

Business, Employment & the Local Economy Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Monday 24 November 2014 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

Panel Members Present:

Councillor D. Anson (Chair)
Councillor A. Andrew
Councillor D. Barker
Councillor M. Bird
Councillor S. Craddock
Councillor A. Ditta
Councillor J. Fitzpatrick
Councillor G. Illmann-Walker
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor G. Sohal
Councillor R. Worrall

Officers Present:

Simon Neilson – Executive Director – Regeneration
Keith Skerman – Executive Director – Social Care and Inclusion
Simon Tranter- Head of Regeneration Development & Delivery
Jo Nugent - Team Leader – Borough Wide Development
Richard Chadwick – Team Leader, Town Centre Development
Matt Crowton – Transportation Strategy & Policy Manager
Kelly Valente – Lead Accountant, Regeneration
David Elsworthy – Head of Planning and Building Control
Steve Laws – Asset Manager
Matt Underhill - Committee Business and Governance Manager

Portfolio Holders

Present: Councillor M. Nazir – Regeneration
Councillor D. Coughlan - Social Care & Health

Invitees:

Richard Dugdale – Network Rail

11/14 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor James, Councillor Harrison and Councillor Clews.

12/14 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Martin substituted for Councillor Harrison for the duration of the meeting. Councillor J. Fitzpatrick substituted for Councillor James.

13/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor Martin declared an interest in relation to Item no. 17/14 Broadway North Resource Centre. [Exempt Information under paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)].

14/14 MINUTES

The Panel considered the minutes of the previous meeting on 23 October 2014.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting, held on 23 October, 2014, be approved as a true and accurate record.

15 /14 PETITION: RAVENSCOURT SHOPPING PRECINCT

The Head of Planning and Building Control introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

It was explain that a petition was submitted to Council on 22nd September 2014 which called for the council to compulsorily purchase Ravenscourt Shopping area. It was also explained that the Planning Committee on 14 April 2014 had resolved to serve a Section 215 Notice to address the poor state of repair of the building. It was explained that under the Section 215 order the owners of the site would be required to undertake a number of improvements, including the repair of weathered fascias, the removal of all litter and fly tipped rubbish, together with the removal of graffiti.

In relation to the petition the Head of Planning and Building explained that officers are in ongoing negotiations with the owners of the site regarding improvements. However, the owners have advised officers that they intend to submit plans for a redevelopment scheme during the first quarter of 2015. It was therefore the recommendation of officers that the Section 215 Notice only be served should negotiations fail to bring an acceptable and deliverable scheme within six months of 24 November 2014.

The Chair noted that this was the second petition received in relation to the Ravenscourt shopping area, with one having previously been submitted to Council. Councillor Andrew explained that he was speaking on behalf of the lead petitioner, Vivienne Aston, who was unable to attend the meeting. Councillor Andrew explained significant efforts had been made over a lengthy period of time by officers to reach a satisfactory agreement with the owners and their land agents regarding the site. He stated that he was very pleased, as would the people of Brownhills, with the progress that now seemed to have been made. A further Panel Member observed that the decision by Tesco to withdraw from an earlier commitment to redevelop the site had compounded the challenge of improving the site.

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration acknowledged the efforts of both officers and the council's previous political leadership in achieving the significant progress made on this matter.

Resolved:

That the Panel agrees that officers continue to work with the owners of Ravenscourt Shopping Centre in order to help bring forward an appropriate redevelopment scheme for the site. However, if a planning application is not submitted within 6 months of the 24 November 2014 officers should serve the

S215 Notice in accordance with the resolution of the Planning Committee in order to improve the appearance of the site; &

the report be noted.

16 /14 A REVIEW OF THE OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE USE OF BROADWAY NORTH RESOURCE CENTRE

The Asset Manager introduced the item. It was explained that the Broadway North Resource Centre was currently used for the delivery of the council's day services for adults experiencing mental health problems. In addition, the property provides a base for the activities provided by Park Hall Community Association.

It was explained that the purpose of the report was to set out the options for the future use of Broadway North Resource Centre. These options were previously considered by the Asset Strategy Group following the receipt of an unsolicited expression of interest from a third party in acquiring the site. It was further explained that any terms agreed for sale by informal tender would be in accordance with the council's obligation to achieve Best Consideration when disposing of its assets. A report setting out the options for the future use of the site will be considered by Cabinet on 17 December 2014.

A Panel Member stated that she wished to remind the committee that one of the key priorities of the Walsall Health and Well Being Strategy (WHWBS) was: "We will build stronger, healthier communities for individuals and groups in Walsall through the promotion of healthy behaviours and access to appropriate facilities and services." (p.37). The Member expressed concern that the WHWBS was being ignored. The Chair noted that it was council owned land and that this was the Panel's opportunity to contribute its view as to the future use of the site. In response to Panel queries it was explained that the decision to sell a council building and/ or land could only be taken once it was deemed surplus to requirements. It was confirmed that the Broadway North Resource Centre had not been deemed surplus to requirements. Members deferred consideration of a resolution proposed by the Member recommending that this matter be referred to the Social Care and Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel, together with the Health and Well Being Board, until they were able to gain a further understanding of the key issues during the private session.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

17/14 A REVIEW OF THE OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE USE OF BROADWAY NORTH RESOURCE CENTRE

[Exempt information under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)]

The Asset Manager introduced a further report.

The Panel made a resolution relating to this item and the report was noted.

18/14 CHASE LINE ELECTRIFICATION AND BLOXWICH LEVEL CROSSING

The Principal Transport Planner introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

Richard Dugdale, Network Rail, explained that electrification of the line required a programme of works, including the reconstruction of a number of bridges. It was explained that one bridge (Broad Lane) had been complete. In relation to Park Street tunnel the preparatory work has been completed, with the remaining works now scheduled to start after the Xmas period in January/ February 2015. In relation to Central Drive it was explained that work is currently underway to resolve subsidence at the site. It is anticipated that work on the bridge reconstruction will restart in January 2015. It was further explained that work at North Street Bridge was also on schedule.

In relation to Bloxwich level crossing it was explained that Network Rail proposed to close the level crossing on safety grounds. In response to Panel queries Richard Dugdale explained that if the level crossing remained open it would be necessary for the barriers to be down for up to 40 minutes per hour. It was also explained that a package of mitigation measures was currently being agreed which would enable the effective flow of traffic. The views of those who participated in consultation events would also be reflected in the traffic mitigation proposals.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

19/14 QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2014/15

The Lead Accountant, Regeneration introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

It was explained that the forecast revenue outturn for 2014/15 for services under the remit of the Panel was an overspend of £112k. There was a forecast capital underspend of £887k for the same period. However, it was explained that £751k will be requested to be treated as slippage into the next financial year.

In relation to the forecast revenue outturn it was explained that a number of areas had contributed to the shortfall. This includes loss of income from the town centre market due its move of £145k. In response to a Panel query it was explained that an overspend in cleaning (£219k) was as a result of the amount of recharges on internal contracts being less than the cost of service delivery. It was further explained that an estimate is made of the likely level of demand for the provision of these services at the start of the financial year, however assumptions change during the year, for example contracts are lost, extra cleans are requested etc hence for a trading account like cleaning there may be fluctuations.

In relation to the forecast capital outturn it was explained that the majority of the carry forward request (£611k) related to the Smarter Workplaces Programme. It was also explained that it was unlikely that available funding of £134k for the Black Country Enterprise Zone would be spent prior to the end of the financial year, and unlikely that the grant provider would allow it to be carried forward into the new financial year.

20/14 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET & CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2015/16 TO 2018/19 FOR REGENERATION PORTFOLIO 2014/15

The Portfolio Holder, Regeneration introduced the report. The Panel considered the report with a number of Members expressing a wish to reserve the right to comment on the budget proposals at a later point. A Panel Member proposed the following recommendation which the Panel supported: That the draft revenue budget and capital programme 2015/16 -2018/19 for the Regeneration Portfolio be noted.

Resolved:

That the draft revenue budget and capital programme 2015/16 -2018/19 for the Regeneration Portfolio be noted; &

the report be noted.

21/14 BLACK COUNTRY ENTERPRISE ZONE (BCEZ)

The Team Leader – Borough Wide Development introduced the presentation. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

It was explained that the BCEZ was a strategically important regeneration and economic priority for the council and Local Enterprise Partnership (BC LEP). It was further explained that it covered two locations: Darlaston, consisting of 14 sites over 40ha, and Wolverhampton North, including i54. It was also explained that the occupants of i54 include Jaguar Land Rover and International Security Printers, which was previously based in Walsall. Key objectives include the creation of 7,000 new jobs by 2038 with additional supply chain benefits.

It was also explained that the BCEZ was viewed as a leader and is one of the top performing enterprise zones in the country with year on year growth continuing to be achieved. In Darlaston the BCEZ has provided a range of support for local businesses. This includes a simplified approach to planning through the Darlaston Development Order, business rate relief and Enhanced Capital Allowances (ECA) for business investing in plant and machinery at specific sites. In addition, significant infrastructure improvements will be delivered through the £26m Darlaston SDA Access Project.

In relation to Phoenix 10 it was explained that the land owners, the council and HCA, were commencing a joint procurement process to secure a purchaser to deliver the remediation of the site. To fund the delivery of the site it is proposed that the council provide financial support through prudential borrowing which will be repaid via the BCEZ business rates mechanism.

The success of the council's approach in Darlaston has been witnessed with year on year growth, with George Dyke Ltd and Nationwide Platforms expanding as a result of taking advantage of opportunities such as ECA. The Chair and Panel Members noted the very positive work that was being undertaken at i54 and within Darlaston.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

22/14 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Team Leader – Town Centre Development introduced the presentation. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

It was explained that there had been in excess of £370m of physical investment in the town centre over recent years. This includes developments at St Matthew's Quarter Walsall Gigaport and Walsall Waterfront, such as Asda, whg headquarters, the Premier Inn hotel and Waterfront South. It was also explained that current developments include Primark and Co-op at the Old Square, the Norton and Proffitt proposed scheme at St Matthew's Quarter (commencement of works anticipated within the next six months) and the relocation of Walsall Market. In addition, planning consent has been given for a VUE cinema at the site adjacent to Tesco, with £12m investment and the creation of 200 jobs anticipated. While the construction of Jhoots Pharmacy office (£3.2m investment, 30 jobs created) and Walsall College Business and Sports Hub (£11m investment, 250 jobs to be created) was well underway. It was explained that planning consent had also been given for the construction of a Light Cinema at the Waterfront North, with the company announcing contracts with a number of national restaurant chains. Planning consent for 44 apartments has also been granted for Waterfront South.

In terms of proposed opportunities a planning application is anticipated shortly in relation to Old Square Phase 2, while the former Shannon's Mill site provides the potential opportunity for a range uses. Elsewhere, the Police Station, Day Street car park, Challenge block, the former Jabez Cliff site, Waterfront Lex, William House and Station Street provide a range of possible development opportunities.

It was also explained that the council has had an enabling role in creating the conditions for economic growth, but has also undertaken the role of direct investment in the St Matthew's Quarter and Jhoots Pharmacy schemes to create jobs and sustain economic growth. Officers also pointed out that work in supporting employment sites was part of efforts to attract businesses into the town and create a vibrant and attractive town centre. The Portfolio Holder noted the work of officers and the previous political leadership of the council for the work undertaken to deliver significant regeneration of the town centre. It was also agreed that a presentation regarding regeneration in the district centres be received at a future Panel meeting.

A number of Panel Members expressed concerns regarding the future of the Police Station which was now likely to be vacated as West Midlands Police had

now removed the £14m of anticipated capital funding to build a new police station in Walsall. These concerns include the possibility of the site ending up in third party ownership with the risk of problems similar to those at Phoenix 10. The Portfolio Holder explained that all options for the site would be considered.

A Panel Member expressed pride at the regeneration work achieved in Walsall. He asked that thanks be recorded to officers, including former Executive Director for Regeneration, Tim Johnson.

Resolved:

That a presentation regarding regeneration in the district centres be received at a future Panel meeting; &

the report be noted.

23/14 WALSALL MARKET UPDATE

The Team Leader – The Team Leader – Borough Wide Development introduced the update. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

It was explained the officers are currently developing a planning application and a suite of planning documents for the new market. The Panel were also advised of that the temporary planning permission that the market currently has for its present position which will lapse in April 2015. On that basis the planning application is likely to incorporate a request to for interim arrangements with some stalls to remain on Bradford Street a reconfiguration of stalls on the Bridge to ensure that the market remained open for business. These proposals will be completed following consultation with the Market Traders Association. In response to a Panel query it was explained that Members will be invited to a further working group meeting once the level of detail of the planning application including the tender costs have been worked up to enable review.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

24/14 WORK PROGRAMME & FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the Work Programme and Forward Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme and forward plan be noted.

25/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be 22 January at 6:00pm.

The meeting closed at 8:40 p.m.

Chair:

Date: