

## **REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Thursday 6 November 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

**Panel Members present** Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)  
Councillor S. Coughlan (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor D. Anson  
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul  
Councillor I. Shires  
Councillor K. Sears

**Portfolio holders present** Councillor Andrew - Regeneration

**Officers present** Tim Johnson – Executive Director – Regeneration  
Mike Tichford – Assistant Director – Regeneration  
Mark Lavender – Head of Strategic Regeneration  
Jo Lowndes – Partnership and Performance Manager  
Stuart Wootton – Finance Manager – Regeneration and  
Neighbourhoods  
Mike Smith – Regeneration Team Leader – Planning Policy  
Sandy Urquhart – Principal Regeneration Officer  
Laura Terry – Partnership and Performance Officer  
Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

**Other invitees present** Karen Sands – Chair, Walsall Market Traders Association  
Tony Larner – Vice-Chair, Walsall Market Traders Association

### **34/08 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors B. Tweddle and A. Underhill.

### **35/08 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### **36/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest of the party whip.

### **37/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS**

#### **Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

(annexed)

## 38/08 FORWARD PLAN

### *88/08 Highways Repair and Maintenance Partnership*

Members commented that road maintenance was a high priority for members of the public and consequently this issue and the effectiveness of the partnership should be closely monitored.

Members discussed the cleaning of gullies and drains and questioned how often cleaning took place. It was noted that responsibility for these issues lay with local authorities and water companies. Members discussed the potential to invite water companies to scrutiny meetings.

The Panel noted that this issue was being considered by the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel and requested that a briefing note outlining the issues raised be forwarded to the Members of the Panel for information.

### *74/08 Gating Orders Policy*

It was noted that this matter was being considered by the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel at their next regular meeting.

### *96/08 Building a New Birchills Together*

Members noted the importance of keeping councillors and the public informed of any changes to proposed regeneration schemes in the current economic climate.

#### **Resolved:**

**That a briefing note be sent to Members of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel to inform Members of the issues highlighted by the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel regarding highways maintenance.**

## 39/08 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Panel noted the available development opportunities.

## 40/08 REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY – PHASE TWO

The Panel considered the phase two revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

Mike Smith explained that RSS Phase two is concerned with subject areas within the plan. The subjects are:

- Housing
- Economy
- Transport
- Waste Management
- Town Centres

The deadline for responses to phase two of the RSS was 8 December 2008. A final draft of the RSS was being considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 19 November 2008.

Appendix 1 to the report highlighted the main issues that officers had identified for further discussion with the Region. Appendix 2 to the report highlighted the specific wording that Walsall is suggesting as amendments to the RSS.

It was highlighted to Members that a Government commissioned study was suggesting that the level of housing development be increased with development areas to include greenbelt land in the south east of the West Midlands. It was proposed to suggest that this item be amended as it was felt that housing development on greenbelt land would be more appealing to developers than urban housing on brownfield sites thus reducing urban regeneration.

The RSS also identified many transport related policies which it was proposed should be removed.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The RSS contained no reference to the existing Walsall to Wolverhampton rail line and the aspirations set out in the Council's 'Rail Services and Facilities Improvement Plan'. Specifically, the suggestion of a triangular rail service between Birmingham, Walsall and Wolverhampton and the Stourbridge to Lichfield rail line.
- In response to questions from Members it was explained that the Black Country was not an attractive place for housing development due to high costs associated with preparing brownfield sites for development. Developers would be more attracted to easier to develop, and more profitable, greenfield sites. The preferred route was build in urban areas first and on greenfield sites when all urban sites had been developed. It was noted that the shire counties were not keen on losing greenfield sites to housing.
- Members discussed the possibility of assistance for developers in clearing brownfield sites for housing.
- It was important the Members on the Development Control Committee had a detailed understanding of the RSS and other regional strategies and policies so that they could ensure that local development met with regional needs and aspirations.

Councillor Andrew reported that project reference groups were being appointed for local development to ensure that regeneration took place with a strategic overview to prevent piecemeal developments. He suggested that the Panel consider the Single Regeneration Framework.

Sandy Urquhart explained that a new planning system was being introduced which was adopting a comprehensive approach to development. Therefore it was important to get the right strategies in plan to allow Walsall's needs and aspirations to be met.

**Resolved:**

**That Cabinet request the West Midlands Regional Planning Body to amend the Regional Spatial Strategy Preferred Option Figure 8, dealing with existing and potential public transport, to include the existing rail line between Walsall and Wolverhampton, the potential rail line between Stourbridge and Lichfield and the**

**potential triangular passenger service between Birmingham, Walsall and Wolverhampton, reflecting the aspirations set out in the 'Walsall Rail Service and Facilities Improvement Plan'.**

#### **41/08 WORKING NEIGHBOURHOODS FUND WITHIN AREA BASED GRANT**

The Panel were informed about the latest progress with the working neighbourhoods fund (WNF).

Laura Terry guided Members through the report highlighting the spending commitments that had been agreed to over the next three years and the remaining balances for each year at the present time. Any monies left over from each financial year could be carried forward to the next year.

A Member suggested that the impact of grants such as Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and WNF was reduced due to local authorities spreading these financial resources across their areas rather than on the areas of most need. Jo Lowndes reported that the Economic Pillar of Walsall Partnership lead on WNF investment and all projects were awarded finance after careful evidence assessment.

In response to a question Mike Tichford explained that the City Strategy counted reductions in worklessness on a borough wide level. This meant that if pockets of worklessness were displaced, for example by housing development, this would not misrepresent worklessness data.

#### **42/08 REGENERATION DIRECTORATE QUARTER 2 BUDGET MONITORING**

Members were informed on the budget outturn position for the Regeneration Directorate for quarter two of 2008/09.

Stuart Wootton explained to the Panel that the forecast outturn for the Regeneration Directorate was £961,444. This was spread over a range of services with the most significant overspends in:

- Planning and Land Charges – overspends were being recorded in these areas due to a downturn in planning applications and land searches which were at their lowest point for 10 years.
- Estate Management – overspends recorded mainly due to external costs and salaries.
- Facilities Management – the majority of this overspend was due to relocating from offices at Tameway Tower and the costs associated with reinstating the offices to their condition before occupation.

The Panel noted that not all of the services managed in the Regeneration Directorate were within the Panels remit. When these services were included the overspend reduced to £776,000.

Within the Capital Programme it was estimated that this would be £792,000 underspent. This money would carry forward into 2009/10.

A Member commented that when setting budgets it was important that realistic and achievable income generation targets were set to avoid services recording overspends.

#### **43/08 ST MATTHEWS QUARTER WORKING GROUP**

Councillor Andrew informed the Panel that during the course of the day it had been necessary to reverse the decision to relocate Walsall Market onto The Bridge. This was because the owners of the Old Square Shopping Centre, Threadneedle, had threatened to judicially review against any Development Control Committee decision to gain an injunction to prevent the market from relocating. Advice from Counsel had been received which had suggested that there was a high risk to the Council at a judicial review in the current circumstances. It was still planned to relocate the market but not until more advanced plans with the redevelopment of the St Matthews Quarter (STMQ) had reached the planning stages.

Tim Johnson added that it was still the intention to relocate the market as part of the STMQ redevelopment. It was not possible to give a timescale when this would happen at the current time. Once the STMQ scheme had a development timetable the Council would have a stronger case to relocate the market. The advice of Counsel had been received the previous evening. It was not worth moving the market now if there was a chance an injunction would force it move back in the near future. In response to a question he confirmed that the market move was dependent on the entire STMQ development being completed.

Members of the Panel were extremely disappointed to hear this news. They explained that the Panel had been investigating this issue for 2½ years making recommendations to Cabinet in public meetings so were surprised that Threadneedle had only picked up on this issue now.

Karen Sands explained that the market traders, who were still unaware of this development, would be extremely disappointed to hear the news tomorrow morning. Many traders were simply hanging on for the move to The Bridge and this news would be devastating. It was likely that the number of traders would reduce as a result of this news. She commented that it was important for the news to be officially communicated to them along with an indication of when the move would be likely to take place. She added that currently the Old Square Shopping Centre had 12 empty shop units and had until recently argued for the market to move as it alleged the market was harmful to the shopping centres image.

Councillor Andrew responded by confirming that the Council would support the market traders. The market stall refurbishment would still go ahead as planned and a five figure sum would be provided for additional support. He explained that the first job for the markets team tomorrow morning would be to hand each trader an official letter explaining what had happened and why.

In response to a question Tim Johnson explained that the new charging policy recommended by the Panel would not be implemented until the market relocated onto The Bridge.

Members agreed that it was important that the market traders and all Members of the Council were kept fully informed about all developments.

Due to events it was decided to defer consideration of the future management options of Walsall Market and the terms of reference for the St Matthews Quarter Working Group.

**RESOLVED:**

**That:**

- 1. all Members be kept fully informed of developments with regard to Walsall Market;**
  - 2. the report on the future management options for Walsall Market be deferred to a future meeting;**
- and;**
- 3. the terms of reference for the St Matthews Quarter Working Group be deferred to a future meeting.**

**44/08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 3 December 2008.

The meeting terminated at 7.59 p.m.

Chair:

Date: