
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 9 March 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors S Walker (Chair), R Arundale (Vice-Chair), D Branson, T Furness and B Hubbard

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: L Lorente-Arnau, Principal Development Officer, Sheffield City Council
G Ritchie, Markets Manager, Sandwell Metropolitan Council

OFFICERS: S Lightwing and J McNally

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors T Mawston, M Saunders and M Storey

21/61 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

21/62 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 9 FEBRUARY 2022**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 9 February 2022 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

The Panel was informed that at a recent meeting, local bus operator Stagecoach had agreed to liaise with Middlesbrough Council's Planning Department to enable them to play a more active part in the planning process when applications for new housing developments were submitted.

The Panel was also informed that Environment Services had been alerted to additional areas suitable for establishing micro forests and more trees in Middlesbrough which would hopefully be included in future planting schemes.

NOTED

21/63 **THE GREEN STRATEGY**

The Markets Manager, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council was in attendance and gave a presentation about the West Bromwich Outdoor Market.

Sandwell Council was situated to the west of Birmingham in what was traditionally called the Black Country: comprising Sandwell, Wallsall, Dudley and West Bromwich, with a population of approximately 300,000. There were quite high levels of deprivation compared to English averages. The Borough of Sandwell had six towns, with West Bromwich being the main one and it had been designated as a regional centre.

A master planning exercise was undertaken ten years ago to look at the area at a regional level and develop a masterplan of infrastructure developments. Wolverhampton, Dudley and Wallsall were all regional Councils that had the benefit of being built around a primary town or city, whereas Sandwell had six towns. West Bromwich had a population of around 60,000.

A Business Improvement District had been developed in West Bromwich and this generated in the region of £280K a year from levies which facilitated the town centre functions. The Market Service was a critical element to town centre re-development and regeneration. Sandwell's oldest market was established in 1709 by Letters Patent. In roughly 90% of the Borough, Sandwell Council controlled market rights. There were a couple of private markets that were permitted and the Council also protected their rights and facilitated markets rather

than actively trying to stop them.

Sandwell Council generated income from its market service and prior to the Covid pandemic was generating about £0.5 million net income, which was a useful amount of money for the Council. Since the pandemic, that income amount had collapsed and the Council was trying to build it back up again.

The West Bromwich market had been operating since 1984 and was originally set up in the pedestrianised high street and run on demountable stalls. In 2004 the stalls were replaced with permanent steel structures with a tin roof that was very functional and worked well. However, over time there a high level of anti-social behaviour, including drug dealing, occurred within the market area. Although there was CCTV in operation, the drug dealers would congregate under the market stalls, deal drugs, intimidate traders, and hide drugs on the stalls.

Much of West Bromwich's town centre retail assets were in poor condition and also in private ownership. Sandwell Council owned only about six shops in the town centre. There was a mix of ownership models including four shopping centres owned by Corporates, owner-occupiers, or small landlords who let their properties. There was not a lot of investment in the upkeep of these buildings so there was quite poor stock in many places.

Planners consider that street markets are a significant contributor to retail diversification and similar to most Councils currently, Sandwell was looking at how to diversify the high street. Street markets were seen as a contributor to that process, especially in Sandwell where many residents had a low income. Markets were used by quite a lot of the population who tended to shop often, and spend small amounts of money, rather than stocking up every two weeks at the larger supermarkets.

Planning permission was required to move to the permanent market structure and the Council consulted with all the local businesses and retailers. The market was set in a pedestrianised high street with shops running down either side. A 90% positive response was received from local business owners to the proposals. At that point the markets ran four days per week and it was proposed to increase them to six days a week, and occasionally seven. Other retailers agreed that the market brought footfall into the town. Those who tended to object to the proposals were the banks and the building societies as they said they did not benefit from passing trade.

Street markets were a significant contributor to retail diversification as well as providing social benefits. Sandwell had a fairly high level of first generation immigrants and many of them might not have had particularly good language skills or recognised qualifications, or work experience in the UK. So those who might not have much disposable income could hire a stall for a day, buy some stock, and convert their £100 into £200 for that day and become economically sustainable. This enabled people to retain their dignity and become economically self-sufficient, when other opportunities might not be available to them. Irrespective of the commercial and regeneration benefits, there was also a social good that markets could provide. The market engendered a social element in town centres that otherwise might not be there. There was social interaction between traders and customers and they got to know each other.

Another benefit of the market was that it was owned by Sandwell Council. So whilst the Council might not have a lot of leverage with the landlords in the high street, it did have the opportunity to do what it wanted with the market. If the Council improved the market and the aesthetic, then that would have a positive impact on the town centre generally.

The Council worked with the Police to find a solution to design out some of anti-social behaviour issues, and also considered how to improve the aesthetics of the market and contribute to environmental improvements. Various 'off the shelf solutions' were considered and one major issue was the roof structure. Demountable roofs or those that could be rolled off were operational problematic and expensive. The prospect of a glass roof on a high street on a market was proposed. Whilst there had not been a lot of vandalism, there had been incidences when the legs from the previous stalls had been broken off and used as weapons.

The Council approached a leisure operator that provided glass roof structures for amenity buildings. The roofs were solar panels, with filaments within the glass, that were photocells

which allowed the structure to generate electricity. PolySolar was the only company in the UK to sell this product. They had previously been used for amenity buildings and bus shelters but not for a market. The company worked with the Sandwell conceptually, and the product was procured through the Council's regular procurement process.

The final product was a self-supporting structure with a transparent apex roof. One of the concerns of traders was that it would get too hot in the summer, however the glass had a UV reflective coating on the outside and this had not proved to be a problem. It was also quite an open structure so this allowed air flow. The structure was simplified as much as possible ensuring that traders had enough space to set up as they wish. The solar roof panels generated the equivalent of enough electricity to run three and a half four-bedroomed houses. LED lighting was installed in the apex of the roof so that the stalls could be used during the evenings as they had their own integral lighting. Most of the power generated was exported back to the grid. Consideration was now being given to retro-fitting some battery storage, although this was quite expensive.

Sandwell Council was now undertaking another scheme within a Heritage Action Zone (HAZ). The existing market was being relocated back to its original market square to rejuvenate that part of the town. Heritage Action Zones had to have community benefit so the proposal was to make the stalls available to community and events groups to use for public events so that they became a community asset rather than just a market. The Council would invite the community to come and use the structures when not in use by the regular market. As part of the HAZ scheme, the Council had also contracted to a community events and arts organisation for three years to develop a community programme of events and activities, and create capacity to continue when the contract ended. Part of their remit was to create an organising function to promote additional community activity and investment in the town centre.

It was highlighted that bigger markets such as West Bromwich generated a significant income that enabled Sandwell Council to subsidise some of the smaller markets. Only running a market one day a week with dedicated staff might not generate enough income to cover its costs or generate a surplus. The only realistic way was to expand the offer having more markets or more days to give opportunity to generate more income. This would take time. Outdoor market traders quite often had a set routine and would visit different markets day to day.

The Panel also received a presentation from the Principal Development Officer, Sheffield City Council, in relation to Sheffield's Grey to Green Strategy.

Grey to Green was a strategy rather than a project. Phase One was completed in 2016, Phase 2 was due to complete in 2022 and Phase 3 was in the planning stage.

The project area was badly flooded in 2007, it was not connected properly to the rest of the city centre, and there was no reason for people to go into that area. Sites had been dormant for a number of years, including an unoccupied Grade A office block. The riverside was nearby and there were businesses, the Home Office, and some residential flats in the area but little investment interest. Since 2014, the climate emergency as become more prominent and the covid-19 pandemic encouraged people to utilise open and green spaces more. Although the greening of the area was the biggest single success for people, it was in fact an unintended consequence of the grey to green strategy as it was originally conceived to provide economic value.

The big challenges for the strategy were:

- Flooding and water management generally.
- Infrastructure and Maintenance.
- Connectivity and the wider city.
- Realising the area's economic potential.
- Safe and attractive settings that would draw people, uses and investment.
- Re-establishing the Riverside Business District.

The scheme was mainly a highways scheme and the area was disconnected from the wider city centre. Four of the city's major hotels were on the wrong side of the former ring road as well as the Victoria Quays canal. The one and a half kilometre route coincided with the ring

road. Phase 1 cost around £3.5 million, with £1 million contribution from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the rest from the Sheffield City Region Fund (SCRIF) and the Sheffield Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF). Phase 2 had also been funded from European money but on the basis of environmental benefits such as increased biodiversity, reduction in CO2 and flooding, rather than economic activity.

Large scale retrofitted Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDs) were implemented to manage surface flooding. Whilst SuDs did not prevent flooding they managed excess water by slowing its journey to the river or sewers. It was the longest retrofit SuDs project in the country.

The key concepts of the project were to use limited spaces – mainly a road – to provide multiple uses and functions and a strong sense of place.

The role of city centres was changing, becoming more about residential areas and less about shops and retail. The aims were to:

- Create a setting for investment.
- Manage rainwater discharge to the river through SuDs.
- Provide opportunities for sustainable transport and connectivity.
- Introduce innovative meadow planting and develop the green linear route theme.
- Reclaim the highways and activate urban spaces that better reflected the surrounding area's opportunities.

Traffic modelling was undertaken to prove that the road could be re-purposed and used for cycle lanes and SuDs. As the roads were going to be narrowed and active travel routes created, it was important to make sure areas were connected appropriately. The Council team designed the narrowing of the road and there was work undertaken on the contamination below the tarmac surfaces. The landscape architects did not want to line the SuDs beds as there was a risk of plants dying. It was proved that plants actually cleaned some of the contaminant substances so that cleaner water went into the river and sewers. The Council also drew on evidence from other similar schemes such as High Line Park in New York.

The benefits and economic impact to date were listed as follows:

- Integration of the Riverside Business District into the core of the city centre.
- Creation of a network of high quality public spaces and infrastructure which would establish the area as a distinctive location for new businesses.
- Positive impact on a high number of development sites.
- West Bar – the only quality location in the city for a large scale office development.
- High Speed 2 City Centre Station.
- Phase 1 provided a 0.492km green corridor (overall project 1.2 km).
- Improve signage to the Riverside Business District.

The Panel were shown various photographs of the area before and after the transformation. Seating areas had also been created and a flower market was held monthly. Sheffield City Council had received positive messages from people and someone had spotted a type of butterfly never seen in Sheffield previously.

It was noted that there had been some strong resistance to the scheme initially but these challenges had been overcome and generally people welcomed and enjoyed the new surroundings.

The planted areas consisted of large number perennials, bulbs and trees which were cut once a year at the end of January. A three year maintenance scheme was procured at the start of Phase 1 with the contractor who had done the planting. So if some plants failed they had to be replaced. It was much cheaper to maintain than having grassed areas as these had to be cut more often. The types of plants and trees used were carefully selected to be low maintenance. Although the trees were deciduous they did not drop a lot of leaves and did not need to be crowned. The other plants grew at different heights throughout the year to a maximum of around one metre at their peak between April and September. The schemes were designed to provide colour and cover all year round. Additional litter bins had been

installed and litter picking regimes were in place.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

21/64 **CITYFIBRE UPDATE**

The Chair informed the Panel that unfortunately the presenter for this item was ill and unable to attend today's meeting.

AGREED that the item was **DEFERRED** to a future Panel meeting.

21/65 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 6 APRIL 2022**

The next meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel would take place at 10.30 am on Wednesday 6 April 2022.

21/66 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update on the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 22 February 2022.

21/67 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED**

None.