

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 September 2019 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members

Present:

Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken (Vice–Chair)
Councillor S. Craddock
Councillor C. Creaney
Councillor M. Follows
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor A. Nazir
Councillor G. Singh Sohal
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor I. Robertson
Councillor M. Ward

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor A. Andrew Deputy Leader of the Council and
Regeneration
Councillor C. Towe Education and Skills

Officers Present:

Simon Neilson Executive Director –
Economy and Environment
Simon Tranter Head of Regeneration and
Development
Matt Powis Democratic Services Officer

9/19 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P. Bott.

8/19 Substitution

Councillor I. Robertson substituted on behalf of Councillor P. Bott.

9/19 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips

10/19 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

11/19 Minutes of the previous meeting

In reference to Minute No. 6/19 in regards to Section 106 Funding, a Member expressed concerns that the Council's Planning Committee had not received an update on Section 106 Funding. He requested that Committee receive an urgent report at the next Committee.

Resolved:

- 1. That the minutes of the meetings held on 20 June 2019 copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record;**
- 2. That, an update on Section 106 Funding be provided at the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.**

12/19 Walsall Town Centre Masterplan

The Committee received a presentation from the Executive Director of Economy and Environment and the Head of Regeneration and Development on the Walsall Town Centre Masterplan.

The Cabinet agreed the Walsall Town Centre Masterplan on 17 July 2019, which aimed to provide a vision of a plan that would re-imagine Walsall Town Centre over the next 20 years amid declining retail footfall.

The Committee was guided through various masterplan interventions which aimed to stimulate investor interest and confidence in Walsall.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration highlighted that the Town Centre Masterplan was the last chance to boost the town centre by redesigning and re-profiling the area to ensure that the centre was clean and safe for everyone. The town centre had evolved over the 10 years with the development of St Matthews Quarter and the installation of Primark. However, he expressed concerns that empty properties remain throughout the town centre.

Following this presentation, a discussion ensued which was outlined as follows:-

- It was noted that the Council had commenced work on the delivery of the 6 month action plan. The Executive Director highlighted that the Council had proceeded to address the problems associated with pigeon fouling and instigated a deep clean of the Town Centre;
- The Borough had experienced high town centre footfall via public transportation;
- A Member sought clarification on the role of the public and scrutiny in the Master Plan. In response, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder confirmed that public consultation had already taken place on the Masterplan. However, the role of scrutiny was vital with regular engagement needed to ensure the ideas of scrutiny were considered as part of the accountability process;

- A Member welcomed the opportunities with Masterplan and sought clarification on the future of the Old Square Shopping Centre and Butlers Passage. In response, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Masterplan presented an opportunity for increased linkages between Park Street and the Bus Station. The Council would assess the long term vision of the Bus Station as part of the work carried out by the Masterplan. In regard to Old Square Shopping Centre, due to commercial sensitivity no information was available for discussion in the public session;
- The Committee welcomed the role of Walsall Art Gallery in the long term vision of the waterfront;
- A Member welcomed the Masterplan for the Town Centre. However, he sought clarification on how the Council would tackle problems with anti-social behaviour with on-street drinking and homelessness. In response, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder responded that the Council had invested in the recruitment of Community Protection Officers for the Town Centre to tackle issues of anti-social behaviour however, he stressed that more Police were needed to patrol the streets;
- It was noted that 24 hour alcohol licences were a problem for the drinking culture in the Town Centre;
- A Member highlighted issues with excessive litter on Waterfront Square and safety concerns with the open canal basin without a barrier. In response, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council was looking to work with the Canal and River Trust on the issues with litter and potential opportunities for the water basin to bring investment whilst improving facilities for canal boats looking to moor in Walsall. In regard to a safety barrier for the basin, he expressed the view that a barrier would not fit with the aesthetics of the surroundings;
- A Member noted proposals about improvements with public transportation links and sought clarification on the role of cars in the town centre. In response, the Committee noted the consultation on the future of Mellish Road roundabout which aimed at reducing congestion to the town centre and was part of wider Council view to ease congestion in the area;
- It was noted that the Council had removed parking charges for Council owned car parks on Sundays which aimed at encouraging people to visit the town centre. However, the Council was actively monitoring the long term effectiveness of this proposal.
- The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council had to be willing to be flexible in the town centre to future changes with technology which would impact the way that people travel into the Borough. As part of this, the Council had invested in electric charging points for electric vehicles;
- A Member sought clarification on the retail engagement offer. In response, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder responded that the retail sector had been shrinking due to the popularity of the online marketplace. The Council was looking to work with businesses to look at retail trends such as café cultures which competes with other neighbouring authorities;
- A Member highlighted the importance of horizon scanning with the town centre especially with public transportation. He sought clarification on the role of SPRINT into Walsall and how it impacts Masterplan proposals. In response, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder noted concerns from residents and businesses about the proposals and confirmed that the Council was working

- with Transport for West Midlands on SPRINT proposals in preparation for the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022;
- The Committee noted developments on tram and train hybrid technology and the need for SPRINT to link with the Town Centre and not just the wider area of the Borough.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for their presentation.

Resolved:

That, the Walsall Town Centre Masterplan be noted.

13/19 **Unauthorised Encampments Working Group – Terms of Reference**

Members considered the draft terms of reference in relation to the Unauthorised Encampments Working Group.

Resolved:

That, the terms of reference for the Unauthorised Encampments Working Group be approved.

14/19 **Areas of focus – 2019/20**

The Committee considered its areas of focus and the forward plans of Walsall Council, the Black Country Joint Executive Committee and West Midlands Combined Authority Board.

In reference to the Council's Executive Forward Plan, a Member requested that the following items be included on the Work Programme:

- Black Country Enterprise Zone;
- A34 SPRINT Scheme;
- West Midland Enhanced Partnership Scheme (Vision for Bus);
- Community Safety Plan.

Members of the Committee reiterated the importance of a Section 106 update. The Executive Director confirmed that a report would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

Resolved:

- 1. That, areas of focus 2019/20 and forward plans be noted;**
- 2. That the following items be included on the Committee's Work Programme:**
 - a. Black Country Enterprise Zone;**
 - b. A34 SPRINT Scheme;**
 - c. West Midland Enhanced Partnership Scheme (Vision for Bus);**

d. Community Safety Plan.

15/19 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 17 October 2019.

Termination of Meeting

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

Signed:

Date: