

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 11 April 2013 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

Panel Members Present: Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor D. Barker
Councillor C. Creaney

Officers Present: Tim Johnson – Executive Director, Regeneration
Mark Lavender - Head of Strategic Regeneration
Isabel Gillis – Director of Public Health
Matt Crowton – Transportation Strategy & Policy Manager
Chris Skilton – Senior Strategic Planner, London North Western
(West Midlands & Chilterns) Network Rail
Matt Underhill - Committee Business and Governance Manager

Portfolio Holder Present: Councillor A. Andrew – Regeneration

237/13 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Longhi, Jeavons and Wade and Mike Tichford

238/13 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

239 /13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

240 /13 MINUTES

Following a Panel Member query in relation to item 231/13 the following amendment was made: It was explained that current proposals include plans to allocate specific sites for particular uses e.g. identification of sites where certain types of development would be sought and where they would not be permitted because they were within the green belt or due to other constraints.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28 February, 2013, as amended, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

241/13 DRAFT HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY FOR WALSALL 2013-2016

The Chair explained that this item would be considered earlier at the meeting than set out in the published agenda.

The Director of Public Health and the Head of Strategic Regeneration introduced the report (annexed). The following is a summary of the report and the subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (HWS) sought to provide the response to the issues identified by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The presentation of the report provided the Panel with an opportunity to comment on the HWS. It was further explained that responses from each of the Scrutiny and Performance Panels to all aspects of the HWS were welcomed. However, for the Regeneration Panel a key area of importance was likely to be the “Employment and improving employability” section of the HWS. Officers had worked collaboratively with partner organisations, including, Walsall College, local commercial companies in the health care sector, Public Health and adult health services in contributing to the HWS. The partners highlighted the importance of ensuring that employers would seek to employ people who were fit and healthy and able to work, as well as having the specific skills and experience to undertake particular jobs. It was also explained that the partners had added a further section on the Marmot Review. This highlighted the significant economic benefits of reducing health inequalities, with illness accounting nationally for productivity losses of £31-£33 billion per year, lost tax revenues and resulted in additional NHS healthcare costs of £5.5 billion per year;
- Officers explained that the key priorities include providing local people with life skills, together with the functional skills required by employers, as well as to work with the key educational bodies to maximise Walsall’s position and capacity to deliver;
- A Panel Member wanted to understand what work was being undertaken with secondary schools to tackle the issue of underage and excessive consumption of alcohol by teenagers. Officers and Members agreed that responsibility for this problem, together with that of drug misuse, was across the piece including parents, schools, as well as retailers who sell alcohol to underage young people. The Director of Public Health explained that the changing relationship between schools and the council provided an opportunity to reinforce the approach. However, the meeting agreed that it would be necessary for changes to be made to British youth culture which currently encouraged drinking as a rite of passage to adulthood. The Portfolio holder expressed the view that the key responsibility for underage drinking was that of parents, he also pointed out that in many instances young people had ready access to alcohol within their own homes;
- In response to a Panel member query officers confirmed that the HWS highlighted the importance of green spaces and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. A Panel Member noted that the NHS had funded the installation of an outdoor gym in a local park.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel endorses the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Panel would also highlight the importance of green spaces in supporting healthy lifestyles and the importance of partnership working in addressing issues of alcohol and drug misuse amongst young people; and

the report be noted.

242/13 WALSALL ECONOMIC BOARD

The Head of Strategic Regeneration introduced the briefing. The following is a summary of the briefing and the subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the Walsall Economic Board (WEB) was one of a number of formal partnerships within Walsall developing inter-relating strategies and contributing to the Walsall Plan, the borough's latest Sustainable Communities Strategy;
- The WEB, which had adopted the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) approach, sought to ensure that all industries were represented. The WEB's overriding principles include placing the private sector at the centre of the decision making process and flexibility;
- It was further explained that the Walsall Plan sets out a number of aspirations for the borough. These include **Economic Development – employment and improving employability** which is focused on getting individuals into work and keeping them there;
- The Panel were advised that the WEB had only be recently established and was in the process of seeking to develop its agenda, while seeking to ensure that it remains fully briefed on key workstreams. It is anticipated that the WEB will receive future reports on planning and helping to promote growth. However, the WEB is also set to determine its overriding Board Aim and will consider the following proposal for 2013/14 at its next meeting: **The WEB Aims to: Develop and Drive Activities that Support the Business to Thrive and Local People into Work.** Four key objectives have been identified by the WEB that sit below this Aim and which are felt to be key to improving the borough's economic circumstances and the promotion of growth with sustainability, these include: **Developing a Workforce with the Skills Employers Need** and **Improving External Perceptions.** Officers explained that it would be necessary to improve perceptions of Walsall to assist in persuading the private sector that Walsall is a place to do business;
- The Portfolio Holder noted that engagement with the private sector was critical and it would be important that decisions are taken that reflected the sector's requirements.

RESOLVED:

That an update on the Walsall Economic Board be received at a future meeting; and the report be noted.

243/13 THE IMPACT OF PROPOSED STRATEGIC RAIL INVESTMENT ON WALSALL BOROUGH

The Transportation Strategy & Policy Manager introduced the presentation. The following is a summary of the presentation (annexed) and the subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the report outlined proposed strategic rail investment for 2014-19 and the implications for Walsall. A key element of the proposals is the electrification of the line between Walsall and Rugeley Trent Valley. It was explained that there were a number of associated planned improvements, including signalling and line speed changes, together with the possible closure of the level crossing at Reeves Street, Bloxwich;
- It was explained that it was the view of officers that the scheme would benefit Walsall, particularly in terms of improvements to the passenger service, rolling stock and increased frequency of trains. In addition, there was also the prospect of re-routing of some inter-city services through Walsall including the London to Liverpool service which would provide a direct link to London from Walsall. The electrification proposals would also improve the business case for electrification of the line between Aldridge and Walsall and a new station at Aldridge;
- It was explained that given that the proposed electrification of the line between Walsall and Rugeley Trent Valley would increase the frequency of speed of trains it would be preferable to close the Bloxwich Level Crossing, including for reasons of safety. If the closure option is pursued it will be necessary to re-route local traffic as part of a package of highway mitigation works, including bridge improvements. It was further explained that if the council supports the closure of the level crossing Network Rail will fund the mitigation work, estimated to be up to £2m. However, mitigation works would be necessary whether or not the crossing was permanently closed (because in future the crossing barriers would be down for a greater proportion of time as more trains will be routed on this line);
- Officers acknowledged that while consultation activity had been carried out regarding the proposed closure of the level crossing and efforts made to seek to reassure residents about the changes to local traffic routes, concerns persisted particularly in terms of the impact on some local residential roads of re-routing of traffic. However, it was also explained that electrification of the line was likely to mean that the crossing was closed to traffic for between forty to forty-five minutes each hour at peak times, which would be a significant increase from the present twenty minutes each hour. It was also highlighted that should the decision be made not to close the crossing then funding of required mitigation works would have to be provided by the council. However, further consultation with local residents and businesses was planned;
- Following a number of queries raised by the Chair officers provided details of the proposed local mitigation works. It was explained that the existing footbridge would be replaced by a wheelchair-friendly bridge at the present site of the manned level crossing control box, with monitoring of the crossing undertaken remotely by CCTV. It was also explained that work would be considered to change the highway priority at Central Drive/ Croxtalls Road junction to encourage traffic away from the Dudley Fields Estate, together with traffic signalisation of the Croxdene Avenue/ Elmore Green Road junction which will better manage traffic movements at this junction;
- Following a further Panel query the Senior Strategic Planner, London North Western (West Midlands & Chilterns) Network Rail, explained that the electrification of the Walsall to Rugeley Trent Valley formed part of planned improvements that must be completed between 2014 and 2019, with electrification potentially completed by 2017. In response to an additional Panel query officers acknowledged that the Area Partnership could be

included in future consultation activity, with consultation work to date in engaging local people including letter drops and the use of social media;

- In response to a Panel question the Senior Strategic Planner, London North Western (West Midlands & Chilterns) Network Rail, explained that the company did prefer that level crossings were removed where possible. He emphasised that such a course of action would be positive from a safety point of view given the anticipated increase in the frequency of trains and given that management of the crossing would be done remotely by CCTV in the future;
- In response to a query from the Portfolio Holder the Senior Strategic Planner, London North Western (West Midlands & Chilterns) Network Rail clarified that it was the preferred position of Network Rail that the level crossing was removed. This was consistent with their nationwide ongoing action to remove crossings for a number of reasons including safety;
- Officers agreed to provide three proposals for traffic mitigation works for the Panel to consider at a future meeting. Officers also agreed to undertake further consultation activity with local residents.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel:

1. notes the Network Rail proposal to close the level crossing at Bloxwich on safety grounds, together with its commitment to the electrification of the Walsall – Rugeley Trent Valley railway;
2. notes the progress of joint work between Network Rail and Walsall Council to identify and agree a package of highway works to mitigate the impacts of possible level crossing closure;
3. requests that officers provide three proposals relating to the proposed highway mitigation works to a future Panel meeting;
4. requests that further consultation activity is undertaken with local residents: &
5. the report be noted.

244/13 BLACK COUNTRY CITY DEAL EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

The Executive Director, Regeneration introduced the briefing. The following is a summary of the briefing and the subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the Black Country is among twenty areas to have gone through to the next stage of the proposal process. The Black Country proposal focuses on the successful existing supply chain with the strap-line of “Built in the Black Country: Sold Around the World”. The region currently designs, builds and exports components used in aircraft and the automotive industry and others. It was further explained that the Black Country is seeking to attract investment in High Value Manufacturing (HVM) to support wider economic growth. This is to build on the major investment already taking place in the region, including by Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) at the i54 site and elsewhere. It was also explained that the Black Country will see seek to establish an environment that allows companies to grow by ensuring they have access to a workforce with the requisite level of skills;
- The Executive Director highlighted that the Black Country bid received the highest rating of the twenty bids. As a result it is first in line to present its bid to

a sub committee of government ministers headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for final approval. He explained that a successful bid would result in the region having local control over how the investment funding was committed. However, he also explained that such control required proper governance across the four authorities and the necessary arrangements were currently being developed;

- A Panel Member highlighted the importance of a having a large enough workforce available with the appropriate skills and flexibility to meet the increasing demands of local employers, particularly within the automotive industry. He also explained that at JLR training included the awarding of diplomas. The meeting agreed the importance of reinforcing apprenticeship training with other basic skills.

RESOLVED:

That the briefing was noted.

245/13 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 & FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED:

That the work programme and forward plan were noted

246/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair explained that the date of the next meeting would be set at Annual Council in May.

The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking the departing Executive Director for Regeneration and wished him well for his future career.

The meeting closed at 7.35 p.m.

Chair:

Date: