

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 January 2020 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members

Present:

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken (Vice-Chair)
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor C. Creaney
Councillor M. Follows
Councillor S. Johal
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor G. Singh Sohal
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor M. Ward

Portfolio Holders

Present:

Councillor A. Andrew Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Officers Present:

Simon Neilson	Executive Director – Economy and Environment
Chris Berry	Interim Head of Planning and Building Control
Matt Crowton	Transportation Major Projects and Strategy Manager
Alison Ives	Group Manager - Planning
Matt Powis	Democratic Services Officer

Other Attendees

Present:

David Reed	Highways England
James Keogh	John SISK and Sons Ltd

35/19 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor C. Towe.

36/19 Substitution

There were no substitutions.

37/19 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

38/19 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

39/19 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

In reference to Minute No. 27/19 Substitutions, the Democratic Services Officer requested that 'Councillor K. Sears substituted on behalf of Councillor A. Nazir' be amended to read 'Councillor K. Sears substituted on behalf of Councillor M Follows'.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2019, as amended, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

40/19 **M6 Junction 10 Major Transport Scheme – Progress Update**

The Committee received a presentation from David Reed, Project Manager at Highways England and James Keogh, Senior Project Manager at SISK about M6 Junction 10 upgrade works.

The Transportation Major Projects and Strategy Manager and Project Manager at Highways England highlighted that a major transport scheme was developed for M6 Junction 10 to address high levels of traffic congestion and support the local economy by opening up access to nearby employment growth sites in the Black Country Enterprise Zone.

It was noted that the junction was strategically important for the Black Country and wider motorway network as it serves both the M6 and A454 Black Country Route between Walsall and Wolverhampton. The junction was found to be often heavily congested and received significantly more traffic than it was ever designed for.

Improvement works at the junction were designed to:

- Reduce congestion on the Black Country Route and other roads linking to the Junction;
- Reduce queue build up on neighbouring local roads and motorway slip roads;
- Improving general access to the strategic road network;
- Attracting new business and development to the area;
- Replace bridge structures and avoiding major maintenance work in the near future;
- Improve conditions for cyclists, pedestrians and other non-motorised users;
- Improve links to Walsall development sites.

The project was supported with funding from the Council, Highways England, Department for Transport and Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership. Highways England authorised contractor John Sisk and Sons Ltd to undertake advanced pre-construction works from November 2019 with an anticipated

completion date of main works by October 2021 and full completion by spring 2022.

The Senior Project Manager at SISK highlighted that work had already commenced at the site which involved carrying out surveys to identify ground cabling and mine shafts in the area. It was anticipated that additional clearance works and temporary access mapping would take place prior to the first phase of the main construction.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal points from the ensuing discussion:-

- A Member sought clarification about whether the Council would suspend the B4464 Bus Lane for the duration of the upgrade works. In response, the Transportation Major Projects Manager confirmed that there were no proposals to relax bus lane restrictions as the Council wished to encourage use of the Black Country Route to avoid congesting local roads and to make bus services a reliable and attractive alternative to driving. Furthermore, the Council was working with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) to strengthen the public transport offer in the area;
- Transport for West Midlands with Council support had commenced a publicity campaign to inform residents and local businesses about the works and to encourage the use of alternative transportation during the upgrade;
- Whilst the Council was monitoring traffic around the junction, traffic would not be diverted to neighbouring residential areas. The Council had also improved some junctions on the local network in anticipation of more traffic using these routes when the main works progress;
- A Member expressed concerns about the amount of rubbish around the junction and whether the Council was actively prosecuting fly tipping. The Executive Director confirmed that the Council had an enforcement contract with Kingdom Services Group to fine individuals that litter from vehicles. In addition, he empathised that vehicle owners should submit any CCTV or dash cam footage to the Council if they witness any fly tipping;
- The Project Manager at Highways England confirmed that before the commencement of works, a litter picking exercise would be scheduled to clear the area ready for works to commence.
- A Member sought clarification on who was responsible for maintaining grass verges around the island and whether there was a regular maintenance programme. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Committee would receive a response in writing on who was responsible for maintaining the grass verges and whether the Council could use enforcement powers on non-Council land;
- A Member enquired about what provisions were in place to prevent suicide attempts at the junction. In response, the Project Manager at Highways England confirmed that parapets and deterrent paving would be utilised to prevent bridge jumpers in future. In addition, it was confirmed that preventative signage from the Charity, Samaritans, would be utilised around the junction;
- A Member sought clarification on the Council's liability for the project. The Transportation Major Projects Manager confirmed that whilst some small

elements of the scheme were resourced by the Council, Highways England ultimately held the commercial risk of the scheme, as they managed the construction contract;

- The Vice-Chair sought clarification on whether Highways England was confident in delivering the project on-time. In response, the Senior Project Manager at SISK confirmed that the company had a long history of technical and challenging projects with great success of projects completing within timescales;
- SISK was committed to keep the traffic flowing throughout the project works and anticipated no disruption risk to the Commonwealth Games in 2022;
- A Member asked how the project works had been communicated to local communities and what steps had taken place to reduce pressure on the overall transport network. In response, the Council was working with Transport for West Midlands on effective communication across the West Midlands including the use of appropriate road signage, social media, posters and engagement with stakeholders. In addition to this, a series of public information events would be scheduled in late-January and early-February 2020;
- Highways England recognised the disturbance created by the project and a newsletter on key milestones the project would be published which would identify the benefits of the upgrade;
- A Member welcomed the retention of B4464 Bus Lane and sought clarification on whether there were any proposals for a park and ride scheme to encourage public transportation uptake. In response, the Transportation and Major Project Manager confirmed that the Council was working with TfWM on a wide variety of schemes across the network such as the reintroduction of the Walsall to Wolverhampton Rail Line and SPRINT;
- TfWM were considering park and ride proposals to aid the introduction of SPRINT;
- Acoustic barriers on the motorway were recognised as a positive instrument in the reduction of noise pollution to local residents. A Member asked whether barriers could be replaced with living walls which reduce both air and noise pollution. In response, the Project Manager at Highways England highlighted that living walls created long term maintenance issues. However, living wall proposals would be considered as part of final designs.
- A Member expressed concerns about traffic build-up on the M6 slip road southbound during busy periods and whether Highways England would consider the suspension of the hard shoulder to ease traffic. In response, the Senior Project Manager at SISK and Project Manager at Highways England confirmed that initial ground work would create the necessary space to commence work without impacting the existing road network. The upgrade works would create a wider bridge which could better manage traffic build-up and would offer greater efficiency. It was noted that suspension proposals would be considered as part of traffic management plans with the Council. However, specific temporary traffic management plans for the project were yet to be finalised.
- A Member sought clarification on whether project materials would be recycled or placed in landfill. In response, the Senior Project Manager confirmed that majority of the material would be recycled unless deemed unsuitable.

The Committee thanked Highways England and SISK for their presentation and requested an update on the project be presented at a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved:

- 1. That, an update on project works at M6 Junction 10 be presented at a future meeting of the Committee;**
- 2. That, a response to the question on the relevant responsible authority for maintaining grass verges around Junction 10 and the use of enforcement powers on non-Council land be circulated to the Committee in writing.**

41/19 Quarter 2 Financial Outturn 2019/20

The Committee considered Quarter 2 Financial Outturn for 2019/20 which was previously presented by the Lead Accountant at the Committee on 21 November 2019.

A discussion ensued about relevant service areas with the Economy and Environment directorate. The following points outline the discussion:

- In reference to Leisure, Culture and Operations – ‘District libraries review of staffing due to implementation of the open plus system - £0.108m’. A Member sought clarification on whether the project would be cancelled. In response, the Executive Director confirmed that whilst the Council had tried to identify a workable scheme, it became necessary to cancel the contract. He clarified that the retendering of the contract had been suspended pending market maturity. However, the Council received no compensation as no monies had been spent;
- In reference to ‘Active Living Centre’ shortfalls of £230k, a Member sought clarification on whether this was due to Active Living Centre membership price increasing resulting in a decrease with overall memberships. In response, the Executive Director confirmed that the Council had not seen the impact of price rises with memberships however, there was a need for the Council to act more commercially with its leisure centres;
- In reference to ‘Street Lighting PFI’, a Member sought clarification on the delays with this project. In response, the Executive Director confirmed that the Council had commenced discussions with Amey on the risk management of the project. It was anticipated that upon finalisation of discussions with Amey, the project would proceed to Cabinet for deliberation.
- In reference to ‘Town Centre Masterplan’, a Member sought clarification on the breakdown of masterplan costs and what had been spent to date. The Executive Director confirmed that a response would be provided in writing.

Resolved:

- 1. That, the Quarter 2, Financial Outturn 2019/20 be noted;**
- 2. That, a breakdown of the Town Centre Masterplan costs be circulated to the Committee in writing.**

42/19 Section 106 Funding

The Committee considered an update on Section 106 Funding from the Group Manager of Planning.

She highlighted that the Council had received £2.989m in Section 106 contributions with £1.106m already spent.

It was noted that traditionally, the Council was restricted from combining six or more agreements into a single pool. However, in September 2019, the Government carried out a review of the Community Infrastructure Legislation (CIL) regulations which removed pooling controls thus allowing multiple contributions into a single pot.

Planning Officers regularly engage with local ward members about new developments in the Borough to identify possible funding obligations.

A Member sought clarification on a number of Section 106 applications which had expired and whether the Council had lost money as a result. In response, the Group Manager of Planning confirmed that if the application had a return clause in the agreement then the Council would be obligated to return monies if requested. However, the Council tries to programme works as soon as possible.

A Member requested further information about 'The Junction, Willenhall'. It was confirmed that a response would be provided in writing.

A Member expressed concerns about the development of new housing without sufficient management plans for local amenities. In particular, he raised concerns about the lack of responses to consultations on planning applications with Clean and Green and Children's Services. In response, the Executive Director confirmed that historically, monitoring and reporting on Section 106 funding was undertaken by an officer within the Councils Strategic Planning Team as a single point of contact to monitor funding. However, due to organisational changes across the Council, the monitoring of funding was shared across directorates. The Council had undertaken a planning redesign to improve planning services and it was envisioned that the redesign was due to be completed before the end of 2020.

Resolved:

- 1. That, the report be noted**
- 2. That, information regarding Section 106 Funding on 'the Junction at Willenhall' be circulated to the Committee.**

43/19 **Areas of focus – 2019/20**

The Committee considered its areas of focus and the forward plans of Walsall Council, the Black Country Joint Executive Committee and West Midlands

A Member sought clarification on why the Committee was not considering the budget setting report in accordance with the work programme. In response, the Democratic Services Officer confirmed that due to size of the budget, Scrutiny Overview Committee was the only Council Scrutiny Committee considering budget proposals for this municipal year.

Following a discussion on the Enhanced Bus Partnership and SPRINT, the Chair requested that Transport for West Midlands be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee on 20 February 2020.

Following, a recommendation from Council on establishing a Working Group on No Vehicle Idling Zones, the Committee agreed to merge this topic with an existing Working Group on Driving Culture with the following membership:

Councillor P. Bott;
Councillor Hicken;
Councillor Shires.

Resolved:

1. **That, areas of focus 2019/20 and forward plans be noted.**
2. **That, a Driving Culture and Vehicle Idling Working Group be established with the following Membership:**
 - a. **Councillor P. Bott;**
 - b. **Councillor Hicken;**
 - c. **Councillor I Shires.**

44/19 **Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 20 February 2020.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated 7.10p.m.

Signed:
Date: