



Housing & Land Delivery Board

Thursday 6 September 2018 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Mike Bird (Chair)	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Sharon Thompson	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Peter Bilson	City of Wolverhampton Council
Bill Blincoe	Coventry and Warwickshire LEP
Councillor Shaun Keasey	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Roy Stokes	Environment Agency
Councillor David Humphreys	North Warwickshire Borough Council
Councillor Ian Courts	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Daren Pemberton	Stratford on Avon District Council
Councillor Peter Butlin	Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Bill Gavan	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

In Attendance

Nick Glover	Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP
Simon Tranter	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Jacob Bonehill	West Midlands Combined Authority
Gareth Bradford	West Midlands Combined Authority
Rob Lamond	West Midlands Combined Authority
Carl Craney	West Midlands Combined Authority

Item Title
No.

10. Apologies for Absence (if any)

Apologies for absence had been received from David Cockroft (Coventry City Council), Simon Marks (Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership), Councillor Paul Moore (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council), Councillor Nic Laurens (Shropshire Council), Councillor Steven Claymore (Tamworth Borough Council) Richard Overton (Telford and Wrekin Council).

11. Nomination of Substitutes (if any)

Nick Glover had been nominated as a substitute member for Simon Marks (Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP) and Councillor Bill Gavan nominated as a substitute member for Councillor Paul Moore (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council).

12. Declarations of Interests (if any)

No declarations of interests were made into items under consideration at the meeting.

13. Minutes of last meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14. Matters Arising

With reference to Minute No. 10 (Matters Arising) and with particular reference to the award of £3.690 million to Telford and Wrekin Council to assist in bringing forward approximately 540 housing units across that area, Gareth Bradford reported that this matter had been considered and approved at the meeting of the Investment Board held on 30 October 2017 having received a positive recommendation from the Investment Advisory Group. He outlined the membership of the Investment Advisory Group which included Officers from respective local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships. He reminded the Board that the decision had been made prior to the formation of the WMCA housing and Regeneration Directorate. He explained that Telford and Wrekin Council role in meeting the housing shortfall in the Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area had not been referenced in the report to the Investment Board.

Going forward, he suggested that all reports considered by the Investment Board which included a housing provision element should first be considered by the Housing and Regeneration Directorate and that a discussion be commenced with Telford and Wrekin Council on its ability to draw down the allocated funding if it was not prepared to play an active and supporting role in the delivery of the housing shortfall in the Greater Birmingham Housing Market Area, the Housing Deal and the Housing Delivery Plan. He advised that all housing units provided should be included in both the Housing Deal, Strategic Economic Plan and the Industrial Strategy and that it was imperative that all partners receiving financial support should play their respective roles.

The Chair advised that in his view if Telford and Wrekin Council was not willing to co-operate in achieving the targets of this Board (and the WMCA) the decision of the Investment Board should be revisited. A further discussion on this matter could be required in the event that Telford and Wrekin Council was not willing to co-operate the decision would be revisited with the grant being reclaimed and rewarded elsewhere as deemed appropriate. Gareth Bradford advised that this could require the Commissioning Framework to be revisited. The Chair requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting on the drawdown of the funding allocated to Telford and Wrekin Council.

Councillor David Humphrey commented that the North Warwickshire Borough Council did not have a large number of brownfield sites but a number of small sites and enquired as to the possibility of a contribution towards funding of development of such sites. He had been advised previously that this issue had been raised with Homes England (formerly the Housing Communities Agency) but had not progressed. The Chair suggested that the details of any such sites be forwarded to Gareth Bradford for consideration. He commented that the recent revisions to the National

Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) had done little to assist the development of such sites but that asking developers to offer commuted sums in lieu of the provision of affordable and/or social housing would have been preferable.

Gareth Bradford suggested that he bring forward a report on the development of a 'Small Sites Fund' targeted at assisting small builders to develop such sites. He stressed the need to maintain and increase the pace of housing supply and that the development of small sites could play a significant contribution in such an aim. He reminded the Board that the NPPF was a policy statement and not a statutory requirement with the WMCA being able to advocate an alternative approach to fulfilling the aims.

Councillor Ian Courts counselled caution inasmuch as small sites were often more difficult and expensive to develop. He suggested that there was also a need to consider existing or former retail sites in town centres. He supported the views expressed earlier in the meeting with regard to the award of funding to Telford and Wrekin Council and the role of this Board in determining future allocations. He stressed that outcomes and delivery were pre-requisites.

Councillor Peter Bilson commented that it was the role of this Board to deliver additional housing units across the region and that any decisions regarding provision of additional housing units should be considered by this Board. He advised that whilst he supported the concept of the development of a 'Small Sites Fund' that this should not be to the prejudice of existing commitments.

Councillor David Humphrey commented that a number of his constituents questioned the purpose and benefits of North Warwickshire being a Non-Constituent member of the WMCA on the basis of the benefits the Borough derived through such membership and financial contributions. On that basis he was of the opinion that if Telford and Wrekin Council was unwilling to support the aims of the WMCA it should be required to refund any grants received. The Chair emphasised the important role the Non-Constituent Authorities had in the work of the WMCA.

Gareth Bradford stressed the need for the maximum utilisation of the available resources provided by HM Government, the importance of an expeditious process and the need for a clear and understandable policy for the deployment of resources. He commented that if this could be achieved the WMCA would be in a good position to lever in additional resources from HM Government. He undertook to submit a report to the next meeting on this issue.

Councillor Bill Gavin asked as to the opportunity to package a number of small sites together for small developers to consider. The Chair commented that this was possible if the sites were in the same ownership but, if not, could be problematic to deliver. He outlined the use of the 'New Homes Bonus' at Walsall MBC to provide loans to small developers to acquire small sites. He requested that a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Board on the establishment of a 'Small Sites Fund' with the report being circulated in advance for comments. Councillor Ian Courts supported the

concept of packaging small sites together especially if this be made of sites which were a mix of easy and difficult to develop sites. The Chair commented that a small developer could manage such a proposal with some assistance.

Gareth Bradford reported that the Housing and Land Team had focussed on the concept of packaging sites and assured the Board that this was a fundamental part of the work of the Team. He advised that to assist small developers there was a need to cut through the bureaucracy associated with seeking planning permission with one planning application being submitted for several sites. He emphasised the need to make optimum use of all sites including those which were contaminated and required remediation measures. He stressed the need for local authorities to identify sites and for the WMCA to respond quickly. Roy Stokes commented on the need to include and address difficult sites.

Councillor David Humphreys referred to the delays associated with the redevelopment of certain redundant premises and gave the example of former public houses being listed as 'Assets of Community Value' which could lead to a delay of 12 months in development commencing. The Chair commented that it was for this Board to respond to such challenges and to expedite development whenever possible. Gareth Bradford suggested that it was part of his role to seek HM Government assistance in addressing problems associated with empty former public houses and redundant petrol stations in the Green Belt and/or countryside and that some form of dispensation from planning guidelines was required. Councillor Ian Courts commented that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) contained several references to the use of derelict land and buildings and there was a need for the rules to be complied consistently across the region.

Gareth Bradford reported that the Housing Deal would not have been achieved without negotiation on various points and stressed the need to improve delivery in order to encourage HM Government to change the principles and rules to assist in further delivery. A definition of 'social housing' and 'affordable housing' was required. He challenged the Board to identify three or four matters which required the assistance from HM Government to aid delivery by the WMCA. He commented that changes to national guidelines was not necessary but that the interpretation of those guidelines could be flexibly applied. He undertook to submit a report on this matter to the next meeting of the Board.

Councillor Ian Courts reminded the Board that planning was an issue for which the local authorities were responsible. He advised that Solihull MBC was about to commence a refresh of its 'Brownfield Register' and the need to identify ownership details at an early stage. He suggested that a simple sifting process was required to identify developable land.

Councillor Peter Bilson commented that the delivery of the implementation phase of both the Housing Deal and the Housing Investment Fund (HIF) was crucial but that addressing issues on the corridors were equally important. He requested that details of the funding regime and timelines be reported to a future meeting of the Board.

Gareth Bradford advised that HM Government had identified 'up to £100 million' of funding but that payments against the Housing Deal were phased against delivery. He reported that he was negotiating for payment through a Section 31 grant which was non-refundable. He aimed for payment of 25% of the money in October 2018 for delivery of 25% of the housing units. Once these units were delivered a claim could be made for the second 25% and so on. Allocation of funding would be at the discretion of the WMCA. Previously, monies allocated in the Devolution Deal had not been spent and this was damaging to the reputation of the region. If allocated funds were used it was likely to realise the allocation of additional funds. He emphasised that it was not practical for the allocation of the £100 million to be agreed in advance of receipt. This view was supported by Councillor Ian Courts who commented that the funding could not be attached to specific sites at this point. Gareth Bradford advised that some sites would be identified especially those with the benefit of planning permission but once the funds were released it would be for this Board to determine on how it was allocated.

Roy Stokes encouraged the Board to consider building in a sustainable manner with due consideration being given to those sites where 'Sustainable Drainage Systems' could be used and/or which were carbon friendly. These developments could be used to demonstrate the work of the Board. Gareth Bradford reminded the Board that these issues were part of its founding principles.

Councillor David Humphreys commented that the developers controlled the release of developable land without recourse to the five year supply. Gareth Bradford responded that the five year supply position could be addressed through building out small sites quickly and that the powers of the WMCA and local authorities could be used to increase build out rates.

Councillor Peter Butlin suggested that the approach needed to be 'process light' and that there was no need to consider sites which were moderately difficult to develop at this point and with very difficult to develop sites being left until much later in the exercise. He advised that he supported the creation of a 'Small Sites Fund' and that monies currently held for remediation purposes could be used for its establishment. Additionally, HM Government should be approached for assistance in removing blockages to development.

Councillor Ian Courts acknowledged the difficulties with developers 'land banking' but commented that the creation of the 'Help to Buy' scheme had slowed down development in the Solihull area. Gareth Bradford commented on the need to commence a dialogue at Chief Executive level with those builders operating across the WMCA area and that the dialogue refer to issues such as build out rates, affordability and quality of design and construction.

Councillor Daren Pemberton reported on an exercise which was underway at Stratford on Avon District Council to attempt to understand the commonalities and differences between builders operating in the area. Once an understanding of their methods of operation had been established a

working relationship and understanding was easier to build. Gareth Bradford commented that those who did not share the aims and ambitions of the WMCA would not benefit from funding. Councillor Daren Pemberton suggested that a regional view was required with regard to viability and housing mix. A corporate view was also required rather than a local view and information sharing between partners would be paramount.

Resolved:

1. That all reports to the Investment Board including reference to provision of housing units be considered by the Housing and Land Team in the first instance;
2. That the funds allocated to Telford and Wrekin Council towards the provision of housing units be subject to such units being included in the numbers required by the Housing Deal/Strategic Economic Plan/Industrial Strategy as appropriate and contributing to the shortfall in the Birmingham Housing Market Area;
3. That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Board on the details of drawdown of funds to date by Telford and Wrekin Council as referred to above and on proposals for the use of remaining funds;
4. That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Board on the establishment of a 'Small Sites Fund' targeted at small builders with the report being circulated in advance for comments;
5. That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Board on a clear criteria for deployment of resources in order to lever in further investment from HM Government to assist in the delivery of additional units;
6. That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Board on opportunities to interpret guidelines and rules in such a way as to assist in the delivery of additional units;
7. That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Board detailing the funding regimes and timelines for the various workstreams.

15. Town Centres

Gareth Bradford reported that a piece of work had commenced on the future opportunities within town centres and a report would be submitted to the next meeting on possible interventions to assist local authorities in developing Town Centre Plans to regenerate High Streets. The Chair commented that, in his opinion, the demise of High Streets could be attributed to the introduction of pedestrianisation schemes.

Councillor Peter Bilson opined that it would be unwise to attempt to introduce a 'one size fits all' solution and reported that the City of Wolverhampton Council had commissioned a piece of work on the drivers that might be required to stimulate High streets. He commented that the common factor for local authorities was the reliance of a retail presence on High Streets. Councillor Ian Courts supported the comments now made and enquired as to the source of funding for further initiatives without prejudicing those already underway. Nick Glover advised that the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership had some policy papers on these matters which

he was happy to share.

Gareth Bradford offered to include within his report to the next meeting details of a range of initiatives on town centre regeneration which would assist in accelerating housing delivery and regeneration.

Councillor Peter Butlin advised that there were a mix of town centres within Warwickshire with each one created its own unique economic viability. He suggested that if residents did not live near to town centres then High streets would suffer as would the local economy. The Chair commented that with new ways of shopping becoming ever more popular there was a need to encourage more use of town centre properties for residential use with associated integrated transport opportunities.

Councillor Daren Pemberton commented that residential use of town centre properties was not the only solution and that consideration needed to be given to making the retail offer more sophisticated. He suggested that the element which was currently missing was increased employment opportunities.

Nick Glover remarked on the need for dialogue with the various Business Improvement Districts. Gareth Bradford referred to research which had been carried out on the opportunities for and challenges faced by town centres. He queried the investment proposition for individual town centres and on the need to make it easier to build units of accommodation and to create employment opportunities in such town centres. He commented that there was a need to understand the challenges faced and to encourage investment in these areas.

Resolved:

That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Board on possible interventions to assist local authorities in developing Town Centre Plans to regenerate High Streets.

16. Social Housing Green Paper Update and Response

Gareth Bradford presented a report and gave a PowerPoint presentation which provided the Board with an update on progress in the development of Social Housing proposals and the evidence base. The presentation outlined the challenge presented by the 'affordability challenge' which varied across the region. He commented that no region had yet been able to meaningfully articulate 'affordability, economic growth and productivity'. He advised the Board that this issue was addressed in the Industrial Strategy and the Strategic Economic Plan and commented on the need to attempt to unlock 'Affordable Housing Investment Fund' monies. He outlined the following issues which could be defined as the Board's 'red lines':

- Housing Revenue Account Borrowing Gap;
- Right to Buy;
- Quality

and invited the Board to let him have views which could be incorporated into a further report to the next meeting.

He suggested that supply of housing and land needed to be increased as did

the quality of affordable and social housing. He commented on the need to assist the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to prompt HM Treasury to understand the integral role of affordability and social housing provision in achieving economic growth. He advised that the problems associated with affordability were likely to increase in the region. Rob Lamond commented that rental levels in the private rental sector were also increasing.

Gareth Bradford reminded the Board that the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid had been agreed by the respective Leaders, the Local Enterprise Partnerships and major businesses in the area. He advised that the latter group had expressed concern on their ability to recruit staff due to affordability of housing options which had a consequential effect on their ability to expand. Councillor Peter Bilson suggested that this point be drawn to the attention of HM Government. Gareth Bradford requested that in the event of similar concerns being raised by local major employers that they be encouraged to submit such concerns in writing to him as this could be used as evidence and was worth more than anecdotal evidence.

He also commented on the costs incurred by employees who were forced to live a considerable distance from their place of employment due to the affordability of housing. He stressed that these comments should not be interpreted as employers not being willing to invest in the West Midlands but that it formed a consideration as to whether or not to invest given potential recruitment difficulties likely to be experienced.

Councillor Peter Butlin commented that a major employer had raised such concerns with him and colleagues. He reminded the Board that employees commuting long distances increased demand for car parking provision and also added to the highway maintenance requirements. Councillor Daren Pemberton supported these views and added that long distance commuters contributed very little to the local economy.

Gareth Bradford commented on the need to collate an evidence pack in connection with these issues with a view to its use in seeking additional investment and identifying the costs to local authorities. It was possible that money could be obtained to assist in the regeneration of town centres. A possibility existed that the region could be the first to model town centre redevelopment based on residential and employment opportunities.

Resolved:

1. That any views on the 'red lines' outlined above be forwarded to the Director of Housing and Land with a view to a report on this matter being submitted to the next meeting of this Board;
2. That any local major employers expressing concern with regard to the effect of 'affordability' on their ability to recruit staff and/or expand their businesses be requested to submit their concerns in writing to the Director of Housing and Land;
3. That an 'evidence pack' be collated on the various issues now raised to be used to assist in seeking additional funds to regenerate town centres.

17. DemoDev Update

Gareth Bradford reported on the outcome of the WMCA Mayor's Urban Challenge Innovation Fund and the award to DemoDev which had formulated an algorithm to identify small sites with links to new types of development. He advised on the links to the 'Small Sites Strategy' which would form part of a report to the next meeting of this Board. He suggested that a small group be established to consider such small sites.

He sought the views of the Board on 'Right to Build' and custom and self-build options which were popular currently with HM Government. Councillor Ian Courts registered his concern as to the finite resources of the Board being diverted into this type of initiative.

Resolved:

1. That a report on 'Small Sites Strategy' form part of a report to the next meeting of this Board including a definition of what comprised a 'small site';
2. That no action be taken at the present time on 'Right to Build' and/or custom and self-build options.

18. 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).

19. Housing Investment Fund (HIF) - Update

Gareth Bradford reported that the Housing Investment Fund (HIF) Business Case had been submitted against a contracted timescale and was an excellent example of collaborative working amongst the local authorities. He suggested that the experience could be used as an experience to maximise the opportunities of obtaining further funding from HM Government. The Chair commented on the need to demonstrate to HM Government that the authorities were able to work collaboratively.

Resolved:

- That the report be received and noted.

The meeting ended at 12.02 pm.