

Portfolio Holder Briefing



Walsall Council

Areas of Responsibility	Lead Executive Director
Economic development and delivery through strategic assets, strategic and public transport and planning policy (inc. Walsall Borough Local Plan), Strategic Housing. Managing Council assets. Markets. Town Centre and District Centre Car Parks. Development of new HWRC	Economy, Environment and Communities – Dave Brown

Partnership Board Membership

Walsall Economic Forum, Town Deal Board
WMCA: Board & Employment Committee
West Midlands Employers Shareholder Board
Sherbourne Recycling Ltd – Stakeholder Board



Agenda Item: 14a
Council – 29 September 2025

Portfolio Holder Report
Statutory Deputy Leader – Prosperous Places & Investment

1. Foreword

This year's annual report for the Prosperous Places and Investment portfolio is a testament to the remarkable progress Walsall has made. Our ambitious £1.5 billion investment programme is not just a figure, it is a catalyst for transformation, revitalising the town centre and district hubs, enhancing transport links, infrastructure, and public spaces. These efforts have already generated over 4,000 new jobs and delivered 1,000 new homes, providing tangible benefits to our residents and businesses. These achievements are crucial milestones on our journey to becoming "the most improved borough in the region by 2040," where every resident, regardless of neighbourhood, enjoys equal opportunities and a strong sense of pride in their community.

Our progress is the result of robust partnerships. Local business owners, residents, and investors have played a pivotal role, from shaping a shared vision for Walsall to taking practical action towards its realisation. Their commitment and collaboration have been instrumental in turning our ambitions into reality.

2. Strategic Context

Following comprehensive borough-wide consultation, the We Are Walsall 2040 strategy was approved by Walsall Council's Cabinet on 21 June 2023. This strategy provides a clear framework for partnership working, enabling all stakeholders to prioritise resources and deliver shared ambitions. The central aims are to support economic growth, improve health and wellbeing, address housing needs, develop infrastructure, and drive place-based transformation.

In March 2025, the Government announced a £20.25 million allocation to Walsall's Community Regeneration Partnership (CRP), in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Formerly known as the Healthy Levelling Up Partnership, the CRP aligns with the Government's five missions, focusing particularly on:

- Kick-starting economic growth
- Taking back our streets
- Breaking down barriers to opportunity
- Building an NHS fit for the future

The funding supports fifteen projects, primarily targeting strategic acquisitions to bolster economic growth in the town centre, as well as a range of initiatives to improve health, wellbeing, and community safety.

3. Key achievements, impact and ongoing work

Strategy Development

- The Walsall Borough Local Plan (WBLP) is being developed to support the delivery of new homes, jobs, sustainable travel, and active lifestyles. Consultation is due to complete in autumn 2025.

- The Housing Strategy sets out our ambition for all residents to live in decent homes that meet their needs and aspirations. A new Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan is in development, aiming for a whole-council approach to housing.
- The Walsall Town Centre Masterplan, first published in 2019, set a 20-year vision and helped secure public funding for capital projects. A new Town Centre Framework is being developed to refresh the vision and objectives.

Housing Development

- Collaboration with the West Midlands Combined Authority and key developers has enabled the transformation of brownfield sites into thriving residential areas, adding to the 1,000 new homes completed at Hollyhedge Lane, Goscote Lodge Crescent, Goscote Lane, and the former Caparo site.
- The council-led scheme for Moat Street/Villiers Street in Willenhall is progressing following the CPO of key sites. Demolition work is set to commence on the first phase, enabling the delivery of over 100 new homes.

Employment site Development

- Construction has begun at SPARK, the largest employment site in the borough, transforming it into a 620,000sqft manufacturing and logistics hub. The first two units will be complete in late 2025, with further units to follow.



- Planning permission for Total Park at Bentley Lane will provide 422,000sqft of new employment floorspace, contributing to circa 2m sqft of new high-quality employment floorspace, bringing jobs and investment to Walsall.

Town Centre Development

- The Connected Gateway scheme, using £11.4m of Government funding, is improving connections across the town centre, especially between St Paul's bus station and Walsall train station, alongside improvements to the Saddlers Centre.



- Works at the Saddlers Centre include new stairs, flooring, ceilings, and shop fronts, with completion expected by October 2025. The “Three Men in a Boat” automaton is being repaired and will return to the Saddlers Centre before Christmas.



- The Creative Industries Enterprise Centre, in the former Guildhall building, is under development, overcoming heritage challenges and expected to complete by May/June 2026.



- The Adult Learning Centre, being built in the former Marks and Spencer, will bring skills and learning back into the town centre, with over 800 adult learners expected. The new facility is due to open by September 2027.



- The Active Public Spaces project includes a new Canal Bridge, improvements to the Canal Basin, and enhancements to the area around the New Art Gallery and Park Street.



Bloxwich Town Deal Schemes

- The Bloxwich Launchpad opened in September 2025, bringing together services from multiple organisations and providing digital guidance for residents and tailored support for local businesses.
- The Active Travel and Connectivity project has delivered 5km of new cycleways and 7.9km of improved pedestrian paths with solar lighting along canal towpaths.
- The Construction Skills through Regeneration programme has delivered ten affordable, sustainable homes with EV charging, transforming disused garage sites into thriving communities and supporting local skills development.

Community Regeneration Partnership

- The Council has secured £20.25m in capital funding to support 15 projects, including site acquisitions, a Youth Hub, market development, and support for community-led projects such as Alumwell Resource Centre and A'ina Hub.

Middlemore Lane HWRC & WTS

- The new Household Waste Recycling Centre and Waste Transfer Station in Aldridge was completed in August 2025, providing a modern facility to increase recycling and operational efficiency, supporting environmental targets and delivering significant social value. Over £1 million was generated in social value, 42 jobs created, 386 apprenticeship weeks delivered, and more than 99% of construction waste diverted from landfill.



Transport Development

- New train stations at Willenhall and Darlaston are under construction, due to open in early 2026. The footbridge and lift shafts have been installed at Willenhall, and at Darlaston the footbridge is now in place. The project also includes improved cycle and walking infrastructure around the new Willenhall Station.



- Construction is ongoing at the new Fingerpost Bridge in Pelsall, due to complete later this year.

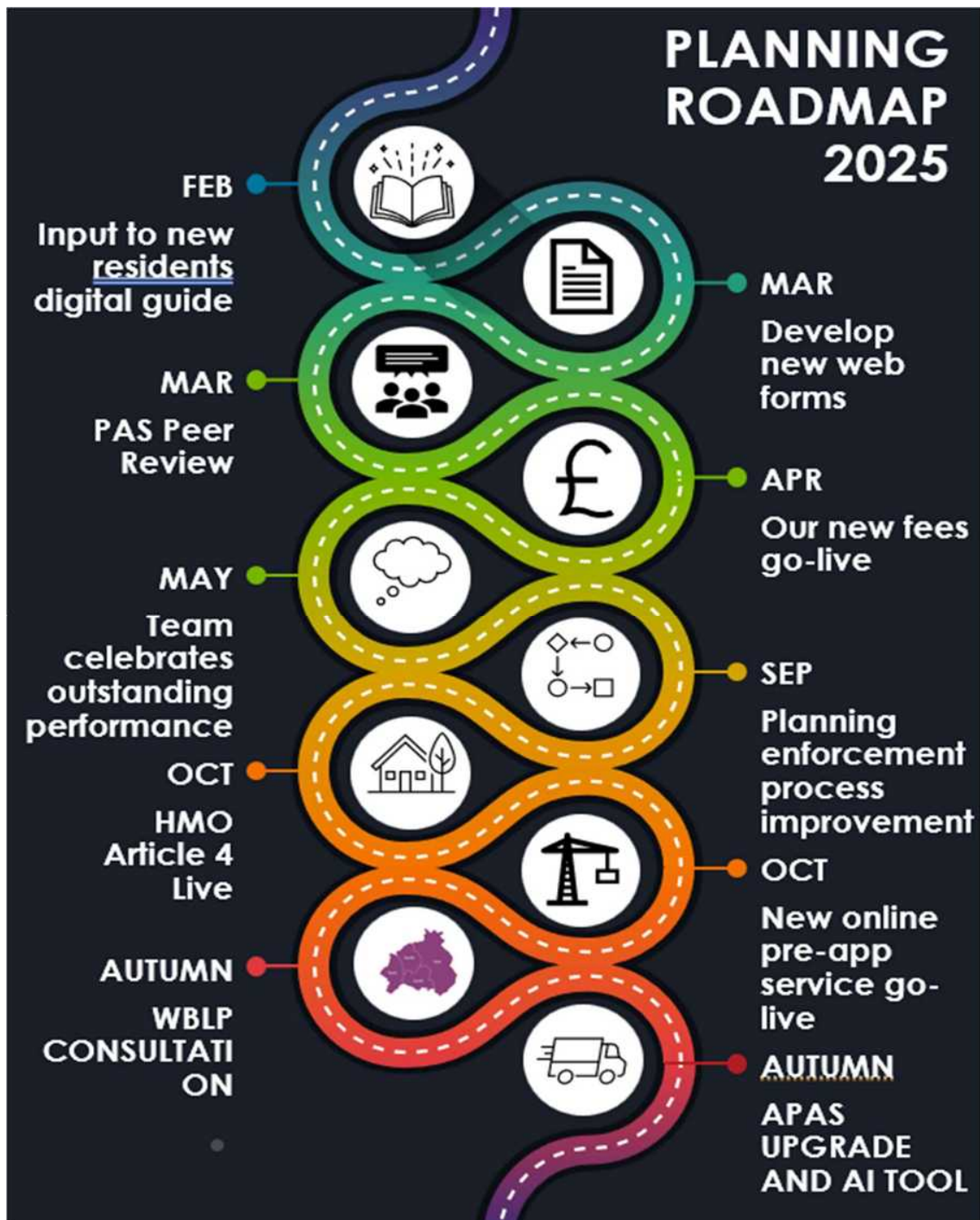


- The corridor from Moxley to Walsall town centre is being developed to improve access to key employment sites and the new rail station.
- Major improvements to junction 10 of the M6 were completed in spring 2024, improving capacity and resilience for local people and businesses.
- Electric vehicle charge points are being installed in residential streets.
- The road safety team continues to deliver engineering measures and education initiatives to reduce personal injury collisions.

Planning and Development

- The planning team continues to deliver timely and robust decision-making, exceeding national targets. Key achievements include 940 planning permissions issued, an 85% approval rate, 77% of appeal decisions in our favour, £617k in planning application fees generated, 482 enforcement cases closed, and a 48% market share of all building control works.

- The team is embedding new ways of working to deliver decisions in record-breaking timeframes, with all 189 decisions in the last quarter of 24/25 issued on time at rates between 92% and 97%.



Business Growth West Midlands

- Business support initiatives, backed by the West Midlands Combined Authority, are delivering advice, skills development, and access to finance. We are on track to engage with 426 businesses, with 156 engagements completed, creating jobs, improving productivity, and enhancing business processes.
- Over £1.36 million has been distributed to local businesses across 2023/24 and 2024/25, with a further £500,000 in grant funding now being deployed.

Walsall Borough Economic Forum (WBEF)

- The Forum continues to serve as a key platform for collaboration between strategic businesses and the public sector, supporting inclusive growth, investment, and long-term economic resilience. Engagement with partners ensures business voices are central to the borough's transformation.

Employment Support Programmes

- Walsall Works delivers impactful employment support from 28 co-located sites, providing tailored guidance and job readiness support. The Walsall Works EXPO hosted over 65 exhibitors and more than 1,000 attendees.
- The Youth Trailblazer programme, with £435,000 allocated, focuses on paid work placements and transition support for young people at risk of becoming NEET.
- WorkWell, launched in April 2025, supports residents with health-related barriers to employment, with over 100 referrals received in the first few months.
- Connect to Work, launching in October, will help residents with significant health barriers into sustainable work.
- The Restart Scheme supported 880 participants, with 353 entering work and 215 sustaining employment.

Corporate Landlord

- The Corporate Landlord team is reviewing the council's property portfolio, supporting regeneration projects and efficient service delivery. Notable acquisitions include Jubilee House in Leamore and Midland Hotel in the town centre, supporting SEND school places and temporary accommodation.
- The team has generated over £1.4m in capital receipts, with contracts exchanged on a further £3.1m of sales. Decarbonisation projects are underway, including a new solar panel array at Oak Park Active Living Centre.

Markets

- Markets are growing, with a 24% increase in stalls let in 2024/25 compared to the previous year. Improvements to Bloxwich Market and new layouts for Willenhall and Walsall Markets are underway.

Tackling poor property standards and support for residents

- Since 2018, over £24 million in external grants has been secured to tackle fuel poverty and assist over 7,696 households.
- The Warm Homes Local Grant and National Grid funding support energy efficiency and carbon reduction, with projects in schools winning three prestigious awards.
- The Housing Standards and Improvement Service has addressed over 1,000 enquiries, with enforcement action taken where necessary, resulting in £60,000 in fines to support further enforcement work.

- The Supported Housing Improvement Programme has improved accommodation quality for residents in supported housing.

4. Future Priorities and Plans

Looking ahead, our focus will remain on delivering the projects supported by the CRP and maximising the impact of our investment. Key priorities include accelerating the delivery of new homes, continuing to improve transport and digital infrastructure, and fostering innovation in business and service delivery.

We will continue to strengthen our partnerships, building on the collaborative approach that has underpinned our success to date. Ongoing engagement with residents and stakeholders will ensure that our strategies remain responsive to local needs and aspirations.

5. Conclusion

Walsall is at an exciting point in its development. Our investment programme is already delivering real benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors. By working together, we are laying the foundations for sustained growth, improved wellbeing, and greater prosperity for all. We look forward to continuing this journey, with the support of our partners and the community, as we strive to make Walsall the most improved borough in the region by 2040.

All this does not happen without experienced and professional officers who work tirelessly to deliver the political priorities set by the council's Cabinet and Members. The successes we demonstrate in this report owe much to the dedication of our elected Councillors, our officers and to local businesses, but also to genuine partnership working at a Black Country and wider regional level as well as at a national level. I'd like to pass on my thanks to all those who have contributed to the activities outlined in this report and ultimately to making Walsall a more prosperous and investible place.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. A. A.', positioned above the printed name.

Statutory Deputy Leader and
Portfolio Holder for Prosperous Places & Investment