

Council – 19th November 2012

Regeneration Portfolio Holder update – Councillor A. Andrew

Purpose of Report

To provide an overview of the Regeneration portfolio, with particular reference to the current challenges faced in regenerating Walsall, the key achievements of the portfolio over the last year and an outline of some of the priorities for the portfolio looking forward.

Context for Walsall's Regeneration

Walsall, like most of the UK, and indeed the wider world, is continuing to face unprecedented economic challenges which are having a significant impact on our businesses and people. This compounds some of the challenges Walsall already faced such as low skills; an economy over reliant on traditional sectors; an underperforming private sector; high levels of unemployment particularly amongst our young people and a historical lack of investment in the borough particularly in our key centres.

The Council's regeneration approach is absolutely focussed on addressing these challenges and promoting economic growth, as reflected in our core purpose of:

Creating the conditions for sustained economic growth by supporting the growth of business and jobs in Walsall, ensuring that Walsall people have the skills and environment to make the most of opportunities.

We are doing this by focussing on 7 key objectives:

- **Understanding our customers and designing our services against demand**
- **Supporting economic growth**
- **Creating the right sites for business**
- **Improving our Town and District centres**
- **Managing our assets effectively**
- **Addressing unemployment**
- **Improving skills**
- **Delivering new and better homes.**

Understanding our Customers

- Current employer demand.
- Business as current employers employing Walsall People.
- New and future business growth.

Achievements to date

Understanding our customers

The challenge

- To understand the needs of our customers (employers and those seeking employment) and work with them to achieve what they want, how they want it. We use this understanding to deliver better services and work with partners to a common objective in support of the regeneration of Walsall.

Achievements in last year

- Sustained programme of business engagement to understand customer needs.
- This has been undertaken by developing greater knowledge of Walsall's Strategic Companies which has resulted in identifying and visiting our top 100 based on turn over and number of employees.
- Visited 28 of the largest 50 companies in Walsall over the last six months, and 46 of the largest 100, which has identified plans to invest which will create and safeguard 587 jobs directly or indirectly
- Walsall has played a key supporting role in development of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the LEP's strategic agenda.
- Launched a new business led Walsall Economic Board.

Future Priorities

- To continue to forge links with our Strategic Companies through direct Employer engagement which will require at times a high level political input to facilitate strong relationship with key employers in the borough.
- Maximise the role the Businesses themselves can play in promoting Walsall as a business location
- Bringing forward new sites and development opportunities

Supporting Economic growth

The challenge

- Identifying and supporting the development of businesses operating in key sectors and attracting new employers.
- Maximising Supply chain opportunities for Walsall businesses.
- Delivering targeted effective business support, to promote longer term sustainability.
- Ensuring local people hold the skills and abilities required by employers

Achievements in last year

- Direct delivery of services and the completion of our WNF first phase, which during the past two years has;
 - Placed almost 3000 local people into work supporting 400 businesses to form and grow.
 - Generated £5million of new business, subsequently secured by local employers in Walsall as a direct result of the Think Walsall approach.
- Successfully gained programme entry approval from the (DfT) for a £14million contribution towards a £26million transportation scheme.
- Developed a new Black Country wide inward investment service – Invest Black Country, which is now working collaboratively with both Marketing Birmingham and UKTI.

Future Priorities

- The delivery of the approved new Economic Growth Programme provides around £5million of new investment until April 2015 and is targeted to achieve the following outcomes: 5000 local people supported into work or training, 3000 people supported into employment, 750 qualifications achieved, 500 businesses assisted, £5million of new business linked to / secured by Walsall employers
- Provision of new services to directly support key employment growth against the following key sectors: Advanced & Traditional Manufacturing, Business & Financial Services, Environmental Technologies, Construction, Health & Social Care, Logistics, Food Production / Sales, Retail
- Pro-active Inward Investment activity to stimulate new job growth

Creating the right sites and conditions for business growth

The challenge

- Ensuring current and future businesses have the right sites/premises in the right place to support future needs.
- Ensuring an integrated end to end Development and 'Business friendly' planning service to improve the attractiveness of Walsall as a business location.

Achievements in last year

- Work has commenced on producing a borough wide Site and Allocation Document (SAD) and Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP).
- Secured Enterprise Zone status for 15 sites within Walsall together with the implementation of a Local Development Order (LDO) which came into affect in April.
- Active progression of a number of key employment sites across the Borough

Future Priorities

- Delivery of Black Country Enterprise Zone
- Adopt the SAD and AAP through the statutory process including an Examination in Public by 2014.
- Identify and progress specific site acquisitions and assembly, to provide a portfolio of sites reflective of future demand.
- Develop grant funding mechanisms to assist relocation and expansion.

Supporting our Town and District Centres

The challenge

- To stimulate investment in Walsall Town Centre as our key Strategic centre, whilst also supporting the economic viability of our district centres.
- To improve the visitor experience in our centres to encourage footfall and protect the town and district centres from competing / inappropriate developments

Achievements in last year

- £40million worth of investment in key development projects,
- 164 new residential units developed in the £20million Waterfront South Phase
- Launched a new business led Town Team in Walsall
- 41,000 sq ft £8m headquarters for whg completed as part of the Gigaport initiative;
- £10m 100 bed hotel for Whitbread at Waterfront construction commenced in autumn 2011 and will be completed in November 2012;
- Supported 97 new and relocating businesses during the last 12 months creating just over 400 new jobs.
- Facilitated in the reduction of vacant units in the districts centres of 41%.

Future priorities

- Walsall Town Centre - Old Square redevelopment in partnership with Threadneedle. Secure delivery of initial phase. Including long term solution for Walsall Market.
- Walsall Town Centre - St Mathews Quarter – in partnership with Norton & Proffitt (St Modwens plc/Goold Estates). Secure delivery of the £12million retail scheme which will create 200 new jobs
- Walsall Waterfront – develop deliverable and viable plans/options for Waterfront north sites with developer Urban Splash and the Lex site with the by the Homes and Communities Agency
- Walsall Gigaport - Bringing forward the site at the corner of Hatherton Street/Littleton Street (Noirit block demolition and reclamation) for office uses; Working with the College on proposals for Walsall Business and Sports Hub; and Delivering the leisure/retail led redevelopment of the Littleton Centre scheme adjacent to Tesco.

- Continue to support the innovative work of the Town and District Centre Management team work to improve the economic viability and vitality of the centres.

Managing our Assets Effectively

The challenge

- Ensuring our property assets help stimulate the Borough's regeneration.
- Manage our properties efficiently, responsibly, and at less cost to the Council

Achievements in last year

- Successful delivery/ progress of capital projects including 2 new Academies (Sheffield and Darlaston); Teaching Block at Caldmore; Bentley Library Development; Eldon House; Streetly Crematorium;
- Supporting capital investment and regeneration through the disposal of surplus property assets generating capital receipts for the council (on target to achieve the agreed sum of £2.5m for 12/13)
- Managing and maintaining property assets including on behalf of schools and other services to ensure continuity of services to customers
- Initiated delivery of the £8 million 'Smarter Workplaces' programme, to rationalise office accommodation, improve the quality and flexibility of working environments for staff and generate significant ongoing savings.

Future priorities

- Actively manage operational properties to meet customers' needs and remove unnecessary property related expenditure
- Completing a fundamental review of all the Council's Property assets and develop property solutions which help to achieve the council's priorities and outcomes
- Work with others in all sectors to optimise property solutions
- Undertake targeted site acquisitions to assemble more viable development opportunities

Addressing Unemployment

The challenge

- Addressing unacceptable levels of Worklessness in the Borough.
- Organising and delivering with key partners activity to directly assist unemployed people into work
- Ensuring that local communities have access to new job opportunities and employer influenced training.

Achievements in last year

- Launched the £2million Walsall Works to support young people through Apprenticeships into sustainable employment with local employers.
- The creation and funding of four multi agency one-stop-shops across the borough.

Future Priorities

- Ensuring delivery of the Walsall Works programme which aims to support up to 550 young people into Apprenticeships with local employers over the next two years.
- The co-ordination of activities to address Worklessness, provided through a range of partners and the delivery of contracted services that support local people directly into work.

Improving Skills - in response to employer needs

The challenge

- Ensuring Walsall people have the skills and experiences required by local businesses to get and sustain employment.
- Ensuring skills provision reflects current and future employer needs.

Achievements in last year

- Supported local people to achieve 1850 qualifications, in support of their aims in seeking progression and ultimately sustainable employment.
- Worked with a range of key agencies including; the Skills Funding Agency and Jobcentre Plus, to influence, and assist with the design and contracting / delivery of a number of key initiatives.

Future Priorities

- Understanding and meeting existing Walsall businesses employee skills needs.
- For potential Walsall businesses, understanding the predicted need of the market place and working with suppliers to influence their future delivery plans and strategies, to ensure a match.
- Develop forward programmes which are helping to equip people with the skills required to secure employment.
- Working to draft plans and strategies that will influence future local and national spending, ensuring a match with our employer's future skills needs and requirements, for example through the evolving Black Country City deal.

Delivering new and better Homes

The challenge

- Supporting development and unlocking stalled housing schemes to improve the provision of new homes across the borough
- Ensuring Walsall people have access to a range of affordable housing options that reflect their needs
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- Supporting people to live independently in their homes and addressing fuel poverty issues.

Achievements in last year

- Unlocked a number of stalled housing sites: through the £1m New Homes Bonus to kick start 6 developments that will provide 230 homes and create or safeguard 300 jobs.
- Landmark housing schemes: December 2012 will see the completion of the award winning 322 home canal side development at Waterfront South which secured in total.£15m HCA funding.
- New energy efficient housing: production started in earnest at the Accord (LoCal Homes) factory in Beechdale and the first development of over 80 timber framed houses at Whitworth Close is well underway.
- Affordable housing provision: over 100 affordable new homes completed.
- Disabled Facilities Grants - 342 approved and 280 completed (£1.95M) Reduced time from referral to approval from 44 weeks 2 years ago to 10 weeks a year ago with a further reduction to 8 weeks last year. Reduced average costs from almost £10,000 two years ago down to £7,000 last year – meaning we can help more for the same money.
- Investment from March 2008 to the end of December 2012 will have totalled over £30M in home energy / insulation and tackling fuel poverty. In the last year alone we

have helped 592 households obtain free cavity wall and loft insulation as well as starting new solid wall insulation schemes.

Future priorities

- Maximise new and affordable homes with current market constraints and limited public investment
- Enable aspiring home owners to secure home ownership including launch of Walsall's Local Authority Mortgage Scheme.
- Tackle fuel poverty and increase the number of new energy efficient homes.
- Reduce the impact of welfare reform and stem the increase in homelessness.
- Maximise NHB and recycled loans to continue to kick start stalled housing sites and affordable schemes.
- Maximise Green Deal investment for retrofitting existing homes.
- Bring empty homes back into use.
- Earlier intervention to prevent homelessness and provide an 'end to end' offer for customers needing help with their " money, home, job".

Conclusion

Despite the current economic challenges we continue to see considerable achievements, which have compensated in part for some of the issues the Borough has faced and which provide a basis for optimism about the future. Despite the obvious challenges Walsall has sustained a steady stream of investment over recent years across the Borough; in part due to our external reputation as Council that is open for business and which is focussed on making things happen. We need to continue this momentum in securing investment and our overall aim of creating jobs for Walsall people.

In order to do this we will retain a clear focus on the desired outcomes that we need to achieve in delivering our purpose of creating the conditions for sustained economic growth. This will need to be done in a number of ways but critically through promoting investor confidence, supporting businesses to thrive and to increase employment opportunities.

The attraction of investment, the creation of new jobs, the retention of existing jobs and the continued emphasis on the up-skilling of Walsall people will provide a stimulus to Walsall's wider economy, and will help reduce the burden on a range of Council support services. In turn this will help continue the commitment to make Walsall a place in which its residents and communities are proud to live and work.