

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

10 March 2015 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

### **Panel Members Present:**

Councillor D. Anson (Chair)  
Councillor L. Harrison  
Councillor A. Andrew  
Councillor D. Barker  
Councillor M. Bird  
Councillor C. Clews  
Councillor S. Craddock  
Councillor A. Ditta  
Councillor G. Illmann-Walker  
Councillor G. Sohal

### **Officers Present:**

Simon Neilson – Executive Director – Regeneration  
Simon Tranter - Head of Regeneration – Development & Delivery  
Mark Lavender - Head of Strategic Regeneration  
Kelly Valente - Lead Accountant  
Matt Crowton – Transportation Strategy and Policy Manager  
Steven Edwards - Principal Transport Planner  
Jo Nugent - Team Leader, Borough Wide Development  
Norman Hickson – Development Management Manager  
Matt Underhill – Committee Business & Governance Manager

### **Portfolio Holders**

**Present:** Councillor M. Nazir – Regeneration

**Invitees:** Richard Dugdale – Network Rail

### **42/14 APOLOGIES**

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

### **43/14 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### **44/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

### **45/14 MINUTES**

The Chair explained that the minutes of the previous meeting, 25 February 2015, would be considered at the Panel's next meeting.

## **Resolved:**

It was noted that the minutes of the previous meeting, 25 February 2015, would be considered at the Panel's next meeting.

### **46/14 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2014/15**

The Lead Accountant introduced the report. The following is summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

It was explained that a revenue break even position for 2014/15 was forecast. Further details were provided including a shortfall in expected income of £191k due to the Walsall market move offset by vacant posts (£36k) and underspends on stalls equipment and cleaning costs (£9k). While development management were anticipating a shortfall in income of £45k, a vacant post (£32k) was offset by overspends in supplies and services. Elsewhere, in planning services an underspend on the centralised budget (£54k), vacant post (£45k) and over-recovery of land charges income, together with a vacant post in planning policy (£18k), resulted in a planning and building control underspend of (£75k).

In relation to asset management it was explained that items including an over-recovery of rental income for shops (£76k), underspend on vacant posts and agency staff (£77k) and overspend on supplies and services, £95k, led to an overall underspend of (£60k).

Building services included underspends on staffing costs (£58k) and centralised energy (£220k) which were partially offset by an overspend on centralised maintenance, £39k, energy bills for redundant buildings, £35k, and fee income shortfall, £53k. Overspends in cleaning and caretaking total £192k, with the cleaning service forecast overspend due to recharges on internal contracts being less than the cost of running the service. The overall position for property services was a break even position. In response to a Panel query it was explained that the expected shortfall in income for the market (£191k) was programmed in at the start of the financial year. This was as a result of the anticipated market move (although the budget at the start of the year had not altered during the year).

In relation to capital outturn for 2014/15 an underspend of £3.292m against budget was forecast. However, £3.291m will be requested to be carried forward into 2015/16. This includes funding in relation to the Civic solar photovoltaic panels, the ERDF funded BCBPIP programme and Darlaston Strategic Development Area Access.

## **Resolved:**

That the update be noted.

### **47/14 CHASE LINE ELECTRIFICATION AND BLOXWICH LEVEL CROSSING**

The Chair introduced the discussion. The following is a summary of the update provided by Network Rail and the subsequent discussion:

It was confirmed that, while the bridge removal works at Park Street had been rescheduled to commence in November 2014, the track lowering work will be completed over the Easter period. It was also explained that reinstatement work at Central Drive, Bloxwich was scheduled for completion by summer 2015, while North Street bridge would remain closed until June 2015. It was further explained that track lowering work at other stations along the route was continuing according to schedule. It was also explained that it was anticipated that four carriage trains would be used on the electrified route which will have a significant capacity benefit. These trains have previously been used on the Thameslink service. These trains would allow different numbers of carriages to be used and also be combined. It was noted that should four carriage trains be introduced it would be necessary for platforms to be extended at stations along the line.

In relation to Bloxwich level crossing it was explained that that planning continued towards the construction of the foot bridge which would be two metres wide with ramps. Final approval with the associated funding was expected soon. A Panel Member explained that she was aware of concerns from local Businesses regarding the impact of the closure of the level crossing. This included a petition which had been signed by hundreds of local people. The Network Rail representative explained that efforts would be made to take account of the petition, although they were set on closing the level crossing. It was further explained that the frequency of trains on the electrified line would mean that the barriers would be down for the majority of the time. In response to a Panel query it was explained that the increased frequency of services will in itself help promote the line to potential rail passengers. However, the franchise holder in place following electrification will be responsible for pricing and promotions.

A Panel Member highlighted the cost of the maintenance of Hatherton Street car Park of £500k annually. He explained that given the condition of the car park it would probably be preferable for it to be demolished. The Network Rail representative explained that the section of the line where the car park sits was clear from any electrification works i.e. overhead cables could be accommodated without any amendments to the car park. However, he would inquire as to whether track possession time could be used to further consider the future of the car park.

The Executive Director emphasised that the council would like to request that the best quality rolling stock available was operated on the new line. The Network Rail representative acknowledged the offer of help from the council in securing the rolling stock which he might seek to call upon in the future. The representative also agreed to feedback on why some reinstatement work on Park Street remained outstanding.

**Resolved:**

That the update be noted.

**48/14 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE**

The Development Management Manager introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and the subsequent discussion:

It was explained that the report covered a number of key areas: performance in

respect of applications received for the final quarter of 2014; decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate for appeals made during the same period; a progress report on enforcement proceedings; and an update on Planning Applications “called-in” by councillors. In terms of performance it was explained the council was exceeding the government target for determining major applications within 13 weeks (60%) with outturn for 2014 -15 expected of 93%. The government target for determining minor applications within 8 weeks (65%) is also being exceeded with outturn expected of 87%. The government target for other applications (80%) was also expected to be exceeded with outturn anticipated of 88%.

A Member highlighted the table setting out Decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate on appeals for the final quarter of 2014. The Member suggested that an additional column be added to set out the comments of Members of the Planning Committee when refusing permission contrary to the officers recommendation. The Member felt this would be helpful to show whether the appeals had been lost or won following the overturned recommendations. The Development Management Manager explained that officers do take account of councillor comments where an application is refused. In particular, because there is a risk of legal challenges by the applicant.

**Resolved:**

That the update be noted.

**49/14 M6 JUNCTION 10 MAJOR HIGHWAYS IMPROVEMENT SCHEME**

The Transportation Strategy and Policy Manager introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and the subsequent discussion:

It was explained that this was a major improvement scheme which the council had been working on with the Highways Agency for 2.5 years. It was further explained that the proposed option included the demolition of the existing two-lane aging bridges and replacement with new four lane bridges, together with a range of other improvement work. These include enlargement of the circulatory carriageway and widening of part of the Black Country Route. It was anticipated that the construction phase will commence during 2017-18 at the earliest.

It was explained that the key sources of funding were from the Black Country Growth Deal and the national Roads Investment Strategy (RIS). This funding is subject to the usual preconditions including procurement of a contractor and an agreed contracted price. The Highways Agency will appoint the contractor and manage the construction project on behalf of the council and the other partners. It was acknowledged that the project will create significant disruption but that there was a big prize of significant improvements to traffic flow. The Executive Director praised the hard work of officers in securing funding of £60m. He explained that the Highways Agency had originally sought to only undertake a simple repair and maintenance of the current structure with no benefit to local growth. The efforts of the officers had led to improvements which will enable Walsall to grow economically.

In response to Panel queries it was explained that it was intended to build the new bridge structures adjacent to the current structures. The current structures would remain operational during the construction phase. However, officers acknowledged that there would be some disruption to motorway traffic. It was also explained that a flyover construction would not be possible as the gradient required was not feasible in respect of where it would meet local roads.

A Member noted that the levels of traffic on the Black Country route discouraged local residents from areas such as Willenhall and Bentley from using it. Officers acknowledged the heavy traffic levels often experienced on the Black Country route. However, there were currently no plans to make changes to Wolverhampton Road West which would continue to flow into the circulating carriageway. It was also explained that even if traffic were able to reach the roundabout at Junction 10 more quickly, the junction's capacity (number of vehicles exiting Wolverhampton Road West at this point) and speed of flow could not be altered. However, officers did acknowledge the importance of seeking to ensure that access for local residents is maintained. A number of Panel Members also considered the merits and problems of either removing the bus lane or making it part time only.

A Panel Member noted a number of potential sites for storing plant and machinery used during the construction phase which could be considered. Officers acknowledged the importance of identifying an appropriate site which would support construction and minimise disruption.

**Resolved:**

That the update be noted.

**50/14 WALSALL TOWN CENTRE MARKET**

The Team Leader, Borough Wide Development introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and the subsequent discussion:

It was explained that planning consent had been given to the new market which represented a significant milestone. Work will be undertaken during April to relocate those sections of the existing market which currently sit within the exclusion zone of ongoing development. This includes the removal of electrical pillars. It was further explained that once a design consultant has been appointed officers will then request Members to reconvene the working group to consider the details of the market's design.

It was also explained that a number of stalls will be relocated to support the redevelopment of the St Matthew's Quarter by Norton and Proffitt. Approval for this will be sought from Cabinet 18 March 2015.

**Resolved:**

That the update be noted.

## **51/14 WORK PROGRAMME & FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel considered the Work Programme and Forward Plan

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the work programme and forward plan be noted.**

## **52/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair noted that the Panel's next meeting would be on 23 April at 6:00pm.

*The meeting closed at 6:50 p.m.*

Chair:

Date: