

Minutes of Rowley Regis Town Deal Board

Thursday, 31 August 2023 at 1.30 pm
This meeting will be held online.

Present: A Eggington (Chair), J Thompson (Vice-Chair), Cllr D Millard, Cllr V Smith, D Harrold, J Morris MP and S Griffiths

Also present: A Miller, J Dennison, J Langford and R Rahim

11 Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed board members to the meeting before outlining the agenda items for discussion.

12 Apologies

Apologies were received from the following board members: -

- B Arnold – Interim SMBC Director of Finance/ S151 Officer
- Cllr J Webb – Rowley Regis Elected Member
- Cllr P Hughes – Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth
- D Downs – West Midlands Police
- S Shingadia – Transport for West Midlands
- L Bird - SCVO
- M Wildman – Sandwell Leisure Trust
- S Rutter – Barnardos
- S Shingadia – Transport for West Midlands
- T McGovern – Director of Regeneration and Growth



13 Minutes and Action Log

Minutes

Board members agreed minutes of the Local Board meeting held on 25 May 2023 were a correct record.

Action Log

Updates recorded on the attached Action Log.

14 Declarations of Interests

The Chair asked board members to raise any declarations of interests. None were forthcoming. The chair asked board members to raise any declarations during discussions should they need to.

15 Governance Arrangements

Following the discussion at the last Town Deal Board, the Terms of Reference was updated and recirculated to board members as part of the agenda pack for the meeting. The chair confirmed the changes made to the Scheme of Delegation is now implemented. In addition, the West Bromwich Town Deal Board Membership list was updated to reflect new members of the board.

16 Project Reporting

The Chair introduced this item by confirming the approach to discussion, which was to split this item into two sections - Change Requests and Project Progress.

Change Requests

Canal Network Connectivity - The Programme Management Team received a request from Canal and River Trust to seek approval for a deferment of budget into 2024/2025 to enable additional access improvement works to be undertaken.

The project lead, James Dennison, informed board members that co-funding was secured, funded by Sustrans which enabled additional works to be undertaken including biodiversity enhancements and path widening. As a result, there is a small underspend in the project. The exact amount is still to be determined, pending submission of final accounts from the contractor.

The proposal put forward to board members is to allocate this underspend towards the replacement of the deck of Wrights Bridge, located on the Dudley no2 canal in Rowley Regis. This funding will contribute towards the costs of design works and capital construction costs. The balance of budget would be underwritten by Canal & River Trust. The bridge is an important crossing for residents who can easily access Old Hill Train Station by crossing it but has been closed for several years due to safety concerns.

The works are entirely consistent with the existing project business case which focused on improving the towpath and access points to increase connectivity. However, this will require an amendment to the spend profile as works will take place in 2024/2025 whereas spend is currently forecast in 2023/2024.

The chair thanked James for presenting the adjustment request and asked board members if they would like to raise any comments or questions. The discussion included: -

Clarification was sought to confirm if Wrights Bridge is the foot bridge between the new housing estate and Station Road. Board members were informed that this is correct. The board member then commented on how including this work is good news as residents have been asking for access across the public right of way.

A comment was raised regarding the existing works being completed on Station Road for another bridge and asked if there were any dependencies between the two. Board members were informed that this work is not dependent on any other works being completed on Station Road.

A question was raised regarding the lifetime of the bridge being in public use following works, in terms of what the average lifespan is from a health and safety perspective. The project lead could not advise specifically, however offered to seek professional opinion and report this back to the board.

A question was raised for the project lead to confirm what works were included in the additional biodiversity enhancements. Board members were informed the original project proposal included cutting back vegetation on the Old Mainline canal by 1 meter, however by securing co-funding this has enabled the team to cut back by approx. 2.5 meters in areas. In addition, coir rolls have been installed to support wildlife and future vegetation, pollination etc.

A board member informed the board that the canal improvements were complimented during a meeting they attended earlier that day and how the works have improved staff wellbeing. The board member commented on how great it is to see the project is being noticed and supporting communities as per the projects ambition.

The chair thanked board members for their comments and questions and echoed the compliment that was highlighted. The chair also expressed how great it was for DLUHC Towns Fund Central Team who joined a site visit in June, to see the works underway.

The chair summarised the proposal put forward and asked board members if they were in support of the change request. No board members raised objections.

Agreed: Programme Management Office to update the financial profile and for Canal Network Connectivity project to proceed with works set out on in the agreed proposal.

Agreed: Programme Management Office to update DLUHC Advisor with the updated financial profile for Canal Network Connectivity in line with the agreed proposal.

Satellite Education Hub - The Programme Management Team received a request from Sandwell College to change the project title and remove the outcome of delivering 100 x Traineeships, replacing it with a new outcome.

The proposal includes a revised title where the facility would be known as 'Sandwell College: Cradley Heath Skills Centre'. The revised name describes where the facility is, what it is and who runs the facility.

In regard to removing the outcome to support 100 x Traineeships per year, this change has been requested as the Department for Education Funding Policy no longer recognises Traineeships as a standalone fundable learning pathway and will be subsumed into other existing pathways. It will not be possible to recruit to and/or identify learners a 'trainee' in the future.

As a result, the proposal is to replace the traineeships outcome with 100 x 16-24 year old NEETs supported, with 75% of learners moving onto progression, further learning, employment etc. In essence the delivery model remains the same.

In regard to progress, planning permission has been granted and the project team are currently engaging with the tender process. The ambition is to complete the tender exercise by December 2023 with ground works commencing March 2024. The construction programme would then proceed for 12 - 15 months. The intention is to complete further consultative works with stakeholders once the build contract is established.

The Chair thanked the project lead for providing rationale for the project adjustment request before commenting on the proposals, of which the Chair was supportive.

A comment was raised regarding the parking provision for the facility and how discussions have taken place at previous board meetings around this. The project lead was asked to summarise the agreed parking provisions now planning has been granted. Board members were informed the College have extended the number of bays on the site from 8 to 12 and will include drop off bays. The project will encourage public transport use. In addition, the courses on offer would be more sensitive timetabling around the use of the building e.g. Not all courses will be during peak times. An analysis would also be undertaken e.g. after 1 year of operation.

A question was raised for the project lead to confirm what proportion of funding is central government vs WMCA funding. The project lead could not confirm the exact proportion and agreed to take this action away and report back to board members.

Clarification was sought that the SEND provision would remain. Board members were informed 50 x new places for High Needs Students per year remains as an outcome.

A question was raised about how the college would encourage public transport and if this would include railway in addition to bus. Board members were informed there are certain courses where the college pay for train passes, however this is limited but remains as an option to look into over the next 12 months or so.

The chair asked board members if they were in support of the change request. No board members raised objections.

Agreed: Programme Management Office to submit a Project Adjustment Request to DLUHC for Satellite Education Hub project to include change of project title and changes made to outcomes.

Action: Simon Griffiths to confirm the what proportion of funding is central government vs WMCA funding and report this back to board members.

Blackheath Bus Interchange and Public Realm Project Update

Board members were informed of the projects current position following public consultation. The discussion included: -

Some stakeholders have raised concerns with the concept design of the scheme. The scheme is set to proceed to detailed design, however there are elements where key stakeholders would be affected. The ambition was to meet with stakeholders to work together and make amendments to the plan, to ensure they are happy with the design, however engagement has not been successful. As a result, the proposal is for the project team to meet with Cabinet Members to discuss how they wish to take this project forward.

The Chair asked board members to raise comments and questions. The discussion included: -

Board members were informed a petition was handed to an elected member which will go to the petitions committee in due course. The chair expressed although this is not good news, the petition may be useful for the team to understand their thoughts and clarify points of concern.

A question was asked if the project lead knew what the principle concerns/ objections were focused around. Board members were informed they were primarily from market traders and the ability to access the Market Hall from the front of the building (Market Place). Confirmation was provided that access would not be lost but would be less convenient. The project team appreciate the difficulties of traders bringing goods into the building from the rear, which would be required under the current design. To redesign this to enable deliveries from the front would significantly change the scheme that would impact outputs.

The chair asked for confirmation of the petitions process. Board members were informed the petition would be presented to the Petition Committee (held early September). Officers would review and attempt to action the concerns raised and return to the petition committee who will make a decision.

A concern was raised regarding how the project has had challenges since submitting the FBC and no significant progress has been made since which presents a risk to not delivering the project and the possibility of not utilising funds. A number of board members agreed.

The Chair asked the Programme Management Office to confirm the route if the project does not proceed. Board members were informed from a DLUHC perspective, other towns have gone back to DLUHC where projects have not been viable to progress and funds have been diverted to existing projects or have been allocated for a new project.

DLUHC are consider projects on a case by case basis but this does depend on what the Town Deal Board and the Accountable Body proposal including what impact this would have, ensuring delivery within the towns fund programme timeline. Where a new project is proposed and is ready to progress and can be delivered within the programme timeline, this would be looked on favourably.

The chair asked for guidance on a deadline to decide if this project proceeds. Board members were advised if detailed design is not underway by November 2023, delivery within the programme timeline would not be achievable.

A comment was raised in terms of Town Centre progress, that if this project does not proceed there is a high chance that no progress will be made in the town centre in the future.

A question was asked in regard to if the project team have gone out to meet traders and business owners and how this was received. It was confirmed a public consultation event was held at the market hall, where engagement with traders took place and face to face meetings have taken place in the past.

A question was posed for James Morris MP and if James received comments about the scheme. James confirmed comments have been received and are of a divided opinion.

A risk was highlighted to the board that until the detailed design work is complete, the project costs are unknown. The current funding profile is based on the scheme submitted in the FBC, however impact of inflation on costs present a high risk that the project is un-fundable.

The chair reminded board members of the origin of the Towns Fund Programme and the Programme Management Office if there are alternative options that have been considered. Board members were informed other potential regeneration opportunities are being explored, however these have not yet gone into any detail until discussions have been held with market traders.

The Chair suggested scheduling a meeting early October to decide if the project proceeds and discuss alternative options for the funding.

Action: PMO to schedule October 2023 Board Meeting to focus on Blackheath Bus Interchange Project.

Project Reporting

To receive an update on project progress and monitoring information for the period of April – June 2023.

Board members received Item 6 - West Bromwich Town Deal Board Reporting April – June 2023 prior to the board meeting. This appendix was shared on screen to provide an update on project progress.

The chair asked board members if they wish to raise any comments or queries. None were forthcoming.

17 Forward Plans

DLUHC Site Visit

A site visit was held with Sandwell's DLUHC Advisor and their Central Team managing the Towns Fund Programme in June. This was their second visit to Sandwell following a visit held in 2022. Our DLUHC advisor who visited in 2022 attended and could see the progress made within the year.

Future site visits will be scheduled and board members will be informed/ invited.

Interest has been received from Rowley Regis Ward Members to see projects. At present, Britannia Park and Canal Network projects are on site therefore a visit will be planned for 18 September 2023. Board members will receive an invite in due course.

Press Release Forward Plan

The Press release forward plan schedule was shared with board members in the meeting's agenda pack and discussed with board members. No comments were forthcoming.

18 Any other Business

No other business to raise.

19 Closing Remarks

The Chair thanked board members for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

Meeting closed at 2:15pm.

20 Rowley Regis Town Deal Board Action Log

Contact: town_deal@sandwell.gov.uk

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Rowley Regis Town Deal Board Action Log

Open Actions

Date	Description	Responsible Officer(s)	Update
31.08.23	Simon Griffiths to confirm the what proportion of funding is central government vs WMCA funding and report this back to board members.	Simon Griffiths	
31.08.23	PMO to schedule October 2023 Board Meeting to focus on Blackheath Bus Interchange Project.	Rina Rahim	
23.02.23	PMO to progress fixed exhibitions further.	PMO	Ongoing Publicity for projects

Closed Actions

Date Opened	Date Closed	Description	Responsible Officer(s)	Update
25.05.23	31.08.23	PMO to set up introduction meeting between Chair and newly elected members	PMO	Complete.
25.05.23	31.08.23	PMO to invite new board members to future meetings.	PMO	Complete.
25.05.23	31.08.23	PMO to share Satellite Hub papers to MP J Morris in the next 2 weeks.	PMO	Complete
23.02.23	31.08.23	PMO to circulate material/reports from Public Health in relation to benefits of cycling when available.	PMO	Complete
23.02.23	25.05.23	PMO to circulate feedback from consultations.	PMO	Complete
23.02.23	25.05.23	Keep Youngs Persons representative as an Agenda item for the next board meeting	PMO	Complete Shape conference in June and PMO will be attending. Will update at next meeting
24.11.22	23.02.23	Kelly Thomas to liaise with Chair of Young Leavers Programme and explore interests from Sandwell Council apprentices to see if they wish to join the Town Deal Board for Rowley Regis, West Bromwich and Smethwick.	Kelly Thomas	Complete
24.11.22	23.02.23	Board members to contact the Programme Management Office with details of incentives on offer to help create a package for young people to encourage their commitment to the Town Deal Board. (town_deal@sandwell.gov.uk)	All Board Members	Complete

Closed Actions

Date Opened	Date Closed	Description	Responsible Officer(s)	Update
08.07.22	24.11.22	PMO to contact board members to confirm their interest to continue as a board member.	R Rahim/ E Parkes	Complete
08.07.22	24.11.22	Terms of Reference to be updated to include 50% attendance annually is mandatory and would trigger individual board member review.	R Rahim/ E Parkes	Complete
08.07.22	24.11.22	Jude Thompson to contact relevant individuals at BCC to explore potential membership suggestions.	J Thompson	Complete
08.07.22	24.11.22	Debbie Downs to also review from a WMP perspective to understand whether they have any local contacts.	D Downs	Complete
08.07.22	24.11.22	PMO to circulate short survey to capture board member preference on board meeting day/ time.	R Rahim/ E Parkes	Complete