



Housing & Land Delivery Board

Monday 30 September 2019 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Sarah Middleton

Bill Blincoe

Councillor Angus Lees

Paul Gascoine

Councillor Julie Jackson

Councillor Joanne Hadley

Councillor Robert Macey

Councillor Ian Courts

Councillor David Wright

Councillor Adrian Andrew

Councillor Peter Butlin

Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership

Coventry and Warwickshire LEP

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Homes England

Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Shropshire Council

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

Telford and Wrekin Council

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Warwickshire County Council

In Attendance

Mark Andrews

Simon Tranter

Gareth Bradford

Carl Craney

Stephen Manners

Jodie Townsend

David Warburton

Patricia Willoughby

Coventry City Council

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority

Item Title

No.

8. Election of Chair for the meeting

In the absence of the Chair, it was proposed by Councillor Ian Courts, seconded by Councillor Joanne Hadley and

Resolved:

That Councillor Adrian Andrew be elected Chair for the meeting.

Councillor Adrian Andrew – In the Chair

9. Apologies for Absence (if any)

Apologies for absence had been received from the Chair, Councillor Mike Bird (Walsall MBC), Councillor Sharon Thompson (Birmingham City Council), Councillor Peter Bilson (City of Wolverhampton Council), Simon Marks (Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership), Karl Tupling (Homes England), Councillor David Humphreys (North Warwickshire

Borough Council), Councillor Sebastian Lowe (Rugby Borough Council), Councillor Daren Pemberton (Stratford on Avon District Council) and Kevin Rodgers (West Midlands Housing Association Partnership).

10. Notification of Substitutes (if any)

Councillor Adrian Andrew had been nominated as a substitute for the Chair, Councillor Mike Bird and Paul Gascoine had been nominated as a substitute for Karl Tupling (Homes England).

11. Declarations of Interests (if any)

There were no declarations of interests made relative to items under consideration at the meeting.

12. Minutes of last meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2019 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13. Single Commissioning Framework

Gareth Bradford presented a report which outlined a number of suggested minor clarifications and revisions to the Single Commissioning Framework. He also reminded the Board that the WMCA was currently piloting a regional definition of 'Affordable Housing' had been agreed previously and advised that a report on the outcome of the trial would be submitted to a future meeting.

With reference to paragraph 3.6 of the report insofar as it referred to 'taller buildings in city centre locations' Councillor Joanne Hadley requested that this be extended to buildings in urban centres also. The Chair supported this suggestion but commented on the need for consideration to be given to the required parking provision and parking standards. Gareth Bradford acknowledged these points and advised that the intention of seeking to secure taller buildings was an attempt to maximise the use of available land.

With reference to Section 4 of the report (Addressing WMCA's climate Change Objectives), Councillor Ian Courts suggested that issues such as storage facilities for bikes, the use of materials, the reduction in the use of plastics and increasing forestation be considered also as part of the work to be commissioned.

Resolved:

1. That the proposed minor amendments to the WMCA's Single Commissioning Framework (SCF) as detailed in the report be approved subject to the additional revisions referred to above;
2. That a piece of work be commissioned to identify how the SCF might be utilised to support the WMCA's efforts to address the climate change and the additional points detailed above be included within the specification.

14. Regional Design Charter

Pat Willoughby presented a report which provided an update on work undertaken by the WMCA and the Regional Design Charter Working Group and sought the views of the Board on the proposed Regional Design

Charter's principles and format.

Councillor Julie Jackson commented that the Charter and principles needed to be comprehensible and cited the use of the term 'spirit of place' which she believed would not be understood easily by either developers or members of the public. Pat Willoughby explained the meaning of the term. Councillor Ian Courts suggested that the term could be replaced with 'character'. Councillor David Wright counselled caution that the document should not seek to limit the introduction of ambitious and innovative design.

The Chair invited Paul Gascoine, Homes England, to comment on Homes England's views on the Regional Design Charter. Paul Gascoine advised that he was involved with the work and supported the emerging proposals.

Resolved:

1. That the principles and format of a regional design charter as set out at Annex A to the report be approved subject to any minor amendments and clarifications;
2. That the production of a web-based tool, featuring the design charter and additional supporting information including case studies be approved;
3. That the production of a further PDF document, for ease of access to both principles and supporting information, be made available on the WMCA website;
4. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Housing and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to make minor and technical amendments to the regional design charter.

15. Modern Methods of Construction (MMC)

Pat Willoughby presented a report which provided an update on work to date on the Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) programme in the West Midlands and the next steps to December 2019. Additionally, the report proposed some immediate actions to accelerate the uptake of MMC in the West Midlands, including the adoption of a new regional MMC definition and target. With reference to paragraphs 3.4, 3.6 and 3.7, Gareth Bradford advised that MMC was supported already under the SCF but that it was proposed to test whether the impact on viability and pace of delivery would be affected unduly if it was included as a pre-qualification requirement initially on larger sites of 200+ units.

Councillor Joanne Hadley advised that Sandwell MBC had investigated the use of MMC but that it had proven more expensive than traditional methods of construction. She suggested that expertise and experience outside the West Midlands region also needed to be considered. She also referred to the recent increase in the price of steel which had had an adverse effect on the costs of MMC.

Councillor Ian Courts commented that modular construction was not a new concept but that it was the economics of MMC that tended to be problematical. At present, the construction of housing units was based on traditional construction methods which were a known entity. There was benefit in going as far as possible in requiring MMC on future development

sites and he referred to the need for safety to be paramount when MMC was used together with the use of environmentally friendly materials, energy efficiency and that innovative methods of construction and working should be encouraged. Gareth Bradford advised that currently only MMC categories 1 and 2 were being considered as a pre-qualification requirement.

Councillor Peter Butlin reported that MMC was very common in both Germany and Scandinavia but that those factories producing modular units required a high throughput which brought unit costs down. He advised that modular units built off site were often off a higher build quality to traditional methods and construction was not subject to prevailing weather conditions. It was also possible to use modern materials and they presented an opportunity to lower the carbon footprint which was not possible with traditional construction methods which required the delivery of raw materials to the construction site. Gareth Bradford acknowledged these points and confirmed that this was the intention of moving to greater use of MMC.

Sarah Middleton suggested that any initiatives for greater use of MMC be cross referenced to the construction element of the WM5G workstream. She also referred to the intention for pre-qualification being confined to larger sites of 200+ units and questioned this given that the majority of the land supply in the Black Country area would be through small sites. She asked whether this would lead to less investment in such small sites. Gareth Bradford advised that MMC was encouraged on sites of all sizes albeit that the intention was for it to be a pre-qualification at this stage only on large sites. He undertook to explore the evidence base for extending this criteria to medium and small sites as part of the testing process.

Councillor Julie Jackson reported that Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council had used MMC for the provision of new council homes for some considerable time and commented on the expeditious construction of such dwellings. She drew to the attention of the Board the delays which were encountered, however, with securing utility connections which often left units uninhabitable. Gareth Bradford accepted this was a broader issue which required attention. Councillor Ian Courts enquired whether this would include Broadband connectivity. Gareth Bradford confirmed that such connectivity would be required and requested authority to amend the SCF to reflect this issue.

Bill Blincoe questioned whether outputs were being measured across the region. Gareth Bradford confirmed that the monitoring and evaluation was required under the terms of the Housing Deal and was part of the drive to increase delivery. He suggested that reports on monitoring and evaluation could be submitted to future meetings of this Board. Councillor David Wright commented that an analysis of market competitiveness was also required to ensure that the market was being broadened. Gareth Bradford referred to the recent commissioned partnership with Lovell Homes which had resulted in the generation of a number of further enquiries from developers. This was likely to drive a change in the market. He reminded the Board that the WMCA would only intervene where there was a case of market failure as set out in the SCF .

The Chair commented that Walsall MBC had a lot of experience with MMC with two factories being located within the Borough. He commended the units for their energy efficiency and also that construction was not limited due to inclement weather.

Resolved:

1. That the progress in developing a vision, routemap and strategy for Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) be noted;
2. That the intention to seek additional technical and industry expertise to support this agenda through:
 - i) The appointment of a dedicated MMC Programme Manager; and
 - ii) The creation of an MMC Expert Advisory Panel

Noted;

3. That the proposal to be an early adopter of MHCLG's MMC definition framework in the West Midlands be approved;
4. That subject to the above, the proposal to move towards a pre-qualification requirement for use of MMC categories 1 and 2 in new developments that were coming forward through the SCF be approved;
5. That the extension of the pre-qualification to all sites be explored;
6. That the SCF be revised further to require the inclusion of broadband connectivity;
7. That the difficulties in ensuring early utility connections for MMC units be addressed;
8. That monitoring and evaluation reports together with an analysis of market competitiveness be presented to future meetings of this Board.

16. Town Centres Programme

Gareth Bradford presented a report which updated the Board on:

- The packages of interventions which were being developed jointly with the local authorities in the five 'first wave' town centres and which were designed to demonstrate active progress and momentum within each of the centres – these complemented the major capital projects agreed by the WMCA investment Board in February 2019 and were in line with the purpose and intent of the £20 million agreed by the Investment Board; and
- The emerging 'Town Centres Toolkit'.

He confirmed that the projects which were to be supported were mostly of a capital nature but included some revenue projects which would be ancillary to and would be required to enable consequential capital schemes. He advised that all supported schemes would be subject to Funding and Delivery Agreements as required by the WMCA Assurance Framework.

Councillor Joanne Hadley advised that Sandwell MBC wished to amend its submission. Gareth Bradford confirmed that all submissions could be reviewed and revised by the submitting authority but the aim was to ensure that there was an agreed list for each centre very soon with funding and delivery agreements following quickly after and delivery on the ground.

Councillor Julie Jackson reminded the Board that the Non-Constituent Authorities had been excluded from applying for inclusion in the 'first wave'

and asked when it was anticipated that the 'second wave' would commence. Gareth Bradford reminded the Board that the intention had been that the 'first wave' would inform the 'second wave' through lessons learnt and that all authorities could submit Town Centre Intervention schemes for consideration through the SCF.

Resolved:

1. That the commitment in February 2019 by the WMCA's Investment Board to earmark £20 million of the WMCA's devolved housing and land funds to support the Regional Town Centres Programme – with detailed funding and delivery agreements of up to £5 million to be agreed by the WMCA's Directors of Housing and Regeneration and Finance and Head Of Governance be noted;
2. That some of the projects initially identified in February 2019 by local authorities for WMCA investment under this programme had now been funded and supported through other means be noted;
3. That the view of the Housing and Land Delivery Steering Group that up to £5 million of the £20 million earmarked for this programme would be used to support delivery of 'early impact' town centre interventions, subject to funding and delivery agreements being put in place between the WMCA and each relevant local authority be endorsed;
4. That the type of interventions recommended by the Regional Town Centres Task Force as detailed in the draft Town Centres Toolkit and endorsed by the Housing and Land Steering Group in September 2019 on which the interventions submitted by each local authority had been determined be noted.

17. Exclusion of the Public and Press

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the business affairs of any particular person (Including the authority holding that information).

18. Town Centres Programme

Gareth Bradford presented a report which detailed a list of interventions which had been developed jointly by the WMCA with the respective local authorities and the Regional Town Centres Task Force in the five 'first wave' town centres: all had been designed to demonstrate active progress within each of the centres. He advised that the interventions had been considered and supported for progression by the Regional Town Centres Task Force and the Housing and Land Steering Group.

Councillor Angus Lees sought an assurance that the delegated powers being sought in respect of substituting schemes put forward by local authorities would only be exercised with the agreement of the respective local authority. Gareth Bradford confirmed that the substitution of schemes would only be considered with the written agreement of the respective local authority.

Resolved:

1. That the list of proposed early interventions set out in Appendix 1

to the report, that had been developed and proposed by the five local authorities in recent months, be approved, subject to further appraisal and due diligence with each of the five town centres. This would include confirmation that they could be delivered by the end of Q2 2020 and that appropriate funding and delivery agreements were in place between the WMCA and the relevant local authority;

2. That delegated authority be granted to the Directors of Housing and Regeneration and Finance and Head of Governance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Land for the substitution of specific projects for other similar projects in the event that the identified project could not be brought forward in the timescale required or if appropriate funding agreements could not be put in place: such requests for substitution to be initiated in writing by the respective local authority;
3. That it be noted that the WMCA and local authorities were continuing to work up projects and schemes across all town centres in the region under the Single Commissioning Framework (SCF) as part of a rolling programme which would support the Regional Town Centres Programme, prior to the future launch of a second wave of pilot centres;
4. That it be noted that projects identified for support were predominantly capital schemes (e.g. investing in public realm) with complimentary and supportive revenue asks (e.g. project design) built in wherever possible. [This was to ensure that the scope was all within the £20 million from devolved housing and land funds agreed for the Town Centres Programme by the WMCA investment Board in February 2019.]

The meeting ended at 10.58 am.