



West Midlands Combined Authority

Housing & Land Delivery Board

Monday 7 September 2020 at 10.00 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Mike Bird (Chair)
Councillor Keith Allcock
Bill Blincoe
Councillor Ian Courts
Councillor Matthew Dormer
Philip Farrell
Councillor Julie Jackson
Councillor Angus Lees
Sarah Middleton

Councillor Daren Pemberton
Kevin Rodgers

Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman
Councillor David Wright

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Coventry and Warwickshire LEP
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Redditch Borough Council
Homes England
Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership
Stratford on Avon District Council
West Midlands Housing Association
Partnership
City of Wolverhampton Council
Telford and Wrekin Council

Item Title No.

10. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Peter Butlin (Warwickshire).

11. Minutes - 6 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

12. Housing & Land COVID-19 Recovery Strategy and Implementation Plan

The board considered a report from the Director of Housing & Regeneration providing an update on the progress made to develop a portfolio-specific COVID-19 economic recovery strategy and interventions plan in response to the challenges and opportunities brought about by the pandemic.

At its meeting on 27 April 2020, this board commissioned the preparation of a Housing & Land portfolio COVID-19 Recovery Plan that specifically focused on driving forward opportunities and interventions in each of the major programmes of work within the board's Annual Business Plan. This would sit alongside, and directly inform and be informed by, the wider regional economic recovery work agreed by the Mayor and constituent authority leaders. Whilst the focus of the regional investment case had been on the immediate economic challenges facing the region during lockdown, the housing and land recovery planning work was being developed with policy interventions and projects being identified over a longer time frame.

Seven priority areas for housing and land within the West Midlands had been identified previously by the Board, relating to:

- brownfield regeneration
- affordable housing policy and delivery
- business and investor partnerships
- Advanced Manufacturing in Construction, high quality design and zero carbon
- public land/One Public Estate
- town centres
- employment land and enterprise

The Chair thanked officers for all the work they had done in pulling together the recovery strategy and implementation plan so that it could be approved today and now moved forward to publication.

Resolved:

- (1) The draft Housing & Land COVID-19 Recovery Strategy, showcasing this board's proactive work on this agenda, be approved for publication.
- (2) It be agreed that a public-facing document be published in order to communicate the Housing & Land portfolio's COVID-19 recovery strategy to a wider audience, and that authority be delegated to the Director of Housing & Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Land to agree the final contents of the document.
- (3) The engagement and on-going development of the recovery strategy, undertaken through strong collaboration with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and expert advisory groups and taskforces be noted.
- (4) It be noted that the recovery strategy had informed the region's 'Recharge the West Midlands: Kickstarting the West Midlands Economy' document published on 23 June 2020 and was directly informing future asks of the Government through the Comprehensive Spending Review, forthcoming business case submissions and the wider business of this board.

13. COVID-19 Recovery Discussion Paper: Town Centre Living and Regeneration

The board considered a report from the Director of Housing & Regeneration on a number of high-level strategic town centre recovery policy principles and interventions in response to the commission on town centre policy from the Housing and Land Board on the Covid-19 Recovery Plan. The detail of the paper had emerged following discussions with the Town Centre Taskforce, the Government, expert industry forums and officer working groups to support town centres to recover from the COVID-19 lockdown.

Whilst each town centre was unique, these discussions had identified a number of common themes and challenges, prompting the development of ten key principles that would need to underpin any regional town centre COVID-19 recovery policy and interventions. The overarching principles and supporting interventions would be incorporated into the Housing & Land Portfolio Recovery & Implementation Plan (minute no. 12 above), the Comprehensive Spending Review submission to Government, the COVID-19 project pipeline, amendments to the Single Commissioning Framework and forthcoming business cases to the Government.

The Chair stressed the importance of developing a strategy that recognised that COVID-19 was unlikely to disappear from communities, and therefore town centres needed to adapt and exist in an environment where social distancing and other health measures were the norm. Councillor Ian Courts highlighted that land ownership issues within town centres were often the most significant barriers to development, and therefore these needed to be addressed within any strategy. He asked that a copy of the document should be prepared for all local authority planning departments.

Cllr Daren Pemberton asked whether officers had any sense of how town centre living might be impacted by proposed changes to the planning system and changes to the methodology for calculating housing needs. The Director of Housing & Regeneration explained that the town centre policy paper will support WMCA's joint work with local authorities on regenerating town centre sites to provide new housing supply.

Cllr Angus Lees endorsed the importance of the proposal for a bespoke town centre investment prospectus.

Cllr Bird Mike Bird emphasised the need to recognise that all town centres are different, requiring individual response to their unique challenges and opportunities.

Cllr Courts agreed that a distinct suite of interventions was needed for each town centre. Specific matters that must be addressed include landownership, articulating a clear and ambitious vision and the ability to deliver. Land ownership presented the opportunity for local authorities to exercise more control over the future of their town centres. Cllr Bird agreed that community impacts needed to be considered carefully so that town centres reflected what local people wanted.

Councillor Julie Jackson stressed the importance of ensuring that there was no duplication between this work and that already being done by local authorities themselves. The Director of Housing & Regeneration confirmed that the WMCA was seeking to add value to the work already being done in town centres and would work closely with constituent and non-constituent authorities to ensure workstreams aligned and any WMCA support really adds value like the work happening on town investment plans, just as this paper itself had been the result of a co-development exercise with local authorities. Councillor Keith Allcock highlighted the particular problem of landownership, delays caused by the compulsory purchase process and noted that revenue funding was often the barrier to supporting town centres. The Director of Housing & Regeneration explained that WMCA is tackling the problems of land assembly in town centres by acquiring and assembling land using devolved housing and land funds and would continue to do so in collaboration with local authorities and the private sector. In relation to town centre revenue funding he indicated that this particular issue was one that the WMCA continued to make the case to Government for.

Cllr Sweetman asked about prioritisation of the principles and interventions. The Director of Housing & Regeneration confirmed that the prioritisation would be different for each centre.

Resolved:

- (1) The town centre living and regeneration policy principles and typology of interventions set out within the report be endorsed.
- (2) It be noted that, as this board had previously discussed, the town centre living and regeneration policy paper was informing the region's Comprehensive Spending Review submission to the Government, future business cases to the Government for town centre and brownfield regeneration investment by the WMCA and local authorities, and decisions by the WMCA over the deployment of devolved housing and land funds and project development.
- (3) It be noted that the report had been co-developed with officers from across the region on the Housing & Land Delivery Steering Group, as well as private sector partners and industry representatives on the Commercial Property Forum and Town Centre Taskforce.

14. COVID-19 Recovery Discussion Paper: Public Land

The board considered a report of the Director of Housing & Regeneration on the role of public land and its disposal in the WMCA's wider COVID-19 recovery plans and on how a new approach to public land disposals and development could support delivering this board's business plan and key policy objectives.

The WMCA's Land Commission report in 2017 recommended that a more productive use of the public estate should be a key aspect to any housing and regeneration activity within the region. It suggested engaging strongly as a single combined entity with the One Public Estate programme and undertaking a comprehensive land audit under which all public land and

relevant private sector bodies would be asked to justify their asset strategies for operational, strategic and surplus land. The key finding from the report was based on experiences elsewhere that land supply to meet housing and employment needs could be partly met from a more effective utilisation of the public sector estate.

The total amount of land in the West Midlands in public ownership amounted to approximately 5,713 hectares. This land was managed by various public sector organisations with some joined up working but no single overarching co-ordinated approach, programme, policy principles or governance. The report set out some of the key policy principles underpinning any public land recovery policy, along with a number of proposals for further development.

The Chair welcomed the report and noted that the potential use of land should not be limited solely to housing, for example where there were greater benefits to be achieved through allocating land for employment and other land uses. Councillor Ian Courts noted the strong links between this item and the town centre policy paper discussed earlier given that, in some town centres, there is substantial public land ownership. Cllr Angus Lees supported the idea of town centres being seen as destinations, entertainment centres and events places. Cllr Keith Allcock stated that green growth is important, not just 'best value' in the assessment of potential development projects. In response to a question from Councillor Daren Pemberton, the Director of Housing & Regeneration confirmed that this work involves constituent and non-constituent authorities.

Resolved:

- (1) The report, produced in line with the commission from this board as part of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan, be noted, and the key policy principles set out within it be endorsed.
- (2) It be agreed that this work should inform the region's forthcoming response to the Comprehensive Spending Review consultation and bid to the next funding round for the One Public Estate Programme (OPE 8).
- (3) The work to co-develop this report with Housing & Land Delivery Steering Group, One Public Estate groups and the Commercial Property Forum be noted.

15. Advanced Manufacturing in Construction Routemap

The board considered a report of the Director of Housing & Regeneration providing an update on the work undertaken by the WMCA, the Advanced Manufacturing in Construction Officer Working Group and the Expert Advisory Group in producing a routemap for accelerating the Advanced Manufacturing in Construction (AMC) industry and take-up in the region.

Due to the barriers that currently existed in increasing the uptake within the AMC industry, the Board had agreed that a comprehensive routemap and strategy would be developed that would set out the purpose of, and aspiration for, AMC in the region, and detail the key steps required to deliver

these aspirations in the short and medium term. The routemap would ensure the region's approach focused not just on investing in more AMC units, but on wider changes to the construction industry in the West Midlands that also delivered inclusive growth, social value, quality and improved environmental performance.

Part one of this routemap was appended to the report, and it was intended that part two would now be prepared, exploring options for implementing the recommended short-term actions contained within part one. Both parts would then be submitted to the next meeting of this board for approval.

The Chair noted that this was a significant growth area and that there was scope to re-skill people losing their jobs in other sectors, particularly if the region's dependency on the motor industry was to fluctuate in the coming years. Councillor Ian Courts noted that AMC was most effective when delivered at scale, and that this scaling up amongst private developers was the key to its success. It was also important to promote the quality of the manufacturing process involved in AMC. The Chair noted that this enabled genuine year-round housing construction, unaffected by variances in weather.

In response to a question from Councillor Keith Allcock, it was clarified that the proposed routemap was seeking to encourage and facilitate house builders to adapt to advanced manufacturing techniques, rather than creating the WMCA's own manufacturing capability. Cllr Keith Allcock further stated that one of the principal issues to be tackled was the higher costs associated with AMC. This was noted and is being addressed in the study. Cllr Bird suggested, whilst a pipeline of AMC projects is being developed, that AMC projects could highlight the reduced running costs.

Resolved:

- (1) The structure and format of part one of the Advanced Manufacturing in Construction routemap be agreed.
- (2) The proposal to explore options for implementing the routemap's recommendations prior to the meeting of the board on 2 November 2020 be agreed.
- (3) The intention to complete part two of the routemap over the coming months, and to bring both parts of the routemap for agreement the meeting of the board on 2 November 2020 be agreed.
- (4) It be noted that the routemap was directly informing negotiations underway with the Government on securing a £50m enabling fund to support Advanced Manufacturing in Construction.

The meeting ended at 11.10am.