

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 28 February, 2013 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

Panel Members Present: Councillor I. Azam (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Barker
Councillor C. Creaney
Councillor M. Longhi
Councillor S. Wade
Councillor L. Jeavons

Officers Present: Simon Tranter - Head of Regeneration, Development and Delivery
Robert Andrews – Senior Regeneration Officer
Chris Knowles - Lead Accountant, Children's and Regeneration Finance
Mark Lavender - Head of Strategic Regeneration
Jane Kaur-Gill – Employment & Skills Manager
Elizabeth Connolly - Economic Intelligence Manager (Regeneration)
Mike Tichford – Assistant Director (Regeneration & Housing)
David Elsworthy – Head of Planning and Building Control
Mike Smith – Regeneration Manager
Matt Underhill - Committee Business and Governance Manager

226/13 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Harrison and Tim Johnson.

227/13 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

228 /13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

229 /13 MINUTES

It was noted that Councillor Creaney had provided Democratic Services with his apologies for the previous meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 17 January, 2013, as amended, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

230/13 SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH AND REMODELLING OF DELIVERY TO MEET CUSTOMER NEEDS

The Head of Regeneration, Development and Delivery introduced the presentation. The following is a summary of the presentation (annexed) which focused on trends in customer demand and the subsequent discussion:

- Engagement activity with local businesses had been undertaken to record key information such as demand, the number of current jobs and turnover, other agencies who provide support and barriers. A key issue that emerged for local businesses was funding. Businesses are keen to identify grant funding that would enable them to invest in machinery which will enable them to create local jobs. However, a small number had also had bank loans refused. A second key issue related to site availability. It emerged that the majority of local businesses required premises with floor space of less than 4,000 square feet, with a significant proportion of those sampled also seeking premises of between 4,000 and 10,000 square feet and some looking for premises of 50,000 square feet. It was also explained that businesses seeking to make inward investment in Walsall frequently expressed interest in premises of up to 80,000 square foot or sites which can accommodate development of this site. However, in Walsall there are not many premises which are over 15,000 square feet and particularly a shortage of those which are of Grade A industrial standard. The borough doesn't currently have many sites which are Shovel Ready (Category 1) currently approximately 22Ha, with a similar total site area of sites in the Pipeline supply (Category 2), these being sites which have been identified as having blockages which can be resolved in the short term. The majority of the boroughs sites have known significant constraining factors (Category 3). A further issue for local businesses is that some will lack the capacity and capability to grow. For example, they may lack the negotiating skills to win new contracts or reduce costs from suppliers. A number of further barriers to businesses growing were also identified, these included a lack of appropriate sites, a low risk appetite, planning issues, together with constraints in development due to a lack of funding;
- It was explained that officers have developed a range of solutions for support business. This included business-friendly planning and reduces unnecessary delays in planning approvals. It would also be important to work effectively internally, as well as externally with other organisations, in referring a business to colleagues who might be able, for example, to assist with an application for funding. The importance of officers being aware of what sites are available was also highlighted, together with the significance of working with policy officers to determine how existing sites can be developed and how associated issues, such as contamination, can be addressed. Managing the expectations of land owners regarding types of suitable development, including what the market wanted, and subsequent land values, as well as the council seeking to make more use of its Compulsory purchase powers and other methods of land assembly were also emphasised;
- Following a Panel query it was explained that expressions of interest for larger sites was from a mixture of local, regional, national and multi-national companies.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation was noted.

231/13 INTRODUCTION TO THE SITE ALLOCATION DOCUMENT (SAD) AND WALSALL TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLANNING (AAP) LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Head of Planning and Building Control and the Regeneration Manager introduced the presentation. The following is a summary of the presentation (annexed) which focused on trends in customer demand and the subsequent discussion:

- The Head of Planning and Building Control explained that the Plans are required to comply with the core strategy, while the plans would also seek to achieve an allocation of land uses that spatially relate to each other to resolve existing issues and create jobs and development opportunity. This was a process that it was anticipated would take two more years and officers were seeking the involvement of the Panel via a working group to steer this work. Members also raised concerns regarding the lack of regeneration activity that had been witnessed following previous policy development initiatives in which Members had participated. Officers stressed that this work was both a legal requirement and critical to the future success of regeneration in Walsall;
- The Regeneration Manager explained that one of the major reasons for the importance of the plans was that they would be one of only two ways in which the council could legally determine the use of land. It was also explained that the Black Country Core Strategy was not site specific but was instead a broad strategy. While the town centre plan will seek to address a number of issues, including the high number of empty shop units, It was explained that current proposals include for the plans would allocate specific sites for particular uses e.g. identification of sites where certain types of development would be sought and where not be permitted because of the green belt or other constraints. It was also explained that there was a requirement for 12,000 new homes to be built in Walsall by 2026. That target was on course to be met but land was required for 6,000 homes. In relation to industry there was a need to find more larger and better quality sites. It was explained that this was the type of challenge that would be faced by both officers, as well as potentially the working group, in terms of striking a balance between meeting the requirements of industry and supporting job creation and protecting the green belt or other competing issues. It was also explained that a number of choices would have to be made in relation to a number of areas ranging from urban open space to infrastructure, including transport;
- In relation to the town centre area action plan it was explained that a key target was the creation of 220,000 square metres of additional office floorspace, together with 85,000 square metres of additional comparison retail floorspace. The production of this plan posed a number of questions, these included how to fit the new shopping development in adjoining the primary shopping area, as well as how to make town centre investment viable and attractive;
- The process of developing the plans is already underway with the next stage a public consultation exercise with businesses and the wider public on the current proposals;
- The Panel agreed to the establishment of a working group to support the development of the plans over the next years. The membership of the group was confirmed as Councillors Azam, Creaney, Barker, Wade and Jeavons, with a separate invitation to be made to Councillor Harrison. It was also

agreed that the working group members would be provided with the consultation documents.

RESOLVED:

- 1. that a working group to support the Site Allocation Plan and the Town Centre Area Action Plan be established with the membership as above; and**
- 2. the working group members be provided with the consultation documents.**

232/13 IMPROVING JOB PROSPECTS AND EMPLOYABILITY FOR WALSALL PEOPLE

The Head of Strategic Regeneration and the Employment & Skills Manager introduced the presentation. The following is a summary of the presentation (annexed) and the subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that in Walsall there were over 28,000 people claiming “out of work benefit”. This was equal to 17.8% of working adults aged 16-64 and higher than the 12.1% across England overall. It was also explained that nearly 13,000 residents claim Employment and Support Allowance, with 10,000 claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance. In Walsall, 6 wards are home to half of all claimants with significant levels of both male and female long-term unemployment;
- It was explained that the function of Regeneration was to assist in creating the conditions that help the commercial sector to create jobs. At the same time it also had a role in helping local people to gain employment. It was also explained that this work came within the theme of Regenerating Walsall, which included reflecting the Black Country Local Economic Partnership Priorities, Walsall’s priority to get people into and keep them in work, together with the council’s Regeneration focus on creating the conditions for sustained economic growth. It was further explained that the role of strategic regeneration included understanding the local economy and setting the right direction as well as supporting the delivery of inward investment schemes and the Walsall Works Apprenticeship Programme;
- In relation to the Employment and Skills service it was explained that a range of services were available to local residents, these would assist an individual to become more employable as well as providing guidance on how to get and keep a job. Current activity in Walsall includes employment one stop shops and advice for those looking to become self-employed. In addition jobcentreplus offers a range of support including a work programme and flexible support fund;
- It was explained that Walsall Works was a two year apprenticeship programme that commenced in April 2012 with funding of £2.2m to help tackle youth unemployment. The objective was to see 450 young people become apprentices, with 290 young people starting pre-apprenticeship programmes. To date, 78 young people have started an apprenticeship, with 72 young people having started the pre-apprenticeship. A Member expressed concerns regarding the take up for the scheme. Officers explained that it took time to develop and market a new concept to businesses and there had been significant interest expressed by local employers. However, these companies would only be able to make use of the apprenticeship scheme if they were in a

position to offer jobs. In addition, where a young person had applied for a scheme but remained within education there application would be held over until they had completed the qualifications for which they were studying. A Member highlighted the importance of the Willenhall Jet in assisting a local resident back into work by helping him get a key qualification. However, he also noted that some employers exploited employment regulations which enabled them to take on temporary agency staff on a short term basis before dismissing them at the point there wages and other benefits increased and employing other short term staff. In response to a further Member query it was explained that there were opportunities for young people to volunteer and improve their CVs and the council would be able to liaise between local businesses and young people to support this. In addition, volunteering schemes were operated by jobcentreplus and Walsall Voluntary Action.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation was noted.

233/13 BLACK COUNTRY CITY DEAL EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

The Assistant Director (Regeneration & Housing) introduced the update. The following is a summary of the update and the subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the Black Country City Deal was an initiative that granted local councils greater flexibility in return for meeting certain economic outcomes. The Black Country councils have made a bid based on an advanced manufacturing proposal which has been accepted by government and the bid now moves to the next stage of the process. A key element of the proposal centres on the governance arrangements and at present the Walsall council Chief Executive is leading discussions around the creation of a joint committee. Following a Member query it was clarified that although Wolverhampton City council were leading on communication it was still a Black Country wide initiative.

RESOLVED:

That the update was noted.

234/13 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2012/13

The Lead Accountant introduced the update. The following is a summary of the update and the subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the current forecast year end financial position was a revenue under spend of £200k, which primarily due to a property services under spend. It was also explained that there was a capital under spend of £11m across a range of activity, although the majority of this funding will be requested to be carried forward.

RESOLVED:

That the update was noted

235/13 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 & FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED:

That the work programme and forward plan were noted

22613 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 11 April, 2013.

The meeting closed at 8.25 p.m.

Signed:

Date: