

23 October 2023

Regeneration Update

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader and Regeneration

1. Aim

Regeneration activity in the borough is key to achieving the objectives set out in Our Council Plan 2022-2025 and the vision of the “We Are Walsall 2040” Borough Plan. Projects and programmes have a positive impact to provide quality homes, vibrant towns, a connected borough and a strong economy for all.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee note the ongoing regeneration activity in the borough and give feedback to support the development of future proposals.

3. Report detail – know

Walsall is in the middle of a £1.5 billion transformation of our Borough through recent, current and planned investment. Significant work is currently underway to progress this transformation and a summary of the key regeneration activity is set out below.

3.1 Walsall Town Centre

- 3.1.1 The **Walsall Town Centre Masterplan** was supported by Cabinet in 2019. It provides an inspirational and deliverable vision for a sustainable and resilient town centre for the next 15-20 years, providing a bold and ambitious vision that is at the same time a clear, deliverable and investible strategy for the council and stakeholders to follow.

The vision 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”.

A series of ten catalytic interventions are set out in the Masterplan. These are the projects that the council and its partners are able to prioritise to enable a process of physical transformation in Walsall Town Centre. The delivery of these catalytic interventions will stimulate investor confidence in the town centre and enable the overall Masterplan vision to be achieved.



A number of capital projects are now in development for the town centre with funding from the Future High Streets Fund, Towns Fund and Walsall Council. These projects will help to deliver several interventions as set out in the Masterplan:

3.1.2 The **Connected Gateway** project was successful in securing £11.4m from the government's Future High Street Fund and is also supported by the council's capital funds. This is an exciting and transformative project that will:

- create a public transport gateway that improves connections between the town's bus and rail hubs.
- enhance the presence of Walsall Rail Station by improving accessibility to it and the arrival experience into the town centre.
- modernise and repurpose the Saddlers Shopping Centre and introduce a greater proportion of non-retail uses, and
- transform the public realm in the heart of Park Street.

A detailed design for the project is currently being developed with a view to submission of a planning application in late 2023. The project will lead to many positive outcomes including increasing footfall, environmental improvements, through greenery and high quality public realm and introduce a new offer to boost economic growth and investment.

- 3.1.3 The **Active Public Spaces** scheme is being supported by Towns Fund. It will deliver an inviting, engaging and quality public space around the northern end of Park Street and its link into Gallery Square. This will provide a stronger connection between the High Street, the New Art Gallery Canal Basin and local restaurant and entertainment facilities. The project will help to change the experience of visiting the town centre. The physical and visual links will encourage more use of the Waterfront and its facilities and put Walsall New Art Gallery at its heart.

In partnership with Canal River Trust, new and improved facilities will encourage boaters to visit and extend their stays around the Canal Basin, creating a vibrant and active waterfront for casual visitors, shoppers and gallery visitors.

A detailed design for the project has been completed and it is anticipated that works will start in early 2024.

- 3.1.4 The **Creative Industries Enterprise Centre** project is being supported by funding that has been successfully secured from DCMS 'Cultural Development Fund and DLUHC's Towns Fund. This funding will enable the currently vacant Grade II* listed Guildhall building to be transformed. The makerspace, to be run by Urban Hax, a local non-profit creative CIC, will include support and facilities for creatives to run and grow creative businesses and projects across art, science and technology. A detailed design has been completed and a planning application has been submitted to change of use and address the listed status.

In the run-up to the Guildhall re-opening, an associated Festival of Design and Making, a programme of creative commissions, events, skills development and business support will take place throughout 2024-2026 to engage local people, raise awareness of Walsall's continuing status as a centre of creative excellence and promote representation of Walsall's diverse communities.

- 3.1.5 The **Construction Skills Academy Programme** is a Walsall Town Deal project led by Walsall College which has enabled the construction of an extension to the front of current Green Lane campus. The new facility expands the offer currently available for the construction sector through the college; including new technologies, advanced skills that are essential for this key sector moving forward and supports local people to acquire new skills at a meaningful scale to gain employment and help to meet pent up demand for upskilling within the construction sector locally.

- 3.1.6 The **Advanced Electric Vehicle Technology Centre Programme** is also led by Walsall College and will create a new purpose-built facility adjacent to the existing and complementary training centre at their Wisemore Campus. This will deliver advanced training in electric vehicle technologies and maintenance

close to the existing traditional motor vehicle education facilities, allowing for easier integration into the wider Wisemore Campus, creating an improved student experience.

- 3.1.7 The **Digital Skills Hub** Town Deal project will provide new digital skills infrastructure at a meaningful scale to help meet the need for upskilling local people in digital technologies, so they are able to move into and develop successful careers within this growing and key market place sector. The centre will be located in close proximity to the Studio School and Sixth within the St Matthews Quarter.
- 3.1.8 During 2023 the **Walsall Public Realm Manual** has been produced for Walsall Town Centre. The manual aims to provide continuity in the design and detailing across the streets and spaces of the town centre. The Manual builds on the existing Town Centre Masterplan and the Public Realm Investment Plan which preceded the manual to provide an overall strategy for public realm. The manual provides a further layer of design information on key interventions developed in the Town Centre Masterplan. The Public Realm Manual will be used as a technical guide for future public realm projects in the town centre.
- 3.1.9 The Walsall Town Centre Masterplan also set out an aspiration to deliver **high quality town centre living**. This will provide new homes in a highly accessible and sustainable location while also helping create a broader community that can help support the vitality of the wider town centre into the future. Delivery of these new homes will complement the investment already taking place through the Connected Gateway and Town Deal projects. The council is actively working to progress new residential schemes within the town centre engaging with landowner and developers and undertaking work to consider potential delivery routes and the role that it can play to support this.
- 3.1.10 Demolition of the **former Challenge Building** and redevelopment of the site for a new modern, purpose-built medical centre reached practical completion in August 2023. The £12.6million town centre scheme, including £4.5million grant funding from NHS England, opened in September and relocated four existing GP practices into a single hub, providing services to over 25,000 patients. The scheme includes consulting, treatment and meeting rooms, plus on-site patient car parking. It is built to BREEAM Excellent sustainability rating and has a high-energy efficiency above standard building regulation requirements. This strategic development in the town centre complements the development plans for the wider area and the vision for the town centre set out in the masterplan. Building on this, work is underway to review potential development and delivery options for the adjoining council owned land.

3.2 Bloxwich Town Deal

- 3.2.1 The Council has launched the **Construction Skills Through Regeneration** programme as part of the Bloxwich Town Deal programme. The programme will build local capacity to deliver on Walsall's housing targets. Walsall College will lead on the delivery of Apprenticeships training and skills development while the

council will manage grant funding to support local Social Landlords. The fund is open to local housing associations and developers to support the remediation of derelict brownfield sites, and the environmental upgrading of existing dwellings.

To access the fund applicants will be asked to make commitments to providing local jobs for local people, the use of local supply chains and the delivery of construction skills and training for local people by developers. Outcomes will include improved quality of neighbourhood, reduced carbon emissions and costs, together with local people trained and employed.

- 3.2.2 The **Community Capital Grants Programme** has enabled voluntary and community sector and social enterprise organisations to submit expressions of interest for a share of circa £2m to refurbish and upgrade existing buildings in Bloxwich so they can expand their roles in supporting local people into employment and training, and improve skills, work and job opportunities (note the programme also extends to Walsall with funding of £740,000).
- 3.2.3 King George V Playing Field in Bloxwich will be enhanced as part of the **Green Bloxwich** programme. Work will include bringing back into use two of the park's heritage buildings, transforming one of them, the existing Pavilion, into a community café, with proposals for the Park Lodge under development. Proposals for King George V Park are being developed and include new equipment, a variety of sports pitches and multi-use games areas, and zones to attract and encourage wildlife. There will also be spaces suitable for holding a variety of events.
- 3.2.4 The **Incubation Space & Digital Access Centre** programme will create a new centre within Bloxwich Town Centre. The Digital Access element will support local people to access internet services, receive training, support, advice and guidance to overcome barriers to their future participation in education and / or employment. For those looking to establish a new or develop an existing business, the Incubation Centre will provide the support they need within a professional environment, enabling participants to develop their self-employment or business ambitions. Council staff and Walsall College, together with local community groups and specialist providers of services, have agreed to and will be engaged to support all participants to succeed. A building has been identified for the centre and a detailed design is being prepared.
- 3.2.5 The aim of the **Bloxwich Towns Fund Active Travel and Connectivity Sustainable Transport Programme** is to make it safer and easier to walk, cycle and use public transport in the Bloxwich area. The main schemes being delivered as part of this programme are:
- Cycling and walking improvements on Elmore Green Road and Croxdene Avenue.
 - Footway widening/one-way improvements on Marlborough St/Clarendon St.
 - LED street lighting on Bloxwich High Street.
 - Infilling/widening works on the A34 Upper Green Ln bridge, next to Cable Drive.

All works must be delivered by March 2026 at the latest.

3.2.6 The cycling and walking improvements on Elmore Green Rd are currently in the process of being constructed and include:

- Upgrading the existing pedestrian crossing opposite Elmore Green Primary School to a facility for both pedestrians and cyclists.
- Installing a new pedestrian crossing on Elmore Green Rd, near to the junction with Croxdene Avenue.
- Creating a new cycle parking facility near to Bloxwich Station, which will be covered by CCTV.

3.2.7 At present the construction work is still running to programme and the upgraded toucan crossing opposite Elmore Green Primary School has already been switched on to coincide with the start of the new school term. The last element of this scheme to be delivered will be the planting, the timings of which are dictated by the types of plants and trees selected – this will be complete by the end of October/start of November, in time for the end of scheme press release.

3.2.8 In addition, the Canals and River Trust are putting in place 14km of new tarmac tow paths, 12km of which is lit (low level solar) across both the Bloxwich and Walsall Town Deal areas, including improving the entrance and exit points.



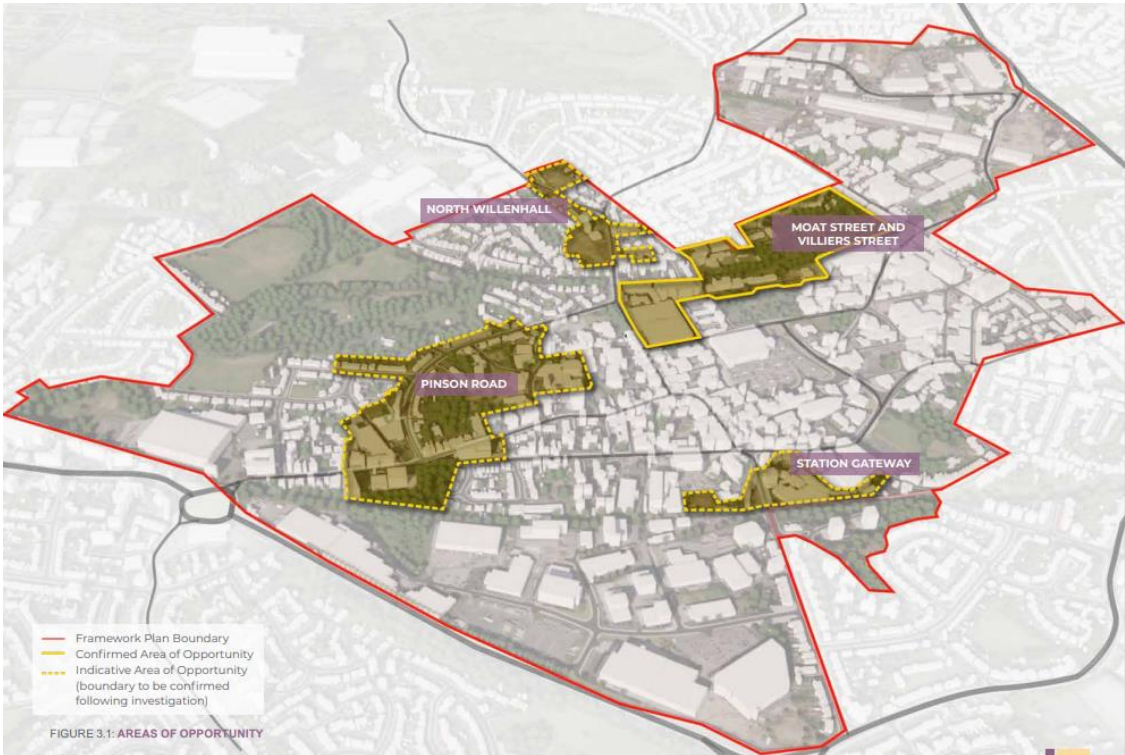
Canal tow path improvement

3.3 Willenhall

- 3.3.1 Willenhall has been identified by the council as an area for strategic intervention with Cabinet previously agreeing to support a targeted programme of activity to regenerate the area. Since then work has continued to explore and promote opportunities for growth and investment. The planned opening of the new railway station and promotion of the Walsall Growth Corridor as a priority for housing delivery and sustainable growth provides a real opportunity to promote Willenhall as a place where people aspire to live, work, and spend leisure time.
- 3.3.2 In February 2021 Cabinet approved preparation of a **Willenhall Framework Plan** to confirm the council's aspirations for Willenhall and to guide future development. The completed Willenhall Framework Plan was supported by Cabinet in February 2022, following engagement with key stakeholders including the local community.

The Framework Plan sets out a 10-year vision for Willenhall which provides an ambition for housing growth and healthy, prosperous communities. The vision is that Willenhall will grow into a vibrant, connected and welcoming town with a strong sense of place which celebrates its diverse communities and promotes safe, healthy and active lifestyles. Quality design and sustainable construction will move Willenhall towards a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future.

There are four opportunity areas identified in the Framework Plan, which are categorised for delivery over the short, medium and long term. In total the aim is to provide up to 500 new homes with associated environmental and connectivity benefits. The Moat Street/Villiers Street area of opportunity has been identified as Phase 1 and the initial focus for the council.



Willenhall Framework Plan and Areas of Opportunity

- 3.3.3 The **Phase 1 Moat Street and Villiers Street** scheme has a number of key workstreams: land assembly (the council has very limited landholdings in the area), development and submission of an outline planning application and the procurement of a developer partner to deliver the proposed homes.

Land assembly

The council appointed property consultants Avison Young (AY) to commence negotiations with the interested parties in March 2021 and negotiations have been on-going since this time. Following a review of progress Cabinet authorised the use of the compulsory purchase powers conferred on the council by section 226(1)(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to acquire land and rights necessary to deliver the Moat Street and Villiers Street scheme at the meeting on 19 July 2023. The council made the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) on 29 August 2023 and the objection period commenced on 7 September 2023. The objection period concluded on 6 October 2023.

Outline planning application

An outline planning application with all matters reserved other than access and layout was submitted on 22 March 2023. The outline planning application was for 107 new homes (54 apartments and 53 houses) together with the conversion of the locally listed Moat Field Works into a residential use. The application was considered by planning committee on 7 September 2023 who resolved to delegate to the Head of Planning & Building Control to grant planning permission subject to conditions and a Section 111 Agreement to secure a Section 106 Agreement.



View 1 - Looking from the War Memorial down Moat Street



View of parcel E - Junction of Villiers St and Cemetery Road.

Artist impressions of the Phase 1 site

Procurement of a developer partner

Following approval from Cabinet in December 2022 to the use of the Homes England Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), the council commenced a procurement process in February 2023 to procure a developer partner for Willenhall. Cabinet considered the appointment of the preferred developer partner on 18 October 2023.

Funding

The council submitted a bid to the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 in August 2022 for £20m to support Phase 1 of the Willenhall Framework Plan together with a movement package that would improve transport infrastructure including the greenway that runs through the Phase 1 site. In January 2023 the council was advised that the bid had been successful. The council also submitted a funding bid to the Land and Property Investment Fund (LPIF) for the Phase 1 scheme which was successful in securing £3.2m.

3.3.4 The **Willenhall Movement Package** is made up of three specific elements:

Willenhall Greenway Route

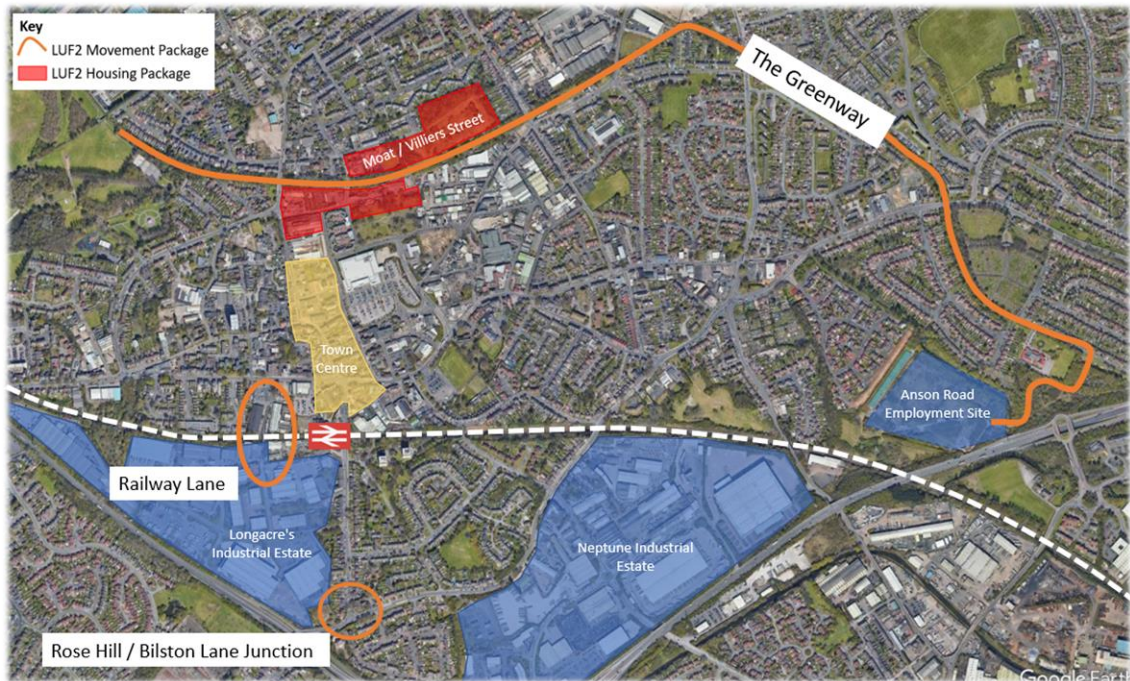
Construction of a shared walking and cycling route from Willenhall Memorial Park westbound to Anson Road, including upgrades to pedestrian crossings, fencing and existing walking and cycling facilities on Stringes Lane. Due to construction cost savings the scheme has been extended to include the link between Noose Lane and Willenhall Memorial Park. Construction started on site in July 2023 and is due to complete in December 2023. The extension to Noose Lane is likely to complete at the start of 2024.

Railway Lane

Clearance and redevelopment of Railway Lane from East Acres to the north of the Wolverhampton-Walsall Railway Line to become a shared walking and cycling route. A Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to prohibit vehicular use along Railway Lane received no objections during consultation in July 2023. Consultation on the Highways Act 1980 Section 205 notice for this section of network to be become formerly adopted highway is imminent. Following consultation, the aim is for construction to begin by December 2023, subject to the outcome of the Section 205.

Rose Hill / Bilston Lane Junction

The proposed conversion of the existing priority junction at Rose Hill / Bilston Lane to a three-arm roundabout. The scheme is currently in preliminary design development, anticipated for completion by November 2023. Following this public engagement and detailed design will be undertaken. The scheme is proposed for construction in 2025.



Locations of the three Movement Package sites

3.4 Strategic Employment Land

- 3.4.1 The **Black Country Enterprise Zone (EZ)** sites, clustered around M6 Junction 10, are the strategic focus for employment land development. These sites providing significant opportunities for high-quality employment uses to drive economic growth and job creation.
- 3.4.2 The most significant site within the EZ is **SPARK**, formerly known as Phoenix 10. At its meeting on 13 April 2023 Committee received a report that provided a summary of the work undertaken to progress the project and information about the future programme towards completion. Since then, site enabling works remain ongoing while SPARK has continued to be marketed by HBD's joint agents Knight Frank and Cushman & Wakefield with a view to securing occupiers for the circa 620,000sqft of new employment floorspace that will be created. New signage has also been installed on site to further raise its profile. A reserved matters planning application relating to development of part of the site is also due to be submitted in October/November 2023. At this stage it is anticipated that construction works could start in the latter part of 2024. HBD are also keeping local people informed via a regular community newsletter with two issues distributed to date.



SPARK

3.4.3 Over the last 2 years, private landowners have delivered schemes on several EZ sites. This includes Fortel Services Ltd who located their 1,500sqft headquarters and storage hub at the **Tempus 10 Opal** site. With EZ grant funding support totalling c. £3.8m from the former Black Country LEP landowners have also completed schemes on EZ sites at Box Pool and Parallel 113. The former development is occupied and operated by Darlaston Builders Merchants and has a new signalised access from the Darlaston Road junction. Following completion earlier this year, the Parallel 113 facility is being actively marketed to purchasers / end occupiers and has the potential to provide up to 200 new jobs.



Parallel 113

- 3.4.4 As landowner of the former **Gasholders** site, the council are progressing development options for the site which has the potential to deliver a minimum 15,000sqm employment floorspace and circa 300 new jobs. A suite of pre-development work has been on-going since last December when Cabinet approved recommendations to continue to explore delivery of high-quality employment uses on the site. This includes technical survey work to understand site constraints and mitigations, layout options, development costs and appraisals, and soft market testing. The outcomes of this week will feed into decision making on next steps; for example, phasing of future delivery work and taking forward a business case to secure public sector funding to support site viability.
- 3.4.5 Following acquisition of the **Tempus 10 Onyx** site, landowner, JB Construction have proposals to redevelop the site for their own business use and additional employment units with a planning application currently being determined. In addition, Fortel have sought to accelerate proposals for the balance of their Tempus 10 Opal land holding by securing reserved matters planning consent for further industrial/warehouse units. The council will continue to support landowners in delivery (e.g. funding and planning) and promote opportunities to potential end-occupiers where necessary. Delivery of the Tempus 10 sites will complete the development of the remaining land parcels at Tempus Drive, which benefit from close proximity to the improved M6 Junction 10 and strategic highway network.
- 3.4.6 Outside of the EZ, **other strategic employment development** has been completed at Reedwood business park, with two units occupied by FW Thorpe and Love Shopping Direct. The final two units, totalling 100,000sqft and branded

as Leftfield Park, are on the market and available to let. Walsall 90 (former Holiday Inn) near M6 Junction10 has also secured planning consent for a 90,000sqft industrial/ warehouse scheme and is expected to be completed by Q3 2024. The employment sites pipeline also includes sites at **Bentley Lane** (former Beatwaste), **Iron Park** (former Moxley Tip) and the decommissioned Willenhall sewage works site at **Anson Road**. The council continues to support landowners in bringing forward much-needed employment space on these sites.

3.5 M6 Junction 10

3.5.1 Background

Walsall Council and Highways England are working in partnership to provide a long-term improvement to M6 Junction 10. The junction currently experiences significant congestion and resultant delays, particularly during morning and evening peak times. The area regularly suffers from long queues at peak times on the roundabout and both the merge and diverge motorway slip roads, with congestion also occurring on other local roads leading to the junction, such as Wolverhampton Road, Wolverhampton Road West and Bloxwich Lane.

The main objectives of the scheme are to provide a more safe and serviceable free-flowing network, support economic growth by attracting new business/employment opportunities and improved access to Walsall town centre and the wider West Midlands conurbation.

3.5.2 Progress

To date, the following major milestones have been achieved:

- Construction of two new four-lane wide bridges and demolition of the previous two-lane structures.
- Introduction of an additional 5th lane on the northbound and southbound exit slip roads.
- Widening of the roundabout to provide additional capacity on the eastern and western extents.
- Introduction of new sign gantries with improved road markings, signage and LED street lighting.
- Construction of a new 4m wide shared cycleway/footway (from Bloxwich Lane to Wolverhampton Road West) with controlled pedestrian crossing facilities.
- Resurfacing of all carriageways and footways within the scheme footprint.
- Reconstruction of the A454 Wolverhampton Road/Bloxwich Lane junction with new segregated right turn lanes on the east and west approaches.
- Widening of the westbound Black Country Route to provide a 3rd lane up to the Marshland Way junction.
- Installation of new traffic signals at both the roundabout and A454 Wolverhampton Road/Bloxwich Lane junction, with high friction surfacing on approaches.

- New landscaping, road restraint systems, fencing and drainage with attenuation ponds installed adjacent to the northbound and southbound sections of the M6 motorway.
- Diversion and reconnection of all affected underground utility apparatus (electric, gas, water and comms).



Image taken from drone footage collected on 9th September 2023

3.5.3 Remaining Work/Programme

Remaining work includes the final surfacing and opening of the new cycleway/footways, further work in relation to the bridge joints/drainage and testing/commissioning of all new communications equipment.

The construction programme has extended beyond the original completion date due to a number of issues:

- Covid-19 impacts - workplace/site restrictions, contractor/supply chain related illness and the requirement for a revised method of working to allow operatives to maintain a safe working distance, whilst still delivering the required outputs.
- The collapse of the bridge beam manufacturer (Cleveland Steel) which resulted in prolonged negotiations with the administrator to enable the workforce to return to complete the fabrication process.
- National shortage of construction related materials in the UK during 2022.

- Poor condition of the existing street lighting and drainage networks prompting additional repairs to be carried out (whilst the necessary resource and traffic management is in place).
- Traffic management re-programming to take into account National Highways planned highway maintenance work on the M6 between junctions 9 and 11.
- Further work associated with the diversion of underground utility apparatus.
- Additional carriageway surfacing required to the motorway slip roads.

It is envisaged that the scheme will be 'open for traffic' in early 2024 with full project completion (not necessarily physical work – e.g. compilation of the Health and Safety File, etc) being completed in Spring 2024.

- 3.6 The aim of the **Walsall Towns Fund Active Travel and Connectivity Sustainable Transport Programme** is to make it safer and easier to walk, cycle and use public transport in the Walsall area. The main two schemes being delivered as part of this programme are pedestrian improvement works on Raybolds Bridge Road, as well as bus shelter improvements on the A34 Green Lane and the B4210 Bloxwich Road. All works must be delivered by March 2026 at the latest, in line with Towns Fund guidelines.

Preliminary designs have been completed for the Raybolds Bridge Road pedestrian improvements scheme. Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) are also planning to improve the existing bus shelters on the A34 Green Lane and the B4210 Bloxwich Road.

4. ***Financial information***

None arising directly from this report. It should be noted that the projects outlined are being funded from a number of different sources, both via the public sector and private investment.

5. ***Reducing Inequalities***

Regeneration seeks to support economic growth for all people, communities and businesses. Increasing housing choice, enabling job creation, making the borough better connected and increasing incomes will all contribute towards reducing inequalities.

6. **Decide**

The Committee is asked to consider the content of this report, provide comments on progress to date and confirm any specific information required for a subsequent project update.

7. Respond

The report sets out a number of projects that are all contributing to regeneration in the borough. Each of these projects have their own specific milestones as they progress towards completion.

8. Review

Progress with regeneration activity is regularly reviewed given its importance in relation to Our Council Plan 2022-2025 and the We Are Walsall 2040 Borough Plan.

Background papers

None

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