

Council – 21 September 2015

Economy, infrastructure and development

Progress Report of Councillor Andrew, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder

My Portfolio is responsible for a number of services vital to the quality of life of residents throughout the borough including regeneration, highways and transportation, planning, community safety and public protection.

Having a job is vital to the well being of anyone of working age and, over the past few months, I am pleased to be able to say that under our administration a number of significant projects have been completed offering the prospect of new jobs in the borough. Most notably these include the recent completion of the £7.8m Old Square development and the new Primark store recently opened by the Leader, with the new Co-op food store soon to follow. This month also sees the opening of Walsall College's £11m Business and Sports Hub to complement its impressive offer to the young people of the borough and completion of the £3m Jhoots Pharmacy headquarters and offices nearby. Next month will see completion of the £1.5m cross party Willenhall Townscape Heritage Initiative programme benefitting 16 business properties in the area.

In Walsall town centre the £12m Waterfront cinema and restaurants project are due to be completed in early 2016 and a start is expected soon on the £14m Norton & Proffitt retail scheme in Digbeth.

Work on the New Walsall Market is expected to commence in the next few months which will help to revitalise a popular and traditional feature of the town centre, this has been delayed through complications due to Network Rail.

We are continuing to work with WHG to deliver an £88m housing and environmental works scheme at Goscote providing in excess of 750 homes over the next few years.

Consideration is currently being given to a proposal to extend the Black Country Enterprise Zone, involving land in Wolverhampton and Darlaston, as part of the J10 cluster of sites. We are working hard to identify a private sector partner to remediate and develop the Phoenix 10 site next to the M6 in partnership with the landowners of the Homes and Communities Agency.

Discussions are ongoing with the seven metropolitan West Midlands authorities and their partners on a possible devolution deal for the West Midlands which could result in the creation of a Combined Authority. This is part of the Government's response to English Devolution following the no vote in Scotland and promises of Devo/max.

We are consulting on the preferred options for the Site Allocation Document and Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan which will be vital to the prosperity of the borough in the period to 2026.

My Portfolio also includes Economic development, under my direction officers established the Walsall Economic Board in 2012 to assist in driving forward the creation of local jobs together with ensuring that local people had the skills and opportunity to secure them.

I would like to bring to your attention the work we are doing to create local jobs through the Council's Employment Growth Team, who during 2014/15 created;

- 152 new jobs,
- safeguarded 92,
- worked with local businesses to secure almost £1m of external grants in support of their expansion,
- over £4million of new business for local companies through our meet the buyer events,
- for every £1 of council money invested in the team they secured £16.13 of external grants.

Their annual report for 2014/15 is attached for your information.

Secondly the work of the Council's Employment and Skills Team, who together with partners assist local people to secure and remain in employment through initiatives including our successful Walsall Works Apprenticeship programme that has so far since July 2012 created 937 pre / full apprenticeships and supported 867 young people into other positive outcomes, including training and employment.

I need to ensure that the homes Walsall people need are being built, including a range of affordable and private housing options, and regenerating derelict sites within the borough – an ongoing project over many years.

During 2014/15 Kier completed the first phase of the Harrowby Road development in Moxley, developing 72 affordable homes that we part funded through our new homes bonus allocation. In addition, last year saw the completion of 40 new timber framed homes in Beechdale, providing high levels of energy efficiency and low heating bills. These homes were manufactured across the road from the site, by local people employed in Accord's award winning factory that our Administration was at the forefront of securing and establishing.

Overall 330 affordable rent homes were completed last year. Building on this achievement we worked closely with the Homes and Communities Agency and our main affordable housing providers to ensure that £15m grant funding was attracted to Walsall for our housing providers to deliver 715 affordable homes between 2015 and 2018. This was 1 of the largest allocations in the region, second only to Birmingham.

As well as increasing affordable housing provision, home ownership is also high on my agenda. In 2013 our Administration launched Walsall's Local Authority Mortgage Scheme, administered by Lloyds bank. We invested £2m with Lloyds to act as a guarantee, and to date this scheme has now helped 64 first time buyers achieve the dream of owning their own home.

Looking forward, we will:

- continue to provide support to stimulate the housing market within Walsall, working with public and private house builders and landlords.
- maximise the number of affordable homes provided, with a particular refocus on ensuring mixed tenure schemes, and we will work hard to unlock derelict land and stalled housing sites that blight some parts of Walsall.
- work hard to increase affordable warmth in new and existing homes
- bring long term empty homes back into use.
- encourage developers to provide suitable housing developments, which take into account the impacts of bedroom tax.

Transportation makes a vital contribution to the local economy and serves as an important catalyst to aid its recovery. My job is to ensure we sustain this contribution and deliver schemes where funding has been identified.

A major improvement to Junction 10 of the M6 is being developed in conjunction with DfT and Highways England. Funding of £64m has been secured for this scheme through the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and Highways England together local tax payers money. An innovative governance model between the funding partners is being established to deliver the project. Preliminary design work and an assessment of the land required are currently being prepared.

During the last year the Council implemented 38 highways maintenance schemes over a total length of 11.6km of carriageway at a cost of some £4m. In the last five months we have completed 9 carriageway resurfacing schemes at a cost of some £605,000 and completed 8 footway resurfacing schemes at a cost of some £370,000. In addition we have carried out £150,000 of patch repairs using the innovative Velocity Patch system.

Earlier this year we were successful in securing an additional £5.1m from the government's Challenge Fund for use on the classified road network with the aim of assisting regeneration and the local economy.

In March the Council gave approval to the Highways Maintenance Strategy and Asset Management Plan for 2015 to 2018. I have recently approved the detailed Programme for 2015/16 which was compiled with the help of the new objective scoring approach to prioritising highways schemes.

As part of the Darlaston Strategic Development Area Access Project we have commenced construction of the new and improved road layout and completed the construction of the Bentley Road North railway bridge. Works to the major junctions at Bescot Road and Darlaston Road, which form part of this project, are progressing well.

We continue to work with the Portfolio Holder for Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships, to deliver the Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy including the award winning A* programme with emphasis on education and training at schools. In the last five months we have involved over 640 parents and reception children in a

range of activities. Over 10,000 children across 40 schools participated in our Walk to School Week and Bike Week campaigns held in May and June.

As part of the road safety aspects we have trained 126 secondary children to level 3 Bikeability Standard with 1550 students trained to level 2. The Council has introduced 20 mph areas for five estates and we are currently assessing their effectiveness with a view to extension into other areas.

A review of the winter gritting service is underway in conjunction with our partner, Tarmac, so that we will be adequately prepared for this winter.

Consultation events have been held this month to consider the proposals designed to address traffic congestion and road safety concerns along Caldmore Road.

Major proposals are currently being formulated for a major £14m 'Invest to Save' scheme to install LED technology throughout the borough's street lighting network.

We will continue with our efforts to provide a replacement for York's Bridge to enhance safety and accessibility in the Pelsall area following the Planning Inspector's recommendation to identify further land to become Common land.

Liaison with Network Rail will continue in relation to the major Chase Line Electrification Project and associated bridge works to protect the interests of the borough. We will continue to talk to the Department for Transport (DfT) regarding motorway improvement works.

My Community Safety team has led on delivering many parts of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 across the borough including the Community Trigger.

The team has helped to develop and coordinate a youth ASB project in North Walsall in which the Reach Up Tower and Move Truck were taken to hot spots during school holiday period.

The Cohesion Through Cricket project brought young people together through the medium of cricket and has had significant outcomes in terms of people of difference playing sport and socialising together. Over 500 young people have been involved in the project in less than 3 months.

A Domestic Abuse Coordinator was recruited in February 2015 using Community Safety grant funding. The Coordinator has been working with partners to ensure a broadly based approach to tackling the problem of domestic abuse across the borough.

Walsall Mela took place in Palfrey Park over the August Bank Holiday involving a variety of performers with a wide cross-section of the community attending and mixing together in a safe and enjoyable environment.

The Council Environmental Health team continues to respond to thousands of concerns raised by residents and businesses regarding matters posing a risk to

health. Through support we have provided, 82% of Walsall food businesses are compliant with food law requirements which is the highest for many years. In contrast, a number of enforced closures of food businesses due to rodent infestations have taken place and five food businesses have been prosecuted for serious breaches of food law. Investigations into three food poisoning outbreaks have highlighted the need to ensure food produced and sold in the Borough is safe.

Officers across the Council are working with our partners to improve the way we use our collective resources across a range of enforcement activity. Over the course of the year we have trialled new approaches to tackling environmental crimes. A project involving West Midlands Police, Walsall Housing Group and the Council's noise team saw staff working together at night to intervene at problem premises and locations.

Investment in the economy and infrastructure is fundamental to making Walsall a great place to live, work and play. We are committed to improving services that support the growth and development of the borough's economy and protect the public. This is challenging in times of unprecedented financial restraint but the performance of our services shows yet again that we are making real progress towards this goal.

Councillor A Andrew

Portfolio Holder for Economy, infrastructure and development

September 2015