as for leisure cyclists.

Sandwell had one of the highest rates of non-car ownership nationwide, with 34% of households not having access to a car. The borough was also the sixth worst area for youth obesity. The draft proposals aimed to tackle this, with guidance received from Central Government that cycle routes were to be segregated from other road users to encourage their use.

There was a need to modernise cycle routes in Sandwell, with new routes having to be well-surfaced and illuminated, however it was accepted that wildlife was impacted by artificial light.

The following was noted in response to members' comments and questions:-

- Members may benefit from a site visit to the proposed cycle routes, in particular Sandwell Cycle Route – Friar Park to West Bromwich due to the proximity to Sandwell Valley Park.
- The RSPB and the Wildlife Trust were consulted on all routes through nature areas.
- Linking up cycle routes to the existing West Midlands Hire Bike scheme may increase usage.
- Exploration of how to enable bikes to be accessible to those with disabilities could promote inclusion.
- Long term planning needs included responsive maintenance, cleansing of cycle path surfaces and vegetation management.
- National Highways would only adopt a cycle route if built to appropriate standard and specification.
- Enforcement powers with regards to cycle lanes rested only with the Police at present.

(Councillors Taylor (Vice- Chair) and Fenton entered the meeting during consideration of this item)

(Councillors Z Hussain, Kaur and Rahman left the meeting during consideration of this item)

44/22

Cabinet Forward Plan and Work Programme

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

Meeting ended at 6:26pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk