

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

8 November 2023 at 6.02pm
in the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Owen (Vice-Chair in the Chair);
Councillors Ashraf, Davies, Dhatt, Hemingway,
Hussain, Rahman and J Singh.

Officers: Andy Miller (Strategic Planning and Transportation
Manager); Samantha Holder (Senior Planner); Simon
Chadwick (Highway Network Development and Road
Safety Manager); Tony McGovern (Director of
Regeneration and Growth); Stephnie Hancock (Deputy
Democratic Services Manager) and Anthony Lloyd
(Democratic Services Officer).

35/23 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors
Akpoteni, Kordala and Taylor.

36/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

37/23 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 03
October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

38/23

Additional Item of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

39/23

West Midlands Local Transport Plan

The West Midlands Local Transport Plan was a statutory document that would be prepared by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) which acted as the Integrated Transport Authority. The plan covered the seven West Midlands metropolitan local authorities and therefore, formed the adopted transport strategy for Sandwell.

In 2021, the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Green Paper was published and consulted on which helped inform the approach that the new LTP would take. The LTP Core Strategy was then consulted on in 2022, which set out the overarching approach and principles.

In response to the challenging social, economic and environmental issues faced by many local authorities, the LTP was framed around 5 “motives for change” to better support inclusive growth so that as many people as possible would be able to shape and benefit from transport in the West Midlands. The 5 motives were: tackling the climate emergency, becoming more active, supporting vocal communities and places, creating a fair society and sustaining economic success.

One of the most important aims of the Combined Authority was to connect people to opportunities. It was highlighted that the amount of opportunities accessible to those by cars far exceeded opportunities accessible via public transport. Decarbonisation was also included in the plan which set a target of becoming “net zero” by 2041; this was nine years ahead of the UK “net zero” target of 2050.

Members were minded that three vital outcomes were essential to help achieve the aims set out in the plan:-

- improve accessibility
- reduce traffic; and

- electrify the transport system

Both local and national policy was required to ensure that all authorities were moving in the same direction to improve transport access and usage for those who did not have alternatives. It was important to understand the challenges faced by residents and how travel behaviours can be changed. The WMCA was working with Sandwell Council to assist in public and officer engagement to review how the project pipeline works would impact on transport principles. The WMCA also assisted in clearly identifying priorities to ensure funding was received and used on projects across the West Midlands so that all works linked to one another.

The final development of the area strategies and implementation plans was due to conclude in December 2023 and the consultation engagement plan was due to be discussed by the Strategic Transport Board in early 2024. It was predicted that the final plan would be presented to WMCA Board for adoption in late 2024.

Following questions from members, the following points were made:-

- the plans would include investigations into the disproportionality negative impact on travel across the West Midlands Region;
- investment in cars made it difficult to persuade travellers to move to public transport however, making travel safer, more efficient and more reliable would help encourage people to use public transport;
- although plans were in place to help relieve “pinch-points” on Sandwell’s road network, previous experience highlighted that the capacity instead increases, re-introducing the problem later down the line;
- the target year for an all-electric bus fleet was 2030 with additional hydrogen vehicles being introduced for the Sprint network;
- the Government scheme to cap adult fares to £2 nation-wide had been extended until 2024 however, WMCA would consider the potential issues arising when this scheme ends;

- the plan would help justify the appropriate mode of public transport is in the right place taking into account costs, viability and time constraints;
- consultation would aim to target a vast array of groups to ensure that representations were fair and reflective of the area in question;
- multiple methods of consultation would be utilised including face-to-face discussions and simpler less technical documents would be provided to promote clarity of the topics.

Although the public had not yet been consulted on what journey routes were most desired, the WMCA was attempting to understand what the key issues were and how they could be fixed. Members were also minded that it was impossible to satisfy all route requests due to the limited funding available to operate the public transport network. Funding issues had impacted work on the bus improvement plan and officers highlighted that there could potentially be a case for franchising in the West Midlands. This would have given the local authority greater ability to specify where routes would go however, this would pose a greater risk on the local authority, especially when considering the difficulties of keeping within the financial constraints.

40/23

Sandwell Local Plan - Consultation on the Draft Sandwell Local Plan

It was a statutory requirement for every Local Planning Authority to have an up-to-date Local Plan. Following the discontinuation of the development of the Black Country Plan in 2022, Sandwell Council was required to produce its own plan with aim of adoption by the end of 2025.

There were three statutory consultation periods required as part of the production and adoption of the local plan; the draft plan was currently in the options and issues consultation stage; this was referred to as Regulation 18. The Consultation would run for 6 weeks until 18 December 2023.

The plan was comprised of the spatial vision and strategy, the development strategy, the Local Plan policies, the site allocations and the policies map for the borough. It was also

highlighted that, following each consultation stage, the Local Plan policy would undergo several sustainability appraisals.

The main aim of the Sandwell Local Plan was to keep a healthy balance between housing provision and employment growth whilst remaining realistic and adhering to the Council's climate change commitments.

Housing need was determined by the standard method set by the Government. This indicated that an additional 29,773 homes needed to be provided across Sandwell over the period 2022-2041. Sandwell was only able to accommodate approximately 11,167 new dwellings during the same period. Therefore, this left the Council with a substantial shortfall in housing supply of approximately 18,606.

As Sandwell was an historic industrial area with various ground condition issues, the identification of new sites was difficult. New land was limited and due to Sandwell's relatively small amount of Green Belt and its significant constraints, such as Nature Conservation protection and Flood Zone restrictions, the Council would not be allocating any sites within the Green Belt.

In order to try to address some of the housing shortfall, the Council had been continuing with the Duty to Cooperate discussions with neighbouring authorities that were started as part of the Black Country Plan. Discussions with South Staffordshire, Shropshire, Lichfield and Telford and Wrekin councils had yielded potential housing and employment contributions of 295 homes and an amount of employment land yet to be determined. Despite these contributions, a substantial shortfall would remain.

In order to meet local needs, the Local Plan required that a sufficient proportion of new homes provided over the plan period should be affordable. The draft policy stated that the minimum proportion of affordable housing that should be provided, subject to viability, was 25%. In addition, 25% of the affordable homes required by the policy would be First Homes tenure, as defined in national guidance.

There were a significant number of House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) properties in Sandwell and it was recognised that an over-concentration of HMO properties

could lead to a loss of family-sized units in an area where this was the type of house in greatest need. This posed a serious issue for maintaining a mixed sustainable housing offer across Sandwell. The proposed HMO policy introduced a 10% threshold for HMOs which meant that no more than 10% of houses within a 100m radius of the planning application site could be HMOs. There was also a proposed new policy to protect family housing and prevent subdivision and conversion to small HMOs.

A total of 185 hectares of employment land was required. Only 42 Hectares was available to the Council, of which, only 29 Hectares was vacant. This was a significant shortfall and therefore, via the duty to operate, the Council would need to look to other authorities to assist in supporting employment land needs.

Work around regeneration town centres was also considered within the plan. The main priority for Sandwell was to ensure that town centres remained focused on serving the needs of their communities by delivering a balanced range of commercial, business, service and residential provisions. Policies on limiting hot food takeaways and gambling services were also highlighted to the Board to promote health and wellbeing in the borough.

Additional, plans were also place that identified key transport priorities in the area to improve the fundamentals of Sandwell's transport network. This included the potential for extending the light rail network and also introducing bus services in key corridors.

Furthermore, the plan also committed to meeting the Council's biodiversity duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) by delivering a Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 10% across the borough.

Following site assessments by officers, members were minded that several key sites were to be noted:-

- Brandhall Golf Course;
- Lyng Industrial Estate – allocated for employment with support to change to residential if future viability issues were overcome;

- Lion Farm Playing Fields – allocated for mixed use with a proportion of the site being retained as open space including football pitches.

The plan existed under the old planning system and not under the newer system that been considered by parliament. Following consultation, representations would be reviewed, and amendments would be made to the plan where required. The plan would then be submitted to the Secretary of State before further consultation which would be considered by the Secretary of State and not the Council.

Following discussion from members, the following points were made:-

- a record of contaminated land was kept by the Council and the majority of funding to treat the contaminated areas was obtained via the West Midlands Combined Authority;
- supporting documents to the plan would support the need for the introduction of compulsory infrastructure such as schools;
- separate Council policies were in place to ensure that new developments were accessible and accommodating;
- any shop operating a takeaway element which was ancillary would not be covered by the policy and would be regarded as a restaurant;
- 25% affordable homes was difficult to achieve and therefore, any figure higher would not be viable;
- officers would consider co-operation ownership models and the social value that they delivered.

Officers were thanked for their hard work on creating the Draft Sandwell Local Plan.

Highway Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030 – Report of the Working Group

At its meeting on 18 January 2022, Council requested the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board to conduct a review into the Strategic Road Safety Plan. The Strategic Road Safety Plan covered the period 2017-2022 and was therefore due for renewal.

On 23 October 2023, members of the working group, alongside officers from the Council's Highways department, met for a final time to consider the contents of the Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030.

The Working group had noted the importance of ensuring the safety of roads and how enabling sustainable mobility played an important role in providing for basic humans needs as well as helping mitigate the impact of climate change. It was highlighted that a "Safe System" approach was built on the principle of Vision Zero whereby no one should be killed or seriously injured whilst using the road network. It also recognised that human bodies were fragile, and minds are prone to making mistakes. Consequently, a Safe System approach considered road safety to be a responsibility shared by all those that use the road, those that design, manage, construct and maintain the network, those that enforce highway laws and those who provided post-crash care.

The new Sandwell Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030 would continue to utilise and build on the previously successful Sandwell Safe System approach to support and complement the refreshed West Midlands Regional Road Safety Strategy at a local level. Sandwell's new Strategic Road Safety Plan would stretch its casualty reduction targets to complement the regional and UN aspiration, as well as embracing Vision Zero. It was deemed unrealistic to expect that Vision Zero could be achieved within the timeframe of this new strategy, but it was noted that it was vital that the right building blocks be put in place for the future.

The findings of the Board would be noted by Cabinet when considered the approval of the Road Safety Plan in December 2023.

Resolved that the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board endorses the Highway Strategic Road Safety Plan 2024-2030 to Cabinet.

42/23 **Cabinet Forward Plan and Board Work Programme**

The Board noted the Cabinet Forward Plan and Board Work Programme.

Meeting ended at 8.12pm

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