



Housing & Land Delivery Board

Monday 27 April 2020 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Mike Bird (Chair)
Sarah Middleton

Councillor Sharon Thompson
Councillor George Adamson
Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman
Bill Blincoe
Marc Lidderth
Simon Marks
Phil Farrell
Councillor Matthew Dormer
Councillor Joanne Hadley
Councillor Robert Macey
Councillor Ian Courts
Councillor David Wright
Councillor Peter Butlin
Councillor Cathy Bayton

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership
Birmingham City Council
Cannock Chase District Council
City of Wolverhampton Council
Coventry and Warwickshire LEP
Environment Agency
Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP
Homes England
Redditch Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Shropshire Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Telford and Wrekin Council
Warwickshire County Council
Association of Black Country Authorities

In Attendance

Richard Lawrence
Rachel-Ann Atterbury
Gareth Bradford
Carl Craney
Colin Clinton
Ed Cox
Neil Elkes
Dan Essex
Rob Lamond
Tim Martin
Gurdip Nagra
Tanya Patel
Lyndsey Roberts
David Warburton
Patricia Willoughby

City of Wolverhampton Council
West Midlands Combined Authority
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Item Title

No.

37. Apologies for Absence (if any)

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Angus Lees

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

38. Notification of Substitutes (if any)

No notification of Substitute Members had been received. Phil Farrell advised that he had replaced Karl Tupling as Homes England representative on the Board.

39. Declarations of Interests (if any)

Simon Marks (Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership) declared a personal interest in Agenda Item No. 5 (Affordable Homes Delivery Vehicle: update) inasmuch as the GB&SLEP) provided advice to the partners.

40. Chair's Announcement

The Chair referred to the recent death of Councillor Peter Bilson following a spell of ill health and drew to the attention of the Board the contribution made to the work of this Board, the West Midlands Combined Authority and local government in general by Councillor Bilson over many years. At his invitation the Board held a minutes' silence in respect of Councillor Bilson.

41. Minutes of last meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

42. Affordable Homes Delivery Vehicle: Update

Gareth Bradford gave a brief introduction to the principles behind the proposal for an Affordable Housing Delivery Vehicle and on the work with partners on its creation to unlock challenging brownfield opportunities. He advised that Kevin Rodgers from the West Midlands Housing Association Partnership had been involved closely with the work on this matter and whilst he could not be present at this meeting, he had requested that the Board be notified that he supported the contents of the report and the approach proposed and the positive working between WMCA and WMHAP.

Rob Lamond presented the report which provided an update on progress in developing an Affordable Housing Delivery Vehicle with a number of Registered Providers operating in the West Midlands. He reminded the Board that the key purpose was to create a dedicated vehicle to unlock challenging brownfield opportunities in the region by the Housing Associations working with the WMCA which would not come forwards through other means thus providing real added value to the work of the WMCA under the Single Commissioning Framework, local housing partnerships, Homes England and local authorities on affordable housing delivery. He reported that a draft Memorandum of Understanding between the parties was being prepared and the Heads of Terms document for the vehicle was at an advanced stage and would be submitted to a future meeting for approval together with a detailed Business Case. He advised on the establishment of an internal Working Group at the WMCA including representatives from finance, legal and procurement to ensure that the

appropriate governance measures were in place. Rob Lamond also set out some of the key next steps for seeking Board approval in June and launch in September.

Councillor Ian Courts welcomed the progress being made. He requested information on the type of projects which would be included. He asked what the Delivery Vehicle would achieve that individual Registered Providers could not deliver and whether there would be cases of partners, as seen historically in this sector, being unwilling to share their ideas on innovation. Rob Lamond explained that the proposed Delivery Vehicle would bring together the expertise and capacity of partners with different ways of unlocking difficult sites being considered and the opportunity to share risk. In relation to sharing examples of innovation, this would be based on mutual trust and a collaborative approach that had been developed between the partners. He advised that in future, subject to the success of such a vehicle, there could also be the opportunity for other public and private sector organisations to participate in the work of the Delivery Vehicle. The Chair commented that the Delivery Vehicle has the potential to play a key role in brownfield regeneration and supporting our post-Covid 19 Housing and Land Plan.

Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman opened her remarks by thanking the Chair and the Board for the earlier tribute to her erstwhile colleague, Councillor Peter Bilson. She referred to the 30% of income levels measure within the definition of affordable units and advised that in the Wolverhampton area the rental levels involved in meeting this definition would be above the local housing allowance and thus unaffordable to local people. Rob Lamond offered to provide Councillor Sweetman with further background papers on this matter as this local interpretation of the definition was critical to its formulation and endorsement by the Board. The Chair commented that the difficulties raised were acknowledged and precisely the reason which led to a more granular definition than the national affordable housing definition. He asked officials to keep progress under review and report back to the Board accordingly given this was a first attempt at defining 'affordability' at a regional level related to local incomes rather than house prices. The differences in rental levels and affordability across the region had been raised in previous meetings.

Sarah Middleton referred to the outcomes detailed in paragraph 3.2 of the report and of the need to make specific reference to the economy recovery phase following the current Covid-19 pandemic. It would be necessary to think collectively on how the implications arising upon the Covid-19 pandemic were to be responded to and that this would include all of the Boards' workstreams. Sarah Middleton commended the partnership approach detailed in the report.

Gareth Bradford gave a quick update on the broader regional recovery planning work and sought the Board's steer on refining and amending the projects and programmes of work in the agreed Housing and Land Portfolio Business Plan in light of Covid-19. A Working Group under the Delivery Steering Group had been recently established to develop this work collectively. The Board sought the preparation of a Covid-19 Housing and

Land Recovery Plan as a product of this work which should propose opportunities and interventions the Board could consider in line with the aims and objectives in the Business Plan. The Board requested regular updates on the impacts of Covid-19 and also the opportunities it might bring for delivering or further advancing the Portfolio's Aims and Mission (for example in the fields of advanced manufacturing in construction and town centre regeneration).

Resolved:

1. That the strong progress that had been achieved collectively since the last meeting of the Board on creating a Collaborative Delivery Vehicle be noted;
2. That Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman be provided with additional information in relation to the regional affordable housing target for Affordable Units and the interrelationship with local housing allowance levels;
3. That the outcomes be amended to include specific reference to the economic recovery phase.
4. That the WMCA undertook to review the existing Housing and Land Business Plan and its key projects and programmes of work in light of the impacts of Covid-19 and develop a Covid-19 Housing and Land Recovery Plan proposing specific opportunities and interventions that the Board can consider for discussion at a future Board meeting.

43. Advanced Methods in Construction: Update on the Project Execution Plan and future work programme

Gareth Bradford introduced the report by explaining the proposals to investigate and adopt advanced manufacturing in construction, for the region to become the market leader in Advanced Methods in Construction (AMC) and again linked back to its role as part of the economic recovery in the post Covid-19 pandemic period and a key element of the Housing and Land economic recovery work.

Rachel-Ann Atterbury presented a report which updated the Board on the progress in implementing its earlier decisions regarding the Advanced Methods in Construction (AMC) programme, specifically the decision to move towards mainstreaming AMC on sites coming through the Single Commissioning Framework for WMCA investment and the decision to produce a new regional AMC strategy and routemap.

Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman commended the work on AMC as a good example of cross-region working. She queried whether the Market Intelligence Model included competitor research analysis in order to better understand what was being done elsewhere on this issue. Gareth Bradford assured the Board that such analysis and intelligence gathering was being carried out and would sit at the heart of the evidence-based AMC Strategy and routemap. Rachel-Ann Atterbury reported on approaches which had been received to date from companies operating in Lithuania and Ireland. She advised that a number of companies already existed in the United Kingdom but that with the commissioning of Cast Consultants, the market leaders, the WMCA was well placed to understand the position in the

industry.

The Chair reported that some time ago Walsall MBC had invested in Accord Housing and its timber framed construction methods but that there were now other options apart from timber framed buildings for AMC. He commented that there were several brownfield sites in the area which could accommodate an AMC factory without the level of remediation required for the site to be used for residential purposes. He reminded the Board of its aspiration to be a major player in the United Kingdom in this industry, that it could be a real game changer for the region and on the opportunities to encourage manufacturers to base their operations in the region. Again the Chair noted how crucial this would be for post-Covid-19 recovery.

Gareth Bradford reported that many of the schemes being considered for funding support through the WMCA investment Board now included elements of AMC in line with previous agreements of the Board to embed AMC requirements into the SCF. He drew to the attention of the Board the development at Icknield Port Loop in particular. The Chair remarked on the quality of build and speed of erection at this development and encouraged Members to visit the site following the cessation of the Covid-19 limitations on travel.

Councillor Ian Courts stressed the importance of delivery at scale and reminded the Board that AMC was not solely related to timber framed buildings. He referred to the use of, for example, bathroom pods. He also commented on the opportunities which existed for boosting the skills agenda. On the downside, he reminded the Board that whilst the superstructures could be constructed completion of dwellings were dependent upon the completion of infrastructure works. He also commented on the opportunities for solar panels and PV tiles to be incorporated into AMC. Cllr Courts also referred to the importance of the work Gareth Bradford and his team were doing with Councils and other partners on using Housing and Land to support economic recovery.

Resolved:

1. That the AMC pre-qualification requirement within the Single Commissioning Framework, as amended, be noted;
2. That the future programme of work on AMC and specific deliverables including the proposal to bring an AMC Charter to the Board in summer 2020, followed by a full AMC strategy by the end of the year be approved;
3. That further market intelligence analysis, including competitor research, be undertaken.
4. That AMC forms a key element of the Housing and Land Portfolio Business Plan and its post-Covid 19 economic recovery planning work.

44. Zero Carbon Homes: Definition and future work programme

Gareth Bradford introduced the report by advising that the Single Commissioning Framework (SCF) could be reviewed to include reference to Zero Carbon Homes if the Board so wished. Rachel-Ann Atterbury presented a report which sought the views of the Board on the proposed approach -

producing a 2025 Zero Carbon Homes standard based on a nationally recognised definition, a clear strategy and routemap as agreed as part of its deliverables for 2020/21.

Councillor Sharon Thompson sought clarification as to whether the intention was to have completed the journey to zero carbon homes in full by 2025 or whether a phased approach was intended. Rachel-Ann Atterbury confirmed that the phased approach was the intention.

Councillor Ian Courts advised that he had three points to raise:

- i) Whilst acknowledging the need to move forward on energy efficiency and carbon reduction there was a need to look at the cost effectiveness of the measures proposed, with the 2041 Action Plan having regard to the need to make best use of limited resources;
- ii) The need for local resource to overcome the necessity to import goods;
- iii) The need to consider the role of landscaping and carbon capture to contribute to carbon reduction rather than concentrating solely on improving energy efficiency.

The Chair opined that the Covid-19 pandemic would contribute to carbon reduction and that if such measures as the siting of an AMC factory in the region could be achieved, this would lead to a reduction in the carbon footprint and reduce the reliance on imported goods.

Ed Cox commented that it should not be taken for granted, especially in the current circumstances, that the economic recovery process would concentrate on carbon reduction. He drew to the attention of the Board the benefits which could accrue from it working in conjunction with the Environment Board on this and associated issues. Gareth Bradford added that the financial resources available for zero carbon homes should also include those that could be levered through the SCF in the same way as had been achieved for affordable housing, higher design standards and AMC since the start of the SCF in April 2019. The SCF could be revised and reviewed to include reference to energy efficiency and carbon reduction. The Chair suggested that future reports to the Investment Board could include a specific paragraph regarding any contribution towards the zero-carbon target.

Councillor Peter Butlin acknowledged the advantages of the zero-carbon target as a clear ambition but suggested that it was not possible for the construction industry to achieve it based on current techniques and that the construction trade should not be placed at a disadvantage by having impossible targets placed upon it. He reminded the Board that its primary target was to achieve a significant increase in the provision of housing accommodation. He commented that he supported any attempts to bring manufacturing industries back to the region. Marc Liddeth advised that bringing back manufacturing to the region was fundamental and would assist in reducing the carbon footprint by reducing the need for imported goods. This view was supported by the Chair.

Gareth Bradford commented that one area the region continued to press

HMG on was whether the current methodology for calculating Benefit Cost Ratios (BCR's) could be amended or made more flexible to take greater account of issues such as brownfield regeneration and/or the use of AMC and wider inclusive growth benefits. The Chair commented that this remained crucial to supporting brownfield regeneration and counting wider outputs and opportunity costs.

Resolved:

1. That the proposal to adopt the UKGBC definition of 'zero carbon buildings' to homes in the West Midlands (as set out in Section 3 of the report) which addressed operational, embodied and whole life net carbon be supported;
2. That the proposal, in responding to the Housing and Land Delivery Board zero carbon commission to take a phased approach to delivering the zero carbon homes ambition in the 2041 Climate Action Plan, including establishing the current level of low/zero carbon building, producing an agreed routemap to 2025 and a zero carbon homes charter to encourage take up be noted;
3. That the proposed governance structure for zero carbon homes programme which sought to draw expertise from across the private and public sectors including:
 - Appointment of West Midlands Zero Carbon Homes Champion;
 - An expert sounding board;
 - An Officer Working Groupbe noted.

45. Delivery and Investment Plans: Town Centre and Inclusive Growth Corridors - progress and next steps
Delivery and Investment Plans: Town Centre and Inclusive Growth Corridors - progress and next steps

Pat Willoughby presented a report which detailed the background to the development of Delivery and Investment Plans (DIPs) for the first five Towns and two Investment Corridors, set out the work to date, its background from previous Board reports and which recommended a way forward. She advised that the development of the DIPs would afford an opportunity to look further at the use of AMC, the target for zero carbon homes and affordable housing. She explained that the various DIPs were almost ready for sign-off by the respective local authorities. The 'next steps' in the process had been agreed at the last Housing and Land Board and were being discussed bilaterally with each council including the necessary steps to deliver the proposed outcomes. She reminded the Board that each Town Centre was different and therefore that a 'one size fits all' solution would not be appropriate.

The Chair commented that the Town Centres would be very different when they did eventually re-open for trading and requested that a report be prepared for consideration at the next meeting of the Board in relation to supporting 'Town Centre Living'. He acknowledged that this could possibly require changes to the current SCF and also local planning policies in relation to car parking provision. He suggested that a policy of proactively supporting Town Centre Living could reduce the reliance on car use and/or ownership but believed that living, working and shopping in the Town Centre

could stimulate the local economy. Gareth Bradford commented that the SCF had been amended as agreed at the previous Board meetings around town centre regeneration and renewal, density, advanced methods of construction and affordable housing. He suggested that this important town centre living piece could helpfully link into the Covid-19 recovery work given the very significant challenges facing our town centres in light of Covid-19 exacerbating previous trends. A significant element of that work would be around amending the town centre programme of the Housing and Land Board in light of the enhanced challenges and new opportunities.

Councillor Joanne Hadley reminded the Board that she had raised previously the need for people to feel safe when shopping on the High Street and suggested that the use of Street Wardens or increased Police presence be explored. The Chair commented that there were several reasons why people were reluctant to use local Town Centres but that the Covid-19 pandemic had served to promote the use of local shops. He referred to the problems with on-street beggars which many people found threatening and on the need for people to support relevant charitable organisations rather than direct giving. He opined that Town Centre Living would improve the feeling of safety in Town Centres through increased footfall.

Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman advised that research indicated that people visited Town Centres for an experience, be that to visit a restaurant, cinema, exhibition etc. rather than to shop necessarily. She also requested that future reports included details of timescales for the completion of tasks and identified the Responsible Officer. Gareth Bradford remarked that this was normally the case and referred the Board to the Project Execution Plan contained in the report on AMC, the clear next steps in the report on zero carbon or the report to the previous meeting on affordable Housing Delivery Vehicle when firm timelines had been detailed.

Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman commented that the feeling of wellbeing in High Streets could be markedly different when these streets re-opened and that there could be a complete re-imagination of the reason for the visit and thus the town centre itself. The Chair acknowledged that a congregation of youths would serve to disincentivise shoppers from visiting as would the lack of Public Conveniences.

Councillor Ian Courts commended the report and the ensuing discussion on town centre renewal. He asked whether there was a need to look at interventions in town centres on a wider scale and enquired as to the further possible interventions which could be deployed. He reminded the Board that the respective Business Improvement Districts had a role to play albeit they were struggling with their own problems at the present time. He commented on the need to encourage independent traders and suggested that local authorities which owned retail premises should look favourably on such traders.

Councillor Joanne Hadley commented that it was likely that some businesses would not re-open and suggested that steps be taken to encourage new businesses by offering financial inducements such as peppercorn rents etc. The Chair commented that many shop units were owned by absentee

landlords who were indifferent to the success or otherwise of individual town centres and communities. He requested that a report on a Town Centre Strategy be submitted to the next meeting of the Board.

Councillor Joanne Hadley referred to the number of business premises which had fallen into disrepair and on the need for local authority Planning Departments to use their statutory powers to seek the necessary repair work.

Gareth Bradford concluded by thanking the Board for their welcome support for the papers presented today and that as requested the team working with local councils, business and other partners would come forward with initial proposals for discussion around the post Covid19 portfolio plan and a revised town centre programme and approach at the next meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the positive progress and engagement on the preparation of Delivery and Investment Plans which were now nearing completion in line with the framework, format, purpose, approach and characteristics set out previously by this Board over the last 12 months be noted. The Delivery and Investment Plans relate to:
 - Bilston;
 - Bordesley Green;
 - Dudley;
 - Walsall;
 - West Bromwich;
 - Walsall to Wolverhampton Inclusive Growth Corridor; and
 - Sandwell to Dudley Inclusive Growth Corridor.
2. That it be noted that the report had been considered and the contents endorsed for submission to this Board by the Housing and Land Steering Group in discussion with relevant members as appropriate;
3. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Housing and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Lead for Housing and Land to agree the final versions of the Delivery and Investment Plans (for publication) for the town centres and inclusive growth corridors listed above. This being conditional on each plan being agreed, in advance, by Officers and Members of the relevant local authorities;
4. That all future reports submitted to this Board include details of timelines for actions together with the Responsible Officer;
5. That a report on a revised Town Centre Strategy and programme as part of the Covid-19 response, including specific support for town centre living, be submitted to the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.34 am.