

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**9 February 2023 at 5.00pm
in Committee Room 2 - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

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

Officers: Tammy Stokes (Service Manager - Spatial Planning and Growth), Andy Miller (Strategic Planning and Transport Manager), Samantha Holder (Senior Planner), Alex Goddard (Democratic Services Officer) and John Swann (Democratic Services Officer).

1/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simms (Chair) and Abrahams.

2/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

3/23 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 are confirmed as a correct record.

4/23 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

Friar Park Urban Village

The Board received a report in relation to the Masterplan proposals for a Friar Park Urban Village.

The proposals outlined the largest development in Sandwell, with up to 630 new homes with approximately 10 hectares of public open space (which represented a net increase).

The Service Manager - Spatial Planning and Growth provided the Board with an overview of the consultation activity that had taken place on the proposals, which included:-

- A dedicated website for the consultation with an online form for residents to complete to share their views;
- Two drop-in sessions, held on a Friday and a Saturday at the Millennium Centre which was adjacent to the development site;
- Promotion of the consultation campaign via Council social media posts and a letter drop to every household in Friar Park as well as a neighbouring estate;
- A joint press release with the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The Board was advised that 57 responses were received to the consultation. It was acknowledged that whilst this number was low, the site had been allocated for residential redevelopment since 2004.

In general respondents to the consultation were supportive of the proposals, but not entirely, with a number of concerns highlighted including:-

- The existing community centre that serves the local area, the Millennium Centre, was not large enough to serve an additional 630 homes.
- School and GP provision were felt by respondents to currently be inadequate, even without the development moving forward.

The Board noted that the draft Masterplan had been amended taking into account the feedback that had been received during the consultation. This included allocation of

space to potentially expand the Millennium Centre as well as changes to the layout to address concerns around specific elements such as preventing access by trail bikes which was an issue for residents in the Friar Park ward.

Members stated that they had been contacted by a local campaign group which had set out its concerns including around the contamination of the site and the environmental impact.

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

- In addition to officers from the Regeneration and Growth directorate, officers from Highways were also in attendance at the drop-in sessions.
- Members sought clarity around how it had been determined that no additional schools would be required for a development of 630 houses.
- A GP practice had been identified in Friar Park where there could be capacity for expansion if it was determined by the NHS to be required.
- The Council's Library Service had requested, in the event that the Millennium Centre was expanded, for a permanent library space to build on the current arrangements for a small temporary library in the Centre.
- Due to the nature of the proposals, including a detailed plan, it wasn't possible to carry out consultation by telephone.
- Some site investigations have taken place which confirmed the site was contaminated. The ground condition would remain in a contaminated state if the development did not proceed and remediation works took place.
- Further details around the provision of Affordable Housing on the site and the projected impact on waiting lists for Council housing was requested.

Members felt that in order to identify recommendations to Cabinet on the Friar Park Urban Village Masterplan it was necessary to arrange an additional meeting of the Board to include a wide range of input from technical officers and partners.

Resolved that an additional meeting of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board be arranged to consider the Friar Park Urban Village in more detail, including input from a range of Council service areas as well as partners.

(Councillor Gavan entered the meeting during consideration of this item)

6/23 **Sandwell Development Plan**

The Board received a presentation on the Sandwell Development Plan, which formed part of the hierarchy of plans that directed and informed what was built and where.

Every local authority had a Development Plan, which usually covered a 15-year period although it was possible to address emerging issues through partial reviews of the Plan.

The Board noted that there were two tiers of plan; the Black Country Core Strategy which set out broad locations (not identify specific sites) and the Site Allocations and Area Action Plans that did identify sites for specific purposes. Underneath these documents were a range of supplementary planning documents that provided guidance on issues.

It was reported that Sandwell had an identified need for 27,873 new homes, however the Urban Capacity Study had indicated only 9,158 could be delivered. Originally it had been proposed to address this through the Black Country Plan under the Localism Act 2011 Duty to Co-operate. The Black Country Plan had identified infrastructure requirements, addressed climate matters and supported a range of sub-regional and regional strategic aims. However due to the insurmountable need to build some of the houses required for the Black Country on Green Belt land Dudley MBC had withdrawn for political reasons.

As a sub-regional plan was no longer possible, it was now urgent for Sandwell to review its own local plan. Consultation had commenced during the week of this meeting and would run until 20 March 2023. Following this a draft plan would be prepared which would again be subject to further consultation. After this a final plan would be developed, with consultation anticipated to take place in the second half of 2024. After this the plan would be submitted to the Secretary of State who would arrange for the 'Examination in Public'. Timescales for that element of the process would depend on availability of the Planning Inspectorate. It was estimated that adoption of the Sandwell Local Plan would be in late 2025/early 2026.

At this early stage of the process the Council was seeking views of local people, businesses and stakeholders on what the key land issues were for Sandwell. Officers highlighted the importance of this and asked members to speak to residents and encourage them to submit their views.

There was a Call for Sites exercise taking place, to allow anyone to identify sites that could be potentially redeveloped. These would then be assessed. Although there was a size threshold for inclusion in the plan (no housing sites less than 10 units, no employment land smaller than 4.5 hectares), the Council still welcomed all suggestions as they could all contribute to the authority's targets for housing and employment land provision.

The Board also noted an overview of the programme of planning reform being undertaken by the Government. It had been stressed that although there would be change, local authorities should not delay reviewing local plans and should continue to carry out reviews under existing arrangements. Sandwell had made the decision to continue with the review, although other councils had paused activity.

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

- At the current stage of the consultation it was not proposed to hold any drop-in events, however at the next stage this would be arranged.

- As part of the Call for Sites exercise all land owners that submitted to the Black County Plan would be contacted as their situations may have changed.
- If the public knew of sites that were underused or derelict and let the Council know they could be assessed, the land owner could potentially be worked with and the site could be considered for allocation.
- Education, Health, Public Health were statutory consultees. Licensing was also consulted.
- The basic definition of Affordable Housing was set nationally and could not be altered locally. The Council could look at percentages of Affordable Housing it would seek on developments, however it was acknowledged that this could impact on the viability of sites – land remediation costs in Sandwell were often high due to the area’s industrial heritage and increased Affordable Housing requirements could place further pressure on developers which could make developments economically unviable.
- The impact of building large facilities such as Police Stations or NHS facilities on surrounding areas needed to be considered.
- It was intended to include draft inset areas which looked at specific centres and the issues particular to them. This would vary from centre to centre and if land use provided a solution policy could be developed to address it.
- Some matters, such as surface materials, would need to be addressed through Design Codes and were not the remit of the Local Plan.
- The importance of linking with the Local Transport Plan (West Midlands Combined Authority) was vital.

The Board thanked officers for attending the meeting.

(Councillor Z Hussain left the meeting during consideration of this item and did not return)

7/23

Cabinet Forward Plan and Work Programme

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

Meeting ended at 6:39pm

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