

**Cabinet – 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016**

**Willenhall Economic and Development Programme**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Andrew: Economy Infrastructure and Development

**Service:** Economy and Environment: Regeneration and Development

**Wards:** Short Heath, Willenhall North, and Willenhall South

**Key decision:** No

**Forward plan:** No

**1. Summary**

- 1.1 Cabinet, at the meeting on 19 October 2015, agreed to support the intention to undertake a regeneration approach to a defined area in Willenhall; through a targeted programme of activity for up to a five year period. Cabinet also authorised officers to undertake a due diligence/scoping exercise to fully understand the current economic baseline of the defined area including the impact of previous regeneration activity to inform the regeneration strategy for Willenhall.
- 1.2 This report outlines the outcomes of the due diligence work that has been undertaken, the preparation of an initial work plan, and further work that is required to inform a regeneration strategy for the Willenhall area, including any currently known budgetary and resource implications.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the progress made by officers towards the production of a programme of targeted activity for the Willenhall Economic Development Programme area.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agrees the baseline report, attached as Appendix A, and the resulting twelve month work plan, attached as Appendix B,
- 2.3 That Cabinet authorises officers to implement the twelve month work plan subject to the identification of additional resources as necessary.
- 2.4 That Cabinet agrees to receive a future report on progress in delivering the initial work plan, and a strategy for delivery of an economic and development programme over defined timescales and including budgetary and resource implications.

### 3. Report detail

3.1 In order to begin to build up a strategy for the regeneration of the area, it was deemed appropriate to undertake a review of recent and current regeneration activity to fully understand the economic profile of the area, the needs and opportunities of the area and what interventions are already taking place at a local and more strategic level. The baseline review concluded that the area defined for the Willenhall Economic Development Programme (EDP) does not easily align with other recognised boundaries. By using information available for a wider geographical area that not only includes the Willenhall EDP area but also the immediate surroundings, it is possible to identify the characteristics of businesses and residents; therefore the information that defined the baseline review includes information from all three wards comprising the Willenhall area.

### 3.2 The baseline review

3.2.1 Willenhall, as detailed in the report to cabinet on 19 October 2015, has benefited from a number of development and investment successes and on-going interventions. The baseline review undertaken has considered the following aspects: programmes and initiatives, the Site Allocation Document (SAD), land ownership and future plans, business engagement, district centre management and public sector intervention; as well as performance indicators used to inform corporate plans and strategies.

3.2.2 The outcome of the baseline review is detailed in the report attached in **appendix A** and considers the information under the three key theme areas in the Walsall Borough Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), as reported to cabinet on 28 October 2015: Place, Business and People. The key findings for each theme are detailed below:

- **Place:** *transforming infrastructure and the environment*
  - The Site Allocation Document (SAD) sets out the opportunities identified for Willenhall including the protection of Willenhall's identified employment sites whilst also considering sites for release for housing development. The draft SAD has identified approximately 26.37 hectares of land within the Willenhall EDP area which could be available for development.
  - Willenhall's strength is considered to be in manufacturing and the area continues to perform well; however, good quality accommodation is in short supply and many businesses suffer from constrained sites in a congested environment. That said manufacturing businesses are actively looking to improve their properties.
  - The area is not considered to be a prime location with existing demand for companies wanting to locate in the area. The Longacres area and sites around the Black Country Route are anticipated to benefit from the proposed improvements at junction 10 of the M6 to improve accessibility and are considered to contain land that is of reasonable/good quality.

- As identified by the Black Country Rapid Transit Study, there is potential to locate a train station stop within central Willenhall – this will connect Walsall and Wolverhampton by re-instating the passenger service on the heavy rail service between the two centres.
- The district centre needs support to maintain its' status as a district centre and enhance the offer provided.

- **Business:** *improving business competitiveness*

- Willenhall is home to five of Walsall's top 100 strategic companies and the business base in Willenhall employs approximately 12,200 individuals. There are 850 local business units in the area with a high number of manufacturing businesses. The manufacturing base in Willenhall is higher than the rest of the borough and double the national figure. However, there are relatively few businesses in professional, scientific and technical industries.
- A range of business support is provided to companies by the council and has resulted in both monetary investment and job opportunities. Further work is also being undertaken to understand the supply chain and customer base of businesses to understand connectivity between businesses and their suppliers and the potential for business to business collaboration on Research and Development.
- Based on full occupancy and all businesses being eligible to pay full rates, it is estimated that the area's total potential business rates could be c. £6.12m, based on a total of £12.5m Rateable Value.

- **People:** *raising employability, education and skills*

- Adults living in the area are more likely to be active in the labour market (in terms of employment or actively seeking employment), however, they are also more likely to be unable to find work and dependent on key out of work benefits than the borough average.
- The majority of people who work in the area are in full-time rather than part-time employment (above the borough average); however, they have relatively low qualification levels.
- Residents in the area have lower qualifications than Walsall as a whole and the lack of formal qualification is much higher than the national average.
- Programmes such as Walsall *Works* continue to successfully engage with residents in the Willenhall area to provide employment and skills support, including Walsall Works Apprenticeships.
- There is close working with employers, developers and major contractors to make available employment, and employers are registered as committed to creating apprenticeships or jobs.
- Local Willenhall secondary schools have also been targeted to receive assistance which aims to encourage school leavers to continue to participate in learning.

3.2.3 Successful regeneration activity is always reliant on strong partnership working. Collaborative working between the public, private and third sectors in Willenhall is evident in the work of the Willenhall and Short Heath Area Panel

and the Willenhall Partnership (Town Centre Partnership) which is active in the district centre.

- 3.2.4 The baseline review has concluded that in addition to Willenhall specific activity, the area continues to benefit from strategic activity, be it borough-wide or sub/regionally. However, the review has also concluded that there are further opportunities which could be explored, including a continuation of the activities currently being undertaken, to better understand the needs of the Willenhall EDP area. It has therefore been concluded that in order to make any meaningful intervention and to better understand the timescales that will be required, additional time is required to explore the work opportunities that have been highlighted by this initial baseline review and fully understand and implement any proposed regeneration strategy.
- 3.2.5 Officers undertaking the baseline review have concluded this initial activity with the production of a twelve month “work plan.” This plan not only aims to build upon the successes identified during the review but also importantly further explores opportunities that have also been highlighted. It is intended that this work plan will better inform the extent of the impact that can be achieved and the likelihood of success. It is felt that a twelve month period is required to implement the work plan and will result in a better devised approach for Willenhall.

### **3.3 The work plan**

- 3.3.1 The work plan provides details of the proposed projects, together with timescales and any resource implications under the three themes of: Place, Business and People. Examples of the proposed work streams include: a review of the Willenhall based projects within the Black Country place pipeline as well as an analysis of funding opportunities and delivery mechanisms, a study to look at potential locations for a rail station between Walsall and Wolverhampton, continuation of business engagement to understand the needs and ambition of local businesses, targeting residents and employers in Willenhall to benefit from Walsall Works and investigating potential governance arrangements to over-see the work plan. A copy of the proposed work plan is included in **Appendix B**.

## **4. Council priorities**

- 4.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2015-2019 seeks to improve lives and life chances for everyone who lives and works in the Borough of Walsall and in so doing, minimise the help that residents need from the state.

The five priorities that will support this purpose are:

- Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work
- Improving health and well being, including independence for older people and protection of vulnerable people
- Creating safe, sustainable and inclusive communities
- Improve safeguarding, learning and life chances of children and young people, raising aspirations

- Creating a modern, dynamic and efficient workforce designed around what residents need.

4.2 The proposal set out in this report seeks to support the delivery of the council's priorities, particularly within Willenhall, through the identification of regeneration opportunities to drive economic growth and job creation, enhance and sustain the district centre and diversify housing type and tenure. Whilst the programme of targeted regeneration activity for Willenhall will not be a formal plan as per the Local Planning Regulations, it will help to deliver the Site Allocation Document and adopted Black Country Core Strategy.

## **5. Risk management**

5.1 In addressing the proposed work plan there are no significant risks, however, the successful implementation of some of the proposed work streams represents substantial risk and this will be assessed on a project by project basis. Where activity is identified as potentially requiring additional resources, there is a risk that should the work plan be prioritised, other council activity may not be delivered.

5.2 There is also a longer-term risk in that despite the council's intervention, the commercial market is not active in Willenhall and therefore commercial development is not delivered in the area, skills shortage continues to be an issue affecting job readiness and business growth is still hampered by issues such as access to finance and a shortage of good quality stock. Risk management will continue to be considered in relation to the outcomes of the work plan and the proposed targeted regeneration programme.

## **6. Financial implications**

6.1 There are no financial implications relating to the proposed work plan as this will be delivered internally by officers within Regeneration and Development, however, the successful implementation of the proposed work streams is likely to have financial implications and these will be assessed on a project by project basis. Future financial implications arising from the outcomes of the work plan and subsequent proposed programme of targeted regeneration will be considered and presented in a future cabinet report: there is currently no provision within the Capital/Revenue Programmes for this and will therefore be a new funding requirement. Dependent on the activities to be funded, this may be internal or external resources or a combination of both.

## **7. Legal implications**

7.1 There is no legal requirement to produce an area based regeneration strategy and therefore it is important to note that the proposed strategy for the Willenhall EDP area will not have any legal status; it can only be used to provide information. It cannot be used as policy when determining decisions but could contribute to the delivery of the SAD. The implementation of the work plan may require the council to consider project specific legal issues but such requirements, should they be necessary, will not be fully understood until

the work plan has been implemented. Therefore, any legal advice needed will be sought at the appropriate time.

## **8. Property implications**

- 8.1 The council's portfolio of land and property in Willenhall has been considered during the baseline review, however, there are currently no property implications arising directly from this report. The council's asset portfolio will be considered further as part of any proposed regeneration strategy.

## **9. Health and wellbeing implications**

- 9.1 There are currently no direct health and well being implications arising directly from this report, although the objective of the programme to increase economic activity and job creation should reduce dependencies on care services.

## **10. Staffing implications**

- 10.1 The implementation of the work plan will be managed by officers within Regeneration and Development – the staffing structure of which is currently under review - with support from other service areas and supplemented by external expertise where required. Future staffing implications will be considered once the programme of activity is known.

## **11. Equality implications**

- 11.1 At this stage of the proposal there are no immediate equality implications. Equality analysis, legal requirements and good practice issues will be considered throughout the project, and will include engagement and consultation where required.

## **12. Consultation**

- 12.1 At this stage of the proposal there are no consultation requirements, however, officers have attended the Willenhall and Short Heath Area Panel where ward members representing Short Heath, Willenhall North and Willenhall South were present. Engagement with appropriate forums/groups and wider consultation will be considered in relation to specific activities once known and it is intended that the implementation of the work plan will involve liaising with other stakeholders active in the area. Businesses will be engaged to determine their requirements but also their appetite for development.

## **Background papers**

- Willenhall Economic and Development Programme, Cabinet report, 19 October 2015

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