

## **REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Thursday 23 January 2014 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

**Panel Members Present:** Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)  
Councillor I. Azam  
Councillor D. Barker  
Councillor S. Wade  
Councillor R. Worrall  
Councillor D. Anson  
Councillor M. Flower

**Officers Present:** Simon Neilson – Executive Director, Regeneration  
Mark Lavender – Head of Strategic Regeneration  
Matt Crowton – Principal Transport Planner  
Jo Nugent – Team Leader, Borough Wide Development  
Simon Tranter – Head of Regeneration Development & Delivery  
Isobel Woods – Employment Growth Team Leader  
Matt Underhill - Committee Business and Governance Manager

### **Portfolio Holders**

**Present:** Councillor A. Andrew – Regeneration

**Invitee:** Mike Hew – Chief Executive, Caldmoreaccord Housing

### **305/13 APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies received for the duration of the meeting.

### **306/13 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions received for the duration of the meeting.

### **307/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

### **308/13 MINUTES**

The Panel considered the minutes of its previous meeting.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting, held on Monday 25 November 2013, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

### **309 /13 CHASE LINE ELECTRIFICATION AND BLOXWICH LEVEL CROSSING**

The Principal Transport Planner introduced the update, representatives from Network Rail were also in attendance. The following is a summary of the presentation and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained by the representatives from Network Rail that work had begun on the bridge reconstruction at Broad Lane with it expected to be completed by Spring 2014, with a further three bridge reconstruction works within the Walsall area to be completed by 2015. It was further explained that activity going forward included the proposed closure of Bloxwich Level Crossing by 2015 and the overall completion of the electrification programme by 2017. In addition, further enabling works for electrification will commence in 2014. In relation to Bloxwich Level Crossing it was explained that Network Rail's position was that it should be closed on safety grounds as well as for the purposes of the electrification of the line. It was also explained that the council and Network Rail are negotiating regarding minimising the impact of the changes on the local area and local businesses. The Chair thanked officers for all their assistance during this process, particularly in relation to the works at Broad Lane. Officers also agreed to ensure that the proposed public consultation regarding the Bloxwich Level Crossing was wider than previous consultation activity.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the report was noted.**

#### **310/13 UPDATE ON BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY: APRIL – SEPTEMBER 2013**

The Head of Strategic Regeneration and the Employment Growth Team Leader introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that 84% of enquiries for support and sign posting were by small and medium size companies (SMEs). This included 29% from manufacturing companies, 13% from construction and 12% from retail companies. It was also explained that a range of assistance was provided to businesses. In relation to recruitment it was explained that businesses had been supported through the Walsall Works programme or referred to partners such as Steps to Work. Business are reporting some difficulties with recruiting for technical skilled positions. It was also explained that 22% of enquiries were in relation to growth with queries regarding funding and financing queries. Other work includes the identification of suitable land and premises undertaken with a number of property searches and discussions with planners, agents and landowners. It was explained that challenges included the availability and suitability of land and premises. Additional activity includes signposting of support to existing businesses and start up and micro businesses. A twelve month schedule of workshops has also been compiled reflecting the areas of support requested by businesses. These include procurement and raising finance. It was explained that the Regeneration teams involved in this work undertook a targeted and in-depth approach. A proactive approach was taken to providing support to companies although in most cases the provision of support is as a result of the companies contacting the council. Work has also been undertaken to raise awareness of the support

that is available to local businesses. This includes working with colleagues from Planning, Procurement and Property Services to utilise links with the business community. It is also intended to continue to develop a consistent Walsall Support message with partners including Walsall College. In addition, the team have identified that the supply chain offers significant opportunities for local suppliers in relation to both public and private sector developments including the cinema proposals, Morgan Sindell – Walsall Council for tenants Primark and Co-op Food Stores, Walsall College and Kier Homes with whg. It is intended to provide help to enable supplier companies to benefit from this activity.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted**

**311/13 UPDATE ON INWARD INVESTMENT TRENDS & PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT (NOVEMBER 2013)**

The Head of Strategic Regeneration and the Employment Growth Team Leader introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the council had a pipeline of 93 live investment enquiries from businesses looking to either move to larger premises or expand or improve existing premises to be more suitable for their business needs. It was further explained that 62% of the enquiries were from existing Walsall businesses, with 9% from Walsall-based start up businesses. A third of enquiries were made from companies based outside Walsall looking to invest within the borough. The majority of enquiries were made by engineering and aerospace companies regarding commercial opportunities in relation to the Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) base at i54. A number of enquiries relating to retail and leisure were also made;
- Officers highlighted some of the key achievements between April and November 2013. These included that during that period 11 investments have been recorded for Walsall involving the creation or safeguarding of around 900 jobs. These include the major investments in the town centre with the cinema development, together with the Primark/ Co-op development expected to bring around 275 new jobs to the borough. In addition, the BH Energy facility is expected to be operational by 2016 with 300 new jobs created, together with the announcement of Lonestar Group to invest in Walsall, safeguarding 3000 - 300 jobs for the Black Country. Officers explained that the borough can offer companies looking to invest or further invest some benefits. The area is attractive because of its proximity to the motorway, access to the automotive and aerospace supply chain and short journey time to Birmingham Airport. In terms of next steps it was explained that developing and promoting the Walsall Investment offer was key. This will be achieved in a number of ways including closer working with key developers and agents active in the Walsall area and increased messaging through relevant social media;
- In response to a Panel question officers explained that many of the 93 investment enquiries were considered to have limited impact on Walsall in terms of job creation in manufacturing, automotive and aerospace. The

majority of enquiries were in relation to business premises. A key difficulty was a shortage of fit for purpose premises. Officers explained that it was at times difficult to engage land owners to with potential investors which is limiting the level of investment in the borough . Officers and the Portfolio Holder explained that, similarly to Phoenix 10, that landowners are unrealistic about land values. In addition, as a result of the empty building business rate potentially suitable premises are being demolished. Officers noted that this was a very positive time for Walsall with the borough's transport links offering particular benefits for businesses. It was also explained that with a list of £90m in developments this was something that should be viewed with pride. It was also agreed that regeneration was a process that evolved over a period of years with the rewards of collective effort now coming through. Officers explained that activities would continue to support the development of a local skilled workforce capable of meeting the requirements of businesses and to improve the supply of suitable land and buildings. It was pointed out by a Panel Member that the planning approval for two cinemas in the centre of Walsall was likely to act as a catalyst for further investment. The Panel welcomed the significant range of development and business activity being witnessed in the borough.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted**

**312/13 CALDMORE ACCORD HOUSING: UNDER OCCUPANCY (BEDROOM) TAX**

The Chief Executive, Caldmoreaccord Housing introduced the presentation. The following is a summary of the presentation and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that key positive outcomes following the introduction of the bedroom tax were the release of some family sized accommodation. It had also increased cooperation between housing associations and improved data and support services. However, there had been a number of disadvantages. This included detrimental impact on tenants and families, such as where a father of a separated family who has been forced to downsize and move out of the areas but is now unable to afford the cost of travel to visit his daughter. Other examples include those who are struggling to meet the cost of having an additional bedroom while on a waiting list for a smaller property, or where someone needs an additional room for medical equipment but this is not permitted under the bedroom tax. Other difficulties include increased poverty and debt in communities and that the cost of downsizing has in fact increased levels of benefit in 80% of cases. This is because one bedroom properties are typically flats which in addition to rent require the payment of maintenance charges;
- It was also explained that, as at December 2013, 358 Caldmoreaccord residents in Walsall were affected by the bedroom tax. Most are under occupying by one bedroom and most are living in two or three bedroom properties. It was further explained that the bedroom tax allocations policy did not use age criteria for children. While local lettings plans, agreed with the council which allowed for mixed schemes to avoid high density of children and limited numbers of children in flats, are now under pressure. In terms of the

impact it was explained that the amount of arrears outstanding has increased by around £70k in 9 months for those affected by the benefit tax although Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) provided by the council had helped with the shortfall for some. However, since April 2013, 39 additional possession notices have been issued but as yet no evictions have taken place solely due to bedroom tax shortfall. It was explained that it was inevitable that tenants affected by bedroom tax will be evicted unless some form of subsidy is applied;

- It was explained that Caldmoreaccord's response included a personal plan for every affected customer and customer profiling has been focussed on those affected by bedroom tax. Other support includes jobs and skills coaches and a direct payment pilot. In response to a Panel query it was explained that a range of energy efficiency measures are either being used or developed by Caldmoreaccord. This includes a retrofit programme for fitting UV panels to certain properties and looking to build properties near industrial developments in order to harvest the heat. In addition, the factory built properties that the housing association have produced are very energy efficient.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the presentation be noted**

### **313/13 BLACK COUNTRY CITY DEAL (BCCD) AND TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Executive Director, Regeneration and Head of Regeneration Development & Delivery introduced the update. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the BCCD had now been agreed and a report was due to go to Cabinet in April 2014 detailing the formal end of the process and its resource implications. It was explained that the agreement puts Walsall on the map and is vital in encouraging investor confidence. The strategic economic plan for the Black Country LEP will see the Black Country competing for a proportion of £2bn of government funding per year; this would be submitted by the end of March 2014. It was also explained that £10m of funding was to be received by the Black Economic Partnership to support the development of sites for high value manufacturing;
- In relation to the town centre a number of key development sites were highlighted. This included the Gigaport with a planning application for development at the site by a pharmaceutical company intending to invest £3.2m and create 25-30 jobs. In addition proposed cinema developments at the waterfront and near Tesco total £24m and the creation of around 300 jobs. It was explained that developments including at St Matthew's Quarter and the Co-op/ Primark scheme would form part of activity for the second half of 2013/14. In response to a query raised regarding the use of flowers on the main arterial route into Walsall from Junction 10 of the M6 to impress potential investors the Portfolio Holder explained that he would refer this query to the appropriate Member of Cabinet. He also agreed to take action regarding a Panel request for additional disabled seating on Park Street. Panel Members collectively welcomed the development activity taking place as good news for Walsall.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted**

**314/13 WALSALL MARKETS WORKING GROUP: WALSALL MARKET FEASIBILITY STUDY**

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

- It was explained that progress to date includes a desktop assessment of the previous GVA study which had proposed to locate the market on the Bridge. This included the need to incorporate the development exclusion zone around the Old Square development and timescales of that scheme. Members were encouraged to participate in the working group in order to determine the location and look of the market. The Portfolio Holder explained that the agreed proposal from the original working group was a state of the art market on the Bridge operating six days a week. However, it would be important to revisit all the work previously done to ensure that it was consistent with the raft of further development planned for the town centre area. In response to a Panel query the Portfolio Holder explained that a significant challenge experienced elsewhere in having a market that was located outside the central shopping area was a reduced footfall.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted**

**315/13 FINANCIAL PLAN 2014/15 TO 2018/19: UPDATE ON DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME, AND OUTCOME OF BUDGET CONSULTATION TO DATE**

- The Panel considered the report.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update be noted**

**316/13 WORK PROGRAMME & FORWARD PLAN**

The Panel considered the work programme and forward plan.

**RESOLVED:**

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

**317/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be 6 February at 6:00pm.

*The meeting closed at 7:55 p.m.*

Chair:

Date: