



Enterprise and Business Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 3 February 2015

Attendance

Members of the Enterprise and Business Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Philip Bateman
Cllr Payal Bedi
Cllr Craig Collingswood
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr John Rowley (Chair)
Cllr Tersaim Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Jonathan Yardley (Vice-Chair)

Employees

Marie Bintley	Head of Physical Regeneration
Keren Jones	Service Director - City Economy
Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from the following members of the panel

Cllr Zahid Shah
Cllr Payal Bedi

2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest recorded

3 Minutes of the previous meeting 2.12.14

The minutes of the meeting of 2.12.14 were approved and signed by the Chair

4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 Taking forward our Regeneration Priorities (presentation to be tabled)

Keren Jones, Service Director, City Economy, gave a brief overview of the background to the presentation and the areas to be covered. The information would also provide preparation to the planned site visits to Southside and Westside Developments to see the regeneration work.

This included a brief overview of the city wide economic context and the skills context. The Service Director City Economy commented that the presentation would not cover the issue of low skills and the labour market, as this will be part of a separate report on from the Council's Skills and Employment Scrutiny review and the planned work of the Skills Commission. The Service Director commented that recent statistics showed improvements in youth unemployment based on JSA rates.

The Head of Physical Development commented the existing clusters of business already located on the i54 site and the potential opportunities for expansion, the completed transport and infrastructure works around the site and the potential to develop the area to the west. The Head of Physical Development commented that public transport access to i54 has been improved but we are looking at improving access by public transport.

Head of Physical Development commented on the Bilston centre regeneration and the discussions with developers and about proposals to improve transport links to the centre from Bilston Urban Village. The Head of Physical Development listed a range of work being done to deliver a viable scheme for development in the area, but acknowledged that ground conditions that include some contaminated land is an issue and the role of the Council is to remove these externalities to facilitate the delivery of viable development and create confidence in the area that will bring forward development and lead to an uplift in land values. The Head of Physical Development outlined a programme of work to allow developments to go ahead on the site as part of an investment in proposals being developed for the wider regeneration of Bilston centre.

The Head of Physical Development commented that funding from the Council, the Local Growth Fund, and HCA will bring 40 hectares of land back into use that will act as catalyst to regenerate the city centre.

The Head of Physical Development outlined progress in delivering the regeneration of Wolverhampton City Centre and the major strategic projects planned for the Westside and Southside and the important role of businesses such as Marston's and Wolverhampton University in investing and contributing to the regeneration of the city.

Head of Physical Development commented on the impact of lack of Grade A office accommodations which made it difficult to break the cycle of low rental values against the cost of construction. The Council intervened to break this cycle and invested in i10.

The panel expressed concern that the presentation did not highlight the value and strength of the city's cultural and entertainment offer suggested that it should be more prominent feature. The Service Director explained the reasons for presenting

the information, but accepted the importance of capturing this fully in the presentation and that there was more work to be done to show this.

The Head of Physical Development commented on the progress of Wolverhampton interchange master plan and extension of the tram and redevelopment of the train station.

The panel commented on the condition of the public realm between the interchange and the retail core and what was being done to improve it. The Head of Physical Development commented on the 'twin track' approach which involved the Council undertaking improvement work and working with owners of buildings to look at options for bringing empty sites, such as the post office building back into use. Head of Physical Development accepted the need to further improve the public realm and this is being examined as part of the strategy to improve linkages and better integrate parts of the City Centre.

Head of Physical Development commented on the investment by Wolverhampton University and the work starting on Springfield Brewery which is expected to lead to an increase in footfall through the shopping areas and the City Centre and well-designed linkages are needed to improve these flows.

The Service Director, City Economy explained the difficulty in using grant funded money to improve the public realm as it difficult to show a direct link to the job creation, which is a condition of getting the funding. Head of Physical Development commented on the importance of thinking creatively and building on the connections with Wolverhampton University and other businesses to regenerate the city and improve the quality of the public realm.

The Head of Physical Development commented on the progress of developments on the Westside development.

The panel discussed the issue of the location of the market and the options being considered to grow the site as there was concern that it was not in the best position. The Head of Physical Development explained the on-going discussions with the market service to deliver a better offer which will make it more successful. There was acceptance of the need to attract more people to the area and the challenge presented by the profile of users. The panel commented on the need to link to the future of the market to future Westside development in the area. Service Director commented that there is a separate market plan.

The Head of Physical Development commented on the complex land ownership issues on the site at Westside 3.

The Head of Physical Development gave a summary of the work being done on the Southside development and the findings of the soft marketing testing. The Head of Physical Development commented on the challenges in developing sites in the Southside

The Head of Physical Development commented on the progress in bringing forward plans for the vacant buildings in the Chapel Ash area and the challenges arising from the efforts to redevelop the former eye infirmary site. The Head of Physical

Development confirmed that the building was owned hospital and the Council is keen to hold further discussions were on-going with representatives of the Hospital Trust to find a solution. The issue is complicated by its location in a conservation area and the locally listed building status needs to be taken into account. The Council have received expressions of interest to develop the site and dialogue is continuing to find a solution.

Resolved

The panel welcomed the presentation and thanked witnesses.

The meeting closed at 7.45pm