

**Cabinet – 19 October 2015**

**Willenhall Economic and Development Programme**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Andrew: Economy Infrastructure and Development

**Service:** Economy and Environment: Development and Delivery

**Wards:** Short Heath and Willenhall South

**Key decision:** No

**Forward plan:** No

**1. Summary**

1.1 This report outlines the proposal to develop a medium-term programme of targeted regeneration activity for Willenhall which might result in the creation of an investment plan. This would build on previous investment delivered, current local need and the potential opportunities that exist and interventions necessary to attract and support further investment and development to continue job and wealth creation in the area.

1.2 It is proposed to undertake initial due diligence/scoping work for the area to understand the economic baseline, the impact of previous regeneration activity, and assess current needs and opportunities for intervention, the results from which will subsequently be reported back to Cabinet together with a targeted programme of regeneration activity to cover a period of up to 5 years. The scoping work will cover the boundary area shown in **Appendix A**. This is likely to include Willenhall District Centre and the key surrounding residential and industrial areas. This work will build upon the previous Strategic Regeneration Framework and draft Area Action Plan for Willenhall and the emerging borough-wide planning policy Site Allocation Document.

**2. Recommendations**

2.1 That Cabinet supports the intention to undertake a regeneration approach to Willenhall through a targeted programme of activity for up to a 5 year period.

2.2 That Cabinet authorises officers to undertake initial due diligence/scoping work in order to fully understand the current economic baseline, need and the impact of previous regeneration activity to inform the future work programme.

- 2.3 That Cabinet notes that a future report on the outcomes of the due diligence/scoping work together with a programme of targeted regeneration activity will come forward, and that the future report will include budgetary and resource implications for the delivery of the programme.

### **3. Report detail**

- 3.1 Willenhall has been the subject of a number of regeneration initiatives over many years. Most recently, the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF), which was approved by Cabinet on 22 March 2006, was to be delivered in partnership between the Council, Walsall Housing Group, and key stakeholders such as the local community, businesses and land owners.

- 3.2 The initial phase of work identified in the SRF, overseen by the Willenhall Project Reference Group, involved the preparation of an Area Action Plan (AAP) which would have formed part of the statutory development plan to guide the regeneration of the area over 10–15 years. Following local consultation, the first main element of 'Willenhall: the plan' was completed with 'the vision' document endorsed by Cabinet in April 2009. This document set out the baseline information for the area and the key issues influencing the plan, including the options to address constraints and opportunities and a draft spatial framework involving significant proposed land use change based on housing-led regeneration. However, due to a number of external factors, in particular the impact of the recession and the loss of resources, work on the AAP was suspended. Some of the information collected at the time, and responses received from stakeholders, have however been used to inform other regeneration and investment activities and planning policy. This includes for example, use of the information in the preparation of the emerging borough-wide Site Allocation Document (SAD) - as referenced in paragraph 3.4 - and the Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS). In the BCCS Willenhall is located within a Regeneration Corridor which focuses on providing a sustainable mix of high quality employment land and residential communities that is supported by local services and infrastructure.

- 3.3 Since this time there have however been a number of development and investment successes and on-going activities in Willenhall, including but not limited to:

- £30m Morrisons store development in the district centre and related S106 community arts project.
- £5.2m housing scheme on the former Josiah Parkes factory at Wood Street by Accord Group and Westbury Partnerships, in partnership with the Council and Homes and Communities Agency.
- 112 housing scheme at Spring Lane by Taylor Wimpey.
- £1m Willenhall Townscape Heritage Initiative funding improvements to 15 properties in the conservation area, including the Grade II listed Bell public house, and the Willenhall Heritage Trail.
- Carriageway resurfacing at Stafford Street / Union Street.

- Disposal of surplus Council owned sites, such as the former school sites at Clothier Street and Lakeside to support housing development.
- Commercial and industrial development in Ashmore Lake e.g. ambulance depot and training/office facilities, and Hewden's redeveloped office building.
- Willenhall Lock Project to commemorate those who worked / work within the lock industry.
- Business engagement with both independent retailers and strategic businesses to support and assist their sustainability and growth plans.
- Continued promotion of the town centre and addressing day-to-day issues through district centre management.
- Continued operation of the Willenhall market.

3.4 Despite these successes, and whilst Walsall town centre and other district centres across the borough continue to thrive and prosper from investment and development activities, Willenhall's distinct heritage and mixed land uses still present opportunities to boost the economy, development and environment of the area. Work on the emerging borough-wide Site Allocation Document identifies that Willenhall has the highest concentration of "Local Industry Consider for Release" sites – this being land allocated as "local quality industry" - that provides for the needs of locally based investment, but which is constrained and will be considered for release for other uses such as housing, provided that it is no longer needed for industry. In total Willenhall has approx. 22.6ha or 33% of the borough's "consider for release" sites. These sites are particularly focused within the east central area of Willenhall which has a concentration of mixed land uses and fragmented land ownership. The delivery of these sites as envisaged in the BCCS and SAD represents a significant challenge, in terms of scale, viability and ownership complexities. This level of change, which may require support to relocating or expanding businesses, may only be driven and delivered through public sector intervention and public-private partnerships.

3.5 To build on previous investment, maximise existing opportunities and co-ordinate comprehensive development and land use change, it is proposed to develop a medium-term programme (3-5 years) of targeted regeneration activity for Willenhall, which can also be used to seek funding interventions. If endorsed by Cabinet, it is proposed that this will commence with completing initial due diligence /scoping work for the boundary area shown in **Appendix A**, which will comprise of a review of the following key areas:

- Programmes and initiatives – Preparing a breakdown of the projects and investment levels that have been implemented, how the projects were achieved and defining measures of success and recorded outputs (e.g. job creation, business rates additionality, land/property redeveloped or brought back into use, number of homes delivered, etc).
- Site Allocation Document – Reviewing the Preferred Option consultation feedback to understand the endorsement or otherwise of the land use and transport proposals for Willenhall and how delivery of

these can be supported, particularly in providing certainty to businesses and the wider investment market, including housing providers and government agencies.

- Land Ownership and Future Plans – Recording and mapping Council and private assets, the extent of existing understanding around other public and private land ownership, their current planned development and investment intentions, and the implications for transport and other infrastructure of delivering planned investment.
- Business engagement – Identifying the key businesses and understanding what information is already held in terms of their growth proposals, breadth of current business engagement, future business needs in terms of sustainability, relocation or expansion, and assistance being given to address these needs.
- District Centre Management – Outline the achievements to date and the key issues, including engagement with the retail sector, the role of the Town Centre Partnership and key priorities such as delivery of an improved Willenhall Market.
- Public Intervention – Identify options for the public sector's role, powers available to aid delivery and resources required to successfully intervene.

3.6 On completion of this work it is proposed that the outcomes will be reported back to Cabinet together with a proposed programme of targeted regeneration activity to cover a period of up to 5 years. Such activities could include revisiting land owner and business engagement, tackling derelict and underutilised properties, progressing delivery of a new railway station, or exploring the use of regulatory powers such as a simplified planning regime or acquisition/compulsory purchase to assist in delivering the level of change envisaged in the BCCS and SAD. It is expected that a key element of the programme will also be to establish investment mechanisms for the delivery of the proposed economic growth activities.

3.7 To deliver the programme of targeted regeneration the report to Cabinet at the next stage will also need to consider and recommend options in terms of:

- Resource and budget – Staffing requirements to manage and lead the programme, for example through a dedicated resource or existing work programmes, in partnership with land owners, businesses and developer, agency and local investment market, as well as setting out cross-service support who will form a virtual team with the joint objective being to deliver the programme, for example involving Development Management, Strategic Transportation, Engineering & Transportation, Strategic housing, and Business Rates. This will need to take account of the work programme that has already been approved and is underway on statutory documents such as the Site Allocation Document.

- Delivery Governance – Roles of Members and officers in informing and delivering the programme and their linkage with existing groups and structures and reporting / decision making processes.
- Consultation – Identification of key stakeholders including businesses, landowners, partners, and local community and process/timing of engagement.

#### **4. Council priorities**

- 4.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2015-2019 seeks to improve lives and life chances for everyone who lives and works in the borough of Walsall and in so doing minimise the help that residents need from the state.

The proposal set out in this report seeks to support the delivery of the Council's priorities of:

- Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work, and,
- Creating Safe, Sustainable and Inclusive Communities

particularly within Willenhall, through the identification of regeneration opportunities to drive economic growth and job creation, enhance and sustain the district centre and diversify housing type and tenure. Whilst the programme of targeted regeneration activity for Willenhall will not be a formal plan as per the Local Planning Regulations, it will help to deliver the Site Allocation Document and adopted Black Country Core Strategy.

#### **5. Risk management**

- 5.1 There are no risks to manage in terms of undertaking the scoping due diligence work as part of the first stage of the proposal the authority for which is sought by this report. Risk management will be considered in relation to the outcomes of this work and the proposed targeted regeneration programme.

#### **6. Financial implications**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications relating to the first stage of the proposal in undertaking the due diligence work as this will be carried out internally by officers within Development and Delivery. Future financial implications arising from the outcomes and subsequent proposed programme of targeted regeneration will be considered and presented in a future Cabinet report: there is currently no provision within the Capital/Revenue Programmes for this and will therefore be a new funding requirement.

## **7. Legal implications**

7.1 There are currently no legal implications arising directly from this report.

## **8. Property implications**

8.1 There are currently no property implications arising directly from this report. Land and property implications in relation to the Council's portfolio in Willenhall will be considered as part of the initial due diligence work.

## **9. Health and wellbeing implications**

9.1 There are currently no direct health and well being implications arising directly from this report.

## **10. Staffing implications**

10.1 The initial due diligence work will be managed by officers within Development and Delivery – the staffing implications for which are currently under review - with support from other services areas and supplemented by external expertise where required. Future staffing implications will be considered once the programme of activity is known.

## **11. Equality implications**

11.1 At this stage of the proposal there are no immediate equality implications. Equality analysis, legal requirements and good practice issues will be considered throughout the project, and will include engagement and consultation where required.

## **12. Consultation**

12.1 At this stage of the proposal there are no consultation requirements. Engagement with appropriate forums/groups and wider consultation will be considered in relation to specific activities once known.

## **Background papers**

- Willenhall Strategic Regeneration Area and Area Action Plan, Cabinet report, 16 January 2008
- Willenhall: the plan, 'the vision', Cabinet report, 22 April 2009
- Willenhall: the plan, 'the vision', May 2009

## **Author**

Simon Tranter  
Head of Regeneration Development  
and Delivery

☎ 01922 654723

✉ [simon.tranter@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:simon.tranter@walsall.gov.uk)

Simon Neilson  
Executive Director



9 October 2015

Councillor Andrew  
Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder



9 October 2015

Boundary Area

