

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Thursday 6 March 2014 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

Panel Members Present: Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor D. Barker
Councillor R. Worrall
Councillor D. Anson

Officers Present: Mark Lavender – Head of Strategic Regeneration
Matt Crowton – Principal Transport Planner
Steve Law – Asset Manager
Norman Hickson – Development Management Manager
Emma Segal – Senior Regeneration Officer (Town Centre Team)
Simon Tranter – Head of Regeneration Development & Delivery
Kelly Valente – Lead Accountant, Regeneration
Matt Underhill - Committee Business and Governance Manager

Portfolio Holder

Present: Councillor A. Andrew – Regeneration

318/13 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received for the duration of the meeting from Councillor Wade, Councillor Flower and Simon Neilson.

319/13 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions received for the duration of the meeting.

320/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

321/13 MINUTES

The Panel considered the minutes of its previous meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting, held on Thursday 23 January 2014, be approved as a true and accurate record.

322 /13 PETITION: NEIGHBOURHOOD OFFICE AT LOWER FARM/ CAR PARK

The Asset Manager introduced the update. The following is a summary of the presentation and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that in November 2011 whg had approached the council with a proposal for a car park on the site. It was highlighted that the scheme would address parking issues experienced by both local shop customers and parents visiting Lower Farm Primary School. The proposal was that the council would make the land available and whg would provide the required construction funding, estimated at between £25k - £30k. It was further explained that

various designs were produced, including refurbishment of the whg owned garage to the rear of the shops. However, in 2012 whg advised that they no longer had the funding to carry out the project and subsequently no further progress was made;

- It was explained that a petition led by Councillor Phillips was received at Council in January 2014 seeking the creation of a car park on the site of the former Neighbourhood Office and adjoining land at Buxton Road/ Bakewell Close. This was followed by a petition to Council on 27 February led by Councillor Rachel Andrew which proposed that the council create the car park with whg providing funding from the sale of the site of the former Wiggin House and a council contribution from proceeds of the sale of the former Millfield Nursery site. It was further explained that the latter is currently being marketed for disposal. In addition it was explained that the cost of funding the works was estimated at £40,000;
- The Portfolio Holder expressed the view that the proposal to use the capital receipt from the sale of the former Millfield Nursery site offered a good solution to this issue. He also explained that possible discussions with whg which involved Members had the potential to prove more fruitful in terms of seeking funding for the scheme. The Portfolio Holder encouraged the Panel to recommend this course of action to Cabinet;
- Councillor Phillips explained that the Neighbourhood Office at Lower Farm had previously been demolished and a commitment had been made that a car park would be created. She explained that she subsequently received notification in 2012 that funding was no longer available and expressed strong concerns regarding these works not being undertaken. Councillor Phillips further explained that as a consequence a petition which included the signatures of shop keepers, residents, together with local business owners and GPs had been submitted. Councillor Phillips expressed strong concern that in spite of the original petition being presented to Council on 13 January she had received notice that a verbal rather than written response would be provided. Councillor Phillips further explained her strong concerns given that the car park had not been created in spite of it being two and a half years on from the original commitment. She also emphasised the importance of the creation of a car park to the local community;
- The Portfolio Holder explained that in his view it would be in the interests of whg to assist in the funding of the works given the number of their tenants in the area. It was further explained that the works would be completed either by the council acting on its own, using the capital receipt from the sale of Millfield Nursery, or in conjunction with funding from whg. However, officers explained that following submission of the second petition contact was made with whg who explained that they had no funding available to support the scheme. The Portfolio Holder agreed with a Panel Member that a car park would assist the local school managing traffic at the beginning and end of the school day, as well as encouraging people to use local shops and amenities. The Portfolio Holder also agreed that approaching the local school and businesses for funding was a good idea which had not previously been explored. In response to a further query it was explained that s.106 funding was not available in relation to a recent local development as it was below the fourteen unit threshold. The Panel recommended that Cabinet give further consideration to the use of the capital receipt from the anticipated sale of the site of the former Millfield Nursery to fund the creation of a car park on the site of the former Neighbourhood office at Lower Farm.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Cabinet give further consideration to the use of the capital receipt from the sale of the site of the former Millfield Nursery to fund the creation of a car park on the site of the former Neighbourhood office at Lower Farm;**
- 2. the Panel receives an update report regarding this matter; and**
- 3. the report be noted.**

323/13 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT

The Development Management Manager introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that at 63.64% (Quarter 3, 2013/14) the number of major applications determined in 13 weeks exceeded both the government's national target (60%) and average performance for planning authorities (59% Jan – June 2013). It was also explained that at 68.06% the number of applications being determined in 8 weeks during Quarter 3 also exceeded the government target (65%), while also matching the national average of 68%. It was explained that there was an expectation that the positive overall performance in the first three quarters of the year would continue, particularly after the two new Development Management teams had become more established;
- It was explained that during the first three quarters of the year 831 applications have been registered compared to 890 in the same period last financial year. It was further explained that while this represents a small fall the context was that there were 79 Prior Approval (permitted development) applications received during the period, compared to 10 for the same period in the previous year, which are not included in the figures. These applications still place significant demands on officer time in terms of checking, notifying neighbours and determining the outcome. Guidance was also provided in relation to decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate during the third quarter, together with progress on enforcement proceedings.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

324/13 CHASE LINE ELECTRIFICATION & BLOXWICH LEVEL CROSSING

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

- It was explained that in relation to the overbridge at Broad Lane, following the demolition of the old bridge, strengthening works and the installation of new bridge beams had taken place. It was explained that the road is expected to reopen in late Spring. It was also explained that Network Rail held a Public Consultation Event in February, which included the provision of updates and guidance regarding works. It was explained that a small number of complaints from local residents had been received. These related to noise and the removal of vegetation screening. Network Rail have responded to these complaints and their officers have confirmed that replanting will occur on the

highway embankment where vegetation has been removed. In relation to Bloxwich Level Crossing it was explained that Network Rail had proposed the permanent closure of the level crossing on safety grounds. This would be detrimental to local vehicular access and necessitate some re-routing. Network Rail have acknowledged the need to fund mitigation works and are working with the council to identify and design the most appropriate improvements;

- In response to a Panel query it was explained that the mitigation works at the site of the existing Bloxwich Level Crossing would be permanent and will impact on traffic going into Leamore from roads including Fryer Road. In response to a further Panel query it was explained that the foot bridge at Bloxwich Level Crossing will be fully accessible to cycles, as well as to those on foot. In response to a query from the Chair it was acknowledged that it was important that the consultation regarding the Bloxwich Level Crossing was wide and that engagement with local businesses formed part of the process. In response to a further Panel query it was explained that there a number of other bridges in Walsall which will also require work as part of the electrification of the line. This includes at Park Street, North Street and Central Drive. It was further explained that some of these works were demanding from an engineering perspective but a solution had been identified. This included track lowering and other amendments. In response to a Panel query regarding the possible electrification of the line to Aldridge it was acknowledged that Centro are promoting this scheme to be delivered in line with the Chase Line electrification works, but no agreement has yet been reached with Network Rail re funding and resourcing. However, Centro are intending to commission work to progress possible designs. It was further explained that the Department of Transport has required Network Rail to complete all the electrification works by 2017.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

325/13 BLACK COUNTRY EU INVESTMENT STRATEGY (BC EUIS)

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

- It was explained that the BC Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has the opportunity to support government to secure a significant amount (around £200million) of European Commission funding to support the Black Country Economy and its people. To do this the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has to produce an EU Strategic Investment Plan (BC EUIS). It was further explained that officers from around the Black Country have worked to produce a BC EUIS, which has been submitted to government for assessment, if approved officers will be designing a programme of work towards the implementation of the strategy. This is based on a number of EU thematic headings which include: Innovation, research and technological development, support for small businesses, employment and social inclusion;
- In relation to the BC EUIS the Panel received guidance regarding the local socio-economic needs and challenges. This includes improving the growth rate which at 2.9% (1998-2008) is the lowest of all LEP areas in England.. In

addition, the need to deliver more businesses and create more jobs, including within knowledge intensive occupations, in the region was identified. The importance of increasing the Gross Value Added (GVA) per head in the Black Country by £6.2bn in order to close the output gap with the national average was also identified. In terms of priority sectors for transforming the economy of the Black Country, to be higher value and faster growing, the BC EUIS identified a number of growth sectors, including transport technologies (aerospace and automotive), building technologies/ construction and business services. It was further explained that the investment focus to support these priority sectors includes inward investment aimed at attracting priority sector companies, together with support for growth and competitiveness, innovation investments, support for the development of low carbon employment sites, as well as activities to develop local workforce skills to meet needs of priority sector employers. In response to a Panel query it was explained that retail did not form part of the BC EUIS as it was not eligible for the related funding. A number of other key elements of the BC EUIS were identified which centre on business, place and people. These include the need for development in response to the lack of suitable business sites and premises, together with a response to the high level of unemployment and low skills levels. The need to address high levels of youth and long term unemployment, together with the concentrations of deprivation and worklessness found in the Black Country was also identified;

- It was explained that the vision for the Black Country was a region recognised internationally as a leader in high quality, cutting edge, high value engineering and manufacturing. It will be an area with a vibrant economy with a mix of employment sectors, where skilled people choose to live based on the education, training, job opportunities and quality of life. It was further explained that a number of objectives would need to be achieved through investment of the Black Country's European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy allocation, over the period 2014-20. These include investment to support the growth of high value manufacturing (HVM) and strengthening the local supply chain; together with investment to support the wider business base across the Black Country, as well as supporting Black Country partners to drive innovation to make local firms more competitive. It was also explained that the Black Country LEP has been indicatively allocated £151.9m of EU Structural and Investment Fund monies to deliver interventions from 2014-2020;
- It was explained that the BC EUIS document contained four Priority Themes, including: SME Competitiveness; Innovation; Low Carbon Places. It was further explained that Strategic Investment Areas (SIA) sit within each Priority Theme. For example, under SME Competitiveness a SIA is Inward Investment, International Trade and Exporting. This will focus on attracting new investment into the Black Country, including supporting SMEs to start or grow and maximise their exporting activity. A further SIA within this Priority Theme was Enterprise Support for New Business Creation. In relation to Priority Theme 2: Innovation it was explained that there were a number of associated strategic and policy drivers. These include the Smart Specialisation Strategy, which sets out the requirement for programmes to focus investment on research and innovation themes. While the UK Industrial Strategy and Sector Strategies highlight the national importance of several key Black Country sectors, including aerospace and automotive. In relation to Priority Theme 4: Skills, Employment & Social Inclusion it was explained that the associated strategic and policy drivers include Europe 2020 with the aim of

raising the employment rate for all 20-64 year olds to 75%. The related SIAs include: Skills for Growth; Young People and Unemployment; and Social Inclusion. It was explained that total funding for this area was between £40m and £60m, this included an allocation of £11m for Employment Support for Over-25s with match funding available from the BIG Lottery Fund;

- It was explained that a range of output and result indicators have been identified for each SIA. In summary these include assisting 6,200 enterprises, creating 2,400 jobs in assisted enterprises, together with assisting 25,000 individuals towards employment, education or training. It was also explained that in relation to match funding opt-in negotiations are currently underway with a number of organisations, including the Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The opt-ins have a number of conditions and requirements that must be met but have a potential value of up to £40m. In relation to Management and Delivery it was explained that the Black Country LEP Board had overall ownership and accountability for delivery, together with a Black Country Joint Committee and Advisory Board, three Commissioning Boards and the Local Authority and Black Country Consortium Blended Team(s). The proposed management and delivery cycle was also highlighted. It was also explained that the LEP had set out a number of initial key asks of the Government and its appointed agents. These include agreement regarding priorities, programme verification, specification development and performance management. Officers agreed with a Panel Member that the funding associated with the BC EUIS provided the opportunity to address some key issues within the region, including high levels of unemployment and low skills.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel supported the development of the strategy with progress updates to future Panel meetings; & that the report be noted.

326/13 WALSALL MARKET FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Head of Regeneration Development & Delivery and the Senior Regeneration Officer introduced the update. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that a first stage consultation had already taken place with market traders. In addition the working group had met to receive a presentation from the council's consultants Arup which set out the process and outcome for the identification of their preferred location of the market. It was explained that Arup's review incorporated both the conclusion of the previous GVA/ Retail Group study, together with more recent factors including the timescales for the Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) and the Old Square Phase 1 Exclusion Zone. The criteria applied when assessing the possible locations included planning policy, viability and accessibility. It was also explained that the working group had supported the assessment process undertaken by Arup. It was further explained that the Arup review had concluded that their preferred location for the market was The Bridge and this conclusion was supported by the majority of the working group. The working group will meet again shortly to consider Arup's proposals regarding the design, layout and public realm options for the market. This will take place

ahead of a second round of public consultation on 21 and 22 March. The Chair and Officers highlighted the opportunity for Panel Members to participate in the working group and influence decisions regarding the market. In addition, the timetable for the completion of the process through to seeking Cabinet approval and ultimately the submission of a planning application was also set out;

- A Panel and working group Member expressed a strong preference for the market to be returned to its original position at St. Matthew's Square. He cited the example of Birmingham which had a successful market which was based outside of the centre of the City. He also expressed doubts regarding whether or not the stalls would in fact be taken down regularly, with the risk that they become unsightly. In addition he highlighted the significant cost of the original paving that had been employed at St. Matthew's Square with the specific purpose of housing the market. The Chair of the working group explained that he had initially agreed with his colleague that the market should be sited at St. Matthew's Square. However, in order to enable future expansion of the major retail developments currently taking place it was clear that The Bridge provided a more suitable location for the market. A named vote was undertaken in relation to the following recommendation: To agree that public consultation on the layout and design of the new Walsall Market, based on Arup's recommendations that the market should be located in the preferred location of The Bridge, take place at the end of March. Member(s) in favour of the recommendation: Councillors Barker, Azam, Worrall and Harrison. Member(s) voting against the recommendation: Councillor Anson.

RESOLVED:

That :

- 1. the Panel agree that public consultation on the layout and design of the new Walsall Market, based on Arup's recommendations that the market should be located in the preferred location of The Bridge, take place at the end of March;**
- 2. the Panel agree to receive further reports in line with the timeline presented;**
- 3. the Panel continue to engage in the working being carried out, through participation in the Markets Working Group, public consultation and regular updates; &**
- 4. the report be noted.**

327/13 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2013/14

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

- It was explained that the forecast revenue position for the financial year 2013/14 was an overspend of £44k. It was further explained that this variance related to Property Services, including a shortfall on the savings target for asset management, together with a shortfall in income due to slippage on

capital works, energy costs and an expected shortfall in Walsall market income as a consequence of the move. In relation to Capital outturn for the financial year 2013/14 there was an underspend of £17.112m. This sum is to be requested to be carried forward into 2014/15. It was explained that the majority of the slippage (£11.176m) related to the delayed expenditure on the Darlaston Strategic Development Area (SDA) project. This was a consequence of now resolved land objections with the full approval expected by the end of March 2014.

328/13 WORK PROGRAMME & FORWARD PLAN 2013/14

The Panel considered the work programme and forward plan.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme and forward plan be noted

329/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be 22 April at 6:00pm.

The meeting closed at 7:35 p.m.

Chair:

Date: