

Portfolio Holder Briefing



Walsall Council

Associate Leader* - Economic Growth & Regeneration

Cllr Adrian Andrew

* Statutory Deputy Leader as required by Schedule A1 of the Local Government Act 2000

Areas of Responsibility	Lead Executive Director
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regeneration• Economic Development• Planning Policy (inc. Walsall Borough Local Plan)• Planning and Building Control Service• Employment Growth• Strategic Housing• Strategic Use of Assets• Strategic transport• Markets• Corporate Landlord	Economy, Environment and Communities – Dave Brown

Partnership Board Membership

Walsall Economic Forum

Town Deal Board

WMCA: Board, Economic Board, Land & Delivery Board, Investment Zone Committee

West Midlands Growth Company

West Midlands Employers Shareholder Board



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST, OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

Council – 4 November 2024

Portfolio Holder Report Associate Leader – Economic Growth & Regeneration

1. Foreword

The council continues to drive a transformative place making programme to create the conditions for increased investment, quality homes, the right jobs and skills in the right places. While the council is leading on several major projects to transform the town centre and wider borough, we work to develop excellent relationships with a range of developers, businesses and providers to arrive at flexible solutions to place making as part of the picture of the £1.5bn investment generated in Walsall.

I am pleased to present the report which will set out the considerable work of councillors, staff and partners to work towards the Councils vision, plans and strategies. Working collaboratively is integral to the work of all services and I am especially pleased to highlight the work of SPARK, one of the biggest employment opportunities in the West Midlands and Walsall Council has led and driven the remediation which has just been concluded this month.

2. Strategic Context

Through the delivery of our strategic regeneration aims and ambitions we will be directly contributing to the delivery of the core objective of Walsall 2040 but particularly around the themes of delivering quality homes, supporting healthy communities and a driving a strong economy for all communities

The economy is one of the priorities of the council plan and has emerged as a key issue in our long-term strategy – We Are Walsall 2040.

3. Key achievements, impact and ongoing work

Our Strategies

Walsall Borough Local Plan (WBLP)

The council is progressing a comprehensive borough-wide local plan – the WBLP - that will seek to prioritise brownfield sites and address local housing and employment needs. As part of the plan making process, the council has already administered a successful call for sites process, resulting in over 300 sites being submitted for assessment, not only from major developers but also from local residents.

Walsall Place Based Strategy

This will be part of the framework for how the government's devolved Single Settlement allocation to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) will be prioritised, targeted and spent in the region over future spending review periods starting from 2025. The aim of the PBS is for the council to set out the vision and interventions for how the single settlement functions will come together to bring transformation and target investment in the borough. The PBS will articulate the interventions needed to deliver existing local strategies and the Walsall 2040 vision.

Walsall Housing Strategy

The Housing Strategy sets out our ambition that Walsall residents should be able to live in a decent home that meets their needs and aspirations. We do this through working with partners to ensure good quality new homes, tackling poor housing conditions, making homes more energy efficient, and minimising homelessness. The Strategy will be fully reviewed in 2025 to ensure homes fit for the future.

Town Centre Masterplan

The vision driving the town centre masterplan is that "Walsall will attract visitors based on its leisure and culture offers, including its internationally significant art gallery. The town centre environment will be easily navigable with healthy streets, which encourage walking and cycling and maximise the value of significant public spaces through regular events and activities".

Our Projects

Housing Development

In recent years substantial investment has been directed towards housing development, resulting in approximately 1,000 new homes completed at Hollyhedge Lane, Goscote Lodge Crescent, Goscote Lane, and the former Caparo site. Collaboration with the West Midlands Combined Authority, and key developers has enabled the transformation of brownfield sites into thriving residential areas.

Work continues to bring forward new housing opportunities such as the Council led scheme being progressed for Moat Street/Villiers Street in Willenhall that proposes 107 new homes, the first phase of these have been subject to a recent CPO process led by the Council which we are awaiting the outcome.

Employment Sites

The end of the first stage of the £100 million regeneration project at SPARK has been reached as the two-year remediation project draws to a close. SPARK is the largest employment site in the borough and construction of 620,000sqft of new manufacturing and logistics floor space will begin early in 2025.

SPARK



Over the last twelve months we have also seen the completion of Parallel 113 and this site is now occupied, new businesses moving into high quality employment space at Reedswood and businesses operating from Impact Park in Leamore, all which contributes nearly 1m sq.ft of new high quality employment floorspace in Walsall.

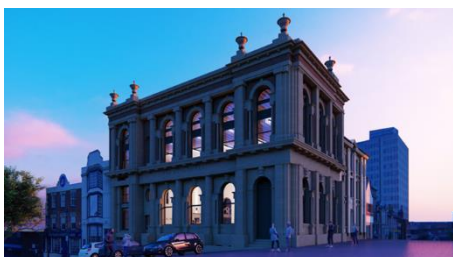
Connected Gateway

A joint initiative funded by the Future High Street Fund and the council aims to create a landmark arrival experience to Walsall's town centre, improving connectivity between transport hubs and establishing a new public square as well as improving the Saddlers Centre (both Park Mall and Bradford Mall).



Walsall Town Deal

Town Deal funded projects include the Construction Skills Academy, Advanced Electric Vehicle Technology Centre, Adult Learning Centre, Active Travel and Connectivity schemes, Digital Skills Hub, Creative Industries Enterprise Centre, Active Public Spaces and Community Capital initiatives.



Bloxwich Town Deal Schemes

Bloxwich also has several Town Deal projects, demonstrating our drive to support and improve the economies of the wider borough, including those related to active travel, construction skills, community capital, incubation space and digital access, and green initiatives to promote community health and well-being.

Strategic Transport

From 2026, new local train services, and re-routed intra-regional train services, will operate along the electrified rail line serving the new stations at Willenhall and Darlaston. A business case has also been developed to extend train services to a proposed new station at Aldridge with scheme development funding ringfenced in the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement.

The construction phase of the £78m major highway improvement scheme at M6 Junction 10 was completed in March 2024. The scheme has been an example of positive partnership working and effective engagement with both stakeholders and the local community. The additional capacity created at the junction helps unlock new development, especially in the Walsall to Wolverhampton corridor.

M6 J10



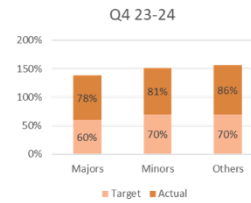
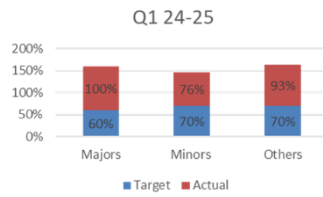
Our Service Delivery

Planning and Development:

Development Management

Our agreed backlog reduction strategy has resulted in a significant reduction of our historic planning application backlog. Combined with investment in our workforce through our award-winning organisational development team and a robust recruitment and retention process we now have a more stable and high-performing planning team

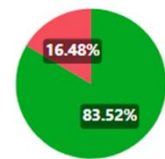
Backlog down
71%



Decisions issued **1247**

Full apps approval rate

● Permission Granted ● Permission Refused



The introduced a planning customer charter provides a clear and transparent commitment to our customers on what to expect for all paid-for services and is a consistent framework for our team to work to moving forward.

Walsall Council Customer Charter
Development Management Planning Applications
and Chargeable Services



We are also embracing technological advances and will be implementing an artificial intelligence planning validator tool early 2025 which will help our customers understand at an early stage whether an application is likely to be considered valid or not and will help our team to validate, register and process planning applications more quickly.

Business Growth Team

Business Growth West Midlands

Launched formally in October 2023, Business Growth West Midlands (BGWM) is a hub and spoke model for delivery of public sector business support across the combined authority area.

Walsall businesses have been successful in securing over £250,000 from the regional net zero and decarbonisation programme and have access various programmes including:

- SME Productivity Grants
- Net Zero & Decarbonisation
- The Walsall High Growth Programme
- Start Up Walsall

Walsall Borough Economic Forum (WEBF)

Relaunched officially in February 2024, the WEBF has met three times at the time of writing this report. The WEBF is made up of a range of partners, including Walsall College, whg, Black Country Chamber and WMCA, as well as

businesses such as Jhoots Pharmacy, Walsall FC, Babcock Engineering, ASSA ABLOY, Barclays, RAC, Menfor Construction and Old Bank Business Centre.

Employment & Skills

Walsall Works

The employment and skills service continues to provide advice, guidance and employability support to all our local residents who are looking for work and training. We identify client barriers to work and in partnership with local organisations find solutions for our participants.

Restart

Walsall Council is one of the best performing suppliers in the contract with Serco, and have supported 796 people on the programme, 331 of whom have progressed into a new job and 182 have reached the sustained earning target of £4,750.

Multiply

Multiply is the UK Government's programme aimed to improve functional numeracy skills for adults. Local authorities engage with local providers to deliver flexible courses which are designed to improve people's ability to use maths in their daily life.

Commonwealth Games Legacy

This funding stream is being used to deliver support to inactive and unemployed residents and has enabled us to embed our delivery in 20 community settings. 563 people have received locally based job support.

Shared Prosperity Funding

We are the lead on the People and Skills Pillar, through direct delivery and commissioning of grant to the voluntary sector, to delivery targeted support to economically inactive residents.

Careers Enterprise Company

We are improving the CIAG offered within our secondary schools, through the appointment of two CEC Co-ordinators to support deliver of the national Gatsby benchmarks, a tool that measures how many employer interactions a child has whilst in education

Transport

The council has continued to work towards the implementation of a number of key transport projects including:

- Walsall Electric Vehicle ChargePoint Strategy
- supporting West Midlands Police in their multiagency road safety operations
- A series of walking, cycling, scooting and road safety
- The council has delivered a variety of local network improvements
- Work on extending the cycle network in the Willenhall

Asset Management

The council is transforming its property portfolio management to a corporate landlord model, focusing on strategic asset planning and disposal of surplus assets. The asset management team is supporting regeneration projects like Connected Gateways and Town Centre projects.

Housing Standards and Improvement

Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households

In just over 12 months the Council has managed to bring 16 empty homes back into use, including 4 secured through Compulsory Purchase Order, to use as much needed temporary accommodation for homeless households.

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)

In 2023/24 the team approved 568 DFGs. The DFG programme facilitates housing adaptations for residents with disabilities, including much needed stairlifts and wet rooms, to enable residents to live independently in their own homes.

Tackling fuel poverty

The team continue to tackle fuel poverty by helping to secure new, or improved, Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) for private rented homes.

Local Authority Delivery scheme (LADs)

The council secured funds of circa £6.5m for round 3 to assist residents with various energy savings measures e.g. external wall, loft and cavity insulation, also solar PV panels

Home Upgrade Grant Scheme (HUGs) 2

The council has secured HUGS funding worth £1.2m to help those households on low income in energy efficiency homes and who do not have gas as a source of home heating.

Retrofit

In July 2023 we secured £185K revenue from the Midlands Energy Hub as part of the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) project to deliver home based detailed retro-fit advice and support.

Household Support Fund

In 2023/24 to date a total of £250,000 has been delivered to replace defective boilers in low-income households. This scheme assisted 64 households

Gas Safety Charity Hardship Fund

£21k has been provided by Foundation Independent Living Trust to address gas safety, gas leak or CO poisoning for repairs, servicing, testing and replacements.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

In March 2024, £125,000 was awarded for targeted help to residents on topics such as energy saving, bill reduction, carbon saving and support of the voluntary sector in the same areas.

Additional (HMO) Licensing scheme launched

Following comprehensive statutory consultation, the first area of the borough for additional licensing of house in multiple occupation launched in September 2022. This licensing scheme covers 4 wards and includes all private rented HMOs that have 3 or more tenants from more than 1 household.

Housing Enforcement

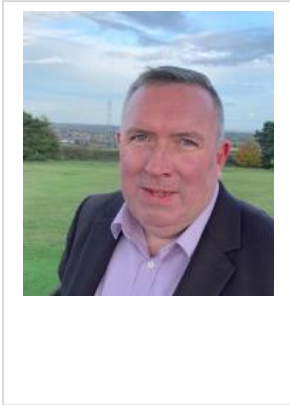
In 2023/24 the service has received 882 enquiries about housing standards of which 196 warranted a follow-up property inspection. In most cases landlords have complied with requests to improve properties but statutory action was required in others.

4. Outside Bodies

We continue to work closely with key partners in delivering our regeneration objectives.

5. Thank you

All this does not without experienced and dedicated Officers who work tirelessly to the political priorities that the experienced Administration set. The partnership working on a Black Country level, wider regional level and nationally has contributed a great deal to our success in Walsall Borough and a successful region leads to a successful Walsall Borough.



Signed

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. J. A. A.', written in a cursive style.

Associate Leader and Portfolio Holder for
Economic Growth and Regeneration