

Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 2 September 2019

Attendance

Members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Payal Bedi-Chadha
Cllr Dr Paul John Birch J.P.
Cllr Claire Darke
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)
Cllr Jonathan Yardley

In Attendance

Cllr Harman Banger (Portfolio Holder for City Economy)

Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer)
Richard Lawrence (Director of Regeneration)
Isobel Woods (Head of Enterprise)
John Roseblade (Head of Transport)
Peter Taylor (Head of City Development)
Ruth Taylor (Senior Regeneration Officer)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies for absence were received from, Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN, Cllr Asha Mattu, Cllr Udey Singh and Cllr Val Evans.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 **Minutes of previous meeting**

Resolved: That the minutes of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel held on 16 July 2019 be approved as a correct record.
- 4 **Matters arising**
Cllr Birch asked about keeping the bus fleet clean both in terms of cleanliness and in terms of emissions. He felt there was a disparity that the fares for buses were

consistent regardless of the condition of the bus. The Head of Transport offered to provide a written response to the question raised from Cllr Birch.

5 Westside Link / Public Realm

The Director for Regeneration introduced the item on the Westside Link / Public Realm. He explained the reasons why it was necessary for the Council to take action. The City was in a state of flux. Footfall was down by approximately 2% and vacancy rates were at 14%. They needed to do something, doing nothing was not an option.

The Director for Regeneration remarked that the authority had made bold steps as to how to re-imagine the City Centre and make it a more vibrant place. Repurposing the City Centre, by bringing in useable space where people could play and socialise, hold more events and provide more residential opportunities, was key to making the City Centre more vibrant and in encouraging growth and investment into the City. This would have a knock-on effect for leisure and destination opportunities within the City Centre. A number of key regeneration projects had been identified, with one of the largest being the West Side scheme. The scheme aimed to provide a new leisure destination for the City Centre which included a new cinema, food and beverage offers, leisure opportunities and new car parking. Key to the delivery of the West Side scheme was how it was positioned within the City Centre. The West Side Link was integral to the West Side scheme going forward.

The Head of Enterprise remarked that the City Centre was seeing a reduction in footfall. The Council needed to be clear as to the form the City Offer would take. They had been working with a range of stakeholders including Wolves Football Club, the City Centre BID and a range of businesses across the sector to help overcome the challenges faced by the City. How the City Centre connected was important and West Side Link would form an important part of enhancing City connectivity through a quality public realm.

The Head of City Development stated that they had asked CBRE (a commercial real estate services and investment firm) in 2017 to assist them in reviewing the City Centre and the range of projects the Council were looking to deliver. The work CBRE had completed had culminated in the investment prospectus. The prospectus effectively set out a number of distinct change zones in the City Centre, led and spearheaded by the Council's key regeneration projects. One of the areas CBRE had cautioned about was the quality of linkages between the regeneration zones needing to be significantly enhanced. The concept of the West Side Link scheme had effectively rose from the work completed by CBRE.

The Head of City Development remarked that there was potential for Wolverhampton City Centre to accommodate significantly more residential accommodation. It was not currently well populated in terms of residential development. They were working on a number of major schemes to increase the residential population in the City Centre. Enabling a quality public space and attracting businesses would increase the likelihood of people choosing to live in the City Centre. Urban & Civic had been at the heart of the discussions with the operators and had made good progress with the key anchor tenants on the West Side scheme. It was clear from those discussions that the prospective tenants would be more attracted to the West Side scheme if there was the connectivity brought by the proposed West Side Link

scheme. Key businesses located in the City had supported the West Side Link scheme.

The Head of Transport commented that maintaining access to the City Centre was vital. The Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel at their meeting scheduled for the 7 November 2019 would be addressing some of the transport issues arising from the West Side Link Scheme. It was important to note that no objections had been received for the Victoria Street phase. A Member Reference Group had also been setup to help resolve some of the challenges, this was however yet to meet.

The Senior Regeneration Officer commented that the Council's Cabinet Committee had received a report on 10 April 2019 outlining the outcome for consultation for phases 1 and 2 and potential delivery programme for phase 1. The timeline for delivering phase 1 was subject to the availability of funding, if the funding was in place it was hoped that enabling works on phase 1 would commence in early November. The economic appraisal was that there was a strong market case for investing in the public realm. The main works programme could begin in January 2020, with completion on site in March 2021.

The Director for Regeneration stated that timing was critical for the project, as it was heavily reliant on securing funding from the Future High Street Fund and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The feedback they had received from the MHCLG (Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) was that the bid submitted by the Council was one of the best they had received. They were meeting representatives from the MHCLG on Wednesday of next week to discuss further.

The Chair asked if Members including those on the Scrutiny Panel could still influence the phase 1 plans. The Senior Regeneration Officer stated that it was the intention for the detailed final design and costs to be approved by Cabinet.

A Panel Member asked if a cinema provider had been secured as part of the West Side scheme. The Director for Regeneration responded that the developers Urban & Civic were in advanced negotiations with a well-known operator and the Council hoped to announce officially the operator in the next two months.

A Member of the Panel asked if the 10,000 new residential dwellings projected for the City over the next few years were to be located within the City Centre. The Director for Regeneration responded that the 10,000 figure was a global figure for the City. Some of these dwellings were currently being built and others were in the planning stage. There was a potential opportunity for residential dwellings as part of future phases for West Side Link, but not in phase 1.

A Panel Member was critical about the current vision for the West Side scheme which they found to be lacking coherence. They believed the overall planning for the project at the present time was not at the standard they would have expected. They added that they were unclear as to what Cabinet had actually approved to date. They were not confident about the approach the Council was taking with reference to the scheme. They also expressed a concern that the proposed Member Reference Group on the scheme had not yet had their first meeting. They would have liked there to have been a figure for the amount of new residential dwellings expected as part of the West Side scheme.

The Chair commented that it was critical to understand how the three proposed phases of the West Side Link scheme would affect businesses and she hoped that when the scheme was discussed in the future, that this would be a central question to be answered. She wanted to know the total number of businesses affected and whether it would be positive or negative for them. She also wanted a clear understanding of how many new businesses would be attracted to the City. In addition, how the scheme would affect how people reached the City Centre.

A Panel Member commented that two churches directly affected by the scheme, St Peter's and the Catholic Church both had concerns about the scheme. The Senior Regeneration Officer responded that the concerns of the churches had been raised as part of the consultation on phase 2. Officers had been asked by Cabinet to further develop the ideas for phase 2 to help mitigate the concerns raised by the churches and in particular on the point regarding access. The ideas were still under development. The Panel Member requested that the Panel specifically look at how the plans affected the churches to come before the Scrutiny Panel in the future, to which the Chair agreed.

A Member of the Panel asked what the projected budget was for phases 1,2 and 3 of the scheme. The Senior Regeneration Officer responded that for phase 1 it was approximately £7-7.5 million, phase 2 - £8 million and phase 3 had not yet been costed.

A Panel Member asked for assurance that due diligence had taken place with the chosen developers of the West Side and West Side Link scheme. They did not want the contractor to go bankrupt as had happened with the contractor for the Civic Halls Project. Both the Director for Regeneration and the Head of City Development confirmed that a considerable amount of due diligence had taken place on the chosen contractor Urban & Civic. Discussions had been taking place over the last two years and a full procurement process followed. West Side Link was a very different entity to the Civic Halls. The Regeneration Officer informed Members that phase 1 of the West Side Link scheme was funded entirely externally and so the funders had also carried out significant due diligence.

A Member of the Panel remarked that the night time economy of the City Centre was missing two key elements, a high-quality hotel and conference centre. The Director for Regeneration responded that there were currently detailed discussions with Hotel operators. There was a capacity for two more in the City of a decent standard. There was interest in hotel conference facilities around the train station and Wolves Football Club. There was also general hotel interest in the western part of the City. For the conference element they were keen to link in with the Football Club and University and so there had been lengthy discussions with them.

A Panel Member commented that the scheme presently did not include a vision for how potential new hotels would have the correct transport connectivity. It concerned him that planning for phase 2 and 3 was underway without a full understanding of the transport requirements of a developing City. They were concerned that not enough thought had been given to the scheme to ensure it was appropriate to match the needs of the future City Centre. They added that Beatties was currently on the market for sale and the largest department store in the Mander Centre, Debenhams, had announced they were closing. These two facts would fuel further footfall loss within the City Centre. There was therefore a lack of clarity over the shopping offer,

future hotel development and potential new housing, which meant it was impossible to properly understand the connectivity needs of the City.

The Panel Member continued that it was important to plan for the public transport needs of the future. He did not want the scheme to have a detrimental effect on connectivity for the City in the future. He also thought it was important to consider the Council's commitment to the climate change agenda. New innovative transport facilities would become available in the future and he did not want anything to hinder their potential use in the City Centre. It was therefore important not to restrict future opportunities and to ensure the correct vision was in place. He wanted to see real figures rather than just ideas.

The Head of City Development commented that he agreed with the Councillor on his point about the need to future proof the City's connectivity needs. The West Side scheme had been ostensibly market tested, to test various parts of the City. There had been several years of engagement with the West Side developer, Urban & Civic, and he wanted to ensure the project was as successful as possible. It was compelling when you heard from the developer, the developer's agents and the Council's independent agents, who all said that the connectivity from West Side into the City Centre needed to be improved to make the West Side scheme as good as possible. Phase 1 attempted to better integrate the West Side scheme into the City Centre by improving the linkages. The Director for Regeneration acknowledged that a key element to the City was ensuring people were able to move around the City efficiently.

The Chair expressed a concern that the West Side Link scheme might not necessarily be integrated with all the Council's strategies for the City Centre. Officers needed to be able to demonstrate that they were not acting in silos. She suspected the drive to keep the West Side Link Scheme on track was possibly getting in the way of deeper and more integrated thinking about the Council's overall vision for the City Centre. She was concerned that the bigger picture of the City may be being neglected. The Head of Enterprise responded that it was complex and Officers were constantly asking themselves how they could ensure the different component parts knitted together as one.

The Director for Regeneration stated that the West Side Scheme was a key project within the City and it was currently at a stage where activity would commence soon. Phase 1 of West Side Link he saw as the environmental setting for West Side.

The Director for Regeneration stated that he hoped Phase 1 of the project would be made possible with Government funding from the Future High Street Fund. If the funding was secured, they would require Cabinet approval to spend the money on the West Side Link scheme.

The Director for Regeneration stated it was important to have the right conversations with Members, so they were fully aware of the current status and their intentions. The Member Reference Group would be an opportunity for the Members, on that group, to discuss the issues. He did believe there was a clear vision for the City and there were a number of key regeneration schemes ongoing. In 2021 the new train station would be completed, the new college campus in the City Centre would be at an advanced stage, the West Side Scheme would be open, the Civic Halls would be

open again and he was hopeful of new housing schemes at Brewers Yard and Canal Side. Once these were up and running, they would act as a catalyst for the City.

A Member of the Panel asked if any consideration had been given to a phase 4, which could include the demolishing of the Wulfran Centre as part of an overall programme of reimagining the City Centre. The Director for Regeneration responded that the Council did not own the Wulfran Centre. He was however open to all suggestions about the future of the City Centre.

Resolved:

- A) That the report be noted and that answers to the various questions raised during the meeting be pursued.
- B) That the “All Change -Reimagining our City Centre” booklet be circulated to all Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel Members in hard copy.
- C) That a Member from the Director for City Environment's Team find out the dates for the Member Reference Group on the Westside Link Project and inform the Scrutiny Panel.

6

City Identity and Marketing for the City of Wolverhampton

The Head of Enterprise introduced a briefing note on City Identity and Marketing for the City of Wolverhampton. She gave a PowerPoint presentation on the subject, the slides of which are attached to the signed minutes.

A Member of the Panel commented that during the Wolves in Wolves Project, many people had wanted to buy a souvenir with a city theme but had been unable to do so. She asked if the Council intended to do some merchandising, citing examples such as fridge magnets and mugs. She felt the shop in the Art Gallery had a poor offering of goods with a City link. She also felt the City did not celebrate its history enough including its sculptures, blue plaques and buildings of architectural significance. She would also be pleased to see more local businesses taking part in the food festival. An area which she thought the City could improve was in the offering of informative walks and talks. It was important to celebrate the positives of Wolverhampton.

The Head of Enterprise remarked that she took on board the comments made by the Member. There was an offer for local independent traders to be part of the Food Festival as part of the arrangement with the promoter. The Offer had been made on each occasion in the last three years. 25,000 people had visited the Food Festival in 2019 over the two days, which had been a ticketed event for the first time. The key point was to ensure people visited Wolverhampton again. Some pin badges with a Wolverhampton theme had been created.

A Panel Member asked if there was a mechanism city wide to capture footfall. The Head of Enterprise responded that the City centre BID (Business Improvement District) had two static counters. There were new technologies coming into place which would help monitor footfall in the future. An in-depth piece of work with investment would be required to assess how to best utilise the new technology

available to capture footfall data. She had been in discussions with the Director for Communications about using new technologies to capture footfall data.

A Member stated that next year was the 25th anniversary of Fair Trade and hoped the Council would make best use of the anniversary at some of its events.

The Head of Enterprise remarked that the Director of Communications was working with the Head of Business Services on a five-year strategy plan to look at the various food and drink events to be held in the City Centre. It was important to note that the City was hoping to attract people through the Commonwealth games being held in the West Midlands and Coventry having UK City of Culture status in 2021.

A Member of the Panel asked if the Council had benefited from the Mipim (Real estate market event) held in Cannes, France. The Director for Regeneration responded that the Brewers Yard Development (Approximately -1300 new homes development) came about following a conversation at Mipim. The ongoing discussions with a major hotel chain had also originated from a conversation at Mipim. It was the one opportunity to be able to engage with investors, developers and agents in one place at a particular time each year. It also helped to put Wolverhampton on the international stage.

The Chair reminded Members that there would be a report on Inward Investment at the first meeting of the Panel in the New Year, the item was already logged on the Panel's Work Programme.

A Panel Member stated that Wolverhampton had a brilliant heritage which should be maximised for the benefit of the City, including the opportunities of tourism. He asked what the Council could do to help the volunteers in the City. The Chair commented that Scrutiny Board would look at volunteering as an item in the future.

The Chair asked for information, via a paper to the Scrutiny Panel in the near future, on how the Council monitored what it was already doing to sell Wolverhampton and how that monitoring affected the Council's future strategic objectives around marketing. She wanted to see actual numbers and what qualitative and quantitative models the Council would be using. She also wanted to know the effect of the marketing video which had been viewed during the item. She asked for the future paper to include information on who had seen the video, it's ultimate purpose and what feedback had been received.

Resolved: To receive a further report on City Identity and Marketing for the City of Wolverhampton in six months' time to make an assessment of progress.

7

Scrutiny Work Programme

A Member of the Panel asked about the Council's plans for Brexit. He was concerned about the effect of food prices increasing, on the poorest people in the city.

The Scrutiny Officer commented that Scrutiny Board were reviewing the Brexit planning of the Council and it was on the agenda for their next meeting. The Director for Regeneration remarked that an Executive Team meeting would be taking place on the 9 September 2019, where the Strategic Executive Board and Cabinet

Members would be looking at Brexit, its potential impact on the local economy and what the authority could do to help support local businesses.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Work Programme be agreed.