



ACTION NOTES

Title of Meeting: Bloxwich & Walsall Town Deal Board Meeting

Date: Wednesday 25 September 2024 14:30 – 16:00pm

Venue: Microsoft Teams ‘Virtual’ Meeting

Quorum - Minimum of 6 voting members, with at least one representative from: Private, Local Government and Communities membership categories, together with Walsall Council.

Present:

VOTING MEMBERS – Via Teams

Manjit Jhooty – Jhoots Pharmacy (Chair) Councillor Andrew (Deputy Chair)
Robert Judson – Homeserve
David Moore – Walsall Council
Rupert Fairfax – Fairfax Saddles / Chair of Bloxwich Advisory Board
Karl Woodward - Reach All Ltd/Chair of Walsall Advisory Board
Ray Flynn – University of Wolverhampton
Kevin Davis – The Vine / Mercian Trust
Shaun Darcy – Walsall Council
Mark Lavender – Walsall Council

MEMBERS – Via Teams / Guests:

Alison Guerra (AG) – Walsall Council
Kelly Valente (KV) – Walsall Council
Keith Beech (KB) – Walsall Council
Natasha Mann (NM) – Walsall Council
Claire Wills (CW) – Walsall Council
Helen Kirk (HK) – Walsall Council
Deb Rajania (DR) – Walsall College
Eleanor Cooper (EC) – Walsall Council
Surinder Kaur (SK) – Walsall Council
James Dennison (JD) – Canal & River Trust
Isabel Clark (IC) – Walsall Council
Guest: Duncan Stewart – Director 56° Insight
Guest: Peter Hoarle – Enterprise Manager at Canal and River Trust.

Town Deal Board - Public - Recorded & Shared Meeting Session

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. The first part of this meeting would be in public session for agenda items 1-6, then the meeting will move into private session.

(Exempt information under Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act, 1972)
(as amended)

1. Welcome and Introductions /Apologies

David Benge, Tarra Simmons, Jatinder Sharma, Richard Ackerley, Matthew Llyod

Guest: Duncan Stewart, director from a company called 56° Insight, Peter Peter Hoarle, Enterprise Manager Canal River Trust

2. Declarations of Interest

Manjit Jhooty stated this part of the meeting would be recorded so that it can be shared with the public through our web site. There were no objections, so this part of the meeting will be recorded.

3. Minutes (Public) of the Previous Meeting (14:45)

Surinder Kaur shared public minutes from the last meeting on 13 August 2024.

The minutes were accepted as an accurate record by Manjit Jhooty and seconded by Karl Woodward.

4. Canal and River Trust – Walsall & Bloxwich (Town Deal funded) Towpath Improvements Evaluation Presentation.

(Aim – JD & Duncan Stewart update Board members about the survey)

The report and survey has been uploaded in the Teams folder.

JD updated – £2.4 million was our funding and we have achieved the target to resurface 6.5 kilometres of towpath. We managed more of that at 7.2 kilometres, about 4 1/2 miles, and we had a target to improve 13 kilometres of shared space, active travel route, which is the towpath and was putting solar lighting into tow paths. We overachieved on that one as well with over 9 miles renovated, Essington Canal, the Walsall Canal and then the Russell Canal.

Duncan Stewart Shared the outcome of the towpath survey:

We are a small market research insights agency we specialise in work relating shared a presentation on screen and talked through this, including images of the Rushall canal pathway surface dressing and solar lighting – this work is now complete.

- We engaged with over 700 different individuals, a mix of people who are using the two paths which have been improved and which were the subject in in Walsall and Bloxwich. Over 300 people interviewed on the towpath and almost 250 people interviewed door to door.
- 61% of current users have increased their frequency of use. 87% report visiting at least weekly compared with 54% before changes.
- 29% of local residents have increased their frequency of use. 43% report visiting at least weekly compared with 30% before changes.
- Just 24% of towpath users agree that they could have just as easily have gone elsewhere for activities done on towpath. This suggests that for the remaining 76%, the benefits gained from towpath usage would not be easily replaced if it was not available.
- Physical health benefits - 66% of users state that the activity they do on the towpath is of moderate or vigorous intensity and 56% agree that the activities they did made them feel out of breath. These levels are sufficient to provide physical health benefits.
- 58% of users are motivated to use the towpath by physical health reasons.

Recorded & Shared Meeting Sessions – FINAL VERSION

- 59% of users and 42% of local residents stated that the physical health benefits they feel they get from the towpath have increased since it re-opened.
- Wellbeing benefits - 41% of users are motivated to use the towpath by wellbeing reasons, most commonly to find peace and quiet (34%) and/or to relax and unwind (29%).
- 79% of users strongly agreed that they felt cheerful and in good spirits after visiting the towpath and 75% felt calm and relaxed.
- 62% of users and 43% of residents stated that the wellbeing benefits they feel they get from towpath have increased since it re-opened.
- Nature connection benefits 31% of users are motivated to use the towpath by the desire to enjoy scenery or wildlife.
- 77% of users strongly agreed that they felt closer to nature after visiting the towpath.
- 54% of users and 41% of residents stated that the amount they notice nature and wildlife while walking on the towpath has increased since it re-opened.
- Overall, 29% increase in using the towpath, predominantly a positive outcome.
- Safer, and enjoyable area, only concerns were fly tipping and anti-social behaviour.

Discussion/Comments

KW: *Barriers and usage will this be fully accessible for wheelchairs, also are there recommendations that some connection with local organisations, charities to highlight this area for social walks?*

Duncan Stewart: *For people with wheelchairs there is access. There are ways in which to accelerate and engage with groups, such as Local groups, who have guided walks, accompanied walks, people will hear of this word of mouth and more the public uses the towpath, can be accessible the more this can be communicated. Can engage with local organisations who are seeking areas for walks and social gatherings.*

JD: *We have been running a number of programmes over the last few years in Walsall such as a programme called Community Roots, have organised, fishing, boating trips. which is all around community engagement.*

KD: *In relation to the demographic of the sample results, are you content with the results, also to attract new users and groups, that are not aware of the renovated towpaths, have you informed the public about the research results?*

Duncan: *we were pleased with the sample size demographically and would always like more feedback. Had 3 different strands, the groups covered were different age groups, ethnicity, and gender, we had a mix set of results.*

RJ: *The work looks great and looks much better, the awareness is 56% of the towpath, how does this compare with other parts of the country?*

Duncan: *This was in the midpoint compared to other surveys around the country, therefore was better than expected.*

DR: *Through the local authority, there is something called Health Walks that are coordinated by the Council, could initiate some walks in that area.*

Action: 24/TDB/081/SK/CW To share this with various internal Partnerships such as Public Health.

5. Bloxwich Advisory Board – Chairs Update (14:55 – 15:00)

(Aim – RF to update Board members on the work conducted at previous AB meetings)

Rupert Fairfax provided an update: Since the last Town Deal Board, the Bloxwich Advisory met on the Thursday 19 September 2024.

Project Updates

Recorded & Shared Meeting Sessions – FINAL VERSION

The Canals and River Trust shared the towpath survey, which was positive feedback and James Dennison completed the Canal projects.

Comms: £440,000 worth of publicity has been generated for the media coverage during the last quarter, shared the signage for the Launchpad.

The Launchpad: the building has been stripped out and the hoardings are up, with comms working on the signage.

Green Lane Bridge has been completed, positive improvement.

Active travel Sustainable, Green Lane Bridge works is completed and a positive transformation. Some funds have moved around to utilise all the funding.

Community Capital have projects ongoing, All projects are on track and are confident the spend will be executed by March 2026. Financial spend 85% is on track.

6. Walsall Advisory Board – Chairs Update (15:00 – 15:05)

(Aim – KW to update Board members on the work conducted at previous AB meetings)

Walsall Advisory Board – Karl Woodward provided an update:

Since the last Town Deal Board, the Walsall Advisory met on the 04 September 2024.

The Verto system was issued to external members, the fact that we now have live visibility in the Projects, Members have access to the whole project. Can see the risk profiles and see the progress and the updates and all being managed between the Project Leads and the Lead Officers.

Active Public spaces We do have a couple of challenges coming through from the financials, both in some slippage.

Vehicle Electric still on going and awaiting government funding decisions.

Canal Bridge has received planning permission, that's a big piece of the active public space's element.

The Gallery Square property been secured. proposed for the gallery square been shared internally, although still looking at more consultation around that. which have covered in previous updates as the discussions from the Community groups.

The Construction Skills programme training centre at the college is now complete, and up and running, with projects progressing.

Date and time of Next Town Deal Board Meeting 06.11.2024 – @14:30

Shared Session closed at: 15:05