



WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY

WMCA Housing and Land Delivery Board

Wednesday 21 February 2018 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Sean Coughlan (Chair)
Councillor Peter Bilson
Bill Blincoe
Councillor Steven Claymore
Councillor Ian Courts
Simon Marks
Kevin Rodgers

Councillor Chris Saint
Councillor Mark Shurmer
Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor David Humphreys
Councillor Nic Laurens
Councillor Bill Gavan

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
City of Wolverhampton Council
Coventry and Warwickshire LEP
Tamworth Borough Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP
West Midlands Housing Association
Partnership
Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Redditch Borough Council
Warwickshire County Council
North Warwickshire Borough Council
Shropshire Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance

Jo Nugent
Ian Powell

Perry Wardle
Carl Craney
Gareth Bradford
Tim Johnson
David Warburton
Eleanor Young

Walsall MBC
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough
Council

West Midlands Combined Authority
West Midlands Combined Authority
City of Wolverhampton Council
Homes England
Blackstock Partnership

Item Title No.

6. Apologies for Absence (if any)

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Majid Mahmood (Birmingham City Council), Councillor George Adamson (Cannock Chase District Council), Councillor Dennis Harvey (Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council), Councillor Richard Overton (Telford and Wrekin Council) and Karl Tupling (Homes England).

7. Chair's Announcement

The Chair welcomed Gareth Bradford, WMCA Director of Housing and Regeneration to his first meeting of the Board.

8. Declarations of Interests (if any)

No declarations of interest were made in relation to items under consideration at the meeting.

9. Minutes of last meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the addition of 'Ian Powell – Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council' being included in the list of those in attendance at the meeting.

10. Matters Arising

Councillor Ian Courts referred to Minute No. 5. (Update on Housing Deal) and requested that further information be provided to all Members of this Board with regard to the award of some £3.690 million to Telford and Wrekin Council to assist in bringing forward approximately 540 housing units across that area. He advised that whilst he had not been present at the last meeting he was concerned with regard to this award given the discussions held under the Duty to Co-Operate requirements and the stance taken previously by Telford and Wrekin Council.

Resolved:

That a detailed clarification on the background to this matter and the decision be provided to all Members of this Board.

11. Spatial Investment and Delivery Plan - (contents and outline for agreement)

Gareth Bradford presented a report which updated the Board on progress in taking forward work to support implementation of the West Midlands Land Delivery Plan, which had been a key recommendation from the West Midlands Land Commission. He advised that this was the third stage of the process and formed part of the bottom up development. He assured the Board that the WMCA was engaged with both Constituent, Non- Constituent and none members on this piece of work and that this was not a Statutory Plan. It was intended to bring together various plans for housing, transport, skills, employment and social infrastructure. It was anticipated that Homes England and the various Housing Associations would have regard to the document, once it was finalised. As part of the draft scoping exercise key information on all sites had been documented. He reminded the Board that this exercise was not about numbers of houses provided but about the quality of developments, the density and ensuring that sustainable communities were created.

He reported that the site pipeline had identified some 800 sites and that the Officers were working with Homes England to commence discussions with H M Government to move forward development on these sites, acknowledging the inherent difficulties with some sites. The constraints included contaminated land and, in some cases, fragmented ownership. He stressed the need for the homes to be delivered in a structured and co-ordinated manner. A number of further Workshops were planned with the respective authorities in order to progress the finalisation of the Delivery Plan.

Councillor Ian Courts welcomed the work undertaken to date and commented that it was essential especially in terms of the Brownfield sites. He suggested that there was a need for some scoring mechanism via a 'Scorecard' on which the various impediments (such as remediation / ownership / planning issues) to development could be rated. He also suggested that there was a need to identify 'shovel ready' schemes and to involve private landlords and developers in the exercise.

Gareth Bradford acknowledged the inclusion of a 'Scorecard' and on the need for the pipeline to be realistic. He advised on the need to identify those schemes which could be delivered quickly and those that could be prepared for delivery with the support of investors. He reported that, to date, the engagement with both owners and developers had been light in touch but assured the Board that the level of engagement would increase as the process developed.

The Chair commented that the negotiations with H M Government needed to be considered including the need to demonstrate that the West Midlands region could deliver on its aspirations.

Councillor Chris Saint supported the approach that was being adopted but expressed concern with regard to the non-statutory element in the planning process. He reminded the Board that the Spatial Development and Delivery Plan would sit alongside statutory plans. He enquired whether those sites identified in the pipeline would be over and above those identified in Local Plans. The Chair acknowledged the position and advised that no attempt was being made to intrude into the Green Belt. He reported that H M Government preferred the adoption of a statutory plan but that the WMCA was resisting this course of action.

Councillor Ian Courts sought an assurance that only those sites put forward by the respective local authorities would be included in the Plan. Councillor Peter Butlin commented that the purpose of the Plan was to accelerate development of sites and especially those where development had stalled. He suggested that reference should be made to the provision of educational facilities in the Plan where new developments were under consideration.

Councillor Peter Bilson welcomed the work on the development of the Plan. He confirmed that it aligned with the Black Country Core Strategy and the City of Wolverhampton Council's development ambitions. He commented that early commitment on land remediation was required and acknowledged the different pressures between authorities in respect of development. He suggested that an early commitment from H M Government would be welcomed. The Chair reported that a letter had been forwarded to the Prime Minister and all local Members of Parliament seeking their support to the aspirations. He commented that there were a number of difficulties preventing development across the region in addition to contaminated land.

Councillor David Humphreys commented on the need for developers to be required to complete sites on which development had commenced. Gareth Bradford confirmed that the public sector needed to intervene in such matters using Compulsory Purchase Order powers if deemed necessary and that the WMCA was discussing with H M Government the appropriate tools

to ensure that the completion of approved developments were achieved. He advised that the WMCA was working alongside Homes England and the respective local authorities on such issues. The Chair intimated that H M Government was supportive of the aims in this matter.

Councillor Peter Butlin commented on the possibility of charging developers Council Tax on such undeveloped properties which was likely to achieve a quicker result than the use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers. Gareth Bradford advised that a range of tools were required especially having regard to the diverse range of issues across the region. Councillor Chris Saint advised that the charging of Council Tax on undeveloped properties was under consideration but could not yet be implemented as the necessary legislation had yet to be enacted.

Councillor Ian Courts commented on the various hurdles which had to be addressed including the 'boom and bust' nature of the construction industry and the various issues which prevented the speedy adoption of Local Plans.

Resolved:

1. That the proposed outline of the Spatial Investment and Delivery Plan be approved;
2. That the progress in taking forward the work programme as agreed at the last meeting of the Board, particularly in relation to developing the Spatial Expression / Integrated Investment Plan be noted.

12. Update on Housing Deal

Gareth Bradford updated the Board in relation to on-going discussions with H M Government to secure investment by way of a Housing Deal. He assured the Board that it was not intended to surpass the target of 215,000 additional housing units by 2031. He reported that the whole housing market was being reviewed in terms of remediation requirements and types of construction. A diverse number of delivery options were being explored including:

- Delivery with both public and private sectors;
- Intervention measures;
- New delivery measures and building on those already in existence;
- Challenges to developers on quality and to complete developments;
- Joint Delivery Team with Homes England.

He advised that the intention was to establish a long term relationship and investment programme with H M Government and associated Agencies. Ideally, a single housing fund would be established to accelerate supply of housing units. Compulsory Purchase Order powers would be used where appropriate and support would be provided on skills and employment provision / training. The proposals would include partnership working with

Homes England. The Chair commented that negotiations with H M Government were on-going but it was hoped that an agreed process for the long term could be achieved.

Councillor Peter Butlin referred to the position with the provision of affordable housing in the Rugby Borough Council area where a number of viability issues, varying from site to site, precluded the requisite proportion of affordable housing units being provided. He opined that if H M Government was willing to fund the costs of remediation of those sites higher levels of affordable housing could be delivered. The Chair reminded the Board of the availability of funding through the Brownfield Land and Property Remediation Fund but acknowledged that this did not provide a solution to all problems. Councillor Ian Courts counselled caution with regard to subsidising land owners and also reminded the Board that the type of affordable housing units provided was as important as the number of units.

Gareth Bradford commented on the need for the WMCA to build up its level of expertise without replicating that which already existed in partner authorities. He advised on the need for a different approach to be adopted to that offered by a Joint Venture Partnership as there was a need for a long term view. The Chair opined on the need to protect the local authorities and reminded the Board of the award of £6 million to establish a 'Delivery Team' as part of the Devolution Deal 2 settlement.

Councillor Peter Bilson commented on the need for affordable housing for rent and on the need for the borrowing cap on the Housing Revenue Account to be lifted. The Chair advised that further parts of the plan would evolve during the on-going discussions including those taking place with Housing Associations. Gareth Bradford reported that lifting the borrowing cap had not formed part of the discussions with H M Government as it was understood that this was under consideration. He stressed the need to convince H M Government that the West Midlands region could deliver on its aspirations.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That the Chair be granted delegated authority to progress negotiations with H M Government in relation to the Housing Deal.

The meeting ended at 10.51 am.