

Business, Employment & the Local Economy Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Thursday 23 October 2014 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

Panel Members Present:

Councillor D. Anson (Chair)
Councillor A. Andrew
Councillor M. Bird
Councillor C. Clews
Councillor S. Craddock
Councillor A. Ditta
Councillor G. Illmann-Walker
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor R. Worrall

Officers Present:

Mark Lavender - Head of Strategic Regeneration
Simon Tranter- Head of Regeneration Development & Delivery
Steven Edwards – Principal Transport Planner
Richard Chadwick – Team Leader, Town Centre Development
Stuart Everton – Darlaston Strategic Development Area (DSDA) Programme Manager
Matt Underhill - Committee Business and Governance Manager

Portfolio Holder

Present: Councillor M. Nazir – Regeneration

Invitees:

Matt Brown – Network Rail

01/14 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor Barker, Councillor James, Councillor Sohal and Simon Neilson.

02/14 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Martin substituted for Councillor Sohal for the duration of the meeting.

03/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

04/14 MINUTES

The Panel considered the minutes of the Regeneration Scrutiny & Performance

Panel meeting held on 4 September, 2014. In response to a Member query the Portfolio Holder confirmed that funding of Walsall Works would be extended. A further Panel Member highlighted the positive impact of the Primark/ Co-op development in the town centre with a number of shops relocating to take advantage of the anticipated increase in footfall. The Member also expressed concern regarding the data used by the Local Data Company in calculating shop unit occupancy in the town centre. The Panel supported a proposal for the Local Data Company to be invited to a future Panel meeting to provide Members with guidance regarding the collection and interpretation of data relating to Walsall town centre.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting, held on Thursday 4 September, 2014, be approved as a true and accurate record.

05 /14 CHASE LINE ELECTRIFICATION & BLOXWICH LEVEL CROSSING

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

Matt Brown, Network Rail, explained that briefing sessions have been undertaken with local businesses based on Park Street. This included informing attendees that Network Rail will have to partially reconstruct the rail bridge in Park Street. As a result a programme of utilities diversions will commence shortly with Phases 1 and 2 of the works to be completed by early/ mid Spring 2015. This will be followed by a temporary cessation of works in the Christmas shopping period, with the main bridge works commencing January 2015. It was further explained that pedestrian access will be kept open at all times. However, vehicle access will be restricted with alternative traffic management/ loading arrangements in place whilst works are undertaken on two of the four bridge quadrants. In response to a Panel query it was explained that Network Rail would be responsible for the re-instatement of the public realm in Park Street when the works have been completed.

It was explained that work at North Street was progressing well but the road would be closed until April 2015 to enable the full reconstruction of the overbridge. It was explained that this scheme would require significant enabling works, including in relation to a number of utilities that would need to be re-sited. In response to a Member query it was explained that it was often difficult to co-ordinate the re-routing of the utilities cables which could only be moved by each utility provider's specific contractor. In practice this meant that there were some brief periods of time during the overall scheme where it appeared that no action was being undertaken.

It was also explained that the overbridge reconstruction works, including bridge widening and an improved footway, at Central Drive, Bloxwich have been suspended. This follows the discovery of mine shafts close to the site which will need to be resolved before work can continue. As a result the road has now been re-opened to traffic with works anticipated to re-start in January 2015. It was

emphasised that this additional work would not delay the overall electrification scheme.

In relation to Bloxwich Level Crossing it was explained that there had been strong local interest in two stakeholder consultation events held in September. The Council's Employment Growth Team supported these events to help coordinate a support package tailored to the needs of businesses affected in the local area. The views received from attendees were collated and will inform the council's response to Network Rail on the mitigation measure proposals. In addition, initial feedback has been provided to those who provided their contact details. It was also explained that it was hoped that agreement could be reached on a suitable set of mitigation works before the end of 2014.

The Chair explained that given the importance of the electrification scheme it was important that the Panel continued to receive regular progress updates.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

06 /14 DARLASTON STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AREA (DSDA) ACCESS PROJECT

The DSDA Programme Manager introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

It was explained that the DSDA Access Project has a total value of £25,908m and covers 4 key sites across Darlaston and Pleck. These are: Bentley Road South; Bentley Mill Way; Darlaston Road/ Pleck Road Junction; Wallows Lane/ Bescott Road Junction. It was also explained that the DSDA project had originally been established in 2002 to seek improvements in Bentley Mill Way. In 2010 the coalition government first required resubmission and then suspended approval of all major scheme business cases of this type across the country. It was subsequently announced that all scheme business cases originally approved prior to May 2010 would be allowed to continue to the bidding round. However, there was a requirement for the council to accept a greater degree of financial liability for the project.

It was explained that there were four key components across the DSDA:

- New Canal Bridge – Bentley Road South
- New Railway Bridge – Bentley Mill Way
- Lowering of the carriageway underneath the James Bridge Aqueduct
- New signalised junction with Bentley Mill Way and Darlaston Road

It was further explained that the scheme would facilitate the creation of 2,000 jobs and was aimed at supporting the regeneration of the area.

In terms of advanced works since the scheme received Programme Entry from the DFT in 2011 a number of elements have been completed. This included a new canal bridge (2009) and railway bridge structure (2014) which had been constructed at Bentley Road South. This had provided a large recycling business with 24/7 road access to its site, as well as access to the railway network for the transportation of materials. The benefit of this action is that a business has been able to continue operating and providing local employment. Other advanced works include tree clearance across all sites, ground investigation for contaminated land and utility diversions.

The Head of Strategic Regeneration highlighted the range of funding for the scheme: Walsall council - £6.6m; Centro - £5m; and the Department for Transport - £14.316m. He explained that the successful approval of the scheme and the award of associated funding was as a result of the hard work of officers over a sustained period of years. A Member stated that the way the project had been managed by officers was exceptional, with many other local authorities' projects having been terminated at a much earlier stage.

In response to a further Panel query it was explained that significant communication had been undertaken with local businesses that are likely to be affected by the works, including those based in Darlaston and Willenhall. In addition, information has been sent to 4,500 homes within Darlaston and Pleck. It was also explained that social media, including twitter, has been used to provide updates on the scheme. Officers agreed with the observation of a number of Members that there were typically high levels of traffic at Bentley Mill Lane. It was explained that traffic flows would be monitored before any potential decision to open up the bus lane to reduce congestion is taken.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the scheme represented a success story for Walsall, with significant investment coming into the borough. He also thanked the officers for their efforts. The Head of Strategic Regeneration noted that the £10m construction contract had been awarded to Dawnus Construction. He pointed out that the scheme will enable the development of empty land, while it would also be worth up to £18m to the local supply chain.

Resolved:

That the report be noted

07/14 WALSALL MARKET UPDATE

The Chair of the Panel provided feedback on visits to Northampton and Leicester he attended on behalf of the working group. He reported that Northampton market was based in the old market square with one third of stalls being permanent and two rows of temporary stalls. It was explained that it took four people to take one of the temporary stalls down. However, the stalls had not been taken down in more than five years. He reported that a new £4m market had just been constructed in Leicester. He noted that there was a successful continental market operating with many of the stalls on wheels for easy set up

and removal.

Members discussed a number of issues including the typical location of markets in other town and city centres. The size and durability of stalls was also considered. It was pointed out by officers that any increase in the size of individual stalls would reduce the overall number of stalls and impact on income. It was also explained that the stalls proposed for the new market development would allow traders a degree of flexibility as they could be configured differently.

The Chair of the working group noted that he continued to be content with the progress of the scheme. However, the Chair of the Panel noted that he remained opposed to the site selected for the market, preferring a return to its original location in the Old Square. The Chair of the working group expressed the view that the new market was being created for future generations of shoppers, while the identification of its location followed a comprehensive feasibility study. The Chair of the Panel noted that the previous location of the market had been its home for more than 600 years. He expressed the view that although the market has evolved over time, history was important to the town.

The Panel supported the recommendation of the working group to recommend to Cabinet the proposals for the market. The Chair of the Panel expressed his opposition to the recommendation and voted against it.

Resolved:

That the Panel supports the recommendation of the working group to recommend to Cabinet the proposals for the market; &

that the report be noted.

08/14 WORK PROGRAMME & FORWARD PLAN

The Panel considered the Work Programme and Forward Plan. Officers advised Members that an update on regeneration of the town centre and the Enterprise Zone would be provided at the next Panel meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme and forward plan be noted.

09/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be 24 November at 6:00pm.

10/14 ST. MATTHEW'S QUARTER UPDATE

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

The Panel received an update from the Team Leader, Town Centre Development.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7:31 p.m.

Chair:

Date: