

## **Business, Employment & the Local Economy Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

25 February 2015 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

### **Panel Members Present:**

Councillor D. Anson (Chair)  
Councillor A. Andrew  
Councillor M. Bird  
Councillor S. Craddock  
Councillor A. Ditta  
Councillor G. Illmann-Walker  
Councillor G. Sohal  
Councillor R. Worrall

### **Officers Present:**

Simon Neilson – Executive Director - Regeneration  
Steve Pretty – Head of Service, Engineering and Transportation  
(Neighbourhoods)  
Helen Kindon – Team Leader – Walsall Town & District Centres Management  
Matt Crowton - Transportation Strategy & Policy Manager  
Matt Underhill - Committee Business and Governance Manager

### **Portfolio Holders**

**Present:** Councillor M. Nazir – Regeneration  
Councillor L. Jeavons - Environment and Transport

**Invitees:** Richard Dugdale – Network Rail  
Matt Brown – Network Rail

### **36/14 APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor Barker and Councillor James.

### **37/14 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### **38/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest for the duration of the meeting.

### **39/14 MINUTES**

The Panel considered the minutes of the previous meeting on 22 January 2015. It was noted that Councillor James had been present at the meeting.

## **Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting, held on 22 January 2015, as amended, be approved as a true and accurate record.

### **40/14 CHASE LINE ELECTRIFICATION AND BLOXWICH LEVEL CROSSING**

The Chair introduced the discussion explaining that it had been prompted by the Panel's concern regarding progress with the work on Park Street being undertaken by Network Rail. The following is a summary of the update and discussion:

The Network Rail representatives explained that the overall electrification project was still on schedule to be completed by December 2017. It was explained that the electrification works represented a significant improvement for passenger and freight services. It was further explained that there had been good progress on enabling works including bridge reconstruction and track lowering. However, the schedule of works at Park Street has been interrupted by the discovery of a number of technical issues with the deck construction of the bridge. The deck is infilled with reinforced concrete. As a result this has delayed the type and sequence of demolition. It is now expected that the works, which require track possessions to be negotiated with the Train Operating Companies, will be rescheduled with preparation works to commence in October 2015 and Phase 1 and 2 following in November/ December 2015. It was also explained that Network Rail would continue to work alongside its contractor AMCO in progressing the revised schedule of works. This would include platform work at Walsall Station during the Easter period this year.

In response to a Panel Member query it was explained that a key reason for the delay in undertaking the work at Park Street was the need to agree sufficient railway possessions from passenger and freight rail companies. In response to a further Panel query it was explained that the Park Street Bridge was different to the bridge that had been removed from New Street Station, Birmingham which had a crash (protection) deck beneath it. It was explained that the Park Street Bridge, beneath Marks & Spencer, was built on a raft structure in the late 60s/ early 70s. However, it was the use of reinforced concrete for the infill, something not indicated in the plans for the bridge, that had created the current problems. In response to a further query it was explained that the presence of the reinforced concrete had meant that the intended removal method, with high pressure water used to cut the bridge into sections which would then be lifted out by crane, would no longer be possible. It would now be necessary to use a traditional demolition methodology to remove the bridge. This would involve protecting the track and platform and stripping the bridge out, with the process taking between 4 and 6 weeks. However, a cautious approach would be necessary to prevent damage to neighbouring buildings and potential insurance claims. In response to a further Panel query it was explained that schedule for this element of the project would shift from January to September 2015 and now run from October 2015 to April 2016. A Member expressed concern regarding the new schedule for the work and the risk that it would run significantly into the Christmas period with the negative impact it would have for town centre businesses. It was explained that Network Rail will be working with council officers to minimise the likely disruption caused by the work. In response to a further Panel query it was explained that based on the information available to Network Rail at this time all

issues have been identified and the phases of work could now be completed in accordance with the revised schedule.

The Chair noted that the town centre already faced a number of challenges and expressed concern that the revised schedule would have an impact during key trade periods. The Network Rail representatives explained that it would be necessary for the proposed new schedule to commence in September 2015 in order to ensure that the Walsall section was available for electrification work. A Panel Member expressed concern that the revised schedule would mean that the market development would now also be delayed. Council officers explained that while the development was due to be considered for planning permission shortly the work itself was not now expected to start before April 2016. In response to a query raised by the Executive Director the Network Rail representatives explained that given the unique nature of the bridge structure at Park Street there were no lessons that could be learned and applied to projects elsewhere in the country. The Network Rail representatives also thanked the Executive Director for the offer of council assistance in ensuring the speedy progress of the project.

The Chair reiterated his concern regarding the revised schedules and the potential impact of the delays on the town centre. He requested that Network Rail attend the next meeting of the Panel to provide an update. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport observed that unexpected challenges were often a feature of large civil engineering projects. A number of Panel Members agreed noting that a number of challenges were faced when undertaking the ring road development in Walsall.

**Resolved:**

That the update be noted.

**41/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair noted that the Panel's next meeting would be on 10 March at 6:00pm.

*The meeting closed at 6:45 p.m.*

Chair:

Date: