

Council – 19 September 2016

Progress Report of Councillor Jeavons, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration.

Putting partnership into action.

My Portfolio is responsible for wide range of services vital to the quality of life of residents throughout the borough including: Economic Development, regional and sub regional regeneration issues, physical development, town, district centres and markets, property and asset management, the Black Country Consortium, planning policy, strategic housing, transportation and highways, together with business liaison, support and skills. The department has a track record of innovation through partnership and I hope that this report demonstrates that and the commitment of the team to that success through partnership.

A strong Walsall economy is essential to the sustainability of our communities, and having a job is vital to the well being of anyone of working age. Over the past few months I am pleased to say that under our administration a number of significant projects have been completed and progress has been made on many more, offering the prospect of an improved economy and new jobs in the borough.

Most notably these include:

West Midlands Combined Authority

We have actively participated in the successful development of the now constituted West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). A successful first devolution deal has been negotiated with Government which is estimated to bring £8billion of investment into the region over the coming decades. The West Midlands Strategic Economic Plan has been adopted by the WMCA which provides the vision and economic policies to guide the region towards achieving significantly better economic prosperity and increasing our regional Gross Value Added by 5% above the national average by 2030.

Future devolution deals are being discussed and at present the WMCA is finalising the arrangements for a Mayoral Combined Authority subject to the outcome of recent public consultation and feedback from Government. Depending on this, it may be that a draft Mayoral Combined Authority Order could be presented back to Cabinet in October 2016.

As part of the ongoing dialogue with Government on future devolution deals, the Black Country has submitted its request for around £120million of Local Growth Funding as part of the 3rd round of Devolution Deals, as part of the first asks of Government by all three West Midlands Local Enterprise Partnerships through the Combined Authority.

Black Country Partnerships

The Black Country councils have successfully worked together in partnership for many years, and together with the Black Country Consortium have and will continue to achieve significant success.

Walsall played a key role in the formation of and is now acting as secretariat to the Black Country Joint Committee, which brings together the four Black Country Leaders so that joint decisions can be discussed and made.

Securing external resources is essential if we are to realise our ambitions, one key programme of funding that was created as part of the Devolution process is the Local Growth Deal. The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership was allocated £162.7 million through to 2021 to aid the creation of new quality jobs, develop / improve our infrastructure and increase housing numbers.

Walsall was appointed by the Joint Committee as Accountable Body for both the Local Growth Fund (LGF) and City Deal programmes, it's being proposed (at the 7th September meeting) that funding received from the Combined Authority is added to the remit of the Joint Committee.

The 2015/16 period was the first year of our LGF programme, Walsall in its role as Accountable Body successfully met its objectives by administering the governance arrangements and making payments for and claiming the full £29.95 million of LGF grant from government for the Black Country, of which £3.2m was invested in Walsall projects.

Walsall borough is and will continue to benefit significantly from the LGF programme, to date we have secured almost £75million, around £60million towards Junction 10 of the M6, funded equally between the LGF programme and the Department for Transport, together with £15.25m of Local Growth Funds for a range of local projects. Outcomes from this work include: 931 new homes, 287 businesses assisted, 1558 people supported into learning and 550 people supported into apprenticeships and sustainable employment.

Walsall Strategic Economic Plan (The Walsall SEP)

Understanding the scale and the nature of the economic challenge we face, and developing robust and evidence-based solutions is vital to moving forward with our partners.

We have continued the process of gathering evidence through a Walsall Local Economic Assessment, which continues to inform the Walsall Strategic Economic Plan, the Walsall SEP.

The SEP holds within it the Walsall Economic Framework, developed together with the Walsall Economic Board, this sets out on one page two of our key Economic Development priorities; ***Creating Local Jobs and Supporting Local People into***

Work, together with our ambitions against the key themes of: **Place, People and Business**.

Approved by cabinet in 2015 this administration continues to recognise the importance of the Walsall SEP for the Borough, that clearly sets out our ambitions and priorities for the future, linked to and aligned with our new Corporate Plan

Our local SEP articulates the key priorities for the development of a flourishing Walsall economy, set within the context of the wider economic ambitions of the Black Country and the West Midlands Combined Authority. These priorities have been accepted by key partners, including the private sector, through the Walsall Economic Board.

We also recognise that many economic issues cannot be tackled in isolation, an example being the cross-cutting themes of skills development and building a healthy workforce are linked and addressed together in key strategies like the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), and prioritised in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

My Portfolio includes the active development of our economy; this cannot be achieved without effective engagement with the private sector so we can really understand their needs, barriers and how we can assist them to make the best of all opportunities.

Within the context of the Walsall SEP I now set some of our achievements under the headings of Place, People and Businesses.

Place

Following completion of the £12m **Walsall Waterfront** cinema and restaurant development, the developer- Kier Property- will shortly be announcing the commencement of phase two of the project, which will introduce a further four restaurants to the already successful Waterfront development. To date this has led to the creation of 250 jobs with further jobs anticipated. The Council has also commissioned, working with the land owners and the Homes & Communities Agency, a masterplan for the redevelopment of land in Station Street.

Also at Waterfront, the former **LEX** site, having the benefit of Local Growth funding continues to be prepared for redevelopment. A grant of £415,000 has been made to support the sites remediation. The remediated site will be offered to the market in early 2017 to support the site's development for commercial and/ or residential uses.

Demolition is largely complete on **The Quarter** redevelopment in the **St Matthews** area of the town centre which will see £14m invested by the developer Norton & Proffitt in a new retail scheme which is due for completion in spring 2017. It is estimated that the scheme will bring in an excess of 100 new jobs to this part of the town centre which has already benefited from the major investment in the **Old Square Development**.

Work continues to bring development sites forward within **Gigaport**, building on strong developer interest in sites such as the former Jabez Cliff site, the Challenge

Block in Hatherton Street, the remaining plots within the Jhoots site, and Wisemore Central for commercial purposes creating further job opportunities.

To ensure that Council run markets can continue to meet customer expectations and increasing the attractiveness, quality and variety of the town and district centres offer, a new Market Policy was introduced in May this year. The Policy clearly sets out ways in which to become a trader together with fair and coherent conditions around the Council's expectations of market traders and the service provision that the Council will provide in return.

Delivery of sites within the Darlaston element of **the Black Country Enterprise Zone** in and around Junction 10 of the M6 continues, with new partnerships being formed with landowners to secure delivery. £125,000 has been invested by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership undertaking site investigations and other feasibility work to identify the barriers to development and steps are now being taken to aid land owners bring forward their sites. Remediation works at the **Tempus 10** site is scheduled to commence in autumn 2016, whilst the former gas towers at the **Gasholders Site**, Darlaston Road were fully demolished at the end of 2015 in anticipation of the land disposing of its asset later this year. A developer procurement process is being run in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency to identify a private sector partner for the **Phoenix 10** site. The process hopes to select a partner by the early part of 2017 who is capable of redeveloping the 18 hectare site, the largest employment site in the borough.

The £26m **Darlaston Strategic Development Area Access (DSDA)** Project has now been completed on time and within budget. It consists of junction improvements at Bescot Rd/Wallows Lane, Bescot Rd/Darlaston Rd (Brown Lion Junction) and Heath Rd/Bentley Rd South; two new bridges; and the realignment of Bentley Mill Way, this will truly open up the Darlaston area for employment growth and improve wider traffic flow.

Work continues to progress at pace at one of the Borough's largest housing development projects. To date 222 (137 affordable homes and 85 private sales) new homes have been completed as part of the **Goscote Lane Corridor Project** working in partnership with Walsall Housing Group, the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership, Homes and Communities Agency and developer Keepmoat to deliver 740 new homes. A total sum of £88m will be invested in the area by 2021, with £1.3m being invested in open space (£1.3m) improvements which are due on site late September 2016. A planning application for the redevelopment of the former Goscote Estate is due to be submitted before the end of 2016.

Supporting the delivery of development in not only **Walsall Town Centre** but opportunities in our **District Centres** and neighbouring communities continues to be a priority. A pipeline of development opportunities for **housing and employment** continues to be worked on, facilitated by effective partnerships with land owners, developer partners and investors- both private and public sector, sites such as Reedswood Way, for employment opportunities and Silver Street, Brownhills where 157 new homes are being constructed and on site currently.

These **pipeline projects** take the opportunities that private sector investment and partnership brings, to secure match funding from the public sector- and looking ahead we will maximise income from future Local Growth Deals and funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority as a priority: Helping to support the delivery of 1390 new homes, 170,000sqm of employment and 59,000 of mixed use floorspace, alongside side up to 5700 new or sustained jobs, and the strategic land use plans for the borough. Facilitating development in this way will be essential in supporting the Council's revenue income base derived from Business Rate and Council Tax income.

Walsall is still attracting significant levels of **development interest**. Despite there being some caution in the construction industry in the early part of 2016 ahead of the European vote in June, the number of planning applications submitted is on course to match or exceed the number that came in during 2015/16. Over the preceding 12 months 1666 applications were submitted to the Council and in the first quarter of 2016/17 a total of 425 applications have been received.

The **Development Management service** continues to issue decisions to enable new development to come forward within the Borough including the detailed approval of 170 new dwellings on the former Servis Site, Wednesbury and the former Castle View Care Home in Moxley.

As part of the continued management and rationalisation of the Council's property estate, surplus assets have successfully been disposed of generating **£720,000** to date in 2016/17 in capital receipts- sites including the **former Little London School** in Willenhall and the **Castle View Care Home** in Moxley. In addition to the rationalisation of assets, the opportunity to acquire sites to support the Council's objectives has also continued, to date in 2016/17 this has included the acquisition of two parcels of land at **Pier Street**, Brownhills.

Looking ahead we will investigate and consider the options for adding to the Council's **Investment Portfolio** which will look to maximise revenue income generation and create a coherent property portfolio.

Quality living accommodation is also key to our economic success, I therefore need to ensure that the homes Walsall people need are being built, including a range of affordable and private housing options to this end we will;

- continue to provide support to stimulate the housing market within Walsall, with partnership working with public and private house builders and landlords.
- maximise the number of affordable homes provided, with a particular refocus on ensuring mixed tenure schemes, and we will work hard to unlock derelict land and stalled housing sites that blight some parts of Walsall.
- work hard to increase affordable warmth in new and existing homes
- bring long term empty homes back into use.

Statutory '**Local Plans**' are vital to ensure a sufficient supply of land and premises whilst protecting the environment and they provide the basis for the Council's decisions on Planning Applications. In the spring the Council undertook consultations on 'Publication' versions of **Walsall's Site Allocation Document**

(SAD) and **Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP)**, as well as a 'Charging Schedule' to introduce the **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regime**. The plans propose sites for about 4,000 new dwellings and seek to safeguard and make available around 650ha of employment land, as well as 7,500 sq.m. of new retailing and 73,000 sq.m. of offices in Walsall Town Centre.

Following the publication, consultation Cabinet in July agreed pre-submission modifications to the plans to be published for public consultation. After this the agreement of full Council will be sought in November for the plans to be submitted to the Secretary of State.

Having up to date plans to taken into account when the Government awards **New Homes Bonus** funding Walsall received almost £6 million for 2016-2017. Therefore, besides progressing plans for Walsall, we have also to look forward to the Review of the Black Country Core Strategy. It is likely that the plan will be the subject of a report to Cabinet towards the end of the year. The Review will have to address challenging issues about the future of the Black Country and about wider housing needs and the aspirations of the Combined Authority.

Transportation makes a vital contribution to the local economy and serves as an important catalyst to aid its recovery. My job is to ensure we sustain this contribution and deliver schemes where funding has been identified.

A major improvement to **Junction 10 of the M6** is being developed in conjunction with Department for Transport and Highways England. Funding of £64m has been secured for this scheme through the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and Highways England together local tax payers money. An innovative governance model between the funding partners has been established to deliver the project. Preliminary design work and an assessment of the land required are currently being prepared.

Since May of this year the Council has implemented 13 **highways maintenance schemes** over a total length of 6.1km of carriageway at a cost of some £1.8m together with 7 footway resurfacing schemes at a cost of some £321,000 over a length of 2.2km. In addition we have carried out 18 preventative treatments to carriageways over a total length of 2.2km at a cost of some £133,000 including use of the innovative Velocity Patch system

Following receipt of the **Challenge Fund** last year we have an allocation of £1.81m for 2016/17 and since May of this year the team has delivered 5 schemes specifically: High Street, Moxley; Bilston Lane, Willenhall; Rosehill, Willenhall; Stafford Street, Walsall and Rollingmill Street, Walsall. All expenditure must be used on the classified road network with the aim of assisting regeneration and the local economy.

I have approved the detailed **Highways Maintenance Programme for 2016/17** in accordance with the approved Highways Maintenance Strategy and Asset Management Plan for 2015 to 2018. The team is currently considering and preparing the new contract and necessary invitations to tender with advertisements for the

future provision of the highway maintenance and winter service. The contract is currently with Tarmac but is due to come to a contractual end in May 2017.

We continue to deliver the **Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy** including the award winning A* programme with emphasis on education and training at schools. Eight new primary schools will be joining the A*STARS (Active Sustainable Travel and Road Safety) programme in the new school year. This includes St Giles, Manor, Reedswood E-ACT Academy and Mayfield Prep., Independent School. Over 75% of Walsall Primary School are now engaged in the programme. The first initiative planned for the new academic year is a 2 week parking enforcement campaign in partnership with Parking Services.

The A*STARS Schools took part in a week long campaign during May as part of **National Walk to School Week**. Approximately 20,000 pupils took part in the campaign across Walsall. This means there were potentially 100,000 sustainable journeys to school during the week. Park Hall Junior and Infant Academies were 2 of the school that took part and they launched the week with a joint 'Let's Walk together Event', which was featured in the local press.

Wednesday, 22 June saw the 7th Annual A*STARS Inter School Quiz take place in Walsall's Town Hall. The competition was fierce, with 20 schools in attendance and teachers and parents looking on in support. At the end of the quiz, the children watched a performance about road safety and sustainability by the Box Clever Theatre Company. Blackwood School emerged as victors, with Barcroft Primary and Park Hall Junior School in 2nd and 3rd places respectively. The Mayor of Walsall, Councillor Kath Phillips, was on hand to award the trophy to the winning team.

In June, **Professor Kevin Fenton, National Director of Health and Wellbeing, Public Heath England**, visited Walsall to see first-hand the range of health initiatives engaging communities and encouraging healthier lifestyles across the borough. The Professor, who spent the afternoon at Walsall Arboretum, praised the town's innovative approach to Public Health and presented 18 school children from Chuckery Primary school with individual certificates for their efforts in the *A STAR challenge - a school programme that promotes fitness for life by walking, cycling and scooting to school. 72% of Chuckery's pupils now use 'active travel' for their daily journeys to school, a figure nearly 25% higher than the national average.

Since May 2016, 548 pupils have received **Bikeability training**, which puts Walsall on track to meet the annual Department for Transport target. This training is complemented by other initiatives, such as cycle maintenance and leisure cycle rides, to help remove barriers to cycling.

The important scheme along **Caldmore Road** to improve road safety, improve parking and reduce traffic congestion was completed just prior to the school summer holidays. We intend to assess its success in September and then carry out further refinements to the operation of adjacent streets.

Proposals are currently being formulated for a major 'Invest to Save' scheme to install LED technology throughout the borough's street lighting network building on

the successful earlier trials to both ensure safety on the highway but also achieve significant cost savings related to energy costs.

We will continue with our efforts to provide a replacement for **York's Bridge** to enhance safety and accessibility in the Pelsall area following the Planning Inspector's recommendation to identify further land to become Common land.

Liaison with Network Rail is ongoing in relation to the major **Chase Line Electrification Project** and associated bridge works to protect the interests of the borough. The new railway bridge at Central Drive has just been completed and the road is close to being re-opened. Network Rail will be consulting with the public and submitting a planning application in the near future for the proposed closure of the level crossing at Bloxwich.

We continue to liaise with Highways England in relation to ongoing maintenance on the Motorway and the implications on traffic on the local highway network.

Management of the local highway network in terms of operations and road safety includes implementing some 75 improvements across the borough as part of the existing Borough wide Traffic Regulation Order since last Sept. We are currently in the legal process (21 day objection period is underway) of the latest Amendment which includes some 37 proposals. Many of the previously mentioned major projects have necessitated TROs to permit implementation and successful operation.

I am keen to ensure both the safety of the public, our contracting partners and our staff is maintained as a high priority and am pleased to advise that the safety record is currently exemplary for all.

People

We continue to operate the successful **Walsall Works** programme, which is now a recognised brand name for residents and employers. Since 2012 the programme has helped local residents into training, traineeships, apprenticeship and jobs. A summary of achievements are set out below.

Walsall Works Achievement Table

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Totals
Walsall Works Apprenticeship	104	262	113	73	47	599
Walsall Works Pre-apprenticeships	191	147	92	37	0	467
Other outcomes						0
Jobs	0	159	180	166	30	535
Work Experience	0	0	24	14	4	42
Self Employed	0	0	1	4	0	5
Study	0	75	103	40	14	232

Talent Navigator Referral	0	0	6	1	0	7
Talent Match Referral	0	0	21	3	0	24
Referral to specialised support	0	2	0	2	0	4
Non - Walsall works - Apprenticeships	0	86	91	31	4	212
Non - walsall Works - Traineeships	0	12	7	3	0	22
	295	743	638	374	99	2149

There is currently a big push to promote the free job brokerage service to more employers and to drive up the number of vacancies being managed by Walsall Works. This will include additional business development with local employers and the development of greater links with organisations that contract with Walsall Council. The team has supported a number of employer led events focussed on engaging with clients who are actively looking for work, these include a Care Event where over one hundred claimants attended to meet with 12 employers were actively recruiting for care workers. We are also organising an annual Jobs Fair in September 2016 in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and Walsall College, where it is expected that 1000 claimants will attend.

A weekly Jobs Bulletin is sent out to all 2500 clients actively looking for work who are registered onto the Walsall Works programme and to our partners. In the period June to August 2016, the team supported 20 employers with recruitment which included vacancies for the new restaurant chain Piri Fino as well as supported employees affected by redundancies at BHS and British Gas.

Walsall played a key role in starting the process and partnership development that has successfully led to the Black Countries **Youth Employment Initiative** (YEI) being approved by DWP. This approval is now providing European funding that can support 16 – 29 year olds classified as NEET into positive outcomes.

The Black Country 'Impact' bid is estimated at £51million, with £17m match funding from the councils, this is now leveraging in some £34million of new external funding.

For Walsall this will draw in £6million of new funding, based on the ability to identify potential match of £2.25m, supporting around 3500 local people, with 1000 entering sustainable work or training outcomes through to and including 2018.

To further enhance this workstream the **Social Value Charter** and indicators was approved at Cabinet in July 2016, ensuring that social value, community and economic benefits are secured in everything the Council procures.

Finally, the team are representing Walsall on the Skills & Employment agenda at a Combined Authority level including an Employment and Skills Strategy and HS2 Employment & Skills Programme (supported by three sub groups Re-Tune, Ignite, Accelerate).

Business

We continue to provide **support to existing businesses, helping them to grow and expand**. The team provides advice and support, matching them with relevant organisations and financing bodies that can meet their needs etc. This service works closely with colleagues across the Council and the Black Country, providing advice on market opportunities and routes that will remove barriers to growth leading to job creation.

We continue to work with partners on initiatives such as developing the High Value Manufacturing City, supporting Black Country Day, showcasing the Black Country Bullet, delivering a successful Meet the Buyer event for Walsall's Construction sector, hosting in partnership with UKTI an "Access to Export" event, and supporting the M6 Junction 10 project consultation process. We are in regular dialogue with local businesses through 1-2-1 meetings, networking events, a monthly newsletter, a dedicated website, and social media (Twitter and LinkedIn).

We also continue to provide advice and **support to new business** across a range of issues such as access to funding, property searches etc for those seeking to set up their own business, as well as signposting enquirers to other sources of external support. Ensuring that Enterprise, innovation, and entrepreneurship is encouraged.

Working closely with Invest Black Country we ensure that Walsall is showcased as an **investment location** to bring new companies in to the area to help create new jobs and generate business rates revenue as a result of commercial premises / sites becoming occupied.

Supporting businesses so that they invest in the local community through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, access new overseas markets, explore opportunities to **innovate** and undertake R&D activities, develop their **supply chains** to ensure that they are fit to supply both locally and into new and diverse markets, is also a priority for the Council.

Investment related to **grants and business growth** totalled £4.1 million in the year 2014-15. This relates in part to the funds pledged by businesses to projects which received grant funding, and also to intelligence received regarding capital expenditure on equipment.

These businesses reported the creation of 152 new roles and the safeguarding of 92 further posts. £16.13 in grants was secured for every pound spent by Walsall Council. It is expected that as new schemes such as **Black Country GOLD 2** launch later this year then grant related support will increase.

At the strategic level the **Walsall Economic Board** brings together some of the key employers in Walsall. The Board aims to assist us in driving forward the creation of local jobs, together with ensuring that local people have the skills employers need and the opportunity to secure them.

I am pleased to report that Walsall town centre has been successful in its bid to be one of 100 towns from across the UK to receive support from some of the UK's

biggest brands who are working together to support the transformation of high streets across the country. Working together with local businesses and key partners an action plan will drawn up to address the challenges facing the town.

A Site Management plan came into force on Monday 23rd May 2016 to control how chuggers (charity muggers) operate in the town, the plan regulates the days, the number, the areas and the way they behave. Companies breaching the plan are issued penalty points by the Public Fundraising Association (PFRA) which ultimately leads to fines. Within the first month of the plan being active in Walsall six companies were each issued 100 penalty points each for behaviour and operating in the wrong areas.

Supporting businesses in Walsall is key to the success of the town. The town centre regeneration officer;

- Interacts with around 100 town centre businesses a month,
- Is in the process of creating a new town centre partnership to support Healthy High Streets and a possible future town centre BID,
- Speaks to around 30 prospective new businesses a month assisting in their search for town centre premises and supporting them via training and the Innovation Fund,
- Interacts with around 50 key partners every month

The district centres team continues to work with the business led partnerships to develop and implement shared visions and action plans to sustain and improve the economic wellbeing of our local high streets. Their work aims to

- Create new jobs in the district centres through one to one business support and signposting to vacant units.
- Work with the private sector to stimulate investment and community grant funding
- Work across the centres to attract investment using local knowledge and partnerships
- Reduce vacancy rates and provide support to sustain existing businesses including working with landlords to bring into use upper floor space
- Deliver annual town centre events to increase visitor figures and showcase the business sector for each centre
- Aim to be successful in receiving awards for the centres to improve civic pride
- Deliver an updated perception survey in Autumn 2016

In Bloom: The district centres have received 2 Gold, 3 Silver Gilt and a category award winner in the Urban Community category for their individual entries. The Heart of England in Bloom approached the districts team and asked if Walsall would deliver the 2016 Awards ceremony due to our previous successes.

The team are currently working to deliver the awards ceremony on the 15 Sep 2016. This is extremely prestigious bringing local authorities from the whole of the Heart of England region to Aldridge allowing us to showcase the exceptional work the team do to improve the district centres. This includes environmental improvements,

installation of 32 brand new bins from S106 funding, extensive business and community engagement and the creation of a strong partnership approach with Birmingham City Council Parks Department.

Conclusion

Investment in the people, our businesses and the infrastructure that support economic growth is fundamental to making Walsall a safe and great place to live, work and invest. By working to reduce health, social and economic inequalities the potential for the area, local businesses, communities and people will be maximised.

We are committed to improving services that support the growth and development of the borough's economy and protect the public. This is challenging in times of unprecedented financial restraint but the performance of our services shows yet again that we are making real progress towards this goal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L Jeavons', with a stylized, flowing script.

Councillor L Jeavons
Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration
September 2016