

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 September 2021 at 6.00pm held at Walsall Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall, WS1 1TW.

Committee Members Present:

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor M. Follows (Vice-Chair)
Councillor B. Allen
Councillor S. Coughlan
Councillor L. Jeavons
Councillor E. Lee
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor G. Singh Sohal
Councillor J. Whitehouse

Portfolio Holders

Councillor G. Perry	Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities
Councillor O. Butler	Clean and Green
Councillor C. Towe	Education and Skills

Officers Present:

Simon Neilson	Executive Director of Economy and Environment
Philippa Venables	Director of Regeneration and Economy
Shaun Darcy	Director of Finance Corporate Performance & Corporate Landlord
Nick Ford	Property Manager
Matt Crowton	Transportation Major Projects and Strategy Manager
Matt Powis	Democratic Services Officer

Invited Attendees:

David Harris	Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)
Ian and Ester Whitehouse	Petitioner Support

Other Members in attendance:

Councillor D Coughlan Lead Petitioner

01/21 **Apologies**

Councillor Andrew submitted an apology for absence.

02/21 **Substitution**

There were no substitutions.

03/21 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

04/21 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

05/21 Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021, as amended, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

06/21 Petition: Riverpoint Estate, Willenhall.

The Committee considered a petition, which requested the Council to explore all options to compulsory purchase the land which runs between the Riverpoint Estate, Willenhall and the former Willenhall Sewage Works. The Chair outlined the format for the item and confirmed that the petition received more than 500 signatures. The Chair invited the petition organiser to introduce their petition.

Councillor D. Coughlan introduced the petition and was supported by Ester and Ian Whitehouse as local residents. The Committee were shown before and after pictures of the land in question and the history of the plot.

She highlighted the land was once a green haven filled with trees and scrubs which local residents enjoyed. Over the course of a weekend, trees and shrubs were removed and the land was flattened for development. She concluded that it was essential that the Council considers all options to save the land from development and restore the land to its original purpose.

The Committee noted that planning consent for the development of the Riverpoint Estate contained the requirements for the subject land to be landscaped. This was stipulated for a period of 5 years from the grant of consent for the retention of the landscaping. However, it was noted that this consent had expired.

Compulsory purchase powers (CPO) enables Local Authorities to acquire land compulsorily in order to carry out a function within in the public interest. Council Officers carried out investigations on the land in question and concluded that the Council had no plan or scheme for the land. As a result, the Council was unable to utilise CPO powers.

The Committee was informed of the following points from the Lead and Supporting Petitioner:

- The land was previously populated with trees and scrubs as the land was designed to be a noise barrier between residential houses and the Black Country route.
- Development of the land happened without notice or consultation with the Council or local residents.
- The Council's Green Space Strategy reinforced open green spaces and was critical for mental wellbeing.
- It was noted that it took 23 years for trees and wildlife to settle on the land. Overnight the land had been flattened which had a devastating impact on local residents.
- The land was sold and transferred to a housing developer.
- A discussion was held around consultation with the residents. In response, the Executive Director confirmed that there had been some confusion between the land relating to the petition and the original application for housing on the Riverpoint Estate. There had been no planning application in respect of the clearance of the land. However, as the owner appeared to be compliant with land use, there was no recourse for the Council to undertake enforcement steps.
- Some of the residents had witnessed threatening behaviour from the landowner.

Ester and Ian Whitehouse thanked Councillor D Coughlan, Councillor S Coughlan and Councillor Andrew on their support of the petition.

Following debate, it was moved by Councillor S Coughlan and Seconded by Councillor Jeavons that:

The Cabinet to explore all options to compulsory purchase the land between Riverpoint Estate and the former Willenhall Sewage Works.

On being put to the vote the motion was unanimously carried.

Resolved:

The Cabinet to explore all options to compulsory purchase the land between Riverpoint Estate and the former Willenhall Sewage Works.

07/21 **West Midlands Local Transport Plan – Green Paper Engagement**

The Committee received a presentation from David Harris, Transport Strategy & Place Manager at TfWM. He reported on the development of a new West Midlands Local Transport Plan and provided an update on developing a new Local Transport Plan.

The Committee noted that the development of the Local Transport Plan was a statutory function of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). The last local transport plan was adopted in 2016, however, the West Midlands had undergone significant development and change.

A robust transport strategy was essential part of the West Midlands' economic recovery post Covid-19 pandemic. The new local transport plan would enable a long-term vision for transport, set a policy framework and work towards addressing the climate emergency. The WMCA had made a commitment to be carbon neutral by 2041.

At this point, Councillor Kaur joined the meeting.

The West Midlands Transport Green paper was published on 6th July 2021, which sets out five 'Motives for Change' for transport:

- Sustaining economic success: Support the building of an inclusive and green West Midlands economy, through better use of existing infrastructure, land, technology and sustainable transport options.
- Tackling the climate emergency: Changes to where people travel to / from, reducing the frequency of travel and changing the vehicles we use to travel.
- Creating a fairer society: analysing land use, the availability and affordability of transport and the experience and usability of transport.
- Supporting local places and communities: Re-imagining local neighbourhoods, reducing dominance of transport and providing quick and easy access to key local services.
- Becoming more active: Enable safe, convenient and accessible walking and cycling opportunities and increase active travel for journeys.

A West Midlands Leaders Summit was scheduled for late September 2021 to consider the approach for the new Local Transport Plan with a formal approval for summer 2022.

The Committee thanked David Harris for his attendance.

Resolved:

That, the presentation be noted.

08/21 Areas of focus – 2021/22

The Democratic Services Officer gave an overview of the Committee's remit and proposed work programme for 2021/22

Members debated the issues and selected the following items for their work programme:

- Maximising Council Income and Assets.
- Electric vehicle charging with particular regard to off-road parking points
- Council Bonfire and Fireworks Update

Resolved:

- 1. That, areas of focus 2020/21 and forward plans be noted.**
- 2. That the following items be added to the work programme:**
 - a. Maximising Council Income and Assets.**
 - b. Electric vehicle charging with particular regard to off-road parking points**
 - c. Council Bonfire and Fireworks Update**

09/21 **Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 21 October 2021.

Termination of Meeting

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

Signed:

Date: